

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH; SAMUEL T. COLERIDGE;  
GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON; PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY:  
CHAMPIONS OF LIBERTY?

AN ABSTRACT OF  
A THESIS  
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF  
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

by  
Harriet T. Rosenberg  
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It has been said that William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1822), George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) were democrats. That is, that they had a faith and an interest in democracy. What is the basis for this statement? Their poetry and prose? Do their actions support the positions they took in their literary efforts?

England had been a government with a Parliamentary system in a Constitutional Monarchy since before the time of these poets. All four were of the French Revolutionary period and the Napoleonic era. Wordsworth and Coleridge were young men at the time of the Revolution and consequently very much affected by it. Byron and Shelley are of the post-war generation for whom the war was romantic. All four were also caught up in the midst of the social upheaval brought about by the Industrial Revolution. These major factors alone may determine the extent to which they can be considered democrats. How are we to determine the extent of their faith and belief in democracy?

In order to arrive at some resolution of the question, use was made of the poets' own works, prose and poetry; the comments and criticisms of their contemporaries; their personal correspondence; the commentary and analysis of more

recent authors and scholars; in addition to a general study of the political atmosphere of Western Europe in their time.