

THE UNFAMILIAR SHELLEY

Proof Copy

*To Don Reiman
in gratitude for his major contribution to the understanding of Shelley*

Proof Copy

The Unfamiliar Shelley

Edited by

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ASHGATE

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The Nineteenth Century Series

General Editors' Preface

The aim of the series is to reflect, develop and extend the great burgeoning of interest in the nineteenth century that has been an inevitable feature of recent years, as that former epoch has come more sharply into focus as a locus for our understanding not only of the past but of the contours of our modernity. It centres primarily upon major authors and subjects within Romantic and Victorian literature. It also includes studies of other British writers and issues, where these are matters of current debate: for example, biography and autobiography, journalism, periodical literature, travel writing, book production, gender, non-canonical writing. We are dedicated principally to publishing original monographs and symposia; our policy is to embrace a broad scope in chronology, approach and range of concern, and both to recognize and cut innovatively across such parameters as those suggested by the designations 'Romantic' and 'Victorian'. We welcome new ideas and theories, while valuing traditional scholarship. It is hoped that the world which predates yet so forcibly predicts and engages our own will emerge in parts, in the wider sweep, and in the lively streams of disputation and change that are so manifest an aspect of its intellectual, artistic and social landscape.

Vincent Newey
Joanne Shattock
University of Leicester

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Michael Bradshaw is the author of *Resurrection Songs: the Poetry of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (2001), the editor of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *Death's Jest-Book: the 1829 text* (2003), co-editor of Beddoes's *Selected Poetry* (1999) and co-editor of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (2007). He has also published critical articles on George Darley, John Keats, Water Savage Landor and Mary Shelley, and on Romantic fragments. He is currently Principal Lecturer in English at the Manchester Metropolitan University.

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Jack Donovan is Reader in English at the University of York. He edited Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* in volume 2 of *The Poems of Shelley* (2000) in the series Longman Annotated English Poets and is currently one of the editors completing volumes three and four of that edition.

David Duff is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Aberdeen. Author of *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (1994) and other work on Shelley, he has also edited an anthology of *Modern Genre Theory* (2000) and co-edited a volume of essays on *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic* (2007). He has published widely on the history and theory of literary forms, and recently completed a new book entitled *Archaists and Innovators: Genre Theory and British Romanticism*. He is currently editing a collection of Romantic political prose and writing a Coleridgean history of bad poetry.

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Timothy Morton is Professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of California, Davis. He is the author of *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), *The Poetics of Spice* (2000) and *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste* (1994). He is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley* (2006) and a Routledge Literary Sourcebook on *Frankenstein* (2002), and has published eight essays on Percy and Mary Shelley.

Michael O'Neill is Professor of English at Durham University. He is currently a Director of the University's Institute of Advanced Study. He has published books, editions, chapters and articles on Shelley, and he has also published widely on many aspects of Romantic and twentieth-century poetry. A published poet, he received a Cholmondeley Award for Poets in 1990. His latest books are *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry since 1900* (2007) and (with Charles Mahoney) *Romantic Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (2007). His current projects include being a contributing editor to the Johns Hopkins multi-volume edition of Shelley's poetry.

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Donald H. Reiman, co-editor of *Shelley and His Circle, Shelley's Poetry and Prose* and *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, and general editor of the *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* and *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics*, is Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Delaware. Some of the almost two hundred published volumes that he has written, edited or compiled – most of them centred on English Romantic literature – are mentioned in his essay here. He looks forward to seeing his fellow contributors to *The Unfamiliar Shelley* when we commemorate the bicentennial of Shelley's death in 2022.

Hugh Roberts teaches English Literature at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (1997). He is currently working on a book on the idea of chance in literature of the Romantic period.

Michael Rossington is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Newcastle University. He has research interests in poetry of the eighteenth century and Romantic period, the writings of the Shelleys including their manuscript sources and textual history, and republicanisms in Britain and Europe 1640–1840. He has published editions of Mary Shelley's *Valperga* (2000) and *The Cenci* in *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 2 (2000). He is one of the editors of *The Poems of Shelley*, vols 3 and 4 (2008) and is co-editor, with Susanne Schmid, of *The Reception of P.B. Shelley in Europe* (2008).

Timothy Webb was, until recently, Winterstoke Professor of English at the University of Bristol where he is now a Senior Research Fellow. As well as a pioneering edition of Yeats's poetry and an introduction to English Romantic Hellenism, he has published six books on Shelley (three jointly edited or authored). He has written and lectured widely, mostly on Romantic topics and writers. Recently, he completed a two-volume edition of Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*, and he is currently working on *The Book of Stones*, an extensive study of the English Romantic writers and Ireland, and a reader of the poems of 1922.

Alan M. Weinberg is Professor in English Studies at the University of South Africa. He has edited vol. XXII of the *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* (Pts 1 and 2), co-edited the Shelley bicentenary collection of essays, *The Most Unfailing Herald* (1996), and has published a further book as well as numerous essays on Shelley, across a wide range of interdisciplinary subjects. He is planning further editorial work on Shelley's 'A Philosophical View of Reform', and studies of other neglected aspects of Shelley:-

Merle A. Williams is a Personal Professor of English at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Humanities. She is the author of *Henry James and the Philosophical Novel: Being and Seeing* (1993). She has written articles and book chapters on Shelley's philosophical poetry, James and Modernism, and the interplay between literature and philosophy. Work in progress includes 'The Challenge of Prometheus: A Reassessment of Shelley's Thought' and a co-authored monograph on the philosophical relationship between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, with particular reference to their Algerian origins and affiliations with Judaism.

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We would like thank W.W. Norton and Co. and Johns Hopkins Press for permission to publish Shelley texts; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford for permission to reproduce material from the Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts.

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We are also very grateful to close families, friends and colleagues who have supported us in our endeavour to present readings of Shelley which are faithful and representative of the extraordinary diversity of his output – a diversity which has not up to the present time received its due.

List of Abbreviations

References to the following primary sources are abbreviated as follows.

- BSM* *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, ed. Donald H. Reiman et al. 23 vols. New York: Garland, 1986–2001.
- CPPBS* *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, vols 1–2. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000 [2004]–.
- Letters* *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- MS Journals* *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814–1844*, eds Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. 1 vol. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- MWS Letters* *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett. 3 vols. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–88.
- MYR* *The Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics: Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald H. Reiman et al. 9 vols. New York: Garland, 1985–96.
- Prose* *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E.B. Murray, vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.
- PS* *The Poems of Shelley*, eds Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, vols 1–2. London and New York; Harlow: Longman, 1989–2000.
- PW* *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mrs Shelley. 4 vols. London: Edward Moxon 1839.
- SC* *Shelley and his Circle*, eds Kenneth Neill Cameron [vols 1–4]; Donald H. Reiman [vols 5–10] co-ed. Doucet Devin Fischer [vols 9–10]. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1961–70; 1973–2001.
- SPP* *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, rev. edn. New York: Norton, 2002.

Editorial Note

The contents of the volume are ordered in accordance with four interlocking categories:

1. broad areas of accomplishment: Poetry, Prose, Drama and Art;
2. diversity of achievement within each of these modes of representation;
3. full span of the poet's career (1808–22), roughly chronological for each 'mode'.

On the Use of Editions and Titles for Shelley's Works

An important feature of the present volume is its recognition of the heterogeneous nature of adequate textual sources for the study of Shelley. No one scholarly text or collection of texts presently suffices to accommodate the range of editions which have provided a sound textual basis for discussion. Each essay has had to find its own way through a forest of notebooks, facsimiles, transcripts and published editions. Each chapter will accordingly signpost the editions upon which the discussion is based, often with indications of MS sources.

Because Shelley did not live to see the publication of a large portion of his extant writing – a fact not often appreciated – and because much of that writing was unfinished and perhaps never intended for publication, the editors have chosen to distinguish typographically between published and unpublished compositions. Published texts are signalled in italics (for example *Mont Blanc*, *Laon and Cythna*, *Ozymandias*) and unpublished texts in quotation marks (for example 'Julian and Maddalo', 'A Philosophical View of Reform', 'Letter to Maria Gisborne', 'Sonnet: Political Greatness', 'A Defence of Poetry', 'The Triumph of Life') irrespective of whether these are long or short works. It is hoped that this signal will serve as a continued reminder of the fluid nature of the Shelleyan corpus, so much of it experimental, provisional and expressive of a creative drive that seldom (if ever) sought publication for its own sake, but which yet did, on occasion, and often against the odds, find an immediate audience.

Introduction

Timothy Webb and Alan M. Weinberg

When Percy Bysshe Shelley was drowned in Italy in 1822 not long before his thirtieth birthday his literary reputation was much in doubt. Within a relatively short time his poetry had been accorded that canonical status which has been attached to his name ever since, but Shelley's admission to the poetic canon was achieved at a price. For various reasons, Victorian literary taste privileged his lyrics and the lyrical passages of larger works such as *Prometheus Unbound* at the expense of his other considerable achievements in poetry and prose; his unswerving concern with politics was largely written out of the record or dismissed as an inferior youthful obsession which had little or nothing to do with the poetry of his later years. Although the Chartists promoted *Queen Mab*, and although sensitive readers and critics acknowledged at least some of his major literary concerns, the received version of Shelley (or 'Shelley') remained emasculated and damagingly limited in its emphases. His predilection for lyrical expression, which may have been directed by an aesthetic which was innocent, conveniently served other purposes and other readers who were rather less innocent; it also made its mark on various anthologies which, in turn, exercised their influence on readers and readings of Shelley and helped to ensure that his canonical status was based on a version which was surprisingly imperfect and incomplete. This emphasis on the lyrical Shelley was often allied to the superficial view (allegedly supported by the 'Defence of Poetry') that lyric inspiration was directed by the feelings rather than the intellect, so that readers should not be surprised if Shelley turned out to be incoherent or unintelligible or even self-contradictory. In this interpretation, 'lyrical' characteristically signalled 'imprecise'. Editors and critics may have allowed some virtues but usually they were strikingly ungenerous to Shelley's poetics and approached his poetry with an attitude which was critical and censorious.

If this involved a blindness to textual history or to the possibility that the received version was misleading or wrong, most readers do not seem to have been troubled; one of the most philosophical and challenging of English poets was, according to them, regularly guilty of the most unfortunate imprecisions and was incapable of thinking an argument through. So, for instance, a leading English publishing house is still reprinting the old version of 'The Triumph of Life' more than forty years after it was unchallengeably corrected, while lines and even stanzas in other poems are still printed in the wrong order, usually without question or comment. In spite of its commitment to a wide-ranging and radical Shelley and the editor's obvious admiration for the poet, David Lee Clark's edition of the prose, still regularly consulted as the only complete edition which is widely available, confuses 'internal' and 'external' and perpetuates editorial distortions and errors. Although Eugene Murray's first volume of the prose for Oxford set new scholarly standards, its textual commentary is forbidding to the uninitiated reader and formidably expensive; unfortunately, the

second volume (which should include most of the best-known prose works) has not yet materialized, although the first was published in 1993. Shelley's prose has its own unfortunate history (which will be examined in due course), but it is mentioned here because any serious engagement with Shelley's considerable output in that medium seems to have been frequently contaminated or impeded by the same prejudices as the poetry, which is much more widely received but is often identified as an example of the limitations of Romantic culture and the dangers of allowing the heart to rule the head.

Such uninformed prejudices are beginning to change with the gradual publication of the Longmans edition of Shelley's poetry (*PS*) initiated by Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest and continued by other editors, and the even more ambitious American publication of the complete poems (*CPPBS*) (organized on different principles) jointly edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, and also involving a team of editors for the later volumes.¹ There have been generous selections by Donald Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (replaced by Neil Fraistat for the second edition), Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, and Timothy Webb (including a selection of the prose which in the case of Webb's edition is challengingly accorded equal status with the poetry). All these editions are based on a detailed knowledge of the manuscripts as well as the printed editions and they are slowly introducing a more informed and responsible attitude to Shelley's *oeuvre*. In spite of such obvious improvements, and a new seriousness of approach, much still remains to be done. The two complete editions are still in process, and the American edition in particular will take some years to complete. It is a sad fact that myths die hard, if at all, and an ineffectual, over-emotional and incoherent Shelley still seems essential to certain readings of English literary history. While attitudes to Shelley and his work may have shifted inside some of the universities and among researchers, such revisionary recognition has not affected all university teachers or courses: a more traditional and comforting image of Shelley still prevails in most schools, among most 'common' readers and in the commissioning offices of publishers. For all its limitations and difficulties, the old view of Shelley continues to maintain a strong mythological force which so far has seemed largely immune to scholarly or critical advances. One of its central tenets is the narrowness of Shelley's concerns and his sensibility, a narrowness which is 'confirmed' by a highly selective approach to reading.

Not only is this strikingly intellectual poet frequently found wanting in thought or expression; Shelley is also dismissed or criticized as monotonous or disappointingly repetitive while, in fact, he was remarkable for the breadth of his interests and the generic diversity of his poetry (not to mention the largely unconsidered stretches of his prose).² Strangely enough, even his lyric achievement has recently been taken for granted. In spite of suggestive accounts especially by Judith Chernaik, Geoffrey

1 Contributors to the present volume of essays who are acting as editors for these volumes are Jack Donovan and Michael Rossington (*PS*); and Donald Reiman, Nora Crook and Michael O'Neill (*CPPBS*).

2 In his recent edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, Timothy Morton remarks, 'Shelley was a protean writer working in almost every corner of cultural and literary space in the Romantic period.'

Matthews, William Keach and Michael O'Neill, the undoubted achievements of Shelley's lyric poetry have tended to evade critical analysis or to attract attention only to a relatively small sample of his lyrical output. This evidence suggests that even his apparently simple creative successes pose an unusual challenge to criticism; but the full range and variety of his poetry are much more extensive and creatively surprising, if not disconcerting, not least for a poet who did not live to see his thirtieth birthday. 'Rarely, rarely comest thou' may have inspired Vaughan Williams but the Shelley who wrote those lines about the elusive spirit of joy was also responsible for many other kinds of poem: the largely urbane 'Julian and Maddalo' in couplets; verse-letters (notably the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne', also in couplets); the visionary satire of 'Peter Bell the Third', with its acute analysis of contemporary London culture and of Wordsworth's strengths and weaknesses; the witty and high-spirited translation of the Homeric 'Hymn to Mercury'; translations from Goethe, Calderón, Dante and Virgil (among others); political songs and the vivid but visionary 'A Mask of Anarchy' (admired by some critics precisely because it seemed to counterpoint Shelley's more 'normal' poetic endeavours); the flawed but powerful epic *Laon and Cythna* (better known in revised and slightly blunted form as *The Revolt of Islam*); *Rosalind and Helen*, a neglected but fascinating narrative poem which approaches the biographical, or autobiographical, but which is also in touch with a variety of narrative possibilities and a number of urgent contemporary concerns; 'The Witch of Atlas', a playfully enigmatic and visionary poem in *ottava rima* which has obviously learnt from Spenser and from the Homeric 'Hymn to Mercury', which Shelley had recently translated, but which offers a plot and narrative structure which are much more elusive than those in Spenser or the Homeric Hymn; the 'Ode to Liberty' and the 'Ode to Naples', neither of which resembles the celebrated 'Ode to the West Wind' and which owe debts both to the classical tradition and to much more recent poetic examples, in the first instance, especially to the eighteenth-century progress piece; 'Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills', an octosyllabic meditation which partly derives from Shelley's own experiences as a traveller in northern Italy but which also looks back to the topographical poem; and so on. Even his early poems, various in themselves, and usually relegated to the category of best-forgotten juvenilia, can now be seen to relate to other poems and to possess distinct values of their own.

This list is deliberately designed to include a number of poems which do not usually feature in the canon and which are often overlooked by readers of Shelley or of Romantic poetry but which might well demonstrate their own claim for excellence, if only they were approached with an open mind. In themselves, they might suggest that Shelley's poetry is much more diverse than is usually acknowledged; they also demonstrate a curiosity and a willingness to experiment with which Shelley is not often credited and which seems to contradict most claims of repetition or monotony. Not all of these poems can be considered here in satisfying detail because the critical expanse of this volume is intended to provide a sense of the neglected range of Shelley's writing (including drama and non-fictional prose, covering politics, philosophy, art criticism and a series of incisive prefaces), and to offer coverage of a number of phases in his writing career. Nor can the volume accommodate neglected material of Shelley's later years, which still awaits critical editing. Yet, the very diversity of this writing and the inclusiveness of Shelley's interests should

demonstrate that the narrowness of his creative output is an outdated and uninformed myth which must be challenged and overturned.

For all its scope, this listing does not allow for at least one factor which might seem to constitute a complication. For whatever reason, Shelley began many more poems than he finished (the same feature characterizes much of his prose). Perhaps he was prepared to follow the fluctuations of inspiration and resign himself to the realities of the fading coal; perhaps his practice was affected by his separation in Italy both from a reading public and the importunities of publishing; perhaps he sometimes intended to revisit the manuscript and complete what he had left unfinished; perhaps he was more prepared to acknowledge divergent impulses and less concerned with completeness or closure than most editors or readers are prepared to admit. Collected editions of his poetry include an unusually high percentage of what are usually listed as 'fragments', the short, unfinished poems which Mary Shelley was the first editor to identify as a separate category for each of the major years of his poetic career. At times, these fragments can scarcely be distinguished from his completed, or apparently completed, lyrics; on other occasions, they are so rough and so abrupt that their fragmentary status is indisputable. Contemporary taste and the dictates of contemporary theory are much more sympathetic to the existence and the implications of such unfinished poems than previous ages which tended to classify, and dismiss, them as unfulfilled expressions of Shelley's lyrical tendency and evidence of a dangerous lack of stamina and tenacity. As Michael Bradshaw argues in his chapter on fragments, Romantic practice and theory were much more accommodating to such phenomena than, say, the influential Victorians; but general, and even editorial, taste still needs to be re-educated in such matters.

It is worth noticing that many of the titles by which we have come to know these poems were not accorded them by Shelley himself but by his widow or, less frequently, by later editors. Why such decisions should have been made, especially in indicating the significance of incomplete poems, is easily understandable; but, with the passage of time, we have come to recognize that such editorial interventions, however well-intentioned, often involve the imposition of a clearer intention than the text of the poem seems to authorize. The publication of the Garland transcripts has finally revealed both the heroic magnitude of the editorial task undertaken by Mary Shelley and the strategies which she felt impelled to employ in presenting 'rough' materials to a reading public.

Whatever their cause, or their justification, and however symptomatic they might be of something in Shelley's poetic condition, these fragments also point to a characteristic of his longer poems. A quick survey of any collected edition will show that he started a number of poems which initially must have been informed by the intention to move beyond a stage which was merely lyric or initiatory but which seem to have been abandoned at an early stage: for instance, the poem generally known as 'Evening: Ponte Al Mare, Pisa', much admired by some critics yet stopping after it establishes a realistic but suggestive setting and before it introduces a narrative. More striking, Shelley embarked on several longer poetic narratives which were also left dangling and incomplete: for example, 'Athanase', 'The Woodman and the Nightingale', 'Marenghi' (or, as some editors prefer, 'Mazenghi'), 'Ginevra', 'Fiordispina', 'The Boat on the Serchio', 'The Zucca' and (following a different

trajectory) ‘A Satire on Satire’. All of these incomplete poems are tantalizing, all of them are thematically suggestive and most are arresting in detail. Not surprisingly, they are usually omitted or marginalized in accounts of Shelley but, when considered as a whole, they constitute a noticeable element in his poetic output.

The most famous of these unfinished longer poems is ‘The Triumph of Life’, which in its own right constitutes a substantial achievement and which many critics consider to be Shelley’s best, or at least one of his best, poems. This poem, which was neglected for so long, has become a favourite not only with influential deconstructionists but with other contemporary critics who are attracted by its very open-endedness, its density of meaning and texture, and its enigmatic reluctance to yield easy answers. That the poem ends in the middle of a sentence shortly after it poses the unanswered question, “‘Then, what is Life?’ I said”, seems exactly appropriate to the nature of their concerns. Awkwardly, if significantly, though, the text does not end with an unanswered question but defeats any expectation of neat closure when it continues for more than three lines and concludes, in the words of the now disenchanted protagonist, Rousseau: “‘Happy those for whom the fold / Of’. Nor is there much persuasive evidence to support the popular theory that the pessimistic philosophy which seems to inform this Petrarchan poem also informed a decision to commit suicide at sea, predicted (they claim) elsewhere in Shelley’s life and work, not least in the concluding verses of ‘Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples’. ‘The Triumph of Life’ is a special case since its challenging and unresolved investigations were interrupted not by Shelley’s own ultimate negation, or his failure to achieve poetic closure or a satisfying answer, but by his accidental and unexpected death; yet readers might also notice that, throughout his career, Shelley had been a characteristically questioning poet. Both ‘Mont Blanc’ and ‘Ode to the West Wind’ conclude with a question mark and *Alastor*, written when Shelley was 23, also expresses an anxious concern about human failure. Many other poems end on a note which is far from celebratory and sometimes even puzzling: for example, among others, ‘Julian and Maddalo’, *The Cenci*, ‘Peter Bell the Third’, ‘The Sensitive Plant’, *Epipsychidion*, and *Hellas*. Even *Prometheus Unbound* warns of the collapse of achieved vision and the intensely arduous route to its recovery. Such reluctance to enter into a final conclusive harmony must be a habit of mind. Like ‘The Triumph of Life’, these troubled or speculative endings suggest an ongoing dialogue, or disputation, which as Earl Wasserman once maintained, is often sustained from poem to poem and runs throughout nearly the whole of Shelley’s writing life.

Such difficulties in reaching an end, much less a conclusion (Shelley often found it hard to ‘come to a conclusion’) feature in a number of Shelley’s dramatic endeavours, not least in the lightly-touched scene for a play on Tasso, the heavily researched ‘Charles the First’, and the complicated plotting of the suggestively (if posthumously) titled ‘Unfinished Drama’. Incompleteness is an equally striking feature of Shelley’s prose. Consider the exactness and metaphorical flair of ‘On Christianity’, or the witty and persuasively argumentative discourse ‘On the Devil, and Devils’, or the political survey ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’ (which provides a significant balance for ‘A Defence of Poetry’), or the notes on sculpture (mostly focused on Florence), or the dialogue on the nature of Keats’s poetry, or the essays on life, a future state, the punishment of death, marriage, friendship, the revival of

literature, a system of government by juries, the game laws, and the Elysian Fields, none of which appears to have been left in a finished state and none of which was published in Shelley's lifetime. While some of these 'essays' may be identified as jottings or annotations, most seem to be initial sketches for longer explorations which were never completed or possibly, in some cases, were intended to connect with longer, existing essays or related to poems which he intended to write. Nor should the forceful argument and metaphorical poise of 'A Defence of Poetry' deflect the reader from recognizing that even this essay (which was not published till long after Shelley's lifetime) was intended to be the first part of a longer argument.

Shelley's distinction in this essay has been widely and rightly acknowledged but the corollary that his numerous prose writings might deserve more careful scrutiny has been largely ignored. Other than the 'Defence', there are very few exceptions: these generally comprise some of the writings connected with *Frankenstein*, and the brief and now frequently anthologized essays 'On Life' and 'On Love' (like the 'Defence', both these significant essays did not appear in Shelley's lifetime). Yet Shelley's trajectory as a writer involved, among other things: several political pamphlets; an introductory essay on the ancient Greeks (intended to accompany his translation of Plato's *Symposium*); a significant number of attempts to engage with philosophical or psychological subjects (Shelley was much concerned with the elusive nature of 'mind'), including a richly suggestive beginning to an essay on friendship; published reviews of works by Mary Godwin/Shelley, her father William Godwin, and Shelley's own close friends Thomas Jefferson Hogg and Thomas Love Peacock, and an apparently unpublished review (in Italian) of a performance in Pisa by the Italian improvisatore Sgricci; his portions of *History of A Six Weeks' Tour* (including versions of his letters to Peacock and some of his journal entries, which seem to have been appropriated by Mary Shelley); the prose notes, several of them essays, which balance or comment on the poetic dimension of *Queen Mab* and one of which also gave rise to a separate (though largely identical) publication of 1813 on the subject of a vegetarian diet; and a significant number of authoritative prefaces. There were also recurrent forays into fiction, not only the two relatively successful Gothic novels which Shelley published at an early stage in his life (and *Hubert Cauvin* set during the French Revolution but now apparently lost), but also later attempts, such as the unfinished 'The Assassins' and 'The Coliseum', 'Una Favola' (in Italian) and the story which begins with a description of the Arch of Titus and is usually classified, misleadingly, with the notes on sculpture.

Although a number of these pieces did appear in printed form during Shelley's lifetime, it seems likely that an examination of Shelley's diverse work as a prose writer was impeded not only by his regular failure to finish but by the fact that a significant proportion of what he had written was not published until long after his death. For many years, most of the manuscripts remained inaccessible, or were closely guarded by his family or relations, or by a small number of libraries in England or America. The dissident Shelley was often concealed by his father, or his well-meaning widow who (in spite of her own strong views) was reluctant to give offence, or his son's wife, or a system of censorship which was usually voluntary and acquiescent rather than externally imposed. For those few who were lucky enough to inspect them in person, the record was often challengingly difficult. Even if the

tangled evidence of the manuscript notebooks yielded many secrets, it was often disheartening, or worse, to try to relate such findings to the relevant evidence of other notebooks or manuscript pages.

Now, at last, these difficulties have largely disappeared and the situation has dramatically changed for the better. Textual matters which had been shadowy in the past have now been brought into much sharper perspective by the Garland series which has published facsimiles of many Shelley manuscripts together with detailed scholarly introductions and textual notes. Gradually, and incrementally, these publications (in which both the present editors must declare an interest) have accorded to Shelley's writings, and especially his notebooks, a clarity of detail and of intellectual profile which is completely unprecedented in Shelley studies. The Garland transcriptions do not aspire to the condition of editions but the revelations which they have created, and which they make available to the interested reader, will result in many new readings for the Shelley text, a much richer sense of the writing process both in poetry and in prose, and an enlarged understanding of the intense, highly pressured and diverse intellectual world which informs the notebooks and the creative texts which they contain. In many cases (for instance, the dedicatory verses to *Laon and Cythna* and much of the poem itself) we have easy access to the cancelled drafts and the complicated stages through which Shelley approached the text of the challenging epic which was eventually published. At last, the enterprise started by Neville Rogers in *Shelley at Work* (1956; 1967) has been completed to a very high level of scholarly accuracy and with standards of book presentation which were unimaginable only a few years ago.

Thanks to the attentiveness fostered by this exercise we now know, for instance, that the last portion of the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* was written significantly later than the other sections and directly, if only partly, in response to a review in the *Quarterly*; we have a more reliable chronology of the composition of many of Shelley's works (including the prose) and an enriched sense of how contiguous writings (including Shelley's reading notes) relate to each other and how poetry and prose are interconnected; we possess a seemingly inchoate but viable text of the unfinished play 'Charles the First'; and we have a much more sophisticated, if troubled, understanding of the evolution of some of Shelley's 'Italian' poems. We have, too, transcriptions of Shelley's quotations from Greek authors such as Aeschylus, Pindar and Plato and a more exact sense of how these fit into other contemporary intellectual initiatives. Publicly, we possess the clues which might lead us towards a more helpful understanding of his reading and of the ways in which it might relate to the patterns of his creativity. At last, Shelley has been taken as seriously as Keats and Byron (both of whom also feature in Garland transcriptions), or Coleridge, or Blake, or William Wordsworth, or Mary Shelley (who, happily, is now separately represented by responsible editions of the letters, the journal and most of the prose writings). Such editorial enterprise should soon result in a more accurate and balanced view of Shelley; but the initiative created by the Garland notebooks still needs to be pursued in appropriate detail.

Some idea of how these transcriptions can help us to see Shelley in a new light is afforded by the introduction by P.M.S. Dawson and Timothy Webb to the 'Devils' Notebook (that is, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 9):

The materials [of this notebook] ... allow us to observe not only the verbal cross-fertilization represented by the two examples just discussed [that is, 'Methought I was a billow in the crowd' and its connection with *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, and 'Within the surface of the fleeting river'] but also Shelley's capacity for looking before and after in imaginative figuration. Thus the draft stanzas for *Adonais* include portraits of literary contemporaries which echo the gallery of portraits in *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, while the portrait of Wordsworth is closely linked to Shelley's presentation of that ambivalent 'master-spirit' of the age in *Peter Bell the Third*.

This introduction also suggests the probable effect of Shelley's reading of Luke's gospel (recorded in detail in this notebook) in stimulating his essay 'On the Devil, and Devils'. Magic plays a central part in

... the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*; it also features in notes on Apollonius Rhodius and Athenaeus and glancingly in some of the drafts for *Adonais*. More significantly still, the notes on Luke seem to establish a tone of voice which can be heard recurrently in 'On the Devil, and Devils', in *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, and in the translation of the Homeric 'Hymn to Mercury' (and which also continues beyond the confines of this notebook in *The Witch of Atlas*).

In the absence of the notebook, these connections may sometimes be a little difficult to follow, but they illustrate that vivid nexus of relationship so particularly marked in Shelley which can only be revealed by access to the evidence of the notebooks themselves and which is frequently recognized in the essays collected in this book.

In spite of such revelations, the Garland transcriptions may be taken for granted all too soon; but their inestimable benefit to the community of Shelley scholars and, more widely, to all who are interested in the evolution of Romantic literature or in the complexities of artistic creation itself, should not be lightly accepted or easily forgotten. We are in debt: to Bruce Barker-Benfield of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, whose assured technical expertise and scholarly insights have been of great help to all editors; and particularly to Donald H. Reiman of the Pforzheimer Foundation, who conceived the project and who acted as the general editor of all the volumes. In recognition of Donald Reiman's achievement and as a tribute to the Garland series which he edited, the present book is dedicated to him; he also contributes a personal assessment as afterword to the other essays which owe so much to the series he initiated and so vigilantly continued to sustain.

The completion of the Garland series has also acted as a stimulus to a number of editors of the poetry and (to a lesser extent) of the prose. Specifically, it has encouraged the editors of this book to take advantage not only of the special perspectives uncovered by that series but also of the new initiatives afforded by recent Shelley criticism. The time was ripe for a reassessment of Shelley and, in many cases, the notebooks have provided material evidence for that reassessment. Shelley's creative achievement needs to be rescued from the apparent certainties of the canon and exposed to a new critical scrutiny which takes nothing for granted and which is particularly attentive to those writings which fall outside the traditional figurations which for so long we thought were immutably part of the tradition. To that end, Shelley's significant contribution as a writer of prose is accorded particular

and unusual attention. Political, philosophical and religious essays, not least the unfinished but memorably authoritative 'A Philosophical View of Reform', the more fragmentary but substantial essay 'On Christianity', and the disparate but intriguing drafts on metaphysics and morals; political pamphlets (including the three published Irish pamphlets, *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote* and *An Essay on the Death of the Princess Charlotte* (all three of which were published although only one copy of the brave and politically adventurous essay on Charlotte is known to be extant); a substantial number of prefaces, such as those to *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci*, 'Peter Bell the Third' (largely suppressed in Shelley's lifetime and for many years afterwards), *Adonais* and *Hellas*; translations from Plato (especially the *Symposium* and the *Ion*) which show unusual imaginative vitality and precision as well as linguistic and cultural responsiveness; letters from throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, from Switzerland and Italy; art criticism and analysis (especially the notes on Greek sculpture), which sometimes resulted in drawings of his own; all these expressions of Shelley's sensibility, which are normally ignored, are here examined with the seriousness of application which seems appropriate to a major poet. (In a still larger volume, attention might also be paid to Shelley's significant correspondence, his travel writing, his Gothic and other fictions, and his essays on pressing contemporary topics such as vegetarianism which Timothy Morton has contextualized with such striking insight.) In particular, as these instances show, Shelley is approached not merely as a poet but as a writer whose concerns frequently demanded articulation in the form of prose. There is also a detailed examination of Shelley's drama, which is usually confined conveniently to *Prometheus Unbound* (suggestively labelled 'A Lyrical Drama') and the sad historical reality of *The Cenci*, but which also includes the little read, rarely performed satyr-play or burlesque *Swellfoot the Tyrant* (which has genuine significance in its own right), the suggestive and fragmentary 'Unfinished Drama' (untitled by Shelley himself) and the unfinished and politically thoughtful 'Charles the First' (which represents Shelley's historical imagination as forcefully as *The Cenci*).

Beyond this, such a new critical perspective seems to licence a look at a number of poems which are often dismissed as of little or no interest: the 1813 volume of minor poems, *Laon and Cythna*, 'Peter Bell the Third' (generally ignored or easily passed over on the grounds that Shelley had no comic sense and no satirical sensibility), Shelley's various and frequent fragment poems, and Italian political poems such as 'Political Greatness'. *Queen Mab*, which strikingly combines poetry and prose, and which has been both welcomed and rejected rather too easily, is now given a more dispassionate scrutiny. Likewise, 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' is examined both as a verse-letter which relates to an extended epistolary vein (Shelley was a rich and inveterate letter writer), and as a poem which exhibits both an exact sense of its audience and a fertile and playful comic creativity often ignored or neglected. Though the overall results of such analysis always depend on the exactness of individual vision which necessarily involves both the critic and the reader, the enterprise as a whole is intended to suggest that many previous encounters with Shelley were sometimes based on a figuring which was too traditionally canonical and which ignored large stretches of his writing. Much has been done in recent times

to adjust this balance. Recent biographical focus has also helped us to recognize a Shelley who is more humanly complex and ambitiously inclusive. Yet much still remains to be done and the received version (or versions) of Shelley still tend to be too narrow in focus. Shelley is more challenging, more difficult and greatly more various than is usually allowed. That we are in a position to recognize the range of Shelley's interests and of his achievement, and to extend the well-established generic codings, is at least partly a tribute to the meticulous scholarship and the complex investigations of the Garland series and to the ongoing scholarly editions of his work which that series has inspired and facilitated.

The Early Phase

Possibly the most neglected area of Shelley's output which the present volume seeks to redress is his earliest writing, compositions dating mostly from the period 1808 to 1814 – from the time Shelley was at Eton and Oxford to the aftermath of the visit to Ireland, the elopement with Harriet Westbrook to Scotland and Wales and the break-up of their marriage in the wake of Shelley's romance with Mary Godwin. His subjective musings on nature and the disappointments and exultations of first love; his penchant for the wild sensations of the Gothic; his inflammatory verse and prose in the cause of revolution and a new social order; his dissident pamphlets demonstrating an enthusiastic foray into active politics; and his philosophical questioning of religious belief, resulting in a similar confrontation with the establishment: all might, on the surface, seem typically adolescent – for that is how they are often characterized – but on close examination repay serious attention.

In considering the Minor Poems (from the *Esdaile Notebook*) which span the years of late adolescence, and which Shelley planned originally to publish with *Queen Mab*, David Duff notes their unwarranted neglect, and the failure to distinguish them from the poet's earlier volumes of verse. Duff shows how carefully and knowingly Shelley constructed his volume, partly by means of an unusual and intricate system of dating the poems. Shelley was clearly aware of the Lake School inheritance, and caught the wind of the contemporary cult of juvenilia. Moreover, his distinctively self-reflexive teenage odyssey, constituted by subtle allusive echoes of his own poems – and highlighted in the longer autobiographical piece, 'The Retrospect' – makes the appearance of *Alastor* in 1816 and its implied critique of Wordsworth a more natural development than has been previously assumed. Of singular importance is the poet's early intuition that his own private journey, if faithfully recorded, would illuminate his own nature and correspond to the inner lives of others. Duff sees the Minor Poems as a lyrical counterfoil to *Queen Mab*, pointing to the obstacles and personal strivings that assuredly lie concealed behind, or underpin, the visionary idealism of the revolutionary work.

In view of the underestimation of the minor lyrics, it is little surprise that the personalized framework of *Queen Mab* has been largely ignored, or simply argued away as scaffolding, designed solely to mask or offset the explosiveness of dissenting ideas. Christopher Miller corrects this mistaken emphasis by taking the title of the poem more at its word. In this he recognizes the significant role of Mab as figure

of the prophetic imagination and lively precursor much later of the Witch of Atlas, and of the young woman, Ianthe, whose guileless innocence gives her privileged access to Mab's cosmic perspective of past, present and future, and of the earth itself. Both Mab and Ianthe register the potential for future happiness against the backdrop of its absence in human history. Related closely to the imagination is the deeply-embedded fairy-tale element which provides both a context for dream-like utopian aspirations, and an ironic critique of the childish absurdities of religion (Christianity in particular), one of Shelley's main targets in the poem. Miller is thus able to show that the frames and visionary substance of *Queen Mab* are in aesthetic harmony, and that the concern at the outset with death and sleep, and more latterly with an earthly heaven of joy, reflects the poet's ethical concern to preserve individual destiny despite the indifference of Necessity.

Prose Generally, Including the Early Phase

Taking his cue from the final epigraph of *Queen Mab* (with its hint of a platform for revolutionary change), Martin Priestman presents a view of Shelley that dispels conventional notions of the young poet's impractical venture into hard-line politics. In all six pamphlets he wrote and published before 1818 (two addresses, two proposals, a declaration and a letter), Shelley displays a sharp awareness, in the immediate time and place, of the possibilities available to him for meaningful change, as well as a sensitivity to the kind of audience which would have to be appealed to – whether it be the general public (as in the case of the 'Address to the Irish', delivered when Shelley was in his twentieth year), or a more select literate audience in the succeeding pamphlets. This does not mean that Shelley always struck the right note but, as Priestman shows, his subtle variation of the distance between himself and his audience – sometimes sententious or self-effacing, at other times ironic – indicates an uncanny preparedness to adapt his discourse to the cause at hand. Hence it is that Shelley's radical thought (in politics or religion) is sometimes disguised, in order that an audience of limited insight might be persuaded to abandon its past habits and to join the libertarian fraternity. That it was connected to the underground movements of his day is reflected in his subversive methods of dissemination, and reliance, in different ways, on a vibrant dissident press culture.

In her consideration of Shelley's diverse, and often fragmentary, philosophical and religious writings, Merle Williams offsets misconceptions as much about the early Shelley's thought, as the later. In close textual analysis, she indicates the lucidity and sharpness with which Shelley reasons and the strong empiricist leanings evident from the earliest of his prose writings, *The Necessity of Atheism* (a work treated with welcome attention to its watertight logic). Indeed it is her emphasis on empiricism that distinguishes her account of Shelley's approach to philosophy and religion, defamiliarizing the superficial (and all-too-current) view of his idealism. Shelley's practical testing out of truth-claims against the evidence of the senses and of 'facts' of the mind – his desire for the truth to be demonstrable – is shown in his subtle negation of the claims of religion, which rely heavily on unquestioning belief rather than proven knowledge, so aligning himself with the dialectics of Socrates and

Hume. His timely reappraisal of Jesus (lifted out of the fabrications of the church) and his playful mockery of the devil (as a spurious theistic invention) emerge from the same Baconian drive to explode mystification, dogma and the deceits to which they lead, and to establish a valuation that is principally humane, and in touch with the nature of things. Most striking of all, in Williams's account, is Shelley's practical intelligence, his concern to make ideas practicable, since what we think and believe make a difference to whom we are, and how we live.

Prose Generally, Beyond the Early Phase

As the chapters of Martin Priestman and Merle Williams illustrate, the diversity and versatility of Shelley's prose are not confined to his early experimental period. They are also to be found in fully mature writings: for instance, in prefaces, translations, and a major political treatise, each of which is considered to have some important connection with Shelley's poetry. The prose prefaces are evidence of Shelley's continued preoccupation with the principles of his own art; the translations of Plato exemplify Shelley's claim (via his admiration for Plato) that good prose may have all the attributes of poetry, may indeed *be* poetry; the political treatise points to Shelley's sustained desire for reform both in his own country and worldwide, using prose to treat discursively what in his poetry is deeply imagined (for example, in *Prometheus Unbound*).

Shelley's continued use of the preface to introduce his poetry is, to say the least, idiosyncratic. The sheer number of prefaces – some fictive and others non-fictive – reflects a particularly Shelleyan cast of mind, one which seems to doubt that his poetry can speak for itself. While inevitably Shelley's prefaces do prepare the reader for the works ahead, Hugh Roberts argues that they do not follow the standard Genettian model, which prescribes that a preface ensure a proper reading of the poem, thus asserting the author's control over the work. Shelley's prefaces might place some limit on uncertainty, to reduce 'noise' with a certain degree of 'redundancy', as Roberts puts it. On the other hand, they also instil uncertainty, forcing the reader to engage actively with the poem, as if this were indeed Shelley's major concern. This approach, differing very markedly from the Wordsworthian model of the self-containment of that writer's poetry and its transparent universality, gestures towards an axiom at the heart of Shelley's poetic enterprise: that his poetry exists in a noisy pre-existing universe of texts which shape it, and are shaped by it. As Roberts makes clear, this interfusion results in new meanings that the reader might discover, but the poet can neither determine nor control.

While the prefaces serve to mediate, if not complicate, the poetry, Shelley's translations of Plato's *Symposium* and *Ion* are attempts to emulate the attractions of Greek philosophical prose. This is prose which, Michael O'Neill explains, is exceptionally precise, lucid and eloquent. It is capable of adjusting to a range of characters refined and coarse, human and divine; and to a variety of stages in love, serious and comic, with comparative ease. Few English authors could rise to the occasion but Michael O'Neill persuades us that Shelley does, even though Shelley never took his renditions beyond manuscript drafts (they were published

posthumously by Mary Shelley in 1839 and have not been widely read). Perhaps owing to the poet's great admiration for Plato, Shelley's style registers empathetically the flux and reflux of Plato's language, and captures too its leisurely and sophisticated intensity. That in Shelley's view Plato was a poet is not surprising as the English author creates in his translations the aura and mood of a prose poem, anticipating and indeed influencing the high enthusiasm and intellectual acuity that mark the prose of 'A Defence of Poetry'. The secular sacredness that O'Neill identifies in Shelley's translation provides, in its evocation of Platonic love, a heterodox alternative to the theology of the Authorized version, indicating the adventurous scope of Shelley's achievement, as if such had never previously been attempted in prose.

Beyond immediate considerations of philosophy, religion and poetry, Shelley's prose (as we have already seen) was deeply engaged with the political mood of his time. One further essay, despite its unfinished state and serious neglect, is nevertheless Shelley's most important review of contemporary politics. This is 'A Philosophical View of Reform', prose counterpart of the revolutionary poetry of late 1819. While Shelley's essay or treatise presents a programme for urgent reform in England, its central concern, as identified by Alan Weinberg, is the imposture that governs English politics and the pressing need for its exposure. With characteristic deftness, Shelley's prose subversively strips away the deceptive mask of government, to reveal the selfish motives beneath. This imposture, masked by the fabrications of monarchy, and the false pretensions of government, is most strikingly observed historically in Christianity as well as English politics, in the appropriation of reform by the ruling class to advance its own selfish interests, to the detriment of the less privileged – the marginalized and downtrodden. As Weinberg shows, this leading insight reveals Shelley's acute understanding that the duplicity of rulers and regrettable credulousness of the ruled are perhaps the greatest obstacles to genuine reform. It becomes crucial therefore that people awaken to their true condition. Distrust of, and even resistance to, the machinations of government is a necessity, if society is to break free of its own servitude.

Poetry Generally, Beyond the Early Phase

The great versatility of Shelley's prose has its counterpart in the poetry, which is formal or relaxed, artful or artless, playful or serious, as the case may be. Such variety of register and style is already intimated in the account of the largely reflective 'Minor Poems' and the prophetic *Queen Mab* – clothed in fairy-tale dress, with pungent prose commentary as foretaste of a flair for dissidence in essays or pamphlets. As further instances of this diversity, a number of very different works are represented from the English and Italian period. The elevated Spenserians in an episode from *Laon and Cythna* (a romance epic, much the longest poem Shelley wrote) differ markedly from the seemingly inconsequential satire of 'Peter Bell the Third' (which Shelley, with undue modesty, called a 'party squib'), while the latter has something in common with the unconstrained imaginings of 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'. This poem draws much of its attraction from the intimacy and informality of letters to friends. In regard to brevity, the sonnet 'Political Greatness' encapsulates, behind the

scenes as it were, and seemingly by sleight of hand, the vicissitudes and significance for the poet of contemporary Italian politics.

In a manner reminiscent of the *lectura dantis* – which traditionally isolates a single canto of Dante’s *Commedia* for exploration – Jack Donovan contemplates a neglected episode from *Laon and Cythna*, a work that, when considered at all, tends to receive over-generalized treatment. While Donovan does not openly contest the standard criticism of the poem – that it is unwieldy, overambitious, and enervated by the outmoded Spenserian stanza – his microcosmic view of the relationship between Laon and the Hermit shows how layered and interwoven are the specifics of Shelley’s imagination, indicating the poet’s care for the finer detail, his astute linking of paradigmatic events in retrospection which fill in crucial gaps in the narrative, and the rich literary-historical configurations that impinge on the writing. The character of the hermit is a composite of Dr Lind and Godwin, admired elder mentors of the poet, which yet falls short of the ideal; and the setting for Laon’s recovery is an amalgam of elements drawn from ancient ruin, nature and fiction associated with Shelley’s tour of the continent and the cult of Rousseau. The roles of hermit and protagonist are in part reversed, customary religious imperatives are withdrawn, and the sites of failed or tragic aspiration are re-constituted to make space – via the subtly unstated but determining influence of Rousseau – for the affirmation of sexual liberation as a necessity in the furtherance of a just revolution.

The relative neglect of ‘Peter Bell the Third’ is in part owing to the tendency of both Mary and Percy Shelley to underplay the work. Critics have taken the cue and denigrated Shelley’s attempt at satire, finding it carelessly (or too casually) written. Attitudes are changing, not least because ‘Peter Bell the Third’ is not an isolated instance of Shelley’s verse satire. Moreover it is notable that, as a product of Shelley’s *Annus Mirabilis* (specifically autumn of 1819), it draws on the abiding concerns of that creative period. But it is in the poem’s steady and complex engagement with Wordsworth as poet and public figure that we recognize the unique importance of this work. As Stephen Behrendt argues, Wordsworth’s publication of the first ‘Peter Bell’ in 1819 pointed to an insularity that was already implicit in his impressive earlier work, but which had now become complacent, anachronistic and ridiculous, the deserving butt of satire. Consequently, Shelley’s disappointment with Wordsworth – as having abandoned the liberal cause – does not result simply in an ambivalence towards the poet he once admired, as is sometimes suggested. Such a mind as Peter/Wordsworth is doomed to apostasy – to selling out to the moneyed establishment – out of its endemic solipsism; and, worse, to dullness, leaving Shelley alone to assume the mantle of a genuine republicanism. If Shelley’s poem ends in contempt for a once revered poet, it is not without a sense of ironic incongruity and disturbing regret.

By virtue of its offhand, quotidian air, ‘Letter to Maria Gisborne’ has (like ‘Peter Bell the Third’), seemed too inconsequential and too uncharacteristic of the Romantic poet to merit sustained interest. By redefining ‘Letter’ as a genuine form of correspondence that operates within the context of prose letters, Timothy Webb shows how Shelley produces persuasive poetry and finds a shared relationship with readers at one and the same time, this not being immediately possible in the usual run of things. The readership, whose centre of gravity within the poem is Maria

Gisborne and her family, is extended by invitation to the few eminent friends addressed directly in brief cameos. Such an anchorage in the polite informality of a verse-letter playfully contrasts the writer's presence in the Gisborne's home in Livorno and his absent friends in London; the wizardry of his imagination – delighting in long underpunctuated sentences and unusual associations – and the plethora of disconnected mechanical parts in his study. These objects are accounted for in such scrupulous 'unpoetic' detail that they seem to tug away in excess from the desire to bring them together, to enliven and make sense of them. Yet the resulting 'harmonious disarray', as Shelley calls it, goes to the heart of the poem and could well embody the poet's ideal – as much in art as in life, or in the wide universe of things.

Although the sonnet entitled 'To the Republic of Benevento' (or alternatively 'Political Greatness') has not been among the most neglected of Shelley's poems, the intricate web of events and circumstances surrounding or, as it were, enveloping the poem's composition in Italy has remained very much the province of biographers and textual scholars, and rarely, if ever, been brought into play in analysis of the work. In Michael Rossington's account of the poem – its genesis and alternative versions – this verbal and political texture is reintroduced into discussion. It is shown to have a bearing on the shifting nature of the poem's significance, according to which events it is thought to apply. On the one hand, the poem responds to the short-lived assertion of independence in Benevento (just north-east of Naples); on the other to the brief Neapolitan Revolution and constitutional government, and (by further implication) to the dormancy of society in Tuscany (supposedly the more advanced of the Italian states), all within the period from July 1820 to February 1821. The writer's social consciousness in advancing liberation is at stake. Affirmation of self-rule is shown to have a Godwinian and Platonic base, being exclusive neither to the individual nor to the state, while passivity – as sensed in Tuscany – or willing servitude, its corollary (and a key factor in the discussion) is deplored.

Late Plays

Variety is again the keynote of Shelley's venture into drama: in addition to tragedy and lyric drama, Shelley produced an Aristophanic pantomime burlesque (*Swellfoot the Tyrant*), several scenes for an historical tragedy ('Charles the First') and sketches for an idyllic *Tempest*-like play (the 'Unfinished Drama', as it has been called), all of them potentially stageworthy. There are also traces of interest in further dramatic experiments based on Job, Troilus and Cressida and Timon of Athens. (For 'Charles the First' and the 'Unfinished Drama', see 'Poetic and Dramatic Fragments' below.)

One of the most neglected of all Shelley's major works, *Swellfoot the Tyrant* is modelled on the satyr play succeeding the classical Greek trilogy. At centre stage, and regarded by Timothy Morton as constituting the protagonist of the play, are the pigs, pitted against their owners in a carnivalesque and pantomimic depiction of society as a factory farm (a bizarre yet insightful transference of our cruel habits with 'lesser' animals). The squalid pigs themselves are as much allegorical of the despised populace as a metaphor for meat – of their reduction to the food ingorged

by their owners in luxury, while they themselves starve. Hence the rich, ruling class pay unseemly homage to the goddess of Famine. Morton argues that Shelley's task is to bring the audience to empathize and, in a sense, to join forces with the stigmatized pigs, thus breaking free of age-old class prejudice, one premised on a disgust with animal nature. Mocking the scandalous, inflated affairs of the realm (the vilification of Queen Caroline, momentarily heir presumptive and wife of 'Swellfoot', the Prince Regent, in the summer of 1820), Shelley succeeds, with cruel irony, in reversing the order of society by depicting a famine-induced, popular insurrection – a refusal to be consumed and demonized – farcically but cuttingly imaged as a revelatory hunt, the aristocrats' favourite sport come back to haunt them and – in the play's own terms – to 'send them up'.

Poetic and Dramatic Fragments, and the Visual Arts

Fragments in the work of a poet may imply failure of completion, but this would be misleading in Shelley's case, as Nora Crook and Michael Bradshaw show. It is not a question of failure as much as it is one of seeking out the possibilities of an artistic conception. The Shelleyan fragment (of which there are many) might, in the case of the larger draft, such as 'Charles the First' and the 'Unfinished Drama', more expansively test out the possibilities of further development, or it might briefly explore an idea in a kind of literary workshop, without, in either instance, being constrained to reach completion.

Evidently Shelley faced difficulties in bringing his late dramatic conceptions to fruition. Time, and the immediate frustrations of composition were, in the end, against him. But, as Nora Crook indicates, in addition to such obstacles – and contrary to received opinion – Shelley's ambitions were high. He would probably throw aside an experiment that was seemingly intractable, perhaps to return to it later. He was conscious of a dramatic talent that, only in recent years, has come to seem an integral part of his output, rather than an offshoot of it. Several projects ran together at Pisa in the winter and spring of 1821–22, and of two that materialized in some coherent if rough and incomplete form, that devoted to a tragedy on 'Charles the First' demanded from Shelley a fastidiousness of style that impressed his friend Medwin. Although the scope of the tragedy was daunting, it appears from Crook's account that Shelley was not put out by ideological conflicts in the play. On the contrary, a Republican ideal outreaching that of the Puritans, and a martyr hero to affirm it (Sir Henry Vane), are identifiable in the extant drafts (a reading previously obscured by careless editing of the MS). 'Charles the First' attempts an ambitious historical reconstruction. In the case of the 'Unfinished Drama', the scale is reduced to that of intimacy and social relationships; its tendency towards unity is only perceptible in the interlocking chain of disappointments in love (elaborated in Mary Shelley's resumé of the story) and a sustained elegiac tone in the extant speeches. Yet intriguing links between the two dramatic fragments underscore their intrinsic significance, pointing to a shared underlying theme of the idea of 'commonwealth', and to a common cause.

With recourse to original manuscripts and notebooks, Michael Bradshaw recovers the integrity and reflexivity of the Shelleyan fragment, and (like Nora Crook) casts

a shadow over the practice of smoothing out the draft to produce a readable version of the text without the authority of the author, thus obliterating the indecisions and multiple pathways, of progression and deviation, of the draft. In the case of the smaller fragments that abound in Shelley's writings, Bradshaw examines a few examples that, read integrally, create their own dynamic as provisional draft imaginings, while linking with broader image clusters in Shelley's corpus (as in the case of the eagle) or with neighbouring drafts within the context of ongoing composition and re-integrative thought. Being in themselves isolated moments of writing, and not simply accounted for as a deliberate Romantic obsession, the fragments (among the finest and most challenging in the literature, according to Bradshaw) provide a microscopic view of Shelley's poetic technique, indicating choices made or deferred, in keeping with a striking predominant idea, perhaps an attribute or movement, as in a serene rising moon, or the latency of the eagle in flight. They also resist certainty and finality, much as they tempt one to seek their realization, suggesting that Shelley was admirably at ease with the provisional – with an idea to be left or taken up as the imaginative potential or the living moment might determine.

Though not generally recognized, the visual image, like the fragment, is a marked feature of Shelley's creative output. Sketches in the notebooks accompanying composition, notes on visits to galleries, and literary representations of classical sculpture or architecture are, in Shelley's case, primary examples of the fluid creative presence of the graphic arts. Given his iconoclasm, there may, however, be a tendency among readers to make unconditional Shelley's subversive opposition to the fixed or determinate image, most famously recorded in Demogorgon's remark to Asia: 'The deep truth is imageless.' Nancy Goslee provides a corrective to this view by showing the gradations of Shelley's relationship to the visual arts. Sketches, very often of trees, foliage and boats reflect less the specific content of the poetry than the general affirmation of liberty, or the tranquil mood that will be required to conceive it. Icons are as much rejected, or 'disfigured' in his writing, particularly those of an idolatrous stamp, as they are recovered for the transmission of enduring 'monumental' cultural forms, or the spirit of the age. While Shelley warms to the influence of surviving classical artefacts, and seeks to embrace their liberating ethos, his later writings, with renewed scepticism, express an anxiety concerning the disfiguring of the image, implying loss of inspiration, or even an enslaving communal influence, though not precluding genuine or positive transmission of some kind.

Afterword

In an afterword to the volume, Donald Reiman reflects on a career dedicated to Shelley – one to which the editors pay tribute in dedicating the present collection to him. He considers himself to have been on a quest to understand everything about the poet, admitting from the outset the danger of *hubris* – that such a task, worthy as it may be, is impossible of fulfilment. What is notable is how Reiman's views have altered over years of reading and scholarship, retaining all the while an increasing admiration for the poet, and gaining always greater insight. After first recognizing Shelley's craftsmanship, typically undervalued by Eliot and the New Critics in the

late 1950s, in a pioneering exploration of the manuscript of 'The Triumph Of Life' (a critical enquiry that remains seminal in Shelley studies), Reiman arrives at successive notions of Shelley: firstly as a reformer, but then only later – in consequence of deepening research into the corpus, and virtually all the original manuscripts – as an exceptionally well-versed artist committed to the best that humanity can achieve. It is an ideal requiring a degree of self-sacrifice but, in Shelley's case, without the support of religion to give meaning to nature's silence or 'vacancy' (a fact that eventually turned Reiman into a disciple). The poet who emerges from this life-long experience may be recognizable to Shelleyans (who will have benefited significantly from its patient explorations), but to most readers and especially those outside the fraternity, the extent of Shelley's accomplishment (endorsed by all the contributors) cannot fail to surprise.

Poetry

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Chapter 1

Reading as Flight: Fragment Poems from Shelley's Notebooks

Michael Bradshaw

What does a reader do with a text like this?

O thou whose cold hand tears the veils from error
Whose empty eyes our delusions mirror¹

Or this?

The flowers have spread
The calm is on the²

In each case, the fragment of verse appears alone on a torn page; it exists in no other version; there is no conclusive evidence that it is part of another work in progress, and it has never been subsumed into a longer text; it has never been previously published. For want of information to the contrary, the fragment remains an entity in its own right. The isolation of the reader before such a text is unusually bracing.

'O thou whose cold hand' is a vocative opening in an odal style, seeming to address a spiritual or allegorical agent who dispassionately exposes human dishonesty, a satirical function, but characterized by sorrow rather than comic verve; the coldness might be tentatively connected with stone or sculpture, or with death: but beyond that, what is it possible to say? 'The flowers have spread' is even more tantalizing, since it briefly sets a languid scene without coming to any point: the intellectual

1 MS Shelley, adds. e. 17, p. 54 rev. (*BSM* XII: 112–13); one of the last entries in this notebook, after much of leaf 53/54 was torn away: 'There is no obvious connection with any other notebook item, though Massey suggested that it might belong with "To the Moon"; as it stands it is a hypermetric heroic couplet. It *might* record an idea for a dramatic lyric', Crook, XII: xlix.

2 MS Shelley, adds. e. 18, p. 162 rev. (*BSM* XIX: 306–7); a rough draft: 'The very deep top margin suggests the start of a new lyric ... Several fragments like this among Shelley's poetry of 1820–1821 characteristically break off after a brief evocation of a scene or mood ... These may or may not have been intended for development or incorporation into a longer poem', Crook and Webb, XIX: xliv. Cancellations and so on have not been marked in these two introductory examples. Because of the draft nature of the texts, both these short fragments are more complex and uncertain than my transcriptions allow: they are quoted here in this edited form for the sake of brevity, in order to broach some of the key issues and problems of (reading) fragmentation. Analyses of complex textual examples will follow.

theme is forever deferred and absent. This tiny fragment of writing serves as a useful example. It is not untypical of the large number of verse fragments to be found in Shelley's notebooks, in that it constitutes an initial evocation, full of latent potential, which may develop and lead into a determined textual form, or may not. A reader can believe that events could have gone in a number of different directions: a poem might have emerged using this sketch as a starting point; it might have been abandoned as an opening, but been absorbed by an already growing text; or it might have stalled in this form, and have been left to languish in the notebook.

The notebook itself, and the relationships between its contiguous drafts and jottings, provides the only clear context that the fragment has. Beyond this, any act of interpretation which gestures towards a sense of context must be conjectural. Due to this general lack of information, and to their short and incomplete form, these texts are as open as can be. It is the combined reward and frustration of a short fragment poem both to invite and to thwart analysis, to appeal for interpretation and simultaneously to discredit it.

In engaging with an incomplete poetic text, the modern reader participates in an established tradition in Romantic criticism, since it was in the Romantic era that 'the fragment' became recognized as a legitimate form with a set of aesthetic associations when – due to a collaboration between writers, publishers and readers – the fragment evolved from being a mere failure of genre into a uniquely privileged genre in its own right,³ and modern criticism persistently returns to the fragmentary texts of the Romantics, sometimes in a spirit of formalist enquiry, sometimes applying historical or theoretical methodology, and often with the eventual effect of allegorizing the Romantic condition itself as broken and indeterminate. Some of the established arguments on fragmentation in Romantic poetry will be summarized below. But the particular qualities of reading fragments in a manuscript or facsimile notebook may be to overturn or call into question some of these standards of 'Romantic' criticism in whose service the fragment is often enlisted.⁴

Theories of the Romantic fragment poem have tended to propose constitutive reading by the projection of an absent whole. The fragment – whether overtly presented as such ('A Dramatic Fragment', 'A Fragment of a Turkish Tale' and so on)

3 Marjorie Levinson makes the most substantial historical argument on the evolution of the fragment as a legitimate genre, in *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, esp. Ch. 2; see below for further discussion.

4 Levinson considers the potential conflation between declared fragments and unfinished drafts: 'poems left unfinished, apparently not intended for publication in that condition, and printed posthumously through the intervention of an editor ... So amenable are these works to the techniques and values of modern criticism ... that we absorb these accidental fragments into the genre tacitly established by the "authorized" RFP [Romantic fragment poem]' (*The Romantic Fragment Poem*, pp. 17–18). My close reading of Shelley's notebook fragments certainly risks falling foul of Levinson's stricture here, and yet my approach to the question of 'intentionality' is markedly different: rather than acknowledging a tendency to intentionalize the fragment, I would argue that it is in the fragment's exclusion of intention – there being no ultimate recourse to the author's intention in the case of a draft which by definition failed to resolve an intentional conception – that the freedoms and fascinations of the 'genre' truly lie.

or identified editorially (as in the case of notebook drafts) – is instinctively interpreted as a deviation from a standard norm of wholeness or completion. In order to read a *fragment* as such, and to maintain the use of this term, there must exist in some abstract space a completed text from which it has become detached. Paradoxically, the whole once again becomes the primary form and focus: in order to analyse the brokenness of texts, we reinstate an approval of wholeness, and imagine that the text in its whole state is, in an abstract sense, originary – if not actually original.⁵ This of course is a challenging and uncertain practice, alternatively begetting a licensed reader able to participate in the writing of the text on equal terms with the author, or else a hopelessly disorientated reader, cast adrift with few if any sea-marks – both of which have their attractions. It is the fragment's radical exclusion of 'intentionality' that holds much of its fascination for a relativist or reader-centred criticism. As for Shelley himself, there is evidence that in the multi-layered complexity of his drafting processes, the fragment occupies a privileged position as a creative suspension of intention, the author's acceptance of and qualified surrender to vivid, unpredictable moments of thought and style: in this sense, the potential imaginative value of the fragment depends on the risk that it may lead to an apparent dead-end. However, to return to the source, so to speak, and examine a poet's working drafts and jottings, will tend to challenge these assumptions. For in a draft notebook we see, or think that we see, writing itself, anatomized and laid bare, an uneven process in which part emphatically precedes whole: stanzas, lines, images, isolated phrases, sketches and doodles crowd together in an apparently unmediated space, as the writer inscribes or transcribes ideas of an entirely provisional nature.⁶

The distinctive value of reading a fragmentary text in a manuscript or facsimile is the rediscovery of the uneven processes of writing, in which the fragment is the primary form. The projected or imagined whole can tend to make the reading and interpretation of fragments too comfortable an activity; a return to the manuscript sources can conversely have the effect of removing the projected whole, and reinforcing the unfamiliarity and uncertainty of the unfinished.

The term 'fragment' is a capacious umbrella which customarily includes broken, disputed, fugitive, or else 'authentically' unfinished texts of all shapes and sizes. There have been several attempts to break the term down into a more rigorous

5 Cf. Anne Janowitz: 'If something is ruined, then presumably it once had a full form that has eroded through time. A fragment, on the other hand, is simply part of a whole: temporal or visual. ... In this de-historicizing and aestheticizing process, the fragment form becomes the place where the theme of incompleteness is enacted', 'The Romantic Fragment', in *A Companion to Romanticism*, Duncan Wu (ed.). Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 442–51 (p. 444).

6 Neville Rogers makes a related point about Shelley's writing methods: 'Readers of the Poetical Works are often conscious of ... relationships between poems and fragments of poems: what we become conscious of when we encounter them in the notebooks is the embarrassed struggle of Shelley with the double, triple, or manifold birth which his fertility can give to a single poetical germ-cell, a single feeling or idea', *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, pp. 199–200.

taxonomy of incompleteness, but none has become widely accepted currency.⁷ It is well known that many substantial works of Shelley were left incomplete, including ‘Marengi’, ‘Fiordispina’, ‘Charles the First’ and others, the classic instance being ‘The Triumph of Life’: part of the fascination of reading fragments and fragmentation is the adaptability of the concept to large and small scales, the discovery that ‘Art thou pale for weariness ...?’ can actually be discussed in the same breath as ‘The Triumph of Life’, and that related scholarly and theoretical concerns are applicable to each.⁸

In this sense, the short fragment poem provides us with a useful micro-instance, an opportunity to consider in focused miniature the workings of Shelley’s ‘fragmentational’ drafting methods, and the creative tension between the experience of completion and incompleteness in his work. This chapter will therefore investigate a range of shorter verse fragments / fragment poems from Shelley’s notebooks, without aiming for comprehensive coverage, and attempt to demonstrate the richness and value of reading the fragmentary, emphasizing a recurrent theme of reflexivity in fragmentary writing, and charting some possible directions from the micro-instances of short verse fragments back into the main body of Shelley’s works.

In 1970 D.F. Rauber wrote that the fragment ‘can ... be called the ultimate romantic form – ultimate in the sense that it matches romantic ideals and tone as fully and completely as the closed couplet matches the ideals of eighteenth-century neoclassicism’.⁹ Rauber argues that the apparently premature truncation of a text can give the impression that it continues in some ideal space beyond comprehension.¹⁰ Despite the limitation of never actually testing these broad ideas in detailed readings, Rauber’s essay is significant in moving away from a prevailing contemporary attitude of disparagement towards incomplete texts, and attributing to them instead

7 See for example Balachandra Rajan’s distinctions between terms such as *fragment*, *torso* and *ruin*, in *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 3–5, and between the *incomplete* and the *unfinished*, pp. 14, 44 and *passim*; for further discussion of fragment theories and taxonomy, see also Michael Bradshaw, *Resurrection Songs: The Poetry of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001, pp. 83–8, 91.

8 ‘The Triumph of Life’ is something of a special case in being both a substantial text and a permanent fixture in the canon of Shelley’s works; and yet influential discussions have focused on its brokenness as well as on its coherence, De Man’s classic deconstructive study continuing to cast a long shadow; after De Man, the idea of defeated or irresolute meaning is a major part of the debate surrounding this poem: see Paul De Man, ‘Shelley Disfigured’, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, no eds. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 39–73.

9 ‘The Fragment as a Romantic Form’. *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (1970), pp. 212–21 (p. 215).

10 For discussion of the related theme of determined vs failed closure in poetic texts, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968; and Stevie Smith’s incisive poetic response to ‘Kubla Khan’, ‘Thoughts about the Person from Porlock’, in *Selected Poems*. London: Longman, 1962.

a distinctive eloquence, thus making an early contribution to a debate which still continues today – an ongoing debate which now includes interventions from reader-response, humanist, deconstructionist and historicist criticism.¹¹

Thomas McFarland's *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* is a collection of chapters on Wordsworth and Coleridge arranged around the idea of fragmentary form; this is prefaced by a long historical survey that demonstrates the pervasive fragmentariness of Romantic culture (in Levinson's term a 'zeitgeist critique').¹² McFarland's argument is amply illustrated with examples from European art and literature, and argues that the distinctively Romantic figure of longing for the infinite tends inevitably to find its most apt expression in broken forms, and in confessions of fragmented defeat. The combination of symbolic longing and organic form constitutes a Romantic paradox, and Shelley (as well as Coleridge) is present as a key instance of both theory and practice:

We see the ... Romantic concern with infinity, and the attendant paradox whereby the perception of parts and fragments implies the hypothetical wholeness of infinity, but the impossibility of grasping that entity simultaneously witnesses the actual dominance of diasparactive forms.¹³

Balachandra Rajan's *The Form of the Unfinished* is a contrasting example of poststructuralist analysis that reads incompleteness by proposing a structural tension in poetry between closural energy which drives towards a determined conclusion, and rival forces 'equally grounded in the work's identity' which tend to scatter and disperse.¹⁴ Rajan also asserts the 'colonial status' of the fragment as a text which refuses and defies attempts to absorb or order it:

It is apparent that the fragment must free itself from relationship with the whole, that it must develop a poetics of independence. ... In moving towards the fragment's self-reliance, its right to significance without incorporation, it is, surprisingly, the Romantics who point the way rather than the main voices of the Pound era.¹⁵

11 The most influential work which contrastingly disparages the high incidence of unfinished texts among the Romantics, and which Levinson places at the opposite pole from McFarland (Levinson, *Romantic Fragment Poem*, pp. 12–13) is Edward Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1975: Bostetter argues that the fragment bears witness to a damaging irresolution which does much to discredit the Romantic generations.

12 Levinson, *Romantic Fragment Poem*, p. 9.

13 Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Modalities of Fragmentation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 28–9. Despite the value and appeal of this argument, McFarland appears largely unconcerned with distinctions between the circumstances which give rise to incomplete texts: '... (and whether fragmentary by intent or by accident makes little difference) ...', p. 20; and also invokes biography in an indifferent way according to its symbolic value: 'Early death is not merely early demise – it is a diasparaction that emphasizes the sense of incompleteness and fragmentation', p. 13. I am keen to avoid this kind of reasoning in my reading of Shelley.

14 Rajan, *Form of the Unfinished*, p. 7.

15 Rajan, *Form of the Unfinished*, p. 309.

Marjorie Levinson's *The Romantic Fragment Poem* is an influential historical study of how and why the fragment became a literary institution in the Romantic era. Levinson analyses the legitimization of the fragment poem in the Romantic era, the frequent appearance of one or more 'fragments' in poetry volumes, and the acceptability among readers that this implies. She identifies a key precursor in literary reception in the hoax poem cases of Chatterton and Macpherson in the eighteenth century: the Rowley and Ossian poems were early examples of a reading public becoming accustomed to accepting literary productions in a 'frame' of fragmentary or spurious status, and thus to consuming them self-consciously in a particular way. The readership became aware of reception context as a problematic condition of a text's meanings. Levinson's discussion is mainly concerned with the publicly declared fragment rather than fugitive drafts and sketches.¹⁶

With their widely differing styles and methodologies, all these studies do perhaps share some common assumptions about the fragmentary text and how to read it. Put simply, this might be a continuing belief that the reader of a fragment, like the observer of broken classical artefacts – 'those faultless productions whose very fragments are the despair of modern art' – is instinctively impelled imaginatively to complete what s/he sees.¹⁷ This complex debate can therefore be seen to work from a tacit assumption that 'fragments' are generally erstwhile 'wholes' in a state of partial decay – an assumption that may be severely tested by the study of a literary style such as Shelley's, which consistently engages with brokenness and contingency in its methods of composition.

With this as a starting-point or common ground, critics and theorists may eloquently differ about the consequences and implications. The importance of manuscript material here (especially a fragment like 'The flowers have spread', cited above, which has no apparent abode or affiliation) is to stress with renewed urgency that the putative whole which may certainly be read in this way is only and always a projection of the reader. In this sense, a return to the manuscript source exerts a surprising double corrective. On the one hand, it focuses attention on the author, reapplying a respectful regard for the exact circumstances of the writing, including a realistic acknowledgement of the limits of knowledge;¹⁸ this is important, and it is a corrective, since a licensed use of, or indifference to, the author is common when Romantic myths are sustained by opportunistic oscillation between life and works. On the other hand, a return to the manuscript also focuses the reader's attention on her/his own practice. To experience a text in this way is to discover that fragmentary writing is intrinsically self-reflexive: it leads us to forge our own connections, and

16 But see n. 4, above.

17 Preface to *Hellas, Shelley's Poetry and Prose (SPP)*: 431. Cf. Henry Fuseli's drawing entitled, 'The Artist in Despair over the Magnitude of Antique Fragments' (1798).

18 For a fuller argument on the value of accepting incompleteness in reading from Shelley's MSS, see Alan Weinberg, 'Making Space for the Conditional: Some Reflections on Shelley Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library'. *The English Academy Review* 13 (December 1996), pp. 121–39.

challenges us to support them, the formal quality of the text drawing attention to both what it will and will not provide.

There are, of course, historical and traditional reasons for believing in the interrelation of fragmentation and reflexivity. Some well-known evidence can be found in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, whose perfection of the aphoristic philosophical fragment in his writings for the *Athenäum* (1798) continues to be a key reference point for theories of the irony and fragmentariness of Romantic art.¹⁹ Much of the energy and satisfaction of Schlegel's writing derives from a formal parallel between a reflexive metaphysics with insights into grand themes such as nature and humanity, and his dramatization of the inevitably fragmentary instance of knowledge: 'Man is Nature creatively looking back at itself.'²⁰ In this short declaration, or 'sound bite', a whole universe is proposed which is organized on artistic lines, with consciousness and human history being products of nature's need to reflect on its own achievement. Schlegel manipulates scale in some exhilarating ways in his writings, juxtaposing fragments of widely differing length, pronouncing on the universe in bold statements just a few lines long. Schlegel's often quoted fragment on fragments is from *Athenäums Fragmente* (1798), no. 206: 'A fragment must like a small work of art be quite separated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog.'²¹ This comically evokes the 'resistance' of the fragment to the threat of attempted incorporation from the outside world, an idea which chimes with Rajan's claim for the 'colonial' status of the fragment;²² at the same time, however, it dictates a set of aesthetic and ethical conditions for its own consumption, and all these levels of signification in the space of a single sentence.

In common with several other major Romantic poets, P.B. Shelley is known for some critical/theoretical arguments which seem to propose incompleteness as an intrinsic quality of literature and art. It is frequently observed, for instance, that incompleteness and failure are implicit in the theories of production in 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821) – the creating mind as fading coal, the achieved work of art as feeble shadow of the original conception. The specific instance of his fragment texts is a rich deepening of this wider discourse. It should not be controversial to suggest that Shelley's fragment poems are consistently among the finest, most complex and most challenging of any British Romantic.²³ At their best, they engage boldly with the formal modality of fragmentary writing, and attach their subject matter directly

19 For example, Anne Janowitz writes, 'The Jena School theory of fragments lies at the origin of poststructuralist notions of all literary texts being in a state of incompleteness and all literary language as insufficient' ('The Romantic Fragment', pp. 442–3).

20 Friedrich Schlegel, *Ideen* (1800), no. 28, in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, ed. Kathleen M. Wheeler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 55.

21 McFarland's translation, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 45; Wheeler cites Peter Firchow's translation, *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*, p. 48.

22 Rajan, *Form of the Unfinished*, p. 309.

23 Shelley, we know, was fully aware of the modish acceptability of the fragment as quasi-genre as described by McFarland, Levinson et al.; but his tactical use of the explicit fragment (in *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, for example) falls outside the scope of this discussion, which addresses only notebook material, and in which the emphasis

also demonstrates how lost concentration is represented on the page, with doodles and light jottings of the pen: Shelley seems to have been a writer able to accept or welcome the movement of attention away from an intended project.²⁸ This is an important idea, since by figuring the straying, or movement of the writer's attention *away from* the immediate project in hand ('when the attention / fails'), Shelley's compositional drafts allow us to engage with the materiality of the 'finished' text as a made object, whose existence is local and partial, and results from the closing down of numerous potential alternatives: the effect also implies confirmation of the fact that Shelley was well aware of this phenomenon. In this fragment, the managed parallel between two interruptions of reading (namely, that of the reader *in* the poem and that of the reader *of* the poem) implies the present reader's conscious mind becoming occupied or possessed by some sensual quality not to be found in the text. The text in fact figures the distraction of its own reader by something external to it. The fragment therefore dramatizes its own moment of extinction, the point at which our experience transcends its small confines. In common with many other fragment poems, 'How sweet it is ...' then turns in on itself; it gestures towards escape, but holds the eye at the border, unwilling to release it. More specific and in fact more limiting than the familiar full-circle return of the well made lyric, therefore, this fragment assumes an ambivalent stance towards the perfection of its own form, by gesturing towards interruption and yet interrupting this theme. It seems to countermand its own invitation before the reader can accept. Pressing further the personifying fallacy at work here, one might say it is both heedless of its own status and also greedy for the attention it seems to renounce.

By reading this fragment in these terms, I have effectively argued that its form functions as an allegory of its own major statement; this is a characteristically 'reflexive' or 'self-reflexive' interpretation, and not an uncommon interpretative response to the problems posed by an unfinished text. But it is also 'about' music, and the reader or scholar has a right to remain curious about the specific piece of music, the specific read text, the specific experience that may have given rise to it.²⁹ The theoretical or close-textual investigation of the poem's reflexivity must not close off its denotative life. In an entertaining exposition of the derivation and usage of the word 'reflexivity' and its allies, Robert Siegle has observed how the idea of reflection has a fundamental association with return, folding-back, a journey which turns in on itself but is then able to continue on its original course on a narrative or denotative trajectory.³⁰ Interpreters and theorists of reflexivity in many forms

28 Cf. 'Unlike the leafy twigs and dot patterns frequently found amidst Shelley's writing during a temporary pause, these [scribbles] seem to be made at the point where he was about to abandon a composition or had just abandoned one ... – the idle hand's activity answering to the mind's relaxing its attention from the wrestling with words', Crook and Webb, *BSM XIX*: lxix.

29 *MS Journals I*: 255 records that Shelley heard a *Miserere* in the Sistine Chapel on 30 March 1819, around the time when he was also reading Plutarch's *Lives*; accordingly, Everest and Matthews suggest that this fragment reflects on the public rather than private performance of music, *Poems of Shelley (PS)* II: 454.

30 Siegle first images 'the Reflexive Circuit' as a line describing a round loop: 'That circling looks almost like an eye or eyelet through which one would look to frame a view

agree that the observation that a text contains (self-reflexive) potential must not be a limitation on its multiple meanings or its capacity to ‘be about other things’ apart from a meditation on its own formality.³¹ And notwithstanding its formal controversies or linguistic involution, a Romantic fragment poem is entitled – as it were – to have things to say about music, or eagles, or what you will. In the case of Shelley, however, there are certain devices which, articulated across the notional divide between form and content, seem to arise frequently and by temperament. As William Keach has observed, the high incidence of reflexivity in Shelley’s imagery is related to his representation of mental process:

The signifying function of a phrase or clause turns back on itself, and its doing so marks an ‘operation of the human mind’ that couples analysis or division (as an aspect is separated from the idea to which it belongs) with synthesis or reunion (as the separated or divided aspect is re-identified with that same idea) ...³²

To read a fragment poem in such a way – basically to have it tell its own allegorical or metacritical story – could therefore be regarded as appropriate to Shelley’s customary way of representing his major themes.

One of Shelley’s more familiar verse fragments appears in the ‘Charles the First’ notebook: ‘Art thou pale for weariness ...?’, often entitled ‘To the Moon’ by editors, has long been an anthology piece, sometimes held to encapsulate the idealistic or alienated character of Romantic longing, or to meditate on the poet’s own soul, or alternatively presented as an encoded tribute to Mary Shelley.³³ This draft poem was first printed in the ‘Fragments’ section of *Posthumous Poems*; it subsequently appeared in *Poetical Works*, dated 1820 by Mary, paired with ‘The Waning Moon’ in the second edition.³⁴ Nora Crook writes that the poem may possibly have been drafted as a dramatic lyric or ‘lute-song’ for an unwritten scene of ‘Charles the First’, and would fit with the emotional and dramatic context if associated with the character of the Queen.³⁵ A dense but unobtrusive draft in the manuscript, ‘Art thou pale ...’ is transcribed in just fifteen lines alongside the *BSM* facsimile:

Art thou pale for weariness
earth
~~Lady of the spheres~~ on the world]
 Of climbing Heaven, & gazing

– and appropriately so, since we are used to talking about a text as a framed view of the world.’ *The Politics of Reflexivity: Narrative and the Constitutive Poetics of Culture*. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 2.

31 See for example Michael O’Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-conscious Poem*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p. xv ff.

32 William Keach, *Shelley’s Style*. New York and London: Methuen, 1984, p. 80.

33 MS Shelley adds. e. 17, p. 53 rev. (*BSM* XII: 110–11); this fragment appears on the MS page previous to ‘O thou whose cold hand ...’, quoted above.

34 *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, London, 1824, p. 263; *PW* IV: 45; *PW*, single-volume edn, p. 276. The poem was also published twice by Rossetti.

35 Crook, *BSM* XII: xlvi–xlix.

Wandering companionless

Among the stars that have a different birth

And ever changing like ^a joyless eye

That finds no object worth its constancy __

~~[?Sole]-s~~

Thou

Thou sp[?o] chosen sister of the spirit
gazes on thee till in thee it pities

That ~~pity s and loves an~~<d>

~~The woe~~

Shelley's 'Charles the First' notebook is the sole source for this much admired lyric, which occurs together with drafts of the eponymous play. The poem has been frequently reprinted in various forms, alternately including or excluding what appears to be a truncated second stanza.³⁶ The difference between the notebook transcription above and an established 'clear text' version of the poem is striking:

TO THE MOON

I

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing Heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, –
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?

II

Thou chosen sister of the spirit,
That gazes on thee till in thee it pities ...³⁷

In this popular form the draft fragment of verse, in acquiring the cleanliness and clarity of print, becomes a legitimate poem, and is canonized alongside major works such as

36 For contrasting examples of the range of practice in presenting this poem, see for example *Shelley, Poems*, ed. Isabel Quigley. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, which follows Hutchinson's text of 1904 and presents a clear text of the poem as above; and *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb. London: Dent (Everyman), 1977, which omits the fragmentary second stanza, using the title 'Fragment: To the Moon'. In the latter text, an explicitly editorial – rather than authorial – title is used to indicate the unfinished status of the text to the reader, and a note is provided, quoting the remainder of the fragment: 'This suggests that Shelley may have intended to relate this symbol of alienation to a specific human context', *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems*, p. 216.

37 The version published by Quigley.

Epipsychidion.³⁸ To read the poem in this form is necessarily to take away much of its contingency and uncertainty, for example in the rejection of deleted phrases such as ‘Lady of the spheres’, ‘Sole [sister]’ and ‘The woe’, but the necessary preservation of ‘Art thou’ in order to make syntactical sense of the opening – the traditional question mark at the end of the stanza being also an editorial intervention.³⁹ The provision of a title is, of course, symptomatic of the production of a ‘legitimate’ text. In this form the fragment can behave as a gorgeous Romantic lyric, and direct the reader’s imaginative attention to abstract ideas and aesthetic delicacy. Cleansed of much of its textual difficulty, and of its possible relationship with a dramatic context, the poem confronts a reader with the appealing mystery merely of its unfinished status. The fact that the poem comes to no decided end can be enlisted in the construction of a spiritualized or internalized Romanticism, allowing the reader to indulge the freedoms of undirected, ‘fragmentary’ reading.

The return to the manuscript source has particular importance in the case of an already well-known fragment poem, since its discipline is to reinstate the complex uncertainty that has been cleansed from the text; a re-acquaintance with the text in its original notebook form may contrastingly direct our attention away from the received freedoms of the lyrical fragment in the ‘Kubla Khan’ style, and towards (for example) the socially collaborative medium of drama. An important detail here is the consideration and cancellation of the phrase ‘Lady of the spheres’, whose status in the draft is neither greater nor lesser than the interrogative ‘Art thou’, long since enshrined as an intrinsic part of the lyric ‘To the Moon’. An apostrophe to ‘Lady of the spheres’ seems on the face of it to support Nora Crook’s conjecture that the lyric may have been associated with or sung by the Queen in ‘Charles the First’, since its tone is companionable rather than erotic. Shelley’s de-familiarization and manipulation of traditional moon iconography is well known from other texts, notably the associated poem ‘The Waning Moon’, and this personification could be another alternative to the customary Diana as virginal huntress. Shelley’s Queen might invoke a melancholy and wandering moon as a potential ally in female grief, just as Sidney boldly re-gendered the moon as a fashionable male co-commiserator in *Astrophil and Stella*. The complex challenge of this phrase, however, is to take account not only of its existence, but also of its cancellation – and even of the likely provisional nature of this ‘working’ cancellation.

Carlene Adamson’s facsimile of Shelley’s ‘Pisan Winter Notebook’ of 1820 to 1821 contains a cluster of short texts addressing a common strong visual image, the eagle in flight. Close attention to these three instances – and even a related sketch of an eagle – reveals some intricate patterns of connection and variation, both among the texts themselves, and also in relation to the long poem whose draft occupies most

38 For example, Quigley’s Penguin edition is based on approximate chronological order of composition, and therefore positions ‘To the Moon’ between ‘Autumn: A Dirge’ and *Epipsychidion*.

39 The underlining of the phrase ‘The woe’ indicates that it was deleted but then apparently reinstated.

of the notebook – *Epipsychidion*. The texts that I will discuss in this section are the fragments ‘An eagle floating in the golden glory’ and ‘Mighty eagle thou that soarest’, and the translated Greek epigram about Plato, ‘Eagle! Why soarest thou above that tomb?’

One of these three texts has no other manuscript source, and seems not to have been published previously to the facsimile: ‘An eagle floating in the golden glory’ appears as follows:⁴⁰

An eagle struck with blinding

An eagle ~~h~~ovring ~~o~~er its

clouds

An eagle floating in the golden glory

<outs preading>

Of the unrisen sun,— a ship, unfolding

expanding

Its white wings beneath a , up <lofting>

under the grey promontory

the black promontory

Rejoicing in the tempest

Its swan like wings over the ocean <hoary>

Rejoicing in the tempest, a star drifting

Oer the Athwart a Planet drifting

Rejoicing in the storm, which

and swiftly <treading>

The

In order for such a densely revised composition draft to evolve into an acceptable printed poem, an editor might choose to abide by the original cancellations, as far as sense allows, leaving in place whatever remains:

An eagle floating in the golden glory

Of the unrisen sun,— outspreading

Its swan like wings over the ocean hoary

Athwart a Planet drifting

Rejoicing in the storm, and swiftly treading

The

This would seem at first to be a reasonable rendering of the text. But notice that, as in the case of ‘[Art thou] pale for weariness’, a word we now find to be crucial to both sense and musicality has likewise been cancelled – ‘glory’. ‘Glory’ has been rejected,

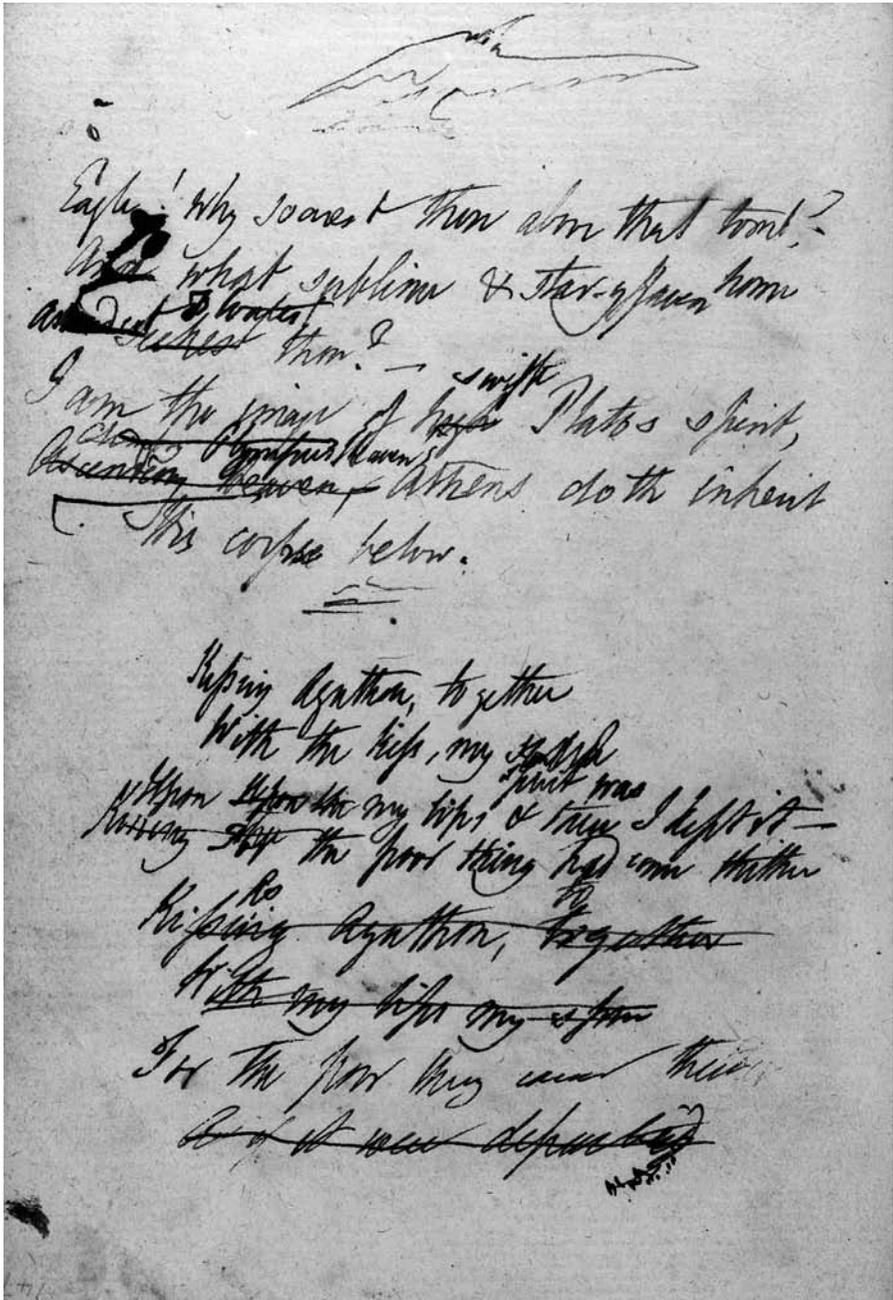
40 MS Shelley adds. e. 8, p. 3 (*BSM* VI: 86–7). ‘To my knowledge, this fragment has not been identified or published. That it is complete on p. 3 and does not belong to any other text in this notebook seems likely. Such a conclusion, however, does not preclude the possibility that it might be a precursor or a derivative of the “Mighty eagle” fragment on p. 139 *rev.*’, Adamson, *BSM* VI: 31. This quotation includes a number of angled brackets, the editor’s indication of conjectural readings, some of which have been cancelled by the author, further deepening the textual complexity of the fragment.

along with its possible alternative ‘clouds’, and nothing finally left in its place. As with the cancellation of ‘Lady of the spheres’, it is again difficult to know how to interpret an interesting cancelled reading in relation to material that is not cancelled. If the whole poem were heavily scored out, or had been rescued from the flames by a friend, in a sense there would be no dilemma: the text is of interest and questions of fractured provenance within it do not arise. But the cancellation of ‘glory’ actually tells us that the poem has no syntactically correct form that was ever decided by the author, and therefore marks it out as definitively irresolute. It does not or should not exist as a legitimate poem that may be perused in a collection; arguably, it should not even be read unless we are able to engage with its textual complexity.

The content of ‘An eagle floating’ is particularly interesting with regard to reflexivity and the reading of fragments. Shelley cancels ‘struck with blinding’ at the top of the draft, directly under a sketch of some trees; he does this not perhaps as a metrical dead end – one good reason to start again – but more probably as a mistaken beginning for tonal reasons: the idea of blinding would presumably intensify the explosive power of a risen rather than unrisen sun, and the writer might judge this inappropriate for a meditation on latency. Alternatively, the ‘blinding’ sunlight might have been a distraction because it offered an unlikely rival to the traditionally peerless, piercing eyesight of the eagle, which would not be blinded but draw strength from that which blinded others.

Shelley cancels what was probably ‘An eagle hovering over its’, also apparently for tonal reasons. ‘Hovering’ is not really a surprising enough word for a successful lyric. And in any case, it would have been ornithologically inaccurate: eagles do not hover, but they do *soar*, as in the companion poem discussed below. Soaring is the controlled but inactive riding of thermal currents in the air: the bird locates a thermal and then rides it in shallow, gradually rising spirals, occasionally drifting down to the bottom of another thermal, as a way of traversing territory. Birds can soar for great lengths of time. A large raptor like an eagle can therefore survey a vast hunting territory while expending a minimum of energy. A bird of prey which hovers, such as a kestrel, maintains a fixed position in the air while preparing to stoop on its chosen prey; the action takes a great deal of energy and can be maintained for a short time only. Hovering, as Shelley surely realized, is something quite different, and unsuited to his tone and leading idea in the poem: a hovering eagle, as well as being inaccurate, which I am suggesting matters to Shelley here, strikes entirely the wrong note, by disturbing the idea of poise and taking a more effortful and active stance. The preferred word ‘floating’ is a clearer evocation of an eagle’s flight, and truer to the poem’s theme of latency.

The cancellation of ‘An eagle struck with blinding’ seems to be a shift away from startling or aggressive imagery, and towards a more neutral tone: many of the intense revisions in this drafting process cancel strong diction, leaving calmer alternatives in place: ‘struck’ and ‘blinding’ are cancelled; ‘storm’ replaces ‘tempest’; ‘promontory’ is cancelled; ‘ocean’ is retained. The wings are white in a deleted line, contrasting with darker colours in the bird’s environment; then, likened to the sails of a ship over the ‘hoary’ ocean, they become ‘swan like’. Why compare an eagle to another quite different bird? Compare an eagle to a thunderbolt, possibly, like Tennyson – but a *swan*? The un-deleted ‘swan like’ brings in some alternative associations, such as



1.1 MS draft of 'Eagle why soarest thou ...', with sketch of eagle

This 'Platonic epigram' is found five leaves before 'Mighty eagle' when the notebook is perused *verso*. As an exercise in translation with a very specific philosophical theme, the style of this text is of course quite different from those (original Shelleyan) exploratory verse fragments discussed above;⁴⁴ and yet in terms of its central visual image, it further demonstrates the complex associative energy of Shelley's drafting process. A subtle meditation on what might be called the ethics of flight accumulates in the interaction between these texts, since the two fragment poems and the translated epigram revolve around a common strong image of emancipation in the eagle itself.

An ironic tribute to Athens, which receives the body of Plato even as his soul ascends heavenwards, the epigram is written in the form of a dialogue between an observer and the eagle-soul: 'Why soarest thou above that tomb ...?' / 'I am the image of swift Plato's spirit ...'. The eagle is Plato's liberated soul returning home, leaving his bodily debris to be buried in Athens.⁴⁵ It addresses themes of commemoration as well as spirituality, and in the dualistic Greek style, celebrates the symbolic *flight* of death as an elevation of the true self above the trammels of the material world, much as Plato had recorded the happy flight of Socrates' death in the *Phaedo*. The arrangement of the text on the page of the notebook is of particular interest here, since this and the following epigram, 'Kissing Agathon', beneath it, (which, like the previous epigram, was traditionally ascribed to 'Plato'), are surmounted by Shelley's eagle sketch: wings extended, head and bill inclined heavenwards, the eagle appears to be leaving the page, departing from the text which offers to contain it in words. If this is an 'elegy', it is in the sense of commemorative inscription rather than song of mourning, and conforms to the convention of the elegiac poem as 'tomb': the text assumes the role of the material body which the psychic self of Plato must disparage and abandon. The poem regards Plato's remains with a tone of mingled reverence and careless disdain; and the page complements this sensation beautifully, by allowing the pure visual form of the eagle drawing – dashed off, the work of a moment, one imagines – to rise away from the meticulous and limiting verse, a visual performance of the escape from language. This dynamic encounter between the text and the picture holds in balance two conflicting impulses which are said to shape all creatively indeterminate writing – 'purposiveness' and 'errancy'.⁴⁶

44 For Shelley's use of the Bipont edition of Plato as a source for his translations, see James Anastasios Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: a Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949, pp. 508–13; for a comprehensive study of Shelley as a scholarly and creative translator and theorist of translation, see Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, esp. Ch. 3 on translations from Greek, pp. 90–141. In summarizing the key components of Shelley's practice, Webb argues for the catalytic power of translation: 'For Shelley, translation was in part a propaedeutic, a poetic exercise which helped to ignite his creative faculties', p. 48.

45 Neville Rogers reads this epigram as a tribute to human philosophical power: 'So too, like the divine eye which radiates life [in "Hymn of Apollo"], the eye of Man's philosophical imagination, when it has power to leap upwards, has its place among the stars. Shelley translated the Greek epigram where the eagle is a symbol of the Leap ...', *Shelley at Work*, p. 115.

46 Rajan, *Form of the Unfinished, passim*; see also Janowitz, quoting Georg Simmel: 'The fragmentary ruin is ... bounded by two impulses or instincts: on the one hand, the "brute,

The two eagle fragments, together with the proximate eagle epigram, constitute a cluster of visual, imaginative and linguistic ideas: they have common points of connection. Although these texts are not substantial in themselves, and although they are left in draft and (in a narrow sense) formally unresolved, they provide opportunities to read across Shelley's working drafts, and to observe ideas beginning to cohere and take shape, an accumulation of material just solid enough to allow the writer's attention to move away to other matters, while leaving in place the possibility that key ideas or images may re-surface at another time, in another context. The eagle poems in the 'Pisan Winter Notebook' exist alongside and in between drafts for the growing poem *Epipsychidion*, which was itself to take up related themes of flight and freedom, and an opposition between incarceration and release that is sited in the conscious self, in erotic relationships, and in the poem's meditations on language.⁴⁷

The incidence of eagles in Shelley's writings has been documented by Donald Reiman, who connects the eagle epigram and fragments with a widespread network of eagles, from *Laon and Cythna* to 'Charles the First'.⁴⁸ In his eagle images Shelley tends to counterpoint the imperial or Jovial associations of the bird with his own emphasis on liberation: 'new-fledged Eagles' as an image of indomitable serenity in *Laon and Cythna* (V, 2182–4);⁴⁹ an eagle as liberated soul again in 'Ode to Liberty' (ll. 5–9);⁵⁰ a figure of idealistic and impetuous speed in 'The Witch of Atlas' (XLV, 405–6);⁵¹ tempest-defying Greek freedom in *Hellas* (ll. 76–89)⁵² and in 'Charles the First' a simile in which 'the eagle spirits of the free' rise out of the mountain nest of the prison, England, challenging and defying the forces of corruption.⁵³ In 'The Triumph of Life' the flight of eagles is again symbolic of a strength that consists in mobility, a conviction that will not be subdued by the coercive nature of institutional power:

downward-dragging, corroding, crumbling power of nature", and on the other, the advance or upward flight of the "human will" ('The Romantic Fragment', p. 448; quotation from Georg Simmel, *A Collection of Essays with Translations and a Bibliography*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff. Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 1959, p. 261). For further discussion of the relation between sketches and text, see Nancy Goslee, 'Shelleyan Inspiration and the Sister Arts', in the present volume.

47 In the Advertisement to the published version (1821) an epigraph which Shelley attributes to Emilia Viviani proposes the flight from decided material form as the central theme of the poem: '*L'anima amante si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea nel infinito un Mondo tutto per essa, diverso assai da questo oscuro e pauroso baratro*' ['The loving soul launches beyond creation, and creates for itself in the infinite a world all its own, far different from this dark and terrifying gulf', *SPP*: 392, n. 1].

48 The following summary is indebted to Reiman, *SC* V: 212–14.

49 *PS* II: 154 (V, 2182–4).

50 *SPP*: 307 (ll. 5–9).

51 *SPP*: 380 (XLV, 405–6).

52 *SPP*: 435 (ll. 76–89).

53 *Shelley: Poetical Works* (1905), ed. Thomas Hutchinson. 2nd edn rev. G.M. Matthews. London and New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford Standard Authors), 1970 (iv, 48–58); this passage is in close proximity to 'Art thou pale ...', *reverso*.

All but the sacred few who could not tame
 Their spirits to the Conqueror, but as soon
 As they had touched the world with living flame

Fled back like eagles to their native noon ...⁵⁴

To this network of images can be added 'Mighty eagle', defiant and powerful, withstanding all the challenges of its surroundings, and 'An eagle floating', embodying poise and detachment, self-confident placidity. Shelley's eagle fragments not only express their formal irresolution, but dramatize an irresolute condition. 'An eagle floating in the golden glory', for example, has a certain similarity to the moon fragment 'Art thou pale for weariness', in that both poems address an airborne object which embodies to the lyrical 'I' a quality of potent detachment: both the moon and the eagle constitute a challenge to the speaker, in that s/he must attempt to position her/himself against a presence which itself suspends all judgement, appearing to adopt no position of its own, except perhaps the assertion of this freedom.

The fragmentary text provides a concrete location from which the reader is impelled to escape. According to this precept there is therefore a self-negating instinct in the fragmentary text, which gestures simultaneously to an empowerment or licence of the ideal reader. Under certain conditions, then, Shelley's fragment poems can articulate an aesthetics of reading which is all about the flight from definitive realization. The poetic text proposes an image of the actual which is reluctant to resolve its own disposition; from this image, the liberated reader ascends into a reflexive and abstract idea, encouraged and assisted in this flight by semantic and structural patterns in the text. The reader extrapolates from the concrete image a sensation of the evanescence of poetic language. The words of the fragment provide a broken or contingent form, the occasion for the reader's meditation on words themselves.

The flowers have spread
 The calm is on the

All of these discoveries and suggestions are contestable. The draft comes first, and in the draft part precedes whole: the earliest origin we can capture is a sketch, a scratch, a sweep of the pen, in which already there is unfathomable complexity and richness.

54 *SPP*: 487 (ll. 128–31).

Chapter 2

‘The Casket of My Unknown Mind’: The 1813 Volume of Minor Poems

David Duff*

If it were possible that a person should give a faithful history of his being from the earliest epochs of his recollection, a picture would be presented such as the world has never contemplated before. A mirror would be held up to all men in which they might behold their own recollections, & in dim perspective, their shadowy hopes and fears, – all that they dare not, or that daring and desiring, they could not expose to the open light of day – But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate & winding chambers which it inhabits.
(Shelley, fragment of an essay [?1815], see Fig. 2.1¹)

I

The reappraisal of Shelley’s early career made possible and necessary by the publication 40 years ago of the Esdaile Notebook has made disappointing progress. Despite extensive editorial work, few critical studies have looked seriously at the Notebook, and the collection of poems it contains, though radically different both in kind and quality, is rarely differentiated from Shelley’s earlier collections of verse, *Original Poetry of Victor and Cazire* and *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, both published in 1810. One scholar’s confident prediction in 1965 that the Esdaile Notebook would be ‘an essential base for all future analyses of Shelley’s art’² has not been fulfilled, and its publication has done little to disturb the widely held view that Shelley’s pre-*Alastor* poetry is immature and lacking in artistic merit. Biographers of Shelley too have generally failed to grasp the significance of the Esdaile collection, the most recent life, published in 2004,³ virtually ignoring it altogether.

* I am grateful to Pamela Clemit for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this essay, and to Donald Reiman for answering a number of textual queries.

1 Bod. MS Shelley adds c. 4, fols 184r–v (Murray, *BSM* XXI: 192–5).

2 Joseph Raben, reviewing Cameron’s edition (see note 9), *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64.1 (1965), pp. 185–6 (p. 186).

3 James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography. Youth’s Unextinguished Fire, 1792–1816*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004.

If it were possible that a person ~~should~~ ^{could} write
 a faithful history of his being from the
 earliest epochs of his recollection, a picture
 would be presented such as the world has
 never contemplated before. It is that which
~~is best~~ A mirror would be held up to all
 men in which their recollections they might
 behold their own recollections, & in dim per-
 -spection their shadowy hopes & fears, - all
 that they dare not, or that daring and
 desiring, they could not see ^{the} ~~the~~
 open light of day - ~~but~~ ^{but} ~~thought~~ ^{thought} ~~is~~ ^{is}
 the intricate & winding chambers which
 it inhabits. - ~~Let it~~ It is like a river
 whose rapid & perpetual stream flows
 onwards; - like one in dream who speeds
 thro' the recesses of some haunted pile
 & does not look behind. The caverns
 of the mind are obscure & shadowy, or
 pervaded with a hazy, beautifully bright

2.1 MS draft of 'If it were possible', with sketch of trees

Manuscript evidence confirms that the Esdaile Notebook is really two entities.⁴ Of the 58 poems in the Notebook, the first 51 constitute a self-contained collection, written over five or more years, that Shelley has fair-copied, edited and prepared for publication. This is the projected 'Volume of Minor Poems' that Shelley refers to in his letter of 17 December 1812.⁵ The remaining seven, two in Shelley's hand, five in Harriet's, are not part of the projected publication and were added later, after Shelley had passed the Notebook to Harriet. That the 'Minor Poems' remained unpublished was not for Shelley's want of trying. Letters indicate that he sought publication of some version of the collection on at least three occasions: first in December 1811 to January 1812 during his stay in Keswick, then a month or so later in Dublin with the printing firm of John Stockdale and sons, and finally in late 1812 to mid-1813 with the London publisher Thomas Hookham.⁶ In the first instance, he apparently failed to find a suitable printer. With Stockdale, printing may actually have begun but was discontinued probably because of a dispute over payment,⁷ after which it took Shelley nearly a year, and a second trip to Ireland, to recover his manuscript (the fate of another manuscript that Shelley had possibly left with Stockdale, a novel on the French Revolution entitled 'Hubert Cauvin', remains unclear). He offered Hookham an expanded version of the collection incorporating poems written over that past year, and proposed at one stage that it be amalgamated into a single volume with the newly completed *Queen Mab*,⁸ whose composition coincides exactly with his work on the 'Minor Poems' edition.

Hookham, however, turned down both parts of the project, probably out of fear of prosecution for seditious or blasphemous libel. Shelley therefore had *Queen Mab* printed privately, but appears to have abandoned attempts to publish the 'Minor Poems', except for a handful that he reused elsewhere.⁹ Instead, he gave the unpublished volume – in the form of a fair-copy notebook – to his wife Harriet, to whom he dedicated the collection. On her death, the Notebook passed to her

4 The decisive evidence is Shelley's cumulative line counts, which show him aiming for a total of 2800 lines, to match the length of *Queen Mab*, as discussed in his letter to Thomas Hookham of 26 January 1813 (*Letters* I: 350). 'The wandering Jew's soliloquy' brings the line count to that figure; subsequent poems in the Notebook are uncounted. See note 60 below.

5 To Thomas Hookham, 17 December 1812 (*Letters* I: 340).

6 For Shelley's attempts to publish the volume, see *CPPBS* II: xxi–xxv.

7 Shelley's dispute with John Stockdale of Dublin (or his son of the same name and address), not to be confused with the London bookseller John Joseph Stockdale, who had issued *Victor and Cazire* and *St. Irvyne*) may not have been purely financial, as his letters imply. The senior Stockdale, a well-known Irish nationalist, was also a government agent who was supplying information on radicals to the British authorities at Dublin Castle. See Timothy Webb, "'A Noble Field": Shelley's Irish Expedition and the Lessons of the French Revolution', in *Robespierre & Co.*, Nadia Minerva (ed.). 3 vols. Bologna: Edizione Analisi, 1990, vol. 2, pp. 553–76.

8 To Thomas Hookham, ?15 February 1813 (*Letters* I: 354).

9 The dedicatory poem 'To Harriet' ('Whose is the love') was reused with minor changes as the dedication to *Queen Mab*, the Notes to which also contain a version of 'Falshood and Vice' and of lines 58–69 of 'To Harriet' ('It is not blasphemy'). 'The pale, the cold and the moony smile' was included in the *Alastor* volume (1816).

descendants, the Esdailes, and remained substantially unpublished until Kenneth Neill Cameron's edition of it appeared in 1964,¹⁰ following the purchase of the manuscript by the Pforzheimer Library in New York. Since then, several other editions have been published, including a diplomatic transcription and a full facsimile.¹¹ The most recent edition is that of Reiman and Fraistat, which reinstates Shelley's 1813 plan by presenting the 'Minor Poems' alongside *Queen Mab*, thereby inviting a fresh assessment of the combined project. Although it is impossible to be certain exactly what the published 'Volume of Minor Poems' would have looked like (the Esdaile manuscript is not a printers' copy, and editors have concluded that there probably wasn't one¹²), the existence of Shelley's fair copy, complete with titles, subtitles and footnotes, allows us to consider the collection in its entirety in more or less the form in which he intended it for publication.

The significance of the 'Minor Poems' for an understanding of Shelley's poetic development lies not just in what individual poems reveal about his unfolding powers, but also in the fact that the collection as a whole (at least, the 1813 version that survives) was intended as an experiment in autobiography containing a review of his creative and emotional life to date. In one poem, 'The Retrospect', that purpose is made explicit, not least through the title, but my contention in this chapter is that the entire volume was conceived and presented so as to highlight formative experiences in Shelley's life, juxtapose the past and present, and explore the development of his own mind. This retrospective, self-analytic method, crucial for Shelley's later poetry, is often seen by critics as dating from the time of the *Alastor* volume, but I will argue that it first emerged in this much earlier collection, in response to a variety of factors that included literary, philosophical and personal influences as well as a maturing sense of his own identity as a poet. The connection with *Queen Mab* underlines the importance of this act of self-appraisal. Reiman and Fraistat aptly compare the relationship between them to that of *The Prelude* and *The Recluse*:¹³ like Wordsworth, Shelley establishes his credentials for writing a 'philosophical poem' by recording 'the origin and progress of his own powers' and conducting a 'history of the Author's mind to the point when he was sufficiently matured for entering upon

10 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Esdaile Notebook: A Volume of Early Poems*, ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964; rpt. with corrections, London: Faber and Faber, 1965 [dated 1964], hereafter abbreviated as Cameron, *Esd.*

11 The other editions to date are *The Esdaile Poems: Early Poems from the "Esdaile Notebook"*, ed. Neville Rogers. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, incorporated with minor revisions in vol. 1 (1972) of Rogers's Oxford English Texts edition of *The Complete Poetical Works*; diplomatic transcription, SC IV: 91–1062; facsimile, MYR I; as separate poems, chronologically arranged, in PS I; as a composite volume in CPPBS II. All quotations in this chapter are from CPPBS unless otherwise indicated. For a summary of the earlier publication history, relating to the parts (totalling less than a third) of the Notebook printed before 1964, see Cameron, *Esd.*, pp. 313–28.

12 CPPBS II: 318–20; also SC IV: 911–12, reversing Cameron's earlier conclusion in Cameron, *Esd.*, pp. 24–5.

13 CPPBS II: xvii.

the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself'.¹⁴ Neither of Wordsworth's poems had yet been published, but Shelley may have learned about them from his conversations with Robert Southey in Keswick, and he was certainly familiar with Wordsworth's already published autobiographical poetry, echoes of which pervade the 'Minor Poems'. Southey's own poetry was another vital influence, and so was Coleridge's. Shelley's complex response to these precursors revealed, as we will discover, an intuitive grasp of the new Romantic poetic that went far deeper than contemporary critical accounts of the 'Lake School'.

To regard the introspective poetry of the 'Minor Poems' simply as a foil to the public and political verse of *Queen Mab* would, however, be to misunderstand the relationship between them, and to overlook the connection Shelley draws, here as elsewhere in his work,¹⁵ between self-analysis and political radicalism. Among the 'Minor Poems' are many that, by his own admission, breathe 'hatred to government & religion'¹⁶ quite as forcibly as *Queen Mab*. Yet these are also some of the most nakedly confessional poems in the collection. The conjunction of political and personal concerns is apparent from the very first poem, 'A sabbath Walk', which (despite its innocuous title) is both a violent denunciation of religious institutions and a personal declaration of Shelley's own creed of militant atheism. A similar act of self-definition takes place in the second poem, 'The Crisis', which predicts the downfall of monarchy and despotism but does so in the name of 'votaries of virtue' among whom Shelley plainly numbers himself. Like other prophetic poems such as 'To Liberty' and the uncompromisingly titled 'The Monarch's funeral / An Anticipation / 1810', 'The Crisis' is as much about the psychology of hope – a deeply personal topic for Shelley – as about the political revolution that will arrive at 'the consummating hour'.

As that odd subtitle, 'An Anticipation', suggests, the collection includes many poems that are prospective rather than retrospective in orientation, concerned with the present and future rather than the past. The foregrounding of tense is, indeed, a prominent linguistic feature of the collection. It is possible that the temporal scheme of *Queen Mab*, structured around what he called 'the grand & comprehensive topics' of 'The Past, the Present, & the Future',¹⁷ was itself an outgrowth of the biographical reflections on Time in the 'Minor Poems', suggesting an even stronger link between the two projects. Each part of *Queen Mab* – the meditation on the ruins of past empires, the survey of the present evils, and the vision of a future paradise on earth – has precise parallels in the 'Minor Poems', and in some cases the shorter poems can be seen as preparatory exercises for the more extended treatment of these topics in *Queen Mab*.¹⁸ By the same token, Shelley's ambitious research on his philosophical

14 Wordsworth's description of his unpublished and unnamed 'preparatory poem' (*The Prelude*) in the Preface to *The Excursion* (1814).

15 For later examples, see Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

16 To Thomas Hookham, 2 January 1813 (*Letters* I: 348).

17 To Thomas Hookham, 18 August 1812 (*Letters* I: 324).

18 Significantly, the 'Past' section of *Queen Mab* seems to have been planned last, the poem having been originally conceived, as he told Elizabeth Hitchener in his letter of ?10 December 1811, as 'by anticipation a picture of the manners, simplicity and delights of a

poem may have deepened his exploration of personal memory and time in later parts of the 'Minor Poems'.

In its synthesis of political and personal themes, the 'Minor Poems' collection reveals too the influence of William Godwin, with whom Shelley opened correspondence during his stay in Keswick. As with Shelley, critics have tended artificially to separate the personal and political aspects of Godwin's work, and to see his influence on Shelley at this stage mainly in terms of the transmission of philosophical ideas.¹⁹ Godwin's philosophical influence is palpable, both in *Queen Mab* and the 'Minor Poems', and Shelley's conception of himself as a 'votary of virtue' is unmistakably Godwinian, though the confrontational rhetoric in which he proclaims that allegiance is often more reminiscent of Paine. For Godwin, however, introspection and philosophical inquiry were complementary activities, two aspects of the same science of mind. The link between them is argued at length in the chapters on Truth and Sincerity (Shelley's favourites²⁰) in the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), which combine Rousseau's theory of sincerity with concepts of self-examination drawn from English Nonconformist traditions. Similar principles inform Godwin's novel-writing and his interest in biography; moreover, his unpublished work of the 1790s and early 1800s includes many autobiographical fragments which, as Pamela Clemit has shown, present a striking parallel with the introspective turn in contemporary poetry by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey.²¹ A Godwinian belief in the political efficacy of self-disclosure underpins and authorizes the messianic confessionalism of Shelley's early poetry. The fact that by 1812 Godwin himself had altered his view and come to doubt the value of autobiographical publication makes his exchanges with Shelley all the more important, since, on this as on other subjects, Shelley was clearly in part defining himself against his newly adopted mentor. The idea of writing what Shelley was later to call, in the unfinished essay quoted in my epigraph,²² 'a faithful history of his being from the earliest epochs of his recollection'

perfect state of society; tho still earthly' (*Letters* I: 201). The composition, probably in mid-1812, of 'A retrospect of Times of Old', which is closely related to the survey of the ruins of empires in *Mab*, may have been a pivotal moment in the larger poem's genesis, and is certainly part of a more general reorientation towards 'retrospective' writing that took place in Shelley's work in 1812.

19 For example, A.M.D. Hughes, *The Nascent Mind of Shelley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947; H.N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963; P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980; Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

20 To Elizabeth Hitchener, 26 December 1811 (*Letters* I: 214).

21 Pamela Clemit, 'Self-Analysis as Social Critique: The Autobiographical Writings of Godwin and Rousseau'. *Romanticism* 11.2 (2005), pp. 161–80.

22 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind', first published by Mary Shelley in 1840 under that adopted caption as part of an assemblage of prose fragments to which she gave the composite title 'Speculations on Metaphysics'. The surviving draft, Bod. MS Shelley adds c. 4, fols 184r–v, is reproduced and transcribed in Murray, *BSM* XXI: 192–5, and conjecturally dated 1815. The text of my epigraph is from this transcription (see n. 1).

remained for him a tantalizing ambition, a project that he considered as revolutionary in its implications as it would be difficult in its accomplishment. The ‘Minor Poems’ volume is, amongst other things, an early attempt at such a history.

The convergence of these potent literary and intellectual influences – exerted through private conversation and correspondence as well as the reading of works in the public domain – made late 1811 and early 1812 a major growth point in Shelley’s intellectual development. Not coincidentally, the year 1812 also marked the beginning of the most politically active phase in his life, a phase which encompassed his mission to Ireland, propagandistic activity in England and Wales, and a string of radical political writings including his two Irish pamphlets, *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, *A Declaration of Rights*, his broadside ballad *The Devil’s Walk*, *Queen Mab*, his missing novel ‘Hubert Cauvin’, a volume of subversive ‘Biblical Extracts’ (also lost), and a projected edition of selections from Paine which was apparently not completed.²³ The variety and volume of his output at this time are remarkable, which may serve as a reminder that by the age of 20 Shelley was already a highly experienced and prolific writer with sufficient self-knowledge to distinguish critically between his ‘younger’ and ‘later’ compositions.²⁴

Emotionally, too, this was a defining moment for Shelley. His marriage to Harriet Westbrook in August 1811 had liberated him from his oppressive family, and inaugurated a period of happiness and security of a kind he had never before experienced – though his marital bliss was to prove short-lived. All these experiences – literary, political and personal – are woven together in the ‘Minor Poems’, a collection which intersperses private and public events, setting Shelley’s turbulent emotional life against events in the external world such as the Napoleonic wars, political unrest in Ireland and the revolution in Mexico. Though half of the poems were composed in 1811 or earlier, the collection itself marks an important new stage in Shelley’s creative development, and shows that by 1812 poetry had become for him a vehicle for self-discovery rather than self-dramatization: a means not only of venting his feelings and propagating his opinions (as in his earlier collections) but also of examining his own mind and analysing his formative experiences.

II

To appreciate fully the autobiographical character of the ‘Minor Poems’, we need to consider both the contents and presentation – Shelley’s editing – of the collection. The first and most obvious autobiographical signal is the use of personal names. Five of the poems, including the dedication, are addressed, by title or subtitle, to Shelley’s wife Harriet, and a sixth (‘To November’) also mentions her by name (three of the supplementary poems in the Esdaile Notebook are also entitled ‘To Harriet’, but I exclude these here). All six are love poems full of conventionalized expressions of

23 Evidence relating to the lost or unfinished works is assembled in Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1951, pp. 379–83.

24 To Elizabeth Hitchener, ?10 December 1811; to Thomas Hookham, 2 January 1813 (*Letters* I: 202, 348).

affection and devotion, but they are also poems of self-reflection in which Shelley pays tribute to the ways in which Harriet has altered the course of his life. He gives few details, but hints repeatedly at the family conflict and personal misery from which Harriet has rescued him, while also speculating enthusiastically about their future together. The interspersal of the 'Harriet' poems across the collection – an important aspect of its editorial design – serves to build up a picture of their developing relationship, and establish an emotional teleology for the larger narrative of Shelley's life which emerges. This is an effect that would doubtless have pleased Harriet in 1813 but must have been a source of some pain when Shelley abruptly abandoned her the following year.

Underpinning this naming strategy was Shelley's decision to publish the 'Minor Poems' under his own name, rather than under a pseudonym as in his two previous collections. Just as he had reasons in 1810 for disguising his authorship, he now had reasons for revealing it, and these relate to his new views on the nature and function of poetry. Writing to Elizabeth Hitchener about the new collection in December 1811, he states:

I think it wrong to publish anything anonymously. I shall annex my name, and a preface in which I shall lay open my intentions as the poems are not wholly useless. 'I sing, and liberty may love the song' ...²⁵

If written, this preface has not survived, but we may infer from these and subsequent remarks in his correspondence that he believed the poems to be 'useful' not just for their 'inculcated moral' (the didactic theory of poetry he had expounded in an earlier letter to Hitchener, before he embarked on the 'Minor Poems' project²⁶) but also for what they reveal about the workings of his mind. Whatever the quality of the poems, he tells her in another letter, they will be 'valuable to philosophical and reflecting minds who love to trace the early state of human feelings and opinions'.²⁷ He reiterates this point in a letter to Godwin probably written on the same day, countering Godwin's charge that 'early authorship' is 'detrimental to the cause of general happiness' by quoting back at him Godwin's earlier ideas about the value of truth-telling and sincerity. 'If any man', writes Shelley, 'would determine sincerely and cautiously at every period of his life to publish books which should contain the real state of his feelings and opinions, I am willing to suppose that this portraiture of his mind would be worth many metaphysical disquisitions.'²⁸ A month later, Shelley applies this same argument to himself, defending his early publications on the grounds that they provide 'a picture of a mind however uncultured and unpruned which had

²⁵ 26 December 1811 (*Letters* I: 214).

²⁶ To Elizabeth Hitchener, 5 June 1811 (*Letters* I: 98). Shelley later abandoned this theory, declaring in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) that 'Didactic poetry is my abhorrence'. The evidence presented here shows that he was developing an alternative theory of poetry (also purposive, but based on the philosophical value and political utility of self-portraiture) as early as 1812, even as he wrote the professedly didactic *Queen Mab*.

²⁷ 26 January 1812 (*Letters* I: 239).

²⁸ ?26 January 1812 (*Letters* I: 242). Cf. Shelley's later formulation of this idea in my epigraph.

at the dawn of its knowledge taken a singular turn'.²⁹ Godwin's reply acknowledges Shelley's points, but reaffirms his own more recent, and more wary, position, saying that a man who resolves 'to present to the moralist and metaphysician a picture of all the successive turns and revolutions of his mind ... must be contented to sacrifice general usefulness, and confine himself to this'.³⁰ He cites Jean-Jacques Rousseau as an example of such potentially self-defeating confessionalism, a comparison that would have discomfited Shelley, who had once described Rousseau's *Confessions* as 'either a disgrace to the confessor or a string of falsehoods'.³¹ Nevertheless, he rejects Godwin's advice, proceeds with his plans to publish the 'Minor Poems', and resolves to append his name to the volume.

A second way in which Shelley conspicuously grounds the collection in autobiography is by place names. Two poems mention in their title or subtitle 'Cwm Elan' (or 'Ellan'), the name of the Radnorshire estate belonging to Shelley's cousin Thomas Grove which Shelley visited in the summer of 1811 and spring of 1812. Another, 'On leaving London for Wales', commemorates a journey that Shelley made via Snowdon to Tan-yr-Allt in November 1812, presenting this as both an escape from urban confinement and a symbolic rite of passage from despair and 'despotism' to 'Mountain Liberty' and beyond. The Bristol Channel features in two sonnets, the first describing Shelley's launch of 'some bottles filled with Knowledge', the second calling for a favourable wind to assist the ferry crossing from Devonshire to Wales. Again, the locations are endowed with political as well as emotional significance, the 'wilds' of Devonshire emblemizing a primaeval paradise marred by 'Man's profane and tainting hand', and Wales representing a pristine new beginning. The bottle-launching sonnet, with its 'Vessels of Heavenly medicine', commemorates one of Shelley's more ingenious methods of spreading his political message (one such 'vessel', reported by the Town Clerk of Barnstaple to the Home Secretary, contained his poem *The Devil's Walk*, another his *Declaration of Rights*³²). Names of places and people without personal associations also occur in the collection, notably in several of the war poems, but it is the autobiographical allusions that bind the

29 24 February 1812 (*Letters* I: 259).

30 To Percy Bysshe Shelley, 4 March 1812, in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp. 8 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992. vol. 1, p. 72.

31 To Thomas Jefferson Hogg, 14 May 1811 (*Letters* I: 84). Ironically, Shelley had cited Rousseau's *Confessions* to Hogg for much the same reason as Godwin, namely to warn him against writing autobiography (Hogg had proposed that they write a joint one, a suggestion Shelley promptly rejected). For Shelley's shifting views on Rousseauian confessionalism, see Edward Duffy, *Rousseau in England: The Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979; and Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution*, pp. 25–7. For Godwin's equally ambivalent attitude, see Clemit, 'Self-Analysis as Social Critique'; and Gary Kelly, "'The Romance of Real Life": Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin'. *Man and Nature / L'Homme et La Nature* 1 (1982), pp. 93–101. Rousseau's own ideas on the connections between self-examination and social reform are discussed by Ronald Grimsley, *Rousseau and the Religious Quest*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, pp. 40–45.

32 See Cameron, *Esd.*, pp. 221–2.

volume together, making it read if not quite as a travelogue then as a diaristic poetic record of the literal and symbolic journeys of Shelley's early life.

Overt autobiography, though, is not the only form of self-portraiture involved. Apart from Harriet, the other intimate acquaintance named in the collection is the mysterious 'Mary', a young woman whose tragic story of love, rejection and suicide is the subject of a sequence of four poems set apart by a prefatory 'Advertisement'. The latter explains that Shelley did not know Mary personally but learned the 'heart-breaking facts' about her from a mutual friend three months after her death. The friend is not named, but Shelley's reference to a book entitled 'Leonora' based on these events confirms that it was Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who, we know from other sources, wrote an unpublished novel under this title which is now lost. Whether or not the unfortunate 'Mary' was real remains obscure,³³ but Shelley presents her as such, declaring that the poems 'are selected from many written during three weeks of an entrancement caused by hearing Mary's story'. The word 'entrancement' is scarcely an exaggeration because the poems reveal on Shelley's part an intense, almost obsessive identification with Mary's predicament. Imaginatively reconstructing the scene of her suicide, he addresses Mary as if he himself were her lover, not only bewailing her fate but also desiring to share it:

The cup with death o'erflowing
 I'll drink, fair girl, to thee.
 For when the storm is blowing
 To shelter we may flee.

Thou canst not bear to languish
 In this frail chain of clay,
 And I am tired of anguish.
 Love! let us haste away!

Like thee, I fear to weather
 Death's darksome wave alone.
 We'll take the voyage together.
 Come, Mary! Let's begone. ('To Mary I', ll. 13–24)

The subsequent poems are in a similar vein, addressing Mary (or, in the fourth poem, her lover) at the moments before and after her death. Yet even as Shelley develops his vicarious suicidal fantasy, he reminds us in a footnote that the 'I' of the poems is not in fact a personal friend of Mary's but an 'Author' reacting to the *story* of her fate. This device allows Shelley simultaneously to claim artistic detachment from the experience described, and to insist that the poems are a genuine response to a true situation. 'What are the Romances of Leadenhall Str. to this of real life?', he writes in another footnote, implying that the emotional effects of the story on him are greater than those of the sensationalist novels of the Minerva Press (a genre he knew well). By foregrounding his own extreme empathetic reactions, Shelley's portrayal of Mary is thus transformed into a psychological case study of himself – which then

33 The possible biographical basis is discussed in *CPPBS* II: 421–2.

becomes part of the on-going narrative of his emotional life that runs through the 'Minor Poems'.

This ingenious editorial manoeuvre is characteristic of the collection. Even purely fictional poems like 'Henry and Louisa' acquire an autobiographical dimension. An extended, two-part narrative in Spenserian stanza, this colourful story of military heroism, separated lovers and battlefield reunion set during the Napoleonic wars develops a theme common in contemporary poetry, drawing in particular on Thomas Campbell's ballad 'The Wounded Hussar' (1797) and James Montgomery's 'The Battle of Alexandria' (1806).³⁴ Ostensibly, the events in the poem are quite outside Shelley's own experience, yet he invites a personal reading by appending a footnote that describes the poem as 'the living portraiture of my own mind'. At one level, this note is obviously defensive, since Shelley is acknowledging the 'defects' of the versification. At another level, however, it lays claim to a new dimension of meaning. The poem, though metrically imperfect, is presented to the reader as an authentic record of the author's own psyche at the time it was composed – which is why the footnote declares him to be 'unwilling' to alter it. It comes as no surprise, then, that the anti-war and anti-religious sentiments expressed by the poem's narrator are recognizably Shelley's own, or that the separation theme mirrors his own experience with his first love, Harriet Grove³⁵ (the fact that the names of the poem's lovers are those of her younger brother and sister seems to be part of this private code). Even to a reader unacquainted with his biography, Shelley's footnote sends a powerful signal that the interest of the poem lies more in its emotional content than its storyline, implying that, however flawed as a work of art, the poem is an accurate psychological document. His point about versification arguably also serves a double purpose, both apologetic and affirmative. While excusing faulty craftsmanship, it also calls attention to formal innovation, since his 'occasional deviations' from the Spenserian stanza may not be inadvertent errors at all, but a deliberate loosening of the verse form for expressive effect, as in the emotionally climactic last four stanzas.

In both these examples, the meaning of individual poems, and their relevance to the collection as a whole, are revealed as much by Shelley's editorial presentation (preface, title, footnotes) as by the poems themselves. Dating is another important editorial signal. The 'Mary' poems carry the date 'November 1810',³⁶ and 'Henry and Louisa' is subtitled '1809'. The inclusion of these dates reinforces the message that the poems are early compositions undergoing retrospective editorial attention. In 'Henry and Louisa', Shelley foregrounds the distinction between the 'now' of (intended) publication and the 'then' of original composition in order to present himself as a faithful custodian of his own past, resisting the temptation to falsify the

34 Sources identified in *PSI*: 13, which also notes the Grove connection. For Montgomery, see *CPPBS* II: 444–5.

35 For details, see Desmond Hawkins, *Shelley's First Love*. London: Kyle Cathie, 1992.

36 *CPPBS* II: 95 prints the date beneath the Advertisement, but this is misleading as the latter is part of the editorial apparatus of 1812–13. In the Esdaile manuscript, the date is positioned immediately above the title of the first poem in the sequence, as printed in Cameron, *Esd.*, p. 116.

artistic and psychological record by amending the poem. This may not be strictly true – Matthews and Everest conjecture that passages were added³⁷ – but what is important is the editorial posture Shelley adopts, and the kind of reading it initiates. In the ‘Mary’ poems, an editorial distinction between ‘then’ and ‘now’ is made even more emphatically, in a way that allows Shelley to repackage his self-absorbed effusions of 1810 as an objective psychological document for 1813.

These creative editorial methods have important implications for Shelley’s subsequent work. As Hugh Roberts argues elsewhere in this book, paratextual framing devices play a key role in Shelley’s later poetry, crucially modifying the texts they surround. Whereas here paratextual features are an editorial interpolation added retrospectively to an earlier composition, Shelley’s later practice is to make them part of the act of composition itself. The self-reflexive prefaces to *Alastor*, ‘Julian and Maddalo’ and *Epipsychidion* are part of the original conception, written more or less simultaneously with the poems themselves. The significance of the ‘Minor Poems’ in the development of this aspect of his artistry is suggested by the fact that he employs the same Latin quotation from Augustine’s *Confessions* (about not being in love, but in love with loving, and seeking an object to love) in both the Advertisement to the ‘Mary’ poems and the Preface to *Alastor*. In the former, Shelley borrows Augustine’s words to characterize his own state of mind at the time of his ‘entrancement’ with the story of Mary. In the latter, he uses it as an epigraph to encapsulate the ‘interesting situation of the human mind’ allegorized in the poem that follows, which is the story of a suicidal poet whose quest for love leads to his doom. In both cases, the Latin quotation, itself a strong autobiographical sign (Augustine invented the genre), is part of a paratextual strategy involving the artistic transformation of intensely personal material.

Fifteen other poems in the volume also carry dates of composition, ranging from 1808 to 1812. In itself, there is nothing exceptional about this. Many other poetic collections of the period include compositional dates, and Shelley had used them – specifying both month and year – on all but two of the poems in his first collection, *Original Poetry of Victor and Cazire*. In the earlier volume, however, dating had acted mainly as a rhetorical device to underline his claim for originality (which is presumably why a date is lacking from the one plagiarized poem in the collection, ‘Saint Edmond’s Eve’).³⁸ In the ‘Minor Poems’, dates are given far greater prominence, and serve a more complex function. The dates precede rather than follow the poems, Shelley usually positioning them between the title and the first line, though in some cases above even the title. Moreover, in no fewer than seven poems there is no title at all, but *only* a date, sometimes doubly underlined for emphasis. This feature of the Esdaile manuscript (imperfectly captured in modern printed editions) has been interpreted as evidence of incompleteness, and some editors, in accordance with well-established convention, have supplied titles

37 PSI: 13.

38 Conversely, the exclusion of compositional dates in Shelley’s second volume, *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, was needed to support the fiction that the poems were found by an editor, ‘John Fitzvictor’, who was presenting them to the public ‘in the same state in which they came into my possession’ (CPPBS I: 92).

by using first lines. Such editorial practice may, however, obscure Shelley's own editorial intentions. It is possible that, had the volume been published, Shelley would have retained this unusual foregrounding of dates. Since the poems in question all belong to 1808–10, the retention of dates as titles³⁹ would have served to emphasize even more strongly the temporal gap between composition and publication, and to remind the reader that some of the poems were the products of early youth. A further, undated poem is actually entitled 'Written in very early youth', which may imply a date even earlier than 1808, and certainly contributes to the impression (doubtless intentional) that by 1813 the author was already a relatively mature poet.

Part of the explanation for Shelley's highlighting of dates of composition was probably to make clear that the earlier poems were apprentice pieces, distinct from the later ones and unrepresentative of his current abilities. A secondary motive, not considered thus far by editors, may have been to exploit a fashion for poetry written in early youth. A number of writers including Leigh Hunt had recently published volumes of poetry entitled *Juvenilia*,⁴⁰ in Hunt's case with the subtitle: *A Collection of Poems. Written between the Ages of Twelve and Sixteen* (published in 1802, when he was 18; three further editions by 1804). Byron's *Hours of Idleness* (1807), a semi-autobiographical collection which Shelley knew well and frequently echoes in his early poems, is another illustration of the trend, the trick of which was to trade on, whilst apparently apologizing for, an author's youthfulness. Not coincidentally, the title page identifies the author as 'George Gordon, Lord Byron, *A Minor*' (my emphasis), and the Preface openly acknowledges that the 'productions' that follow 'bear the internal evidence of a boyish mind'.⁴¹ They also bear evidence of a girlish mind, since Byron's volume is partly modelled on Charlotte Dacre's *Hours of Solitude* (1805),⁴² a collection of sentimental, elegiac verse (also known and imitated by Shelley⁴³) whose preliminary address reveals that many of the poems

39 For other examples of dates as titles in the Romantic period, see James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1998, pp. 111–20. Of these, Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. London, 1812 may be particularly relevant to Shelley.

40 William Arthur Crichton, *Juvenilia*. London, 1812; Andrew Williamson, *Juvenile Poems, Sacred, Moral and Humorous*. Edinburgh, 1807; Thomas Romney Robinson, *Juvenile Poems*. Belfast, 1806; anon., *Juvenilia*. Eton, 1805; James Henry Leigh Hunt, *Juvenilia: A Collection of Poems. Written between the Ages of Twelve and Sixteen*. London, 1802; John Courtenay, *Juvenile Poems by the Late John Courtenay. With an Elegy on his Death*. London, 1795; Henry Kett, *Juvenile Poems*. Oxford, 1793; John Armstrong, *Juvenile Poems. With Remarks on Poetry, and a Dissertation on the Best Method of Punishing and Preventing Crime*. Edinburgh, 1789; Miss J. Griffiths, *A Collection of Juvenile Poems, on Various Subjects*. Warwick, 1784.

41 *Hours of Idleness, A Series of Poems, Original and Translated. By George Gordon, Lord Byron, A Minor*. Newark, 1807, Preface, p. 5.

42 Charlotte Dacre ['Rosa Matilda'], *Hours of Solitude. A Collection of Original Poems*. 2 vols. London, 1805. For Dacre's influence on Byron, see Jerome McGann, "'My Brain is Feminine': Byron and the Poetry of Deception", in *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, Andrew Rutherford (ed.). London: Macmillan, 1990, pp. 26–51.

43 *PS I*: 171 identifies Dacre's 'The Poor Negro Sadi' as a possible source for 'Zeinab and Kathema'; *CPPBS II*: 494 connects Dacre's 'Queen Mab and her Fays' (also from *Hours*

were written 'when she was sixteen or younger'. In 1808, another young female poet admired by Shelley, Felicia Browne (later Hemans), published a collection of poems introduced by the even more startling claim that they were 'the genuine productions of a young lady, written between the age of eight and thirteen years'. Her subsequent remarks make clear that her extreme youth was intended as a point of 'additional interest'.⁴⁴ Part of a broader Romantic interest in precocious creativity which began with the Chatterton affair in the 1760s, this publishing trend was well established by the turn of the century, and persisted until the 1820s.⁴⁵ Among its contributors was Wordsworth, the great poet of childhood, whose sonnet 'Written in Very Early Youth' (first published in 1802, reprinted in his *Poems in Two Volumes*, 1807) probably suggested Shelley's title.

Shelley's collection as a whole was, I suggest, part of this cult of juvenilia. The conspicuous dating of the poems draws attention to their youthful origins, differentiating the various stages of his life and implicitly inviting the reader to trace his emotional growth and artistic progress. His reference to the poems in the dedication 'To Harriet' as 'early wilding flowers' is part of the same strategy, being designed not only to excuse any artistic immaturity but also to entice readers interested in precocious composition. Indeed, the very title of the collection, 'Minor Poems', may be a punning reference to Shelley's youth, not simply an indication of the poems' modest size and significance. His letters of the time frequently refer to his legal 'minority',⁴⁶ a fact of which he was acutely conscious since it barred him from his inheritance and limited his personal autonomy.

Shelley's apparent willingness to tap this lucrative publishing trend does not mean he had no misgivings about releasing early poems some of which were of poor quality. Like his editorial footnotes, his private letters acknowledge the artistic limitations of the poems, especially the 'younger' ones. Writing to Elizabeth Hitchener in January 1812, he describes the volume as 'an inferior production',⁴⁷ and confides to Hookham a year later that the poems 'will I fear little stand the criticism even of friendship'.⁴⁸ As Donald Reiman points out, however, his disclaimers are almost always accompanied by statements which explain and defend his motives in wanting

of Solitude) with Shelley's *Queen Mab*. Dacre's gothic novel *Zofloya* (1806) was a model for Shelley's *Zastrozzi* (1810).

44 Felicia Dorothea Browne, *Poems*. Liverpool, 1808, Advertisement. Shelley corresponded with Browne in 1810–11 (a surviving letter from mid-March 1811 has recently come to light: see B.C. Barker-Benfield, *Shelley's Guitar*, exhibition catalogue. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1992, p. 26 [exhib. no. 22; Bod. MS Don. c. 180, fols 13–16]), and Medwin and Hogg both claim in their biographies that her poems made a deep impression on him. See James Bieri, *Youth's Unextinguished Fire*, pp. 149–51.

45 Later examples include: John Howard Payne, *Lispings of the Muse: A Selection of Poems, Chiefly Written at and before the Age of Sixteen*. London, 1815; Chandos Leigh, *Juvenile Poems*. London, 1815; John H. Gerrie, *Juvenilia: Poems Written in Youth on Religious and Moral Subjects*. Aberdeen, 1822.

46 To Sir Bysshe Shelley, 2 June 1812; to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, 3 December 1812 (*Letters* I: 301, 335).

47 26 January 1812 (*Letters* I: 239).

48 2 January 1813 (*Letters* I: 348).

to publish the poems.⁴⁹ The same letter to Hitchener in which he acknowledges the inferiority of the poetry counterbalances this with his claim, already quoted, about the utility of disclosing ‘the early state of human feelings and opinions’.⁵⁰ In a previous letter, he had sent her an untitled copy of his ‘Tale of Society as it is’ (dated 1811 in the finished volume), asking her to ‘Think of the Poetry which I have inserted as a picture of my feelings not a specimen of my art’.⁵¹ He uses similar phrasing to describe his poems about the political situation in Mexico and Ireland as ‘lineaments in the picture of my mind on these topics’.⁵² To Hookham, likewise, he follows his remark about the poems’ vulnerability to criticism with the claim, ‘Some of the later ones have the merit of conveying a meaning in every word, and these are all faithful pictures of my feelings at the time of writing them.’⁵³ Whatever his doubts about the artistic quality of some of the poems, these were clearly outweighed by his sense of their psychological value, and his belief that frank self-portraiture of this kind could serve political and philosophical ends.

III

The most ambitious act of self-portraiture in the collection is the long poem that bears the title ‘The Retrospect. / Cwm Elan 1812’. Here, the contrast between past and present is effected not by paratextual framing but through the very structure of the poem, which consists of an extended comparison between Shelley’s state of mind during his present and previous visit to his cousin’s estate in Wales. On the first occasion, in July and August 1811, he had been depressed and anxious as a result of a series of emotional crises including his break-up with Harriet Grove (caused, he believed, by paternal interference), expulsion from Oxford, protracted quarrels with his family, and continuing uncertainty over the future of his relationship with Harriet Westbrook, whom he was trying to persuade by letter to elope with him. By contrast, at the time of his second visit, from April to June 1812, he was happily married to Harriet Westbrook (now present with him at Cwm Elan), free at last of his family, and enjoying his first real experience of independence and emotional security.

None of these details is spelt out in the poem, which employs instead a mode of ‘cryptic self-revelation’ that, as Matthews and Everest note,⁵⁴ anticipates the coded personal history of *Epipsychidion*. A good example of this is the fourth verse paragraph, where Shelley probes some of his most painful memories, reaching back beyond the crisis of 1811 to earlier experiences of rejection and alienation. Here as elsewhere in the poem, Shelley modulates between the first and third person, and between literal and figurative language, presenting himself both as the flesh-and-blood ‘I’ who underwent the traumas described, and as an allegorical ‘spirit’ caught up in a primal scene of persecution and redemption:

49 *MYR* I: xvi.

50 26 January 1812 (*Letters* I: 239).

51 7 January 1812 (*Letters* I: 226).

52 To Elizabeth Hitchener, 14 February 1812 (*Letters* I: 254).

53 2 January 1813 (*Letters* I: 348).

54 *PSI*: 221.

For broken vows had early quelled
 The stainless spirit's vestal flame.
 Yes! whilst the faithful bosom swelled
 Then the envenomed arrow came
 And apathy's unaltering eye
 Beamed coldness on the misery;
 And early I had learned to scorn
 The chains of clay that bound a soul
 Panting to seize the wings of morn,
 And where its vital fires were born
 To soar and spurn the cold control
 Which the vile slaves of earthly night
 Would twine around its struggling flight.
 O many were the friends whom fame
 Had linked with the unmeaning name
 Whose magic marked among mankind
 The casket of my unknown mind,
 Which hidden from the vulgar glare
 Imbided no fleeting radiance there. (ll. 65–83)

Despite some syntactic awkwardness, the language of this passage is, at best, vivid and effective, the rapid succession of images succinctly encoding his emotional trajectory from soaring aspiration to bitter frustration and then defiant isolation. Much of the vocabulary (stainless spirits, panting souls, swelling bosoms) is typical of sentimental poetry of the time, but Shelley invests it with new energy, creating distinctive image clusters that acquire the potency of a private mythology. Most resonant of all is the final image, 'The casket of my unknown mind', an original and richly suggestive phrase that encapsulates perfectly the complexities of Shelley's project of self-revelation. The 'unmeaning name', according to Reiman and Fraistat's gloss,⁵⁵ is that of Shelley as heir to a baronetcy and son of a Member of Parliament, its 'magic' being the spurious allure of a social distinction that marks him out for attention. But the 'vulgar glare' of public attention can provide no sustenance or 'fleeting radiance' for him, nor can it penetrate the inviolable 'casket' that is the inner sanctum of his private self. 'Hidden' in that casket, Shelley's imagery implies, are the treasures and mysteries of his inmost personality, of a mind that is 'unknown' to outsiders and perhaps unfathomable even to itself (an interesting anticipation of the Freudian unconscious). The implicit, tantalizing promise of the poem, and of the autobiographical collection of which it is part, is that the poetry will unlock that casket, and make the unknown known. 'The casket of my unknown mind', a typical Shelleyan reversal of a negative into a positive,⁵⁶ thus becomes a potent symbol for the dialectic of self-concealment and self-disclosure that is the essence of Shelley's poetry.

⁵⁵ *CPPBS* II: 466.

⁵⁶ An early instance of the linguistic phenomenon analysed by Timothy Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*', in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, Kelvin Everest (ed.). Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983, pp. 37–62.

Later parts of the poem focus more closely on the comparison between Shelley's two visits to Cwm Elan, the mounting psychological pressure of the recollection process finding vent in a sequence of apostrophes to personified features of the landscape. The function of these apostrophes is not purely descriptive. At a literal level, Shelley is making the point that these were the places that witnessed his crisis of a year ago, and which must now bear witness to his transformation. Metaphorically, though, the 'jagged peaks', 'tumultuous surge' and isolated woods also serve as emblems of Shelley's volatile emotional state the previous year – a 'strange chaos of a mingled madness' (l. 135) – and are thus part of what is in effect an allegorical landscape of the mind. Such psychological coding was a familiar device in late-eighteenth-century nature poetry, an expressive mode that made extensive use of what was later to be termed the pathetic fallacy. Shelley, though, gives this device a new and unexpected twist by adding an extra layer of coding. In a deliberate act of self-quotation, Shelley's description recycles passages from three other poems in the collection that had been composed at Cwm Elan the previous year: the one specifically entitled 'Written at Cwm Ellan 1811'; an untitled poem beginning 'Dark Spirit of the desert rude' which also mentions the river Elan; and another untitled piece ('Death-spurning rocks!') which depicts the same landscape without naming it.

With the first of these, the resemblances are thematic rather than verbal, but from 'Dark Spirit' he recycles whole phrases, notably the description of the 'broken peaks sublime' that 'mock the scythe of time' (ll. 8–9), which in 'The Retrospect' becomes the opening of the first apostrophe: 'Ye jagged peaks that frown sublime, / Mocking the blunted scythe of Time' (ll. 112–13). Similarly, the lines in 'Death-spurning rocks!' about the 'maniac-sufferer' who 'soared with wild intent / Where Nature formed these wonders' (ll. 11–12) are reworked in the third apostrophe of 'The Retrospect' as:

Woods, to whose depth retires to die
The wounded echo's melody,
And whither this lone spirit bent
The footsteps of a wild intent –. (ll. 120–23)

Read in isolation, 'Death-spurning rocks!' might seem more like an exercise in the fashionable literary theme of pathological suffering than an act of self-description: the poem is couched in the third person, and there is a specific echo of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*. The effect of the recycling, though, is to emphasize the personal content, and remind the reader that the 'maniac-sufferer' of the earlier poem is both a literary archetype and a real person – namely, the author. Here, then, internal allusion accomplishes what paratextual framing achieves elsewhere, retrospectively converting an earlier poem into autobiography. Moreover, this process works both ways, since the manifest links between the earlier poems and 'The Retrospect' serve to authenticate the memories presented in the later one, by providing textual evidence, as it were, of Shelley's agitated mental state of a year ago.

After the apostrophes, Shelley turns to his current state of mind, an exultant 'happiness' as profound as the despondent 'sadness' of a year ago. In describing

his emotional recovery, Shelley once again mixes literal and figurative language, plainly declaring ‘every gloomy feeling gone’ (l. 146) but also visualizing this release metaphorically as a resurrection from the dead: a dispersal of ‘mortality’s dull clouds’ and a piercing of ‘the thin veil of flesh that shrouds / The spirit’s radiant sanctuary’ (ll. 148, 151–2). His most compelling metaphor of psychological release, though, is of a larva (or ‘worm’) turning into a butterfly, to which Shelley adds a gothic twist by having his larva feed off corpses, a macabre detail which, by way of negation, highlights even more strongly the completeness of his transformation:

Changed! – not the loathsome worm that fed
 In the dark mansions of the dead,
 Now soaring thro’ the fields of air
 And gathering purest nectar there,
 A butterfly whose million hues
 The dazzled eye of wonder views,
 Long lingering on a work so strange,
 Has undergone so bright a change! (ll. 136–43)

Here, too, Shelley is recycling his own poetry. The depiction of emotional transformation in ‘The Retrospect’ directly echoes that of his lines ‘Written on a beautiful day in Spring’, a key poem in the collection (probably written in 1812) which proclaims even more decisively his psychological recovery from the crisis of 1811, and ends with the same metaphor of a larva metamorphosed into a butterfly. The final paragraph of ‘The Retrospect’, addressed to Harriet, is also replete with internal echoes, in this case of his other poems ‘To Harriet’, all of which revolve around the same interlinked ideas of passion, ‘ardent friendship’ and virtue.

This pronounced pattern of self-quotation⁵⁷ constitutes an artistic solution to a problem Shelley himself raises. In the opening paragraph of ‘The Retrospect’, before the autobiographical narrative proper begins, Shelley discusses the challenges he faces: first, that of recollection itself, a challenge faced by any autobiographer but one that Shelley seems to find peculiarly onerous, to judge from his bizarre metaphor of struggling with the ‘monster’ Time (an allusion to the Greek myth of Chronos,⁵⁸ here rendered in a gothic fashion typical of early Shelley):

To snatch from Time the monster’s jaw
 The children which she just had borne
 And, ere entombed within her maw,
 To drag them to the light of morn

57 A refinement of a technique established even earlier in Shelley’s career, of recycling poems, or parts of poems, in different contexts, often with a significant transformative effect. For examples, see Donald H. Reiman, ‘Shelley Comes of Age: His Early Poems As an Editorial Experience’, *Early Shelley: Vulgarisms, Politics, and Fractals, Romantic Circles Praxis Series*. Available at <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/earlyshelley/reiman/reiman.html>, (paragraph 7).

58 Chronos, God of Time, was often conflated, as here, with Kronos, King of the Titans, who swallowed Rheia’s children because of a prophecy that one of them would overthrow him. Shelley alludes to the myth again in *Queen Mab* VIII, 3–5.

And mark each feature with an eye
Of cold and fearless scrutiny (ll. 5–10)

Ostensibly these lines are about the problem of transience – how to arrest the flow of time. But they also hint at the idea of repression, a Freudian concept foreshadowed in Shelley's image of a psychic struggle in which 'entombed' childhood memories are exhumed and confronted through an act of analysis. Elsewhere in the poem, 'cold' is a negative word, associated with hostile external forces (for instance, in the phrases 'cold repulse' and 'cold control' in lines 62, 70 and 171). Here, though, it combines with 'fearless' to become a strongly positive term implying clinical detachment and dispassionate objectivity – qualities not readily associated with Shelley but ones he aspired to nonetheless.

The second challenge is that of comparison, of juxtaposing present and past states of mind, something Shelley again finds intrinsically difficult and even alienating, as the next lines show:

It asks a soul not formed to feel,
An eye of glass, a hand of steel;
Thoughts that have passed and thoughts that are
With truth and feeling to compare. (ll. 11–14)

Shelley reiterates the need for objectivity and courage: 'nerves of steel' would be the cliché, but Shelley refreshes this with a strange, almost frightening image of a heroic self-examiner with 'hand of steel', 'eye of glass' and a 'soul not formed to feel'. Unlike the wistful childhood reflections of typical sentimental poetry of the time, Shelley's poem emphasizes the complexity of the recollection process, and the difficulty and risk of psychological self-analysis. His description of the challenges of autobiography, when undertaken seriously, is exactly analogous (though the parallel is one of which Shelley could not have been aware) to Wordsworth's account in *The Prelude* of the 'hard task' of analysing a soul, and the unsettling effect of experiencing, through recollection, 'two consciousnesses', 'myself' and 'some other Being'.⁵⁹

Shelley, as we have seen, has his own approach to the task, and his own artistic solution to the disjunction between past and present selves: the tactic of self-quotation. By embedding in his poem of 1812 verbal traces from his poetry of 1811, Shelley finds an authentic way of generating a comparison between 'Thoughts that have passed' and 'thoughts that are'. Like Chronos swallowing his children, the later poem ingests the earlier ones, creating a palimpsest of the different stages in Shelley's creative life. A further stimulus to self-quotation may have been Stockdale's temporary sequestering of his manuscripts (probably containing his only copies of some of the 'younger poems'), a frustrating circumstance which must have exacerbated his sense of distance between his current and previous work, and may have encouraged him to engage in imaginative retrieval of his earlier poetry.

⁵⁹ 1805 version, II, 232, 31–3, quoted here from William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, ed. J.C. Maxwell. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

The title and editorial positioning of ‘The Retrospect’ as the penultimate item in the collection⁶⁰ are thus doubly significant, since the poem provides a ‘retrospect’ not only on Shelley’s life but also on the earlier poetry that had recorded it. ‘The Retrospect’ both recalls and re-enacts the preceding poems, incorporating their techniques, elaborating their imagery, and deepening their disclosures and insights. Through textual collage and intertextual linkage, the poem binds the collection together, highlighting and integrating its different temporalities, and providing a master-key for interpreting the other poems as formative moments in Shelley’s artistic and emotional life. Moreover, ‘The Retrospect’ integrates not only the personal but also the political poems, the latter being, from this retrospective vantage point, not only timely expressions of political emotion but cumulative illustrations of how, in the public as well as the private sphere, the author has been ‘with this mortal world at strife’ (l. 52) – defying the sources of unjust authority wherever he found them.

IV

The technical and imaginative achievement of ‘The Retrospect’⁶¹ are thus central to the 1813 volume, though Shelley had first conceived of the collection before the poem was written. Several factors made possible this artistic breakthrough, and the leap of poetic consciousness that the volume as a whole represents. One factor, as many poems confirm, was biographical: Shelley’s relationship with Harriet Westbrook, described in the dedication as ‘the inspiration to my song’, and in ‘The Retrospect’ as the ‘reviving ray’ who enabled him to confront both his troubled past and his uncertain future. In purely psychological terms, there is no reason to doubt this account, and the Esdaile Notebook was and remains the decisive testimony to Harriet’s regenerative impact on Shelley. The artistic stimulus, however, came from elsewhere. It was whilst in the Lake District, where he conversed with Southey and began his serious reading of the other Lake poets, that Shelley first announced his plan of making ‘a selection of my younger Poems for publication’.⁶² His letters record his conversations with Southey (also recorded separately and in surprising

60 Since the Esdaile Notebook was not a press copy, we cannot be certain that the printed version would have retained the ordering of poems in the manuscript. *PS I*: 221 speculates that ‘The Retrospect’ was intended to conclude the collection, like ‘Tintern Abbey’ in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). *CCPBS II*: 467–9 contests this, interpreting ‘The wandering Jew’s soliloquy’ as a ‘counter-piece’ to ‘The Retrospect’ and an ‘emphatic finale’ to the volume; the outcast figure of the ‘wandering Jew’, already the subject of an unpublished long poem by Shelley composed in 1809–10, was ‘a kind of personal totem or symbol of the poet himself’, and thus, by extension, part of Shelley’s autobiographical scheme.

61 A judgment in which modern editors concur: Matthews and Everest describe it as Shelley’s ‘first poem of any real imaginative complexity’ (*PS I*: 221); Cameron credits it with ‘a sustained technical proficiency that he had not previously exhibited’ (*The Young Shelley*, p. 237); Reiman and Fraistat call it a ‘brilliant autobiographical poem’ (*CCPBS II*: 462), and include it in *SPP*.

62 To Elizabeth Hitchener, ?10 December 1811 (*Letters I*: 202).

detail by Southey⁶³) and are filled with poems, or parts of poems, which show Shelley experimenting with the artistic devices and subject matter he found in the writings of the Lake poets. Most of these poems, and others like it composed over the following year, were included in the 'Minor Poems'. Together, they show that the impact of these new influences on Shelley's work amounted to a revolution in poetic consciousness and technique.

The key imaginative presence is Wordsworth, whose poetry provides Shelley's direct model, or counter-model, for at least five poems in the collection.⁶⁴ What is notable in each case is not only Shelley's saturation in the language, themes and structuring techniques of Wordsworth's poetry, but also the fact that he is using a literary medium that verges on Wordsworthian pastiche in order to express his own ideas and interpret his own experiences. 'A Tale of Society as it is', for instance, reads at one level like a crude imitation of Wordsworth's 'The Affliction of Margaret', yet the poem is based on Shelley's own encounters with the rural poor of Cumberland. The autobiographical basis is underlined by the poem's subtitle ('from facts 1811') and confirmed by a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener in which he sends her a copy of the poem with the comment: 'the subject is not fictitious; it is the overflowings of the mind this morning. The facts are real; that recorded in the last fragment of a stanza is literally true.'⁶⁵ His phrasing echoes Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' from the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, but the overflowings here are Shelley's own, and the 'Tale' combines humanitarian pathos for the oppressed with distinctly un-Wordsworthian denunciations of the oppressor, notably in the lines about 'The law's stern slavery and the insolent stare / With which law loves to rend the poor man's soul' (ll. 75–6). The tactic of appropriation is even more palpable in the poem entitled 'Passion'. Shelley reproduces almost exactly the structural pattern – a sequence of rhetorical questions, enhanced by ostentatious grammatical parallelism – of 'A Poet's Epitaph', and includes the Wordsworthian poetic device of an emblematic flower, in Shelley's case (another gothic touch) deadly nightshade. But he does so to explore acutely personal subject matter, namely the treacherous behaviour of his close friend Hogg, who had attempted to seduce Harriet two months after their wedding – an incident which had major ramifications in Shelley's emotional life.

Wordsworth's influence, though, extends beyond individual poems, and shapes the collection as a whole. The retrospective, psychological orientation which provides the organizing principle and editorial rationale of the 'Minor Poems'

63 See Southey's letter to John Rickman, 6 January 1812, partially reproduced in Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*. 2 vols. London: Secker & Warburg, pp. 618–20 n. Apart from his identification with Shelley as a younger version of himself, what is surprising in Southey's letter is the degree of intimate personal detail, notably about Shelley's love affair with Harriet Grove and his problematic relations with his family. That Shelley should have confided so readily and fully with a relative stranger – as he did simultaneously with Godwin – is further evidence of the autobiographical impulse that produced the 'Minor Poems'.

64 See G. Kim Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, Ch. 2. Blank's survey is not exhaustive; further parallels are noted by Cameron and other editors, and in the present essay.

65 7 January 1812 (*Letters* I: 223–4).

is itself essentially Wordsworthian. The decisive influences, in this respect, are 'Tintern Abbey' and the Immortality Ode, the two poems in the public domain that demonstrated most forcibly the radical internalization that was at the heart of the new Romantic poetic. In defending his decision to publish his early poems on the grounds that the poems provide a 'picture of my mind' at the time of writing,⁶⁶ he is implicitly acknowledging his debt to Wordsworth, because the phrase is taken almost verbatim from 'Tintern Abbey':

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
 With many recognitions dim and faint,
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
 The picture of the mind revives again. (ll. 59–62)⁶⁷

The perplexed self-portraiture of the 'Minor Poems' is Shelley's attempt to rekindle his own 'half-extinguished thoughts'. Indeed, the very word 'extinguished', morphologically altered into another Shelleyan negative-positive, 'unextinguished', becomes one of the *leitmotifs* of the collection, epitomizing his idea of poetry as a commemorative, politically inspirational force:

Yet in spirit oft I see
 On the wild and winding shore
 Freedom's bloodless banner wave,
 Feel the pulses of the brave,
 Unextinguished by the grave. ('To the Republicans of North America', ll. 3–7)

When the storm cloud that lowers o'er the daybeam is gone,
 Unchanged, unextinguished its lifespring will shine –
 When Erin has ceased with their memory to groan,
 She will smile thro' the tears of revival on thine.
 ('On Robert Emmet's tomb', ll. 25–8)

The famous comparison in the *Ode to the West Wind* between the poet's words and the scattered ashes and sparks of an 'unextinguished hearth' is a later elaboration of the same metaphor, underlining Shelley's conception of himself as a preserver and disseminator of revolutionary impulses. Similarly, the 'withering wreath-buds' referred to in the last stanza of the dedication 'To Harriet' are intended, like the 'withered leaves' in the closing section of the 'Ode' and the 'votive wreaths of withered memory' in line 4 of *Epipsychidion*, not just as relics of the dead past but as emblems of regeneration, 'to quicken a new birth'.

Shelley's political appropriation here of the language of 'Tintern Abbey', though indicative of the complexity of his creative response, shows no sign of the ideological antagonism that will mark later stages of his literary relationship with Wordsworth. In the case of Southey, antagonism is already felt. Shelley's early

⁶⁶ To Elizabeth Hitchener, 14 February 1812; to William Godwin, 24 February 1812 (*Letters* I: 259, 254).

⁶⁷ Quoted from William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, ed. John O. Hayden. 2 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977, vol. 1, p. 359.

admiration for Southey's poetry is well documented, and the latter's influence is discernible throughout the collection, not just in narrative poems like 'The Voyage' and 'Zeinab and Kathema', which are modelled on *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), but also in a number of the lyrics. As Reiman and Fraistat note,⁶⁸ the first four poems of the collection – 'A sabbath Walk', 'The Crisis', 'Passion', and 'To Harriet' ('Never, O never, shall yonder Sun') – all make use of Southeyan themes, metrics and diction. Arguably, it is Southey rather than Wordsworth who exerts the strongest technical influence on the volume, certainly where metre is concerned. Several of the verse forms Shelley experiments with in the 'Minor Poems' are derived from Southey's poetry, and the collection reveals his continuing fascination, which had started around 1809 and extends into *Queen Mab*, with the irregular unrhymed metre known as 'the Thalaba style' – regarded at the time as Southey's most controversial technical innovation (though Southey credits his friend, the poet-physician Frank Sayers, with its invention).⁶⁹

However, once Shelley met Southey in person, his attitude rapidly changed, and his sense of Southey as a political apostate resulted in an altered relation to his poetry. Thereafter, Shelley borrowed the medium but resisted the message of Southey's poetry, a point forcefully brought home by 'A sabbath Walk', which was probably composed soon after their meeting in December 1811. This begins like a benign and pious reverie in the manner of Southey's 'The Chapel Bell' (1793) and 'Written on Sunday Morning' (1795), but 12 lines later turns into a vitriolic attack on Christianity, and on the moral and political values Southey now upheld. 'The Crisis' is another poem that uses Southeyan means – here, the Sapphic metre of Southey's 'The Widow' (1795) – to radically anti-Southeyan ends, namely denouncing monarchy and advocating political revolution. In this case, though, the source poem was a hard-hitting humanitarian ballad written in Southey's most radical phase, so Shelley's application of the metre to an explicitly revolutionary theme can perhaps be interpreted as an implicit reminder to Southey of his tergiversation – and thus a further example of the multi-layered and subversively allusive quality of Shelley's early verse.

The third member of the Lake triumvirate, Coleridge, is another powerful presence in the collection, notably in 'Falshood and Vice', a dialogue poem inspired by Coleridge's notorious (though anonymous) anti-war polemic 'Fire, Famine and Slaughter'. Here, there was no need for Shelley to subvert his model. 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter', first published in the *Morning Post* in 1798, was a denunciation of government war policy so outspoken that when Coleridge republished the poem in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), he felt the need to add an 'Apologetic Preface' explaining away his 'violent words' as 'mere bubbles, flashes and electrical apparitions, from the magic cauldron of a fervid and ebullient fancy, constantly fuelled by an unexampled opulence of language'.⁷⁰ The Apologetic Preface postdates the 'Minor Poems',

68 CPPBS II: 326.

69 For contemporary reaction to this style, and Shelley's subversive use of it, see my *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 70–79. For the Sayers connection, see CPPBS II: 506–7.

70 *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 16: *Poetical Works I (Reading Text)*, ed. J.C.C. Mays. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, Part 1, p. 433.

but Coleridge's brilliant rationalization of revolutionary writing is fully applicable to Shelley, whose early political poetry often has precisely this self-generating, linguistically exhibitionistic quality.⁷¹ Whether Shelley was aware of Coleridge's altered politics – or indeed Wordsworth's – is not clear, but the 'Minor Poems' collection displays none of the political disillusionment towards Wordsworth and Coleridge revealed in the *Alastor* volume, and Shelley's letters of the time express continuing admiration for both of them. At this point his ideological antagonism seems to be reserved for Southey, and his literary relationship with Wordsworth and Coleridge to be still at the honeymoon stage.

Yet ultimately what makes the collection so fascinating a record of Shelley's creative development is that in certain poems we find him responding simultaneously to all three Lake poets, and to other writers who were part of the Romantic literary revolution. 'Written on a beautiful day in Spring', for instance, looks at first glance like a routine example of eighteenth-century nature rapture, but turns out, as I have shown elsewhere,⁷² to be a remarkable synthesis of motifs, metrical features and verbal traces from Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and other contemporary poets. Though love for Harriet is the personal inspiration, the 'strange mental wandering' described in the poem is a skilful assimilation of the psychopoetics of Romantic quest romance, and the 'foretaste of Heaven' motif a far-reaching allusion to the millennial fantasies that pervade the literature of the period. The poem not only absorbs but also analyses these imaginative tendencies, and the importance of Shelley's discovery of them is suggested by his later reworkings of these *topoi* – sometimes involving the recycling of actual phrases from the Spring lyric – in works such as 'The Assassins', *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*.

The most powerful illustration, though, of Shelley's synthesizing method is 'The Retrospect', in this as in other respects the pivotal poem in the collection, and one to which I now return. Probably composed around the same time, in early 1812, 'The Retrospect' is a companion piece to the Spring lyric that amplifies and contextualizes its theme of emotional transformation, recycles some of its imagery, and carries further the creative implications of Shelley's initiation into Romantic poetics. Its pattern of influences is similarly complex, and its intertextual engagement with other writers is as intricate as the strategy of self-quotation already described. The title is usually seen as deriving from Southey, who had published a long autographical poem called 'The Retrospect' in his first volume, co-authored with Robert Lovell, *Poems: Containing The Retrospect, Odes, Elegies, Sonnets, &c.* (1794). The poem was Southey's favourite,⁷³ often revised and reprinted, and admired by Coleridge sufficiently for him both to cite in the title of his sonnet to

71 A stylistic feature that deeply worried Godwin, who, after reading *Queen Mab* in 1813, made notes for a more comprehensive critique that would contrast the 'excellent philosophy' of 'modern poetry' with the 'drunken, reeling, mystical Pythia form in which it clothes itself' (Abinger MSS, Dep. b. 229/4, quoted by Pamela Clemit, 'Shelley's Godwin, 1812–1817'. *Durham University Journal* n.s. 54 [July 1993], pp. 189–210 [p. 189]).

72 'Shelley's "Foretaste of Heaven": Romantic Poetics and the Esdaile Notebook'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 3.3 (2000), pp. 149–58.

73 Mark Storey, *Robert Southey: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 110.

Southey⁷⁴ and to quote from in his own autobiographical poem, ‘To a Young Lady with a Poem on the French Revolution’ (1794).⁷⁵ There are, though, other ‘retrospect’ poems that may have influenced Shelley, this being a Romantic sub-genre almost as popular as its neoclassical precursor, the ‘prospect’ poem. One example he may have known is Sydney Owenson’s ‘Retrospection’ (from her *Poems* [1801]), which, like Southey’s poem, describes her complicated feelings on revisiting her childhood home. This poem, in turn, was probably inspired not by Southey but another poem entitled ‘The Retrospect’ by her childhood tutor, Thomas Dermody, to whom Owenson pays handsome tribute in a footnote. Dermody was a linguistic prodigy and political radical who had contributed to the cult of juvenilia with his *Poems: Consisting of Essays, Lyric, Elegiac &c. Written between the 13th and 16th Year of His Age* (Dublin, 1792). ‘The Retrospect’ is a later work, published in his *Poems: Moral and Descriptive* (London, 1801), which mixes private reminiscences about his childhood with political reflections on the vicissitudes of nations. At the time of Shelley’s visits to Ireland, Dermody was still a household name, having been mythologized in a posthumous biography which had presented him as a boyhood genius who, like Chatterton, had died tragically young, in 1802.⁷⁶ Shelley may well have encountered his work in Dublin, and, if so, would have been interested in him not only as a precocious poet, like himself, who had promoted Irish radicalism, but also as a mentor of his favourite Irish writer, Sydney Owenson.⁷⁷

Whatever models prompted his choice of genre and title, the dominant influence on the poetic language of Shelley’s ‘The Retrospect’ is undoubtedly Wordsworth. It is in phrasing borrowed from the Immortality Ode that Shelley introduces his comparison between ‘Thoughts that have passed and thoughts that are’, a comparison focused, like Wordsworth’s, on a changed perception of a revisited landscape. For Shelley, recollecting the past – negotiating the psychological gap between previous and present selves – is like comparing

A scene which wildered fancy viewed
In the soul’s coldest solitude;
With that same scene when peaceful love
Flings rapture’s colour o’er the grove,
When mountain, meadow, wood and stream
With unalloying glory gleam
And to the spirit’s ear and eye
Are unison and harmony. (ll. 15–22)

74 ‘Sonnet: To Robert Southey, of Baliol College, Oxford, Author of The “Retrospect,” And Other Poems’ (1794), the tenth of Coleridge’s ‘Sonnets on Eminent Characters’, published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1795.

75 First published in the *Watchman* in 1796, and reprinted in Coleridge’s *Poems* (1796) and subsequent collections. Coleridge acknowledges the borrowing (l. 14) in a footnote.

76 James Grant Raymond, *The Life of Thomas Dermody, Interspersed with Pieces of Original Poetry, Many Exhibiting Unexampled Prematurity of Genuine Poetical Talent*. 2 vols. London and Dublin, 1806. I am grateful to Stephen Dornan for assisting me in tracing Dermody’s work.

77 In particular, Shelley admired Owenson’s *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811), which he read soon after publication (*Letters* I: 107).

Not only is the entire vocabulary of this passage Wordsworthian, but Shelley presents that language in an overpoweringly concentrated form, yoking together Wordsworthian keywords like ‘glory’ and ‘gleam’, ‘ear’ and ‘eye’, and mimicking the very syntax of the Immortality Ode (the only un-Wordsworthian word is ‘unalloying’, but even this, yet another Shelleyan negative-positive, picks up on the dialectic of loss and gain, appearance and essence, in Wordsworth’s poem). At a technical level, too, it is the example of the Immortality Ode, and of ‘Tintern Abbey’, that enables Shelley, later in his poem, to modulate from the prosaic register of some of the narrative passages into the sublime language of the apostrophes, and the final Dorothyesque address to Harriet. Such transitions, a structural feature of the ode form that Wordsworth uses to capture his oscillations of mood as he recalls his childhood and youth, are used by Shelley in much the same way, to construct his mental journey into the past, and to re-enact the highs and lows of his complicated emotional life.

There are, nevertheless, linguistic features of ‘The Retrospect’ that are not Wordsworthian, nor part of the more general idiom of Romantic poetry. When Shelley raises the theme of political injustice, or describes his feelings of hostility towards his family, he employs a language of denunciation and retaliation more reminiscent of the ultra-radical newspaper verse of the 1790s than of contemporary lyrical poetry. A typical example is the passage where, recalling the ‘friendless solitude’ of the darkest parts of his childhood, he suddenly breaks out with the rhetorical question:

For who, that might undaunted stand
The saviour of a sinking land,
Would crawl its ruthless tyrant’s slave
And fatten upon freedom’s grave,
Tho’ doomed with her to perish where
The captive clasps abhorred despair. (ll. 86–91)

Mixing gothic paranoia and messianic political fantasy in one breathless sweep, the passage pushes the language of revolutionary poetry to its limits, providing a tangible illustration of the syndrome Coleridge described, of ‘violent words’ created in the ‘magic cauldron of a fervid and ebullient fancy’. Such writing, heavily reliant on rhetorical parallelism, personification of abstract nouns, and extreme diction, is a recurrent feature of the ‘Minor Poems’, liable to surface at any moment, wherever anger erupts. This style dominates the most aggressively political poems like ‘The Crisis’, ‘Falshood and Vice’ and ‘The Monarch’s funeral’, and is used extensively in *Queen Mab*, its presence being doubtless a factor in Hookham’s decision not to publish either part of the project. A variant of this style, characterized by a more temperate vocabulary, frequent use of the future tense, and repeated allusion to the utopian theories of Godwin, is also manifest in the ‘Minor Poems’, notably in the ‘Paradise on Earth’ passage in the closing stanza of ‘To Liberty’, and in the lines about the ‘Dark Flood of Time’ in ‘To Harriet’ (‘It is not blasphemy’). This style too reaches its apogee in *Queen Mab*, especially in the final two cantos, where Shelley envisions more comprehensively the political millennium glimpsed at certain moments in the ‘Minor Poems’.

The example of 'The Retrospect', though, suggests that in 1812 Shelley found it difficult to combine these polemical modes of writing with the new forms of 'internalized' expression he had learned from Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. At times he does achieve a temporary fusion of these modes and idioms, but it is an unstable one, and the different strands are always threatening to unravel. The subsequent course of Shelley's poetic development confirms that these styles do indeed pull in different directions. The introspective dimension of the 'Minor Poems' is largely absent from *Queen Mab*, which confines its gaze to the external world (though aspects of his personal history inform the revolutionary education of Ianthe). The introspective element then re-emerges, at a higher level of complexity and in the context of a now sharply problematized relationship with Wordsworth and Coleridge, in *Alastor* and the poems published alongside it. The political perspective is not lost, but it becomes subsidiary, *Alastor* being primarily a study of solipsism: an analysis of the predicament of an introverted quester who has lost contact with the external world. Yet it is poems like 'The Retrospect' that help us to make sense of that analysis, to interpret the codes and understand the challenges and risks of introspection.

This may in turn shed light on what has long been regarded as an intractable problem in Shelley criticism: the stylistic and perceptual shift from *Queen Mab* to the poems of 1815–16. As my essay has emphasized, *Queen Mab* represents only one strand in Shelley's poetic output in 1813. Shelley's 'philosophical poem' is half of a projected whole which, seen in its entirety, can give us a much fuller picture of the accomplishments and preoccupations of the 21-year-old Shelley. The other half of the project, the 'Volume of Minor Poems', was also brought to completion but never published. Far from being mere apprentice work, it is a collection that reveals a rapidly maturing poet with impressive technical skills, considerable self-knowledge and a sophisticated awareness of the new possibilities opened by recent developments in English poetry. The experiment in self-portraiture that the volume represents has many aspects to it, some of which had profound implications for his later artistic development. By 1813 Godwin had come to believe that to publish an autobiography was like opening Pandora's box, a politically hazardous act that could impede rather than advance the cause of reform. Shelley seems to have believed otherwise, and the 'Minor Poems' volume is an act of self-exposure and self-analysis that he was willing to make public. The casket, however, remained locked for another hundred and fifty years, and its contents, now open to view, still await further inspection.

Chapter 3

Happily Ever After? The Necessity of Fairytale in *Queen Mab*

Christopher R. Miller

I

A year after a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism* got him expelled from Oxford, Percy Bysshe Shelley channelled his anti-religious energies into the philosophical poetry of *Queen Mab*, flatly declaring in the voice of his title character, ‘There is no God!’ (VII, 13).¹ If God did not exist, however, it was necessary to invent a goddess and call her Mab, after a figure from English faery tradition famously celebrated as patroness of dreams in *Romeo and Juliet*. Though she requires no church, scriptures or ritual, she does display a deity-like omniscience and benevolence in descending to earth to summon a young woman named Ianthe for a night of instruction in cosmology, ethics, world history and apocalyptic prophecy. Her ‘pearly and pellucid’ (I, 82) chariot, one might say, was merely a vehicle for Shelley’s philosophical and political hobbyhorses. In short, she is a framing device; and scholars have tended to look past the frame to take note of the numerous ideas it contains, assessing their intellectual lineage, their internal contradictions or inconsistencies, and their anticipation of the poet’s more mature thought.²

Commentary on the figure of Mab has treated her as a foil to the poem’s provocative ideas: several critics have suggested that she puts a benign face on Shelley’s fiercely radical politics;³ and two have referred, in precisely the same phrase, to the poem’s

1 *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose (SPP)*: 54. All quotations from Shelley’s poetry, as well as ‘A Defence of Poetry’ and ‘On Life’, refer to this edition. Quotations from Shelley’s notes to *Queen Mab* refer, with page citations, to *Collected Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley (CPPBS)*.

2 As to the poem’s ideas, Carlos Baker (*Shelley’s Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948) once dismissed the poem as ‘a distempered and unoriginal vision, mediocre as verse, and something less than mediocre as history’ (p. 23). Conversely, Desmond King-Hele (‘Shelley and Erasmus Darwin’, in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, Kelvin Everest [ed.]. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1983) values the poem for showing ‘how Shelley’s mind worked, before he dressed it up in sophisticated clothing’ (p. 143). Though he takes a simplistically dim view of those ideas, he does rightly note in *Shelley: His Thought and Work*. London: Macmillan, 1964, that ‘the first canto of *Queen Mab* is a charming fairy story in verse’ (p. 32).

3 One of the poem’s earliest and most ardent admirers, Kenneth Neill Cameron (*The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*. New York: Macmillan, 1950) first suggested that Shelley

‘conventional literary devices’.⁴ Another critic has proposed that the poem’s faery trappings serve as a dialogic counterpoint to Shelley’s subversive teachings.⁵ In this account, the reader is sensitized rather than lulled by the poem’s framing device and ornate poetic diction, perhaps even inspired to view Mab’s authority with scepticism. This is an ingenious reading, but I would argue that Shelley was more earnest than clever in this poem. Indeed, as David Duff has argued, the elements of romance in *Queen Mab* were not incompatible with Shelley’s radical politics; the ‘fusion of the magical and political’ was not uncommon in earlier revolutionary literature.⁶ Duff uses the term ‘romance’ specifically to indicate a literary genre with a set of conventions, as well as more broadly to suggest the effect of ‘polarizing between two worlds, one desirable and the other hateful’.⁷ In the first sense, he shows how Shelley borrows the Spenserian romance-motif of the Bower of Bliss to advance the idea of sexual liberation; and in the broader sense, he proposes that the poem’s fanciful and magical elements are figures for the revolutionary – not escapist – imagination.

The binary nature of *Queen Mab* – the traditional and the radical, the real and the visionary, romance and revolution – has thus been seen by critics as both internal conflict and fruitful intersection. With Duff, I would like to take the latter position, but with a different approach. Rather than emphasizing the genre of romance as the literary container for Shelley’s radical ideas, I will consider the poem in terms of its structuring frame – or rather, frames: the earthly scene of keeping watch over a sleeping person and the celestial scene of Mab’s instruction of Ianthe. To give these scenes mythical headings, I would call them ‘Sleeping Beauty’ and ‘Heaven’, respectively; and I will show how these frames intersect in Shelley’s preoccupation with ideas of the afterlife. For reasons that will become clear in the course of this chapter, I will prefer the term ‘fairytale’ to the broader genre designation of ‘romance’. As I will show, the fairytale frames of the poem overlap with the instruction they contain. They should not be dismissed as extraneous to or incongruous with Mab’s radical teachings; they are, rather, integrally related to the poet’s philosophical and political ideas.

used the framing device ‘to ease his readers by degrees into the radical propaganda which forms the core of the poem’ (p. 244).

4 See Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 67–8; and Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p. 88.

5 Jessica Smith agrees with other critics that Shelley’s archaism is deliberate, but to a different end: invoking Bakhtinian dialogism, she argues that Shelley fosters ‘an ironic distance with which the reader must contend’. See ‘Tyrannical Monuments and Discursive Ruins: The Dialogic Landscape of Shelley’s *Queen Mab*’. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 47 (1998), pp. 108–41 (p. 121).

6 See Duff’s chapter on the poem in *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 56–114 (p. 62).

7 Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, p. 112.

II

In terms of genre, *Queen Mab* might be described as a hybrid of new and old: an eighteenth-century didactic poem presented as dream vision. Despite its anti-religious opinions, the poem harks back to the Christian allegories of *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Piers Plowman*, as well as the instruction of Adam in *Paradise Lost*, both pedagogical (Raphael's prelapsarian colloquy) and prophetic (Michael's postlapsarian survey of human events). Its Enlightenment sources, as several critics have noted, include Pope's *Essay on Man*, with its prospect of the 'mighty maze' of the universe; Volney's *Ruins*, in which the protagonist, standing amid the decayed city of Palmyra, is spirited away by a white-robed Genius to be shown historical scenes of failed civilizations and a hopeful glimpse of a utopian future; and Sir William Jones's *Palace of Fortune*, in which a young woman is given a panoramic view of the world by the goddess Fortune.

To describe the narrative frame as dream-vision or celestial journey, however, is to omit an important narrative element: the vigil over a sleeping person. At the beginning of the poem, the still form of Ianthe is watched over by two characters, immortal and mortal: her spiritual guardian Queen Mab, who gazes long and 'silently, / Upon the slumbering maid' (I, 66–7) before summoning her soul; and her lover Henry, whose presence is only disclosed at the end ('Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love', IX, 238). The *topos* of watching another person sleep is emblematic in Romantic poetry, and it is easy to see its appeal. It enabled meditations on a variety of topics – the liminal border between sleeping and waking life, the inaccessible subjectivity of other people, the corporeality of the human, the powers of the imagination, the state of radical innocence intimated by the face of a sleeping person.

It can also be a frankly erotic activity, as when Byron's Haidée watches Don Juan sleeping or Keats's Porphyro conspires to 'melt' into Madeline's dream. And so it is with the scene of observed sleep in *Queen Mab*. When Shelley's narrator remarks that 'twas a sight of wonder / To behold the body and soul' (I, 144–5) of Ianthe, he can only be referring to Mab's privileged perspective, since Henry is not granted such spiritual clairvoyance; but by implication, this view is also given to the imagination of the reader. There is an indirect eroticism in the vision of Ianthe rising 'All beautiful in naked purity' (I, 132), since, in Shelley's metaphysics, soul is 'The perfect semblance of its bodily frame' (I, 133). Mab's sight of Ianthe's 'nakedness' is thus literal as much as figurative, serving as surrogate for what Henry cannot see beneath the bedclothes. This imaginative unveiling might also be read as a trope for the apocalyptic vision of millennial peace in which the poem will culminate. These two readings of the unveiling, the erotic and the apocalyptic, are not mutually exclusive for Shelley. The prefigurative glimpse of Ianthe would be part of the poet's utopian vision of liberated sexuality, especially since Henry and Ianthe can be construed as alter egos for Shelley and his young wife Harriet, whose marriage was opposed by the poet's father Timothy. In this case, the political is the personal.⁸ As in our own nightly dreams, it might be

8 For a biographically informed reading of the poem, see Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988. Sperry argues that while

said that the dreamer here gets to play all the parts. Diverse aspects of Shelley appear in the three main characters: Mab is the reformist pedagogue, Ianthe the starry-eyed youth, and Henry the unconstrained lover.

The scene of Henry watching Ianthe involves not only a voyeuristic thrill but also an anxious fear that a healthy young woman might have died in her sleep. Why should Shelley begin his poem with a paean to Death ('How wonderful is Death, / Death and his brother Sleep!', I, 1–2), and why should the possibility of Ianthe's death be such an urgent issue? Of course, the intimation of mortality in the picture of sleep was a Renaissance commonplace, memorably expressed in Shakespeare's phrase, 'death's second self'. For Shelley, the resemblance between sleep and death seems to have been an *idée fixe*, as the scene of watching a prostrate body appears several times in his poetry – particularly in two poems about doomed poets, *Alastor* and *Adonais*. In *Alastor*, an Arab Maiden attends the sleeping Poet 'to gaze upon his lips / Parted in slumber, whence the regular breath / Of innocent dreams arose' (ll. 135–7); and Shelley's narrator repeats the gesture in describing the Poet's wasting-away at the end of the poem. Shelley later recapitulates this scene in *Adonais*, in the all-night vigil over the body of Keats, when it seems for a moment as if the poet might be merely sleeping.

In *Queen Mab*, the urgent question about Ianthe's fate humanizes the stark Lucretian physics and Necessitarian philosophy of the poem. Under the rubric of Mab's teaching, the question of whether Ianthe lives or dies should be a minor one. She is, after all, just another temporary arrangement of atoms, and death is a natural process. The question, 'Must putrefaction's breath / Leave nothing of this heavenly sight / But loathsomeness and ruin?' (I, 18–20) would have a simple answer in the light of Mab's instruction, which is full of humbling views of ancient ruins: as the most glorious human edifices must decay, so must beautiful human bodies. And yet as the poem begins, Death is melodramatically cast as a 'gloomy Power' with 'lips of lurid blue' waging a contest with his benignly rosy-hued brother Sleep over a maiden's sinless soul. The victor in this fraternal struggle is quickly declared to be Sleep, and the maternal figure of Mab intervenes to whisk Ianthe's soul to her own heavenly realm. 'Yes! she will wake again' (I, 31), the narrator declares – but whom is the announcement meant to reassure? Implicitly, it addresses Henry, but his presence is made manifest only at the end of the poem; by default, the reader is implicated in the question. In this way, the dramatic frame of the poem injects a note of human sympathy and concern in what might otherwise seem like a starkly dispassionate view of the world. The difference between strict Necessitarianism and the poem's fairytale frame is, in effect, a difference between ethos and pathos – between a dispassionate philosophical view of Ianthe's life and a keen narrative interest in its shape and duration.⁹

Queen Mab is undoubtedly a poem of ideas, it is strongly driven by Shelley's relationships with his father and his wife. While his father represented the paternalistic tyranny against which Shelley rebels in the poem, Harriet represented Shelley's hopes to form a small utopian community of friends (p. 14).

9 In the opinion of Desmond King-Hele strict Necessitarianism jeopardizes not only human sympathy but also a passion for reform: 'After telling us that man is a trivial parasite

The peril of premature death that haunts the opening of *Mab* also reflects Shelley's own youthful anxieties about unfulfilled promise. What better way to cast a shade of doubt on Mab's utopian visions than to raise the possibility that her pupil might die before her struggle against falsehood and oppression can be fully waged? Even the reassurance that Ianthe is merely sleeping has an elegiac undertone:

Yes! she will wake again,
Although her glowing limbs are motionless,
And silent those sweet lips,
Once breathing eloquence,
That might have soothed a tyger's rage,
Or thawed the cold heart of a conqueror. (I, 31–6)

As if the narrator had not fully wakened from his sepulchral vision of the dead maiden, he seems to lament the frustrated possibility of her becoming a salvific force in the world: those lips, which *once* breathed eloquence, *might have* done some good. Such is the sense of unfulfilment that hangs over the deaths of the Poet in *Alastor* and Keats in *Adonais*.

The pointedly fantastic references to tiger-charming and emperor-seduction also conjure an alternate fairytale reality of the sort that will be opened up with the arrival of Queen Mab. Thus, the statement can also be read as a suggestion that Ianthe might have exercised magian powers in some alternative reality. To put the matter another way, Ianthe *might* charm an emperor given the right historical circumstances: like the 'middling' hero of a Scott novel, she needs an opportunity to exercise her latent powers. At first glance, the fairytale tropes seem to hide the radical significance of the instruction Ianthe is about to receive, as if the girl were a virginal princess or a Sheherazade instead of a potential agent of social change. But they are in fact directly related to the millennial vision that Mab unfolds later in the poem – for the act of charming tigers and tyrants intimates an edenic world beyond savagery or conquest, in which human beings have become frugivorous and live in perfect harmony with the animals and with each other. Shelley's fanciful frame and language, far from masking or counterpointing the poem's political register, undergird it.

As a fairytale of sorts, *Queen Mab* also serves as a counter-text to what Shelley saw as another improbable fiction: biblical narrative.¹⁰ By implication, both Shelley's poem and the Bible are works of the imagination, and neither has an indisputable claim on the truth. (In a felicitous accident of history, the poem later came to be known as 'the Chartist's Bible' for its appeal to a later generation of English radicals.)

in a determinate universe, he continues as if it were most important that the more down-trodden parasites should, presumably in defiance of determinism, dispose of their oppressors and develop Godwinian virtues' (*Shelley: His Thought and Work*. London: Macmillan, 1964, p. 42). What King-Hele misses, however, is that Shelley's conception of Necessity involves a tendency toward the good and the just – a conception he would develop with greater sophistication in *Prometheus Unbound*. In defence of the poem, Kenneth Neill Cameron argues that Shelley's deterministic philosophy is 'representative of the most advanced school of social thought of the age' (*The Young Shelley*, p. 241).

10 For a discussion of biblical archetypes and echoes in *Queen Mab*, see Bryan Shelley, *Shelley and Scripture: The Interpreting Angel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 37–49.

In one of his notes to the poem (15), Shelley describes the Genesis narrative in the mockingly simplistic terms of a children's story, sharpened by the astringent language of Enlightenment satire:

A book is put into our hands when children, called the Bible, the purport of whose history is briefly this: That God made the earth in six days, and there planted a delightful garden, in which he placed the first pair of human beings. In the midst of the garden he planted a tree, whose fruit, although within their reach, they were forbidden to touch. That the Devil, in the shape of a snake, persuaded them to eat of this fruit; in consequence of which God condemned both them and their posterity yet unborn, to satisfy his justice by their eternal misery. (ll. 1–10)

In effect, Shelley's synopsis constitutes a form of defamiliarization: an absurdist telling of a narrative that readers already know. Shelley describes Christianity from the wondering, anthropological perspective of someone who cannot believe that it has prevailed as a world religion for so long and with such consequences. The poet's way of introducing names as if for the first time emphasizes the sceptical outsider's perspective: 'a book ... called the Bible', 'the Devil, in the shape of a snake', and later, the culminating statement, 'The belief in all that the Bible contains, is called Christianity'.

Admittedly, a synopsis of *Queen Mab* would sound no less absurd: 'One night, a beautiful but otherwise unremarkable young woman named Ianthe is visited by a fairy named Mab, who arrives in her bedroom in a horse-drawn chariot seen by no one else', and so on. If, as Shelley says in his note, 'Christianity, like all other religions, rests on miracles, prophecies, and martyrdoms' (ll. 136–7), the same is true of *Queen Mab*, minus the martyrdoms: it, too, relies on supernatural events (explained by Shelley as purely natural phenomena), and it, too, makes prophecies. And if 'Christianity was intended to reform the world', so is *Queen Mab*. Shelley's counter-bible has its own cosmology, historical narrative and apocalyptic vision.

And deity. In a poem that wears its atheistic commitments on its sleeve, Mab functions as a kind of goddess – a human face and voice for the otherwise invisible, vaguely feminized 'Spirit of Nature' that Shelley exalts as the ultimate power in the universe.¹¹ As Kenneth Neill Cameron first pointed out in an early appreciation of the poem, Shelley's version of Necessity differed from the one proposed in Baron d'Holbach's influential *Système de la Nature*: whereas Holbach's was a strictly monist-materialist model, Shelley's was a dualistic one, consisting of both matter and 'some spiritual force pervading matter but not identical with it', a force that works through both the material world and the mental.¹² This spirit, as various critics have noted, is Shelley's alternative to God – a universal, non-personal, non-creative entity.

11 Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi (*Shelley's Goddess*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) has noticed a strain of quasi-feminist revision in the poem: whereas Volney's *Ruins* features a male narrator visited by a male phantom who affords a future glimpse of a 'remodeled patriarchy', *Queen Mab* centres on a female spirit instructing a young woman in a world-view inflected by distinctly feminine mythical elements (pp. 76–8).

12 Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, p. 245.

Like Shelley's later god-like entities and powers, Mab exceeds the wildest imaginings of 'the visioned poet in his dreams' (I, 68). While she visits Ianthe in *her* dream, she cannot be fully represented by vocational dreamers. Responsible for endowing 'fancy's thin creations' with 'manner, being, and reality' (VII, 62–3), she summons Ahasuerus, the mythical Wandering Jew, to deliver a critique of both Hebrew and Christian scriptures. But we approach a *mise en abîme* when Mab finally dismisses the archetypal Miltonic rebel as a 'phantasmal portraiture / Of wandering human thought' (VII, 274–5) – for she herself might be called a phantom calling forth phantoms. In her brief nocturnal appearance, Mab personifies the 'Intellectual Beauty' that Shelley would celebrate in his Hymn of 1816, and she prefigures the Witch of Atlas. She is, in short, a figure for the imagination. In ethical terms, she is a benevolent and superior being who recognizes Ianthe's innate goodness and rewards the young woman for it; and she is a maternal queen as opposed to the mostly male monarchs and paternal authority-figures whom Shelley rails against. Since her reign encompasses the notional realm of sleep and dreams rather than a world of subjects and courtiers, her monarchical status is purely stylized; and like the Witch of Atlas, she is utterly alone.

In the broadest terms, the faery mode of *Queen Mab* represents the transformative faculties of the imagination and the possibility of wish fulfilment – a Romantic equivalent of the kind of dream-work that Bruno Bettelheim saw in the way that children inject themselves into fairytales.¹³ The poem is governed as much by the logic of fairytale as by the morality of religious allegory: Ianthe, after all, is not a Bunyanesque Christian or a middle-aged Dantean figure in spiritual crisis. Rather, she is an orphaned princess-in-disguise adopted for a night by a fairy godmother; or, more obviously, she is Charles Perrault's Sleeping Beauty, to be awakened into a new life with her destined prince. Even her name – from that of a mythical ocean-nymph – is enchanted, particularly in contrast with the stolidly English name of her chaste consort, Henry. (Shelley and Harriet named their first child Ianthe in 1813.) The liberation of Ianthe's soul from its body reminds us of the fairytale lineaments of the poem: 'The chains of earth's immurement / Fell from Ianthe's spirit; / They shrank and brake like bandages of straw / Beneath a wakened giant's strength' (I, 188–91). The trope of liberation alludes to fairytale wonders (in the reference to a wakened giant) and invokes a form of Christian resurrection (in the notion of earthly bonds cast aside). Shelley also alludes here to *Gulliver's Travels*, another social commentary thinly disguised as fantasy-narrative. Indeed, the shifts in perspective and scale in *Gulliver*, which give Swift's satire its emphatic power, anticipate the focal changes in Ianthe's journey, from earth to heaven and back to earth.

As a virtuous young woman, Ianthe would seem least in need of hearing Mab's moral tirades; and Mab might have done better to choose a wicked person to educate.¹⁴

13 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairytales*. New York: Knopf, 1976.

14 Considering the poem as a romance, David Duff notes that whereas a figure such as Spenser's Guyon learns through experience, Ianthe learns solely by instruction; and thus 'we do not really see her develop as a character' (*Romance and Revolution*, p. 93). Though he grants that this didactic mode deprives the poem of an element of what Mary Shelley

In Mab's explanation, however, it is precisely her goodness – her sincerity, her freedom from 'heart-withering custom's cold control' (IX, 201) – that makes Ianthe worthy of instruction. Mab first hails her as 'judged alone worthy of the boon, / That waits the good and the sincere' (I, 123–4) and reiterates the point upon departing (IX, 204). Judged *alone*? Surely Mab's qualifier does not suggest that Ianthe is the only good person on earth worth instructing; rather, it isolates her from Henry, and perhaps some small circle of family or friends. What sets Ianthe apart, perhaps, is that she neither congratulates herself on her own goodness nor expects any particular reward for it. Her still form, watched over by her lover, is, in Byron's phrase from *Don Juan*, 'all unconscious of the joy 'tis giving' (II, 197);¹⁵ and her deep sleep, in contrast to Henry's anxious wakefulness, symbolizes the moral status of guileless innocence and pure potentiality. The fairytale language of Ianthe's chosenness also plays on conventional ideas of heavenly reward. While Mab is neither divine gate-keeper nor angelic scribe, she does possess a degree of omniscience and interpretative authority that suggest such functions: she can read a history of past actions in 'the unfailing consciences of men' (I, 170). In judging Ianthe worthy, then, she admits Ianthe to a kind of heaven; and it is this aspect of Shelley's framing narrative I wish to take up next.

III

Though Ianthe does not die, she has what might be called a near-death experience. When Henry looks on her sleeping form, he beholds someone who has temporarily died to the world, since her immortal Spirit has momentarily departed. Meanwhile, her Spirit's nocturnal sojourn in Mab's realm functions as a Shelleyan version of the afterlife; the celestial voyage sponsored by Mab, in other words, is a journey to heaven. Though Shelley did not believe in a conventional heaven, he could not entirely dismiss the idea; the word 'heaven' itself was one of the most well-used in his poetic lexicon. In their edition of Shelley's poetry, Reiman and Fraistat explain in a footnote to *Queen Mab* that the poet 'finds no absolute need for Heaven, or an afterlife'.¹⁶ This is well and succinctly put, and the word 'absolute' is an important qualifier. If Shelley does not *absolutely* need heaven, neither does he dismiss all imaginative possibilities that it entails; there is a vestigial poetics of heaven in Shelley's thought.¹⁷

The narrative frame of *Queen Mab* is, among other things, a kind of heavenly vestibule, within which Shelley can voice his contempt for what he elsewhere

called 'human interest', Duff hastens to add that we should not overlook Shelley's ideas about human virtue focused in the figure of Ianthe.

15 Byron (The Oxford Authors), ed. Jerome McGann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

16 CPPBS II: 262.

17 For further consideration of those possibilities in Shelley's poetry, particularly *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Ode to Heaven*, see my article, 'Shelley's Uncertain Heaven'. *English Literary History (ELH)* 72 (fall 2005), pp. 577–603.

rejected as a children's fiction purveyed by priests and grandmothers,¹⁸ as well as his free-floating speculations about pre-existence and some future state of being. Throughout his career, Shelley favoured the word 'heaven' as a poetic term for the firmament, often with a hint of the mystical sense of the word, and in *Queen Mab*, he invokes it in describing the splendours of Mab's realm: 'As Heaven, low resting on the wave, it spread / Its floors of flashing light, / Its vast and azure dome' (II, 31–3). In a perspectival inversion that suggests how far Ianthe has travelled, Mab's floors are described as the world's ceiling. An architectural miracle of rare device, Mab's palace features 'pearly battlements' that overlook 'the immense of Heaven' (II, 37–8); and it is at 'the overhanging battlement' (II, 69) that Mab and her young pupil take in this view. Since no mention is made of Mab's militancy or of any possible sieges against her property, these battlements serve a symbolic purpose – just as Mab herself is 'queen' in a poetic sense, rather than a strictly political one.

Mab's battlements hark back to the heaven of *Paradise Lost*, which becomes a theatre of war between rebel angels and God's forces. The war culminates in the ejection of Satan and his crew through a rent in the 'crystal wall of heav'n' (VI, 860) – a rout that recalls the myth of the fire-god Mulciber, who was 'thrown by angry Jove / Sheer o'er the crystal battlements' (I, 741–2) of Olympus. It is a commonplace of Milton criticism that the war in heaven is a mock-epic that both incorporates the conventions of Homer and Virgil and transcends them by proposing a new model of Christian heroism based on mental strength rather than martial prowess. It is a model embodied in Abdiel, the single defector from Satan's rebellion, who is praised by God for maintaining 'the cause / Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms' (VI, 31–2). Shelley echoes this trope in *Queen Mab*. The Miltonic implication of the faery monarch's battlements comes to light in Mab's envoy to Ianthe: 'but bravely bearing on, thy will / Is destined an eternal war to wage / With tyranny and falshood' (IX, 189–91). Ironically, since Shelley is of the devil's party, the true enemy would be Milton's God.

In a poem imbued with Godwinian anarchism, Mab attacks the orthodox notion of heaven as a mythical place that mirrors the political topography of earthly realms. God, 'prototype of human misrule, sits / High in heaven's realm, upon a golden throne, / Even like an earthly king' (VI, 105–7). One implication of this charge is that such a heaven is bad poetry – an unimaginative duplication of a hierarchy which we already know. But it is a poetic solecism with injurious consequences, since kings and priests can use the promise of a heavenly reward to keep the downtrodden complacent in their earthly misery. Religion, Shelley insists, populates 'earth with demons, hell with men, / And heaven with slaves' (VI, 70–71). In Mab's lexical analysis, the word 'Heaven' is one of several loaded terms wielded by 'hoary-headed hypocrites' (IV, 203). 'They have three words: – well tyrants know their use, / Well pay them for the loan, with usury / Torn from a bleeding world! – God, Hell, and Heaven' (IV, 208–10). One might think that a word like 'Heaven' would be rendered valueless through overuse, but Mab suggests the reverse: it is precisely by becoming a reflexive piety that the word works its most noxious influence. Mab diminishes the use-value of such words by offering a kind of devil's dictionary of subversive

18 See Shelley's *Declaration of Rights* (1812), in *Prose* I: 59.

definitions: God is a ‘vengeful, pityless, and almighty fiend, / Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage / Of tameless tygers hungering for blood’; Hell is ‘a red gulph of everlasting fire’ for ‘hapless slaves’ who have suffered enough on earth; and Heaven is ‘a meed for those who dare belie / Their human nature, quake, believe, and cringe / Before the mockeries of earthly power’ (IV, 211–20).

It is characteristic of Shelley’s thought, already noticeable in the early works, to analyse social, political or cultural problems as linguistic ones.¹⁹ Dismissing something – a deity, a monarch, an abstract concept – as an empty word or mere ‘name’ was a favourite means of political critique. Elsewhere in the poem, Mab says that ‘human pride / Is skilful to invent most serious names / To hide its ignorance,’ especially names for a deity (VII, 24–6). As Shelley recalls in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* (1816), he himself once ‘called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed’ (l. 53), including ‘God’ and ‘Heaven’, the verbal ruins of unanswered questions about death and mutability. The idea that *language itself* was the problem represented a powerful way of thinking about social change as involving a change of consciousness – ways of using words, habits of thought.

It is not entirely clear from Mab’s attack on the trio of religious terms whether it would be necessary or possible to expunge them entirely from the world’s lexicon; of greater concern here is their misuse. Shelley’s monetary metaphor illustrates the linguistic problem at stake: like money, words have agreed-upon values and can be said to circulate within a society; they are at once everyone’s and no one’s; and their meanings are both fixed by authorities and institutions and accrued in popular usage. Words cannot, however, be hoarded or monopolized, and this is where Mab’s trope of borrowing and lending becomes important. Tyrants might seem to have absolute control over the politically charged words they use, but the situation is more complex. In the chiming cognate-words ‘use’ and ‘usury’, Shelley suggests that language is both currency *and* lender: the tyrannical borrower uses these words to his own advantage and repays them with the usurious interest of his subjects’ misery. In usury, the rate of interest is in *arithmetical* disproportion to the original amount borrowed; but in Shelley’s conceit, it is in *moral* disproportion, for human misery cannot be assigned a monetary value. By implication, language is a silent partner, a usurer operating behind the monarchical façade.²⁰

19 Richard Cronin (‘Shelley’s Language of Dissent’. *Essays in Criticism* 27 [1977], pp. 203–15) was one of the first Shelley scholars to elaborate on the linguistic dilemma, inherited from Enlightenment philosophy, that the poet faced: on the one hand, language is a ‘means by which established authority maintains its power’; on the other hand, it can be a force for social renovation. Cronin sees Shelley as negotiating the problem by using the vocabulary of his enemies in new ways – for instance, celebrating republicanism in the language of monarchy. For further consideration of this linguistic dynamic, see William Keach, *Shelley’s Style*. New York: Methuen, 1984. For commentary on Shelley’s ideas of language as they relate specifically to *Queen Mab*, see Monika H. Lee, “‘Nature’s Silent Eloquence’”: Disembodied Organic Language in Shelley’s *Queen Mab*. *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 48.2 (September 1993), pp. 169–93.

20 For further comment on the misappropriation of words, see chapters in this volume by Alan Weinberg and by Merle Williams.

The subtler and more powerful implication of this trope is that the unwitting lenders are the monarch's subjects, whose pious regard for these words is easily exploited. In this way, language – with its common meanings and customs – stands for political consent, and the ruler's subjects are to some degree complicit in their subjugation. Though Shelley does not go so far as to blame the victim, he does address the problem of being a participant in one's own victimization, and holds out the revolutionary prospect of escaping this trap. For Shelley, the dilemma is ultimately distilled to a problem of consciousness, as it will be in the hero's mental struggles in *Prometheus Unbound*: Ianthe will wake from her dream with a keener political awareness of the world in which she finds herself. In the best scenario, she will distinguish between a false celestial heaven and a true earthly one, and work toward the realization of the latter.

IV

For all of Mab's invective against tyrants' cynical manipulation of words like 'heaven' and 'hell', Shelley cannot renounce the idea of some otherworldly abode. Though Shelley rejects the notion of 'a future state of punishment', he never entirely discounts a possible future state of rewards.²¹ Indeed, the poem is based on the premise that its heroine has been granted a 'high reward' (II, 65) for her spotless virtue; the very fact that Mab visits her is evidence of this. This night of benevolent instruction constitutes a temporary heaven or sanctuary. Mab's palace is not the only intimation of heaven in the poem; Shelley also gestures toward a conventional place of eternal reunion 'Where friends and lovers meet to part no more' (IX, 16).

In Mab's teaching, which hints at both a traditional afterlife and a myth of the soul's pre-existence reminiscent of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, both birth and death are intimations of 'perfect happiness' (IX, 151):

For birth but wakes the spirit to the sense
Of outward shews, whose unexperienced shape
New modes of passion to its frame may lend;
Life is its state of action, and the store
Of all events is aggregated there
That variegate the eternal universe;
Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
And happy regions of eternal hope. (IX, 155–60)

21 See Shelley's Note 12 to the poem (*CPPBS* II: 262). What offends Shelley most about Christian concepts of the afterlife is that 'God made man such as he is, and then damned him for being so'. This is the doctrinal problem that haunts Milton in *Paradise Lost*, but Shelley addresses it without the Miltonic faith in rational agency and free choice, the idea that God created man 'sufficient to stand yet free to fall'. Under Shelley's ruling concept of Necessity, there is no such thing as utterly 'free' choice, only an endless chain of causes and contingencies; and as the poet asserts, there is no absolute good or evil but only 'events to which we apply these epithets'.

It is significant that Shelley uses the word ‘spirit’ rather than ‘soul’: though he insists that there is a substance in us that prevails, he is reluctant to borrow the Christian notion of an individual soul whose character or agency can be divinely judged. It is not that he avoids the idea of a soul entirely: after all, it is Ianthe’s soul, momentarily parted from the body, that receives Mab’s lessons; and Mab addresses her pupil as ‘Spirit’. In Shelley’s usage here, the word ‘spirit’ connotes both an individual soul and an impersonal, animating energy whose medium is defined as ‘life’. As in Locke’s cognitive model of the *tabula rasa*, spirit takes its form through its immersion in a world of perceptions (‘outward shews’) and feelings (‘new modes of passion’). In Shelley’s somewhat vague syntax, life is a kind of space – a ‘there’ – in which events accumulate in endless variety. Many years later, in *Adonais* (1821), Shelley uses a similar trope in comparing life to ‘a dome of many-coloured glass’ that ‘stains the white radiance of eternity’ (ll. 462–3); and in his unfinished poem ‘The Triumph of Life’ Shelley, in the voice of his narrator-persona, poses the question, ‘Then, what is Life?’ (l. 544) – dying at sea before he could formulate what we can only assume would be a more complex answer than he had heretofore given.

Shelley offers a fairly confident and succinct definition of life in ‘Mab’; and yet there is a discontinuity between the philosophically abstract way that he defines it and the visually specific way that he seeks to minimize death. When Mab describes death as merely a portal to isles of the blessed, she veers suspiciously close to conventional ideas of heavenly rewards. In its eternal impersonality, the ‘spirit’ as defined by Shelley would not care about the palliating prospect of azure isles and beaming skies; but an individual soul – with a persistent identity and faculties of recollection and anticipation – surely would. Shelley would later revisit the idea of a utopian island in *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, which ends with the imagination of ‘some calm and blooming cove / Where for me, and those I love, / May a windless bower be built, / Far from passion, pain, and guilt’ (ll. 342–4).

Though this prospect bears some resemblance to traditional paradises, a hint of the poet’s politics is disclosed in the phrase ‘eternal hope’. Shelley prefers imagining heaven as a state of open-ended aspiration rather than definite completion. This is the gist of his description of Ianthe’s soul, which ‘aspires to Heaven, / Pants for its sempiternal heritage, / And ever changing, ever rising still, / Wantons in endless being’ (I, 148–51). This note of aspiration returns in the final canto of the poem, where Mab reclaims the word ‘heaven’ in an ecstatic odal outburst:

O happy Earth! reality of Heaven!
 To which those restless souls that ceaselessly
 Throng through the human universe, aspire;
 Thou consummation of all mortal hope!
 Thou glorious prize of blindly-working will!
 Whose rays, diffused throughout all space and time
 Verge to one point and blend for ever there:
 Of purest spirits thou pure dwelling place!
 Where care and sorrow, impotence and crime,
 Languor, disease, and ignorance dare not come:
 O happy Earth, reality of Heaven! (IX, 1–11)

Though Shelley celebrates the imaginative energy of aspiration, he slips into the teleological language of heaven as ultimate goal. But there is an important distinction between heaven as a ‘meed’ that waits for the pious after death and heaven as a ‘prize of blindly-working will’: the first notion posits an afterlife available to a fortunate elect; the second asserts a force of good moving toward perfection, a realizable *summum bonum*. The word ‘blindly’ removes the cynical intentionality that Shelley saw in orthodox conceptions: heaven is not a reward for carrying out certain practices or holding certain beliefs. It is, more broadly, a ‘consummation’ of earthly aspiration.

Ultimately, Mab’s moral lesson culminates in a new definition of heaven:

For, when the power of imparting joy
Is equal to the will, the human soul
Requires no other heaven. (III, 11–13)

This does not conclusively answer the question of a heavenly afterlife, but rather promotes its indefinite deferral. It says that the act of bringing joy to others constitutes a form of self-forgetfulness in which one no longer worries about the individual fate of one’s soul, even as it more radically suggests that the *only* heaven lies in earthly happiness. Part of Mab’s reason for negating death is ethical – a forestalling of nihilistic doubt or despair. If death really is a definitive end without reward or continuation of soul or consciousness, one might tend to feel a sense of futility or insignificance in earthly struggle. And yet the utter finality of death leads Shelley to suggest an alternative immortality – the acts of love and kindness that one has performed in life, all tending toward some cumulative and lasting good.

V

For all of Shelley’s grand hopes for social change, the poem’s climactic event – Ianthe’s reawakening – happens on a far more intimate scale. When Mab sends Ianthe back to earth, she is charged not so much with spreading her new knowledge among mankind as with making her boyfriend happy: ‘Go, happy one, and give that bosom joy / Whose sleepless spirit waits to catch / Light, life and rapture from thy smile’ (IX, 209–11). This might seem an anticlimactic way of concluding such a revolutionary work, and it is no wonder that critics have tended to ignore the poem’s slight narrative frame. Its limitations were implicitly addressed by Leslie Brisman when he described *Alastor* rather than the earlier *Queen Mab* as ‘Shelley’s first extended treatment of dream vision as source’.²² *Queen Mab* may be one long dream, but its content is not *explicitly* represented as a source for much of anything; if it becomes a motivating force, a haunting subliminal pattern, or a cause of disenchantment in the dreamer’s waking life, we are told nothing about it. As various critics have noted, Shelley does little to bridge the gap between the present state of the world and a ‘reality of heaven’. Most recently, Cian Duffy has noted, ‘we are

²² Leslie Brisman, *Romantic Origins*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 138.

significantly not *shown* the means by which the transition from present corruption to future utopia is achieved.²³ Instead, we must read the poem with the interpretative logic of fairytale – to see Ianthe’s waking smile or Mab’s parting counsel as symbolic origins, as fine-grained counterparts to the poem’s rhetoric of reform.

As I have argued, the fairytale frame of the poem – with its heavenly inflection – has a complex relationship to the ideas it contains. The question of whether Ianthe is sleeping or dead and its final answer in her awakening to Henry’s gaze stage Shelley’s own anxieties about death and unfulfilled hopes, and thoughts about happiness, temporal and eternal. Indeed, this framework is reflected ‘inside’ the poem, in a description of Ianthe’s delighted reaction to Mab’s happy vision of the future. It is ‘[s]uch joy as when a lover sees / The chosen of his soul in happiness’ and sees ‘her lovely eyes, / Which like two stars amid the heaving main / Sparkle through liquid bliss’ (VIII, 32–3, 38–40). What appears to be a trope for Ianthe’s joy serves as a prediction – for at the end of the poem, Henry *will* exult to see Ianthe alive, in the ‘luxury of health’, and there will be real stars glimmering through a window as she awakes. It is thematically apt, too, that one form of imparting joy is likened to another, because Shelley’s ideal of harmonious communication is the ‘pure stream of feeling’ (VIII, 29) that flows from Mab to Ianthe’s spirit. Mab’s talent for playing ‘dulcet music ... / Concordant with the life-strings of the soul’ (VIII, 19–20) is simply a celestial model for what Shelley calls ‘consentaneous love’ (VIII, 108).

In a poem so invested in a happy ending, the central moral code can be summarized in Mab’s commandment to Ianthe: ‘Learn to make others happy’ (II, 64). With its pedestrian phrasing, this counsel might be easily dismissed as a *sotto voce* homily in the midst of more robust political tirades; nevertheless, it forms the ethical core of Mab’s teaching – somewhat akin to the hero’s declaration in *Prometheus Unbound*, ‘I wish no living thing to suffer pain’ (I, 305). In essence, it is a Shelleyan variation on Jesus’s teaching, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ (*AV*, Mark 12:13), which is in turn a revision of the monotheistic commandment to love God (Deuteronomy 6:4). Indeed, in a pedagogical disclaimer, Mab tells Ianthe that this one moral lesson is worth more than her whole palace; and the palace itself becomes part of a parable. It is not ‘virtue’s only meed, to dwell in a celestial palace’ (II, 59–60), she says; without love and concern for others, the spirit would become ‘immured / Within the prison of itself’ (II, 61–2). Here, the heavenly architecture of the dream-vision becomes a potential distraction, in the way that Puritans worried that stained-glass windows might obscure the biblical stories they are meant to tell.

Arguably, Ianthe already makes at least one other person happy; but the key term in Mab’s commandment is the verb ‘learn’, with its connotation of mindfulness, intention and perfectibility. (Reading the poem through the lens of Keats’s *Eve of St. Agnes*, we might also say that this act of learning implies sexual consummation

23 See Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 45. Shelley is vague about both the affirmative and negative aspects of achieving his utopian vision, particularly with respect to the role of Necessity. As Duffy notes, ‘The poem ultimately remains ambivalent about the precise manner in which Necessity will chastise the corrupt who “transgress her law”’ (p. 45).

– the next step toward happiness as Ianthe wakes to find the adoring Henry leaning over her.) Years later, Mab's lesson would be more elegantly expressed in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), in a definition of love as an act of sympathetic imagination: 'The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, and person, not our own.'²⁴ In essence, Mab's generosity models the kind of behaviour that Ianthe must learn. Mab embodies the imagination acting in the cause of moral good.

In the end, it turns out that the framing question about Ianthe's fate has been motivated by a conversation that the lovers had the evening before, to which Mab alludes: 'When to the moonlight walk by Henry led, / Sweetly and sadly thou didst talk of death' (IX, 183–4). Thus, Henry worries that idle talk might be turned into a tragic outcome, in a species of magical thinking (or a high sense of dramatic irony). The conversation echoes the young Shelley's own morbid fascinations. As the poet later recalled in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, he once 'sought for ghosts' and 'high talk with the departed dead' (ll. 49, 52); and it is the sudden shadow of Intellectual Beauty that turns him toward a more 'awful loveliness' than can be found in graveyards alone.

In the moment of Ianthe's reawakening, the high talk of death vanishes. For Henry, the relief of this moment perhaps inspires a renewed appreciation of his beloved. For the person who has had the dream-vision, the change in perspective is still lovelier and stranger:

She looked around in wonder and beheld
Henry, who kneeled in silence by her couch,
Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love,
And the bright beaming stars
That through the casement shone. (IX, 236–40)

Imagistically, the recent past (the starry realm of Mab's palace) is intertwined with the present and future (Henry's face). More disorienting is the fact that Ianthe now sees the ordinary vista of the night sky as a place she has actually visited. From Mab's battlements, the earth had seemed like 'a little light / That twinkled in the misty distance' (II, 83–4), like another star in the starry firmament – and yet also, to the telescopically enabled 'intellectual eye', a human scene of 'thronging thousands' (II, 99). Long before the first photo of the earth from a moon-orbiter would be taken in 1966, Shelley imagined what the planet would look like from a great distance. There are elements of fairytale in *Queen Mab*, to be sure, but also hints of science fiction. Arguably, the view of earth in its glimmering fragility is more edifying than the panorama of ruined civilizations that Mab had insisted on showing. If the strange events of the night have accentuated Henry's affection for Ianthe, we might well imagine that they have made Ianthe feel more tender toward the entire sleeping world.

Like Coleridge's window-view of icicles 'quietly shining to the quiet moon' in *Frost at Midnight*, the final image of the stars through the casement represents a domestication of the sublime, an enclosure of nature within a single human

24 *SPP*: 517.

perspective. Ianthe's final experience of standing apart in her single soul and later returning to her body achieves the kind of defamiliarization that Shelley would later suggest in the opening statement of his fragmentary essay 'On Life': 'Life, and the world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing. The mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being. We are struck with admiration at some of its transient modifications; but it is itself the great miracle.'²⁵

Beyond the miraculous realm of the poem, however, things did not go so well. Despite his belief in 'consentaneous love' and the idea of universal happiness, Shelley could not make everyone in his life happy. On another night a few years later, Harriet Shelley would wake to find that her husband had left for the Continent, in another fairytale elopement with a different lover; and a few years later she would drown herself in the Serpentine. To remember this fact is not to discount the utopian vision of *Queen Mab* but rather to appreciate the difficult challenge of harmonizing 'the kindred sympathies of human souls' (IX, 76), and to see the lovers' blissful reunion as one episode in a larger and more complicated history. Ianthe's view of the night sky, then, represents a charmed pause in that irresistible flow of events, a momentary suspension between heaven and earth. Of all the framing devices in *Queen Mab*, the most haunting may be a window-frame.

25 *SPP*: 505.

Chapter 4

Laon and the Hermit: Connection and Succession

Jack Donovan

I

At the opening of Canto IV of Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, a small boat carrying the poem's principal character Laon and the old man who has just rescued him from death by exposure turns from the open sea, enters a small cove and touches on the shore. A modern Greek revolutionary and poet whose cause is the freedom of his nation from the oppression of the Ottoman Empire, Laon is also the poem's chief narrator and its central consciousness. In the previous canto he had been left to die by soldiers in the service of the Tyrant Othman, chained to a column overlooking the Aegean on which lay the ship which would take his sister Cythna to captivity in Constantinople in the harem of the same tyrant. The old man, who will shortly be identified as a learned hermit, has struck Laon's chains, bound up his wounds, administered medicine; he now carries him into a crumbling tower that stands on the beach and down a staircase to a chamber tapestried with moss where he places him upon a couch strewn with grass and leaves. Good physician that he is, the hermit then opens the shutters to let in the fresh air, and Laon's gaze follows him to the open window:

the moonlight lay
Upon a lake whose waters wove their play
Even to the threshold of that lonely home ...

The rock-built barrier of the sea was passed,—
And I was on the margin of a lake,
A lonely lake, amid the forests vast
And snowy mountains:— did my spirit wake
From sleep as many-coloured as the snake
That girds eternity? (ll. 1435–46)¹

Somehow Laon has got from the landward side of what appears to be a breakwater sheltering the cove from the open sea to a lake lost in deep forests and enclosed by snow-covered peaks. By what means? Neither the details of the landscape that are

¹ *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Jack Donovan in *The Poems of Shelley (PS) II*: 10–260 (124). Subsequent canto and line references will be given in round brackets in the text.

given, nor the syntax, nor any discernible shift in the mode of representation provides a secure basis for an answer. With 'Did my spirit wake from sleep' Laon, still weak and faint, wonders not whether he is dreaming now but whether his previous life has been a dream; and when (both earlier in the poem and later) he does hallucinate, these episodes are clearly signalled as delusions in contrast to his actual experience of life as subject to common material contingencies. Neither is there any indication that we are meant to attribute to his mental confusion the lacuna in his account of the scene in which his rescue is completed.

The established mode of narration appears to have been ruptured at this point in the poem. Similar instances of awkward narrative transition can be found in *Laon and Cythna*, hardly surprising for a poem of its length which was written and seen through the press at great speed. An examination of the manuscript evidence for a given case can sometimes help to elucidate the difficulty by uncovering some lapse in the revision or transmission of the text.² But for this passage no manuscript has survived. Failing such an explanation, it is useful, I think, to adopt the term *aporia* to describe the present discontinuity. The word is here to be understood in a restricted sense: not as indicating a philosophical conundrum or a rhetorical assumption of perplexity, nor as possessing the meaning it has acquired after Derrida³ of a textual inadequacy traceable to a corresponding limitation in the system of thought on which the text is based, but rather in a sense very close to the etymology of the word *aporia* itself – from the Greek *a + poros* (passage) – an impassable situation, or the absence of a way through. We're at point B; we know we've been at point A, but the text doesn't provide the means to work out how we've moved from one to the other.

I propose as working hypothesis for this chapter that such a conspicuous absence of connection signals a textual locus that invites particular scrutiny, one that translates some preoccupations of the author intimately fused with the narrative of the poem and sufficiently pressing to override the conventions that are the grounds of representation at this point. And I should like to come at the task of accounting for this textual peculiarity by way of some major constituents of *Laon and Cythna*, themselves rooted in important incidents and preoccupations in Shelley's life and reading for several years preceding the composition of the poem. These have as their chief intellectual and imaginative co-ordinates two of the figures who had exercised most influence on his recent artistic and personal life, Godwin and Rousseau.

II

On 22 June 1816, about a year before he composed the episode of Laon and the Hermit, Shelley set off from Montalegre with Byron on a nine-day tour round Lake Geneva by boat. On their first day out they visited a place that Shelley was to describe in some detail the following year in the travel book written by himself and Mary Shelley, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*. His description would appear to be a

2 For example ll. 2343–5: *PS* II: 160.

3 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1978, pp. xvi–xvii; at greater length in 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone Press, 1981, pp. 63–171.

revised version of an entry, now lost, in the diary that he kept during the tour with Byron; he described the place again in a letter he sent to Peacock in England two and a half weeks after returning to Montalegre on 30 June.⁴ In the version of the letter in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* the description reads:

The lake was calm, and after three hours of rowing we arrived at Hermance, a beautiful little village, containing a ruined tower, built, the villagers say, by Julius Caesar. There were three other towers similar to it, which the Genevese destroyed for their fortifications in 1560. We got into the tower by a kind of window. The walls are immensely solid, and the stone of which it is built so hard, that it yet retained the mark of the chisels. The boatmen said, that this tower was once three times higher than it is now. There are two staircases in the thickness of the walls, one of which is entirely demolished, and the other half ruined, and only accessible by a ladder.⁵

What Shelley and Byron were shown by their guides was the ruins of a circular stone tower built in the fourteenth century which had served as the keep of the Château d'Hermance, and which still stands today. The Roman origin claimed by the villagers no doubt represents local legend doing double duty as historical curiosity designed to attract tourists. When Shelley came to create the hermit's tower in *Laon and Cythna* two of the physical features that he recorded (window, staircases) of this dilapidated pile in the upper part of the village overlooking the lake were recalled as well as its general situation. Its surroundings of forests and mountain peaks he will have borrowed from the Savoyard Alpine landscape further along the shore of the lake to the north and east that he and Byron would visit in the next few days, perhaps supplemented by views encountered on the trip to Chamonix and Mont Blanc the following month. Other details, noticed during a walk to the lake at sunset on the evening of the visit in company with Byron, are also reclaimed soon after in the poem.⁶

4 For the surviving pages of the diary, see *MS Journals* I: 110–12. See also Robert Brinkley, 'Documenting Revision: Shelley's Lake Geneva Diary and the Dialogue with Byron in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*'. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 39 (1990), pp. 66–82.

5 *Prose* I: 212.

6 Shelley's lakeside conversation that evening with Byron at Nemi and the 'craggy islets' he saw near the shore (109–10) are adapted in stanzas V–VII. The landscape of *Laon and Cythna* forms part of a symbolic fiction and as such adapts more than one actual source. An intriguing possibility, pointed out to me by Chris Jones of the University of Wales at Bangor, is the artificial landscape created at Port Madoc by William Madocs's embankment barring the estuary at Traeth Mawr from the Irish Sea, which was completed in September 1811. Shelley had been an enthusiastic supporter of the project. During his stay at Tan-yr-allt in the winter of 1812–13, he would have absorbed the features of the surroundings which included the sea, a barrier of rock and high mountains. The land within the embankment was then being drained, but Shelley had read (*Letters* I: 518) in Chapter VII of *Headlong Hall* (1816) Peacock's description of the scene when the tide had passed through the remaining gap in the uncompleted embankment and formed 'a lake about five miles in length and more than one in breadth' (*The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, eds H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C.E. Jones. 10 vols. 1924–34; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1967, vol. 1, p. 74 [hereafter *Peacock Works*]). See Elisabeth Beazley, *Madocks and the Wonder of Wales*. London: Faber, 1967, pp. 135–54.

The original letter to Peacock, which had long disappeared from view, was rediscovered 30 years ago; dated 17 July, it includes a response to the same site that is briefer, oddly grudging and distinctly polemical:

At Hermance we saw a ruined tower, one of four which the Genevese had demolished for their fortifications in 1560. The marks of the chisels of Caesar's libticide legions yet remain on the wall. I wondered at the massy structure, cursed its builder & departed.⁷

The refusal to visualize the tower, in a letter whose principal object is description, once the chiselled signature of the destroyer of Roman liberty has been recognized, the verbal shake of the head, the curse and conclusive exit from the scene: these are addressed, with histrionic flourish, to a friend of like political views. No qualifying references to local reporters are included as they are in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, where the summary imprecation of the letter yields to the travel writer's imperatives of curious detail and intrepid investigation. In *Laon and Cythna* the tower, now adapted as the hermit's retreat, undergoes a further metamorphosis:

It was a crumbling heap, whose portal dark
With blooming ivy trails was overgrown;
Upon whose floor the spangling sands were strown,
And rarest sea shells, which the eternal flood,
Slave to the mother of the months, had thrown
Within the walls of that grey tower, which stood
A changeling of man's art, nursed amid Nature's brood. (ll. 1416–22)⁸

The slow repossession by Nature of what in the letter to Peacock is portrayed as a decaying monument to human aggression, complete with one of Shelley's favourite climbing plants, announces the onset of a therapeutic process for Laon. He has killed three soldiers in resisting capture (III, x) and has experienced the beginnings of a troubling passion for his sister Cythna (III, i–v). The fictional tower's sombre tones are being revived with green and sparkling hues by the combined action of earth and sea, while its status as 'changeling' works a symbolic variant on a theme which entered the poem in stanzas 12 and 13 of the Dedication, the adoption of appropriate foster parents in the process of refashioning the self, a point I return to in section IV. The course of healing that is here to be carried out has a long pedigree in romance narrative, in which the hermit who tends to the body and spirit of the disabled hero is a consecrated figure. In formalist terms the *raison d'être* of such a character, the 'helper', is limited to fulfilling one of a strictly limited number of elementary

In his letter to Peacock of 17 July 1816 Shelley twice refers to the stormy Lake Geneva as a 'sea' (*SC* VII: 29, 32; *History of a Six Weeks' Tour in Prose*: 216); jetties and barriers of stone along the shores of the Lake provided a harbour for boats and these may also have inspired the 'rock-built barrier' of *Laon and Cythna* l. 1441.

7 *SC* VII: 29.

8 Further details of the boat journey appear to have been adapted in *Laon and Cythna*; the landscape and dramatic changes of weather encountered on the second day in Canto I (i–iv): *SC* VII: 29. Other towers and castles viewed during the tour, including the one at Chillon, may also have contributed to the hermit's tower and its surroundings: *SC* VII: 32–3.

narrative functions: he aids the hero in attaining his object.⁹ But in the tradition of Christian romance, within and against which Shelley writes in *Laon and Cythna*, the hermit's function as 'helper' had acquired a particular moral dimension. His was the office of correcting the dangerous tendency of passion, chiefly and typically erotic desire, to turn the heroic warrior from a beneficial public enterprise sanctioned by divine will. To this end he deployed the arts of physic to restore the hero to health, and more especially the authority of established religious doctrine to instruct him how, as Spenser has it, 'with wholesome reede of sad sobriety / To rule the stubborn rage of passion blinde'.¹⁰ Shelley was well read in the founding texts of this tradition, all of them showing evident debts to the episode of Dido and Aeneas in book four of the *Aeneid* and to Odysseus's encounters with Circe and Calypso in the *Odyssey*. Motifs deriving from the romantic epics which had appropriated and modified this ancient opposition between private desire and public endeavour are recognizable in the major narrative movements of *Laon and Cythna*, in its friendships, battles, sea-voyages, and the character of its principal actors.

Important examples of the hermit's intervention in romance narrative, to cite texts that Shelley knew, would include: the instruction and baptism of Ruggiero by the hermit of the lonely island in *Orlando Furioso* (XLI, 50–57) and the similarly godly assistance bestowed on the Muslim warrior Sobrino (XLIII, 187–99) by the same character; the counsel and absolution given to the errant Rinaldo by Peter the Hermit in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (XVIII, 6–40) in order to neutralize the effects of the debilitating passion which has kept him from overcoming the diabolical enchantments of the ancient wood. Paired episodes in the *Faerie Queene* contrast the attempt of the enchanter Archimago (disguised as a holy hermit) to deceive Redcrosse Knight by erotic dreams and delusive spirits (I, i, 29–ii, 6) with the curing of the wounds of Timias and Serena by a hermit in whose chapel they find refuge (VI, v, 35–vi, 15): bodily medicine proving of no avail, the hermit's spiritual ministrations teach them to subdue desire so that they may set off again to rejoin Prince Arthur. More recent and more intriguing is the case of King Roderick in Southey's *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814), the first of the poet's efforts in the epic mode after assuming the laureateship the previous year. Books I–IV of the poem follow the long and tormented penitence that Roderick undergoes for having violated Florinda, daughter of Count Julian. In his ordeal he first finds refuge in a hermitage where he is counselled by the old monk Romano; later at the monastery of St Felix, the abbot Odoar consecrates him to the task of liberating Spain from Muslim rule, an object which his redemption frees him to bring about but whose fruits he cannot share because of the lingering pollution of his sin.¹¹

9 For the formalist view of character as function see A.-J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Viele. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, pp. 197–213.

10 *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton. London and New York: Longman, 1977, p. 660 (VI, vi, 5).

11 Shelley was reading the *Orlando Furioso* in April 1815 and reread it in Italy in 1818: *MS Journals I*: 75–6, 92, 212, 266; *Letters II*: 21–6; *Gerusalemme Liberata* in 1815: *MS Journals I*: 92; *The Faerie Queene*, especially from April to July 1817 during the composition

When such instances are borne in mind, the peculiarity of Shelley's revision of the tradition he inherited comes into sharper focus. The hermit's retreat in *Laon and Cythna* is a place of secular healing and the hermit's wisdom derives from purely humanist principles; he never mentions religion and appears to have none. Neither does he speak of erotic passion as such, much less of its perils. Although the text indicates (ll. 1459–63) that he talks to Laon at length of Cythna, his words are not represented directly, and he lays down no prescriptive moral norm in relation to what is the beginning of an incestuous love. His mission of psychic healer in the interest of public benefit is nonetheless evident, and the distinctiveness of the role that Shelley here creates for him can perhaps best be appreciated by recognizing how it is implicated both with other events of Canto IV and in relation to the larger narrative ordering of the poem.

When Laon's period of mental derangement has passed and he is once again fit to resume rational discourse, the hermit apprises him that his recovery has been a lengthy one: 'seven years are spent, / While slowly truth on thy benighted sense / Has crept'. This interval appears in the text under a double aspect. Initially (IV, v–vii), its passage is concisely represented as psychic anguish, as a period of insanity whose causes are erotic torment and frustrated hope. Of these Laon retains only scant memory which the hermit is able to draw from him by skilful questioning. Later, he provides Laon with an ample history of events in the public arena (xii–xxviii) since his arrest, exposure and rescue, thereby adding an informative function to the traditional therapeutic one. In his role as informant, he furnishes hero and reader with a narrative that connects the missing past with the present and points the way to future action. This process, essentially pedagogical, in which the narrative movement of the poem makes a major temporal return on itself, has been established as paradigmatic in the first canto. There the unnamed narrator's despair at the failure of the French Revolution is addressed first by a dramatic visionary experience, the aerial combat of an eagle and a serpent, then by an explication of its meaning. The supernatural woman guide who provides the instruction enables him in this way to situate recent events within a coherent scheme of world history. The intelligence thus acquired in turn allows him to recover that hope which is the necessary mental precondition of effective action and so to re-enter the course of contemporary history with renewed purpose. The magisterial intervention by a character possessed of special knowledge beyond the narrator's experience, which reorients his course and thereby advances the plot, is recognizably adapted in the episode of Laon and the hermit. The forward momentum of events later stalls at two further crises in the revolution: the defeat of the patriots (VI, iii–xviii) and the death of Laon and Cythna (XII, viii–xvi). In each instance, a similar narrative return is the mechanism by which the fresh information necessary to connect present with past and future is delivered, first by Cythna herself to Laon (VII, iii–IX xxxvi), then posthumously to them both by their child (XII, xxiv–xxxi).

The religious and moral instruction proffered by the hermit in the Christian romance tradition is thus replaced in *Laon and Cythna* by a lesson in history. In the

of *Laon and Cythna* (*MS Journals* I: 100, 167–77). Mary 'look[ed] over' Southey's *Roderick* in January 1815 (*MS Journals* I: 59, 88) but does not indicate that Shelley read it.

moral order that the poem imagines, the mental shift indispensable for redeeming past transgression is not a conscience subdued to the precepts of religion in the domain of human passion but a mind enlightened by a right understanding of the past. Passion is nonetheless present, disruptive and intractable. Laon's hallucinations and madness in Cantos III and IV are presented as a direct consequence of it. Moreover, the failures in the revolutionary narrative mentioned above, which occasion interventions in the form of historical enlightenment, are invariably accompanied by an erotic crisis. But – and here is Shelley's second critical revision of literary tradition – erotic attachment, so far from being an obstacle to endeavour for the public good, is presented as its natural and necessary accompaniment. Again the pattern is established in the long scene of education that constitutes Canto I. The supernatural guide who instructs the narrator, after disclosing the events that accompanied the origin of the cosmos, proceeds to dissuade him from despair at recent historical reverses by recounting her autobiography as an exemplum. The personal present is thus connected with the past and future of world history to lay down an intelligible basis for individual action within a mythic continuity that creates a sense of time analogous to that of the biblical religions. She first experienced the thrill of erotic energy, she says, at the outbreak of the French Revolution. The impetus of this simultaneous political and sexual awakening carried her, like Mary Wollstonecraft – an idealized version of whose engagement with the Revolution is the basis of hers – to a city evidently drawn after Paris and home again, while sparing her the despondency at the Revolution's failure which has affected many (xxxviii–xlvi).

Her initial inspiration had arrived in the shape of a vision in sleep:

'Deep slumber fell on me:—my dreams were fire,
Soft and delightful thoughts did rest and hover
Like shadows o'er my brain; and strange desire,
The tempest of a passion, raging over
My tranquil soul, its depths with light did cover,
Which passed; and calm, and darkness, sweeter far
Came—then I loved; but not a human lover!
For when I rose from sleep, the Morning Star
Shone through the woodbine wreaths which round my casement were. (ll. 478–86)

The sequence of five stanzas (I, xxxix–xlili) that includes this one must count among the remarkable passages of Shelley's verse. Its celebratory location of the source of revolutionary fervour in a frankly erotic dream-vision defines a principal thematic combination of the poem and invites comparison with its other striking representation of erotic experience, the consummation of the love of the brother and sister, Laon and Cythna (VI, xxviii–xlil). That solemn and statuesque conjunction compensates for the defeat of their cause. The guide's sexual initiation trembles with promise, sensual tempest evolving into firmness of purpose and directed resolve, which continue to be nourished by erotic energy. Its constituent details recall various instances of divine-human impregnation in classical mythology as well as the Annunciation of the Immaculate Conception to the Virgin Mary by the angel Gabriel in Christian

tradition, a bold and characteristic instance of Shelleyan revisionary syncretism.¹² Laon's dreams and hallucinations in which Cythna figures in Cantos III (i–v, xxvi–xxvii) and IV (v–vi) may be understood as imperfect, because uncompleted, manifestations of this prototype. The hermit's role in relation to these tormented visions of Cythna is confined to recombining what his recovering patient has already said of her in his deranged ramblings: 'He knew his soothing words to weave with skill / From all my madness told; like mine own heart, / Of Cythna would he question me' (ll. 1459–61). In this, as in the information on the progress of the revolution that he conveys, he does no more than mediate what the hero has already imagined and inspired. Neither as counsellor on the pains of love nor as interpreter of events does he assume the directive authority of his counterpart in Christian romance. 'For I have been thy passive instrument' (l. 1549) he acknowledges to Laon, thereby collapsing all but the merest functional distance between the 'helper' and the 'hero', in effect declaring himself to be (in formalist terminology) largely an 'actant' or narrative mechanism. As an 'actor' his part is reduced to the roles of messenger and kindly doctor.¹³

III

In addition to being a conscious literary revision, the figure of the kindly doctor is a portrait from life. Mary Shelley says in her 'Note on the Revolt of Islam' (the title of the expurgated *Laon and Cythna*)¹⁴ that the 'character of the old man who liberates Laon from his tower-prison, and tends on him in sickness, is founded on that of Dr Lind, who, when Shelley was at Eton, had often stood by to befriend and support him, and whose name he never mentioned without love and veneration.'¹⁵ James Lind (1736–1812) was appointed physician to Eton College in 1799 and was a septuagenarian when the schoolboy Shelley delighted in his company towards the end of his period (1804–10) at the school. A native of Edinburgh, Lind was a well-travelled polymath and collector with a taste for experimental science and enlightenment critical thinkers, something of an eccentric whose kindness and benevolence induced his young friend to fancy him as a substitute father. Shelley also valued him for an introduction to what he calls in the Dedication 'forbidden mines of lore' (l. 38), sources of that liberating scientific and political knowledge which was excluded from the highly traditional classical curriculum at Eton. Of more direct relevance to the poem is an anecdote Shelley recounted to several intimates, according to which Dr Lind arrived to rescue him as he lay ill of 'a fever which had attacked my brain' – while he was at home during a school vacation – from his father's plan to have him confined in a madhouse. The truth of this recollection

12 For example Zeus's affairs with Europa, Leda and Danae; Luke 1: 26–38 for the Annunciation.

13 See footnote 9.

14 The transformation of *Laon and Cythna* into *The Revolt of Islam* is dealt with in *SC* V: 141–89; *PS* II: 15–17; J. Donovan, 'Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire'. *Keats-Shelley Review* 2 (1987), pp. 49–90.

15 *PW* I: 376.

has been doubted by some who knew Shelley well, but it shows at least the revered position that the independent-minded and cosmopolitan doctor had come to occupy in Shelley's imaginative autobiography, the chief elements of which he had by then constructed.¹⁶

In the poem, what Shelley recognized as Lind's virtues and qualities – liberality, serenity, breadth of knowledge, varied experience of the world – are bestowed on the hermit. Yet in one particular the hermit's limits of mind and manner are unequivocally declared. He has lost hope in the possibility of human improvement. This is a cardinal failing in a narrative designed to revive precisely that virtue in its readers after the disappointments of the French Revolution. It is insisted upon as such in two passages in which the hermit's heart is described as 'blind and obdurate' (l. 1486) and his aspect as 'cold in seeming' (ll. 1560–61): the first flaw persuades him that their habitual self-abasement will keep men enslaved, the second unfits him for inspirational leadership. Such shortcomings are hardly compatible with Shelley's memories of a man that he described thus: 'Free, calm-spirited — full of benevolence & even of youthful ardour ... he breathed the spirit of the kindest tolerance & the purest wisdom.'¹⁷ Reviewing *Laon and Cythna / The Revolt of Islam* in the *Quarterly Review* for April 1819, John Taylor Coleridge thought he could discern the silhouette of Godwin behind the portrait of the hermit, on the basis of a footnote to Shelley's Preface in which *Political Justice* is invoked as an authority (ll. 467–8). Considered on its own the evidence he cites is hardly sufficient to confirm the identification, the chief aim of which is to unmask a baleful influence on the poem, and the reviewer (a contemporary of Shelley's at Eton) does not bring forward any resemblance to Dr Lind.

Yet on other grounds the suggestion in the *Quarterly* is not without interest. 'But I, alas! am both unknown and old, / And though the woof of wisdom I know well / To dye in hues of language, I am cold / In seeming, and the hopes which inly dwell, / My manners note that I did long repel' (ll. 1559–62). Despite the obvious difference (Godwin, though no longer lionized as he had been in the mid-1790s, was hardly 'unknown'), there is enough of his reserved and fastidious temperament and demeanour in the hermit's self-description to associate him with Shelley's estimate in 1817 of his father-in-law and erstwhile mentor as the yesterday's man of the post-revolutionary age.¹⁸ But the hermit's principal failure of vision is the narrowness

16 Weinberg, *BSM* XXII (2): 269–7, *PS* II: 120–21, and Christopher Goulding, 'The Real Doctor Frankenstein'. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 95 (2002), pp. 257–9. The 'adoption' of Lind and the doctor's imaginative recreation in *Laon and Cythna* find an echo in Shelley's self-stylization as the 'Hermit of Marlow' in his political pamphlets of 1817.

17 *BSM* XXII (2): 269.

18 See Godwin's 'Analysis of Own Character' in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philip. 8 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 55–60 (hereafter *Novels and Memoirs*). James Bieri indicates that Lind probably introduced Shelley to Godwin's *St Leon* and *Political Justice* (*Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography. Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792–1816*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004, p. 95). David Duff also considers Godwin to be a possible model for the Hermit, and emphasizes Shelley's inversion of Romance convention (*Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 177–8).

of his moral understanding, and in this particular his Godwinian pedigree can be less confidently traced. He has persuaded himself that ‘fate / Which made them [mankind] abject, would preserve them so’ (ll. 1488–9). The curious invocation of ‘fate’ as the cause of human abjection, a kind of original sin (as the secular hermit conceives of it) which underpins a state of permanent inequality and oppression, could not directly be attributed to Godwin the advocate of perpetual improvement. We might allow that, by some negative extrapolation, Shelley here regards the hermit’s blindness and obduracy as an approximation of the insistently reiterated opposition to radical activism in *Political Justice*. Just as he might represent as a condition of disabused passivity in the character of Laon’s preserver Godwin’s tenacious faith in the imperceptible working for good of an opinion nourished in free discussion, which would ultimately bear fruit of its own accord.

He had, moreover, repeated these essential tenets of *Political Justice*, tailoring them as advice offered directly to Shelley, at the time of the latter’s first Irish expedition. The eager young reformer was expressly discouraged as to the efficacy of the political associations he was recommending – to achieve Catholic emancipation, the repeal of the Union, and ultimately human liberation on the broadest scale – in the two pamphlets of 1812, *An Address to the Irish People* and *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists*. Shelley was warned of the possibility that the *Address* might ‘light again the flames of rebellion and war’. In the same correspondence other favourite themes were stressed: the impossibility of predicting the consequences of one’s writings, the volatile nature of the Irish, their bloody and ineffectual recent attempts at liberation.¹⁹ As well as the spectre of the French Revolution, Godwin was clearly drawing upon his own experiences during a visit to Ireland in July and August 1800 during which he witnessed the consequences and heard accounts of violent bloodshed and reprisals.²⁰ *Laon and Cythna* represents a revolution by direct political action, brought about by a movement like those that Shelley’s two 1812 pamphlets propose – one rooted in education and self-discipline, motivated by a disinterested love of humankind and acting with benevolent determination. A short-lived reign of wisdom, justice and love results. When, therefore, the hermit reports to Laon (IV, xiii–xxvi) that a peaceful army of millions, inspired by his own and Laon’s writings and growing out of what are manifestly political associations, has gathered beneath their standards at the walls of the Golden City to accomplish their ideals by peaceful means, the Godwinian aspect of his character attaches an ironic dimension to his role as messenger.

Other ironies, like this one partly private, are more largely diffused in Canto IV. Some effort is necessary to uncover them but the exercise can reveal much about the combination of personal, literary and political elements that Shelley intertwines in *Laon and Cythna*. The imaginative geography of Canto IV responds particularly

19 See *Prose* I: 7–55; *Letters* I: 229–32, 258–62, 266–70, 276–80; the fuller versions of Godwin’s replies in *Novels and Memoirs* I: 69–76.

20 Timothy Webb, ‘Missing Robert Emmet: William Godwin’s Irish Expedition’, in *Reinterpreting Emmet: Essays on the Life and Legacy of Robert Emmet*, Anne Dolan, Patrick M. Geoghegan, Darryl Jones (eds). Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007, pp. 105–37 (especially pp. 131–3).

to such an enquiry. As we have seen, its configuration and details owe a debt to the Swiss landscape that Byron and Shelley traversed on their tour of Lake Geneva in June 1816. The tour was literary as well as scenic. Each poet had with him a copy of Rousseau's novel *Julie; ou, La Nouvelle Héloïse* and each was intent on 'reading' through the lens of Rousseau's fiction the celebrated natural sites visited on days three, four and five of their tour. There was nothing unusual in this. The Rousseau excursion round the lake, exploiting the enormous success of the novel, was a well-established part of the local tourist trade. In Shelley's case the lens through which he observed was a telescope and was turned backward from a distance. Although in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* he recounts their stop at Meillerie as though he were discovering the reality of a place he had already known through *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in the letter to Peacock it appears that the process was reversed: 'Mellerie is the well known scene of St. Preux's visionary exile. I had not yet read enough of Julie to enjoy the scene as I do by retrospect. but Mellerie is indeed enchanted ground, were Rousseau no magician.'²¹ Shelley alludes to the great XVIIth letter of the 4th part of Rousseau's novel (he gives the precise reference in both the letter to Peacock and in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*) in which St Preux describes to his English mentor Lord Edward Bomston a boating excursion with Julie on the lake. She is his former pupil and lover, and he has been forced into desperate exile through the impossibility of continuing an intimate connection between himself (a retainer in her father's household) and the daughter of the house, her father's implacable opposition to their love, the difference in their social positions and her subsequent marriage. On his return he has joined the new household over which she now presides on the estate of her husband Monsieur de Wolmar with a view to becoming tutor to her children. During the boating excursion, they picnic at Meillerie, allowing St Preux and Julie to revisit the wild and rocky place he had frequented in the early period of his separation from her ten years previously. There he relives in their original surroundings the anguished reveries that haunted his early separation from his forbidden love.

Rousseau's peculiar achievement in this letter is to integrate the sublime Alpine landscape of mountain peak, glacier, roaring stream, deep forest and immense lake with the exaltation and despair of St Preux's tormented passion for Julie. Rather than any descriptive qualities as such, it is his recreation of the scene as possessing a depth and range of sentiment and as suffused with erotic tension that added a new property to the spectacular surroundings, laid the foundations of the literary tourism that had become routine by 1816, and which accounts for the fervour of Shelley's response to it. The language of superlatives and singularity, the current coin of travel-writing, which informs his letter to Peacock, also governs his estimate of Rousseau's creative powers. On the day after the visit to Meillerie:

I read Julie all day. I forgot its prejudices—it is an overflowing of sublimest genius & more than mortal sensibility.— It ought to be read amongst its own scenes which it has so wonderfully peopled. Mellerie, Chillon Clarens the mountains of La Valais & Savoy are monuments of the being of Rousseau. like the valley path of a mighty river— whose waters are indeed exhausted but which has made a chasm among the mountains that will endure forever. The feelings excited by this Romance have suited my creed, which

21 SC VII: 32.

strongly inclines to immaterialism – The beings who inhabit this romance, were created indeed by one mind – but a mind so powerfully bright as to cast a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality.²²

Not all travellers experienced such a reaction. The Rev. William Coxe, for example, visiting Meillerie with *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in hand in 1789, found that ‘no pencil, however animated, can delineate the wonderful and sublime works of nature; even the warm colouring of Rousseau has not equalled the beauty of the scenery.’²³ And Byron, while acknowledging that Rousseau had invested the landscape with ‘a sense of the existence of love in its most extended and sublime capacity’, also insisted that ‘such scenes ... have done that for him which no human being could do for them’.²⁴ For his part, the bookseller and publisher Thomas Hookham, who visited the lake shore in September 1816, found (like Shelley) that Rousseau’s imaginative traces constantly disputed with the physical landscape for priority of attention: ‘so must the lover of Rousseau believe that his spirit is every-where the *genius loci* ... new charms are diffused on the scenery by the magic influence of his presiding genius.’ Like Shelley too he found that a simple reality / fiction divide was rendered inadequate by *Julie*’s example: ‘yet why do I call the Eloise a fiction? It must not be called a work of imagination; – it is so perfect a copy of an original, it is so pure a reflection of human feelings and actions.’²⁵ In all four cases, of course, the political sympathies of the tourist enter into the perception of *Julie*’s vestiges in its original location.

Turning to the novel after his view of Meillerie Shelley uses the same word for the presence of Rousseau in the landscape he recreated as does St Preux for *Julie*’s in the scenes in which he lamented her loss: *monument*. He uses it in a sense possible in both eighteenth-century French and English, ‘anything that conserves a memory’, but also in that of a funerary memorial, insisting thus that here nature is being so decisively superseded by the power of fiction as to incite metaphysical speculation on the immaterial nature of what is truly real. And indeed the circumstances of their tour seemed to conspire to enhance the superior claims of imaginative life. Byron pointed out the uncanny coincidence that their boat had nearly swamped in the storm on the second day of their tour on the very spot where St Preux’s desperation prompts him to contemplate grasping *Julie* and making her the partner of his suicide by leaping with her into the lake.²⁶ The immanent trace of these visionary creations was reinforced too by the guides’ practice of speaking of Rousseau’s characters as if they had in fact existed. Both Shelley and Byron notice the habit as curious, although

22 SC VII: 33.

23 William Coxe, *Travels in Switzerland, and in the Country of the Grisons: in a Series of Letters to William Melmoth, Esq. from William Coxe, M.A., F.R.S., F.A.S, Rector of Bemerton*, 4th edn. 3 vols. London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1801, vol. 2, p. 96.

24 *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann. 7 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980–93, vol. 3, p. 288.

25 *A Walk through Switzerland in September 1816*. London: T. Hookham and Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1818, p. 153.

26 SC VII: 33–4.

Shelley falls into it in his letter to Peacock.²⁷ Half a century earlier Rousseau had himself artfully equivocated on the question whether the characters in the novel had actually lived the lives he had given them. The responses evoked by *Julie* in the 1760s, the high point of its phenomenal popularity, were so intense as to make it and its author the objects of a cult of sensibility. The extensive surviving correspondence that Rousseau conducted with admirers, each side assuming the identity of one of the novel's characters, can be set down as an oddity of literary history but is also a manifestation of the new level of emotional intimacy binding author, reader and fictional text which he had introduced into European literature.²⁸ Shelley's belated encounter with the *Julie* phenomenon *in situ* incites him to ponder on the porous divide between reality and fiction, and to allow the potent ambiguity of the moment to award precedence to the latter. Among the many peculiarities of the situation is that he and Byron were currently overlaying one of Europe's notably eroticized landscapes with another, and more scandalous, sexual dimension, soon to become a phenomenon of tourism in its own right.²⁹ Rumours about the 'league of incest' they had formed together with Mary Godwin and Claire Clairmont during their stay near Geneva were already circulating.³⁰

Shelley will not have failed to catch the autobiographical resonances of *Julie* in which an older male tutor transgresses sexually with his younger female pupil in defiance of her father, then contemplates suicide when balked of his love.³¹ Perhaps above all he will have been arrested by a narrative that finds sexual transgression compatible with the exercise of both public and domestic virtue, and yet finishes in erotic tragedy, a thematic nexus which he would incorporate into *Laon and Cythna* the following year. More particularly, he borrowed the sublime Alpine setting of what he calls St Preux's 'visionary exile' for the landscape in which stands the hermit's tower where Laon will complete the curative phase of his own tormented exile from Cythna, who is the object of a passion dramatically more transgressive than that of a tutor for his pupil.

IV

Nearly two years before the tour of Lake Geneva with Byron, Shelley made a brief visit to Switzerland in company with Mary Godwin and Claire Clairmont. The three of them crossed the border from France on 19 August 1814 and departed by boat eight days later to begin their return journey to England. They had been attracted to the

27 *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand. 13 vols. London: John Murray, 1973–94, vol. 5, p. 98; *SC* VII: 31.

28 Robert Darnton, 'Readers Respond to Rousseau', in *The Great Cat Massacre*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984; Claude Labrosse, *Lire au XVIIIe Siècle: La Nouvelle Héloïse et ses lecteurs*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1985.

29 James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to Culture 1800–1918*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 114–30.

30 *PS* II: 47 n.

31 Edward Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. 2 vols. London: Kegan Paul, 1886, vol. 2, p. 544; T.L. Peacock, 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Peacock Works* VIII: 91.

canton of Uri – where they impulsively rented rooms for the winter, then impulsively abandoned them – because of its associations with Godwin’s novel *Fleetwood* (1805) in which the shore of Lake Uri beneath the towering Alps is the site of the modest cottage inhabited by the retired sage Ruffigny. In one of his letters of 1812 to Godwin, Shelley had imagined re-enacting an episode in *Fleetwood*: ‘I had pictured to my fancy that I should first meet you in a spot like that in which Fleetwood first met Ruffigny.’³² In the novel the dejected Fleetwood seeks out Ruffigny in search of counsel after a period of sexual dissipation in Paris. The sublime setting of the fictional cottage carries associations with Swiss liberty owing to the proximity of the chapel of the patriot and liberator William Tell, and in that part of *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour* given to the 1814 visit the naturally and politically inspiring qualities of the lake and its surroundings are lyrically described.³³

Ruffigny, as the common etymology of their names in the Latin *rufus* (red-headed) suggests, is Godwin’s recreation of Rousseau, a composite portrait derived from his political writings, the *Confessions* and *Julie*. But Ruffigny is a Rousseau without imperfections, at once blander, simpler and more assertively critical of moral and social norms than the Rousseau of the *Confessions*. The similarities in their life-histories appear at almost every point in the fiction but it is the differences that concern the present argument. Compare, for example, the child Ruffigny’s escape from the silk-mills of Lyon with the 16-year old Rousseau’s flight from his apprenticeship to an engraver in Geneva – Godwin’s re-written episode a prodigy of judicious calculation and resolve (though in pursuit of a chimerical deliverance), the original a muddle of emotional confusion, fantasy and accident. Of the other differences one above all is at first sight extraordinary and inexplicable: Godwin deprives Ruffigny of any erotic life, thus removing the turbulent sexuality which was a leading objection to Rousseau’s character and writings. When, therefore, in Volume 2, Chapter 5 Ruffigny delivers his broadside against the sexual licence claimed by Fleetwood – who has been endowed with this aspect of Rousseau’s biography – his authority, like that of the hermit of Christian romance, derives from principled severity rather than acquired understanding. On a broader view, such sexual experience as the novel represents is almost entirely either debauchery or jealous paranoia; the latter, a variant on that morbid suspicion of others which was one of Rousseau’s notorious vices, is attested to in the novel by Fleetwood’s father-in-law Macneil who says that he has known the historical Rousseau personally.³⁴ Its pathological effects as they appear in Fleetwood’s character are famously elaborated in the third volume of the novel in what is an evident subversion of the exemplary domesticity of *Julie*, Parts IV–VI.

In the central narrative of Godwin’s novel a redemptive education-plot is tried and evaluated by the transmission of property. The fortune that is secured to Fleetwood in the final chapter originates in Ruffigny’s free gift just as that gift

³² *Letters* 1: 266, 287; Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*. 2 vols. London: Secker and Warburg, 1947, vol. 1, pp. 352–3.

³³ *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour* in *Prose* I: 197.

³⁴ *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling*, eds Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001, pp. 243–4.

originated in another, the selfless adoption of the destitute 9-year-old Ruffigny as foster son by Fleetwood's grandfather. For a line of transmission traced in blood kinship is substituted one that consists in plain-dealing, honesty and kindness. This middle-class variant on the romance-plot that legitimates royalty by the discovery of true birth is founded upon a separation of sex and mind: 'Love is a passion in which soul and body hold divided empire', observes Fleetwood ruefully.³⁵ Spenser's hermit could say no better. Both this radical separation and the plot that replaces descent according to blood kinship with a succession defined by virtue as the true parentage that guarantees material and moral prosperity Shelley would remember and revise in *Laon and Cythna*.

When he came to write the episode of Laon and the hermit, Shelley drew upon a rich fund of literary precedent. The lakeside tower of the sage who has withdrawn from the world he marked out from the retired Ruffigny's cottage, and from its predecessors in romance-narrative, precisely in respect of its function in liberating sexuality. The counsellor who subdued desire by reproof and removed its effects by absolution he replaced by the hermit who makes a sympathetic echo to Laon's erotic history. These transformations are carried out in order to adapt to the narrative conventions and symbolic idiom of European heroic poetry a fervour, particularity and candour in the representation of erotic life which had been opened up by Rousseau. The new sense of personality, from which both Shelley and Byron realized there would be no going back, incorporated sexuality in all its unresolved tensions and intractable fullness. That this was the source of a new intensity in writing Byron recognized in his brilliant sketch of Rousseau in the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (LXXVII) as 'he who threw / Enchantment over passion, and from woe / Wrung overwhelming eloquence'.³⁶ It is to this imaginative territory that Shelley transports Laon and the hermit by the boat journey that Rousseau himself made in 1754,³⁷ noting details that Rousseau later incorporated into *Julie*, that he has his lovers follow in the novel, and that Shelley and Byron traced in their turn. The conspicuous gap in the route taken by Laon and the Hermit with which this chapter began in a sense represents the absence of any indications that link the landscape with the one recreated by Rousseau as well as with the name Rousseau itself, the sexual and political associations of which would have made an obstacle to sympathetic reception of the poem in 1817.

The gap also measures the textual distance between the Preface and Dedication to *Laon and Cythna* and the body of its romance narrative, each governed by a distinct generic decorum. As the *Quarterly Review* noticed, a footnote to the Preface refers the reader to Godwin's *Political Justice*, while stanza 12 of the Dedication identifies Mary Shelley's father and mother (Shelley's parents-in-law since his recent marriage to Mary) in all but name – in effect adopting them as foster parents of the poem to follow in a gesture that recalls the substitution of a virtuous parent for a

35 Fleetwood, p. 327.

36 Lord Byron: *The Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 2, p. 105.

37 *Les Confessions* VII, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Oeuvres Complètes*, eds Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1959, vol. 1, p. 393.

blood relation in *Fleetwood*.³⁸ In the first canto Mary Wollstonecraft, 20 years dead, returns in the guise of supernatural messenger bearing a revelation on the intimate link between sexual and revolutionary energy. Shelley will have remembered the character of Maria in Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* who, when imprisoned in a madhouse, dreams of an ideal lover inspired by the St Preux of Rousseau's *Julie*.³⁹ The other parent, Godwin, was the creator of the desexualized Ruffigny and the pathologically jealous Fleetwood, between whom he polarized his portrait of Rousseau's mind and character. By the beginning of the new century Godwin had also lost confidence in the Rousseauvian model of autobiography and warned Shelley of the inevitable 'sacrifice [of] general usefulness' risked by the writer who exposed too many of his intimate failings to public view.⁴⁰ In the poem, versions of Godwin's limitations, suitably fictionalized, are grafted on to the benevolent hermit based on Dr Lind, who is made to join, and lose his life in, a revolution of a new kind, inspired by love, which he was persuaded would never happen. Each role is defined in relation to the presence of Rousseau, anonymous and artfully concealed, in the poem's poetic economy.⁴¹

In 1812, under Godwin's influence, Shelley found in Rousseau's representation of the erotic a cause of human enslavement: 'Rousseau gave licence by his writings, to passions that only incapacitate and contract the human heart:— so far hath he prepared the necks of his fellow-beings for that yoke of galling and dishonourable servitude, which at this moment, it bears.'⁴² Seven years later 'The Triumph of Life' engages again with the injurious consequences of the passions Rousseau had set free in his work. In *Laon and Cythna* the example of Rousseau is absorbed and modified in the service of quite another literary enterprise. In order to express a radical image of human possibility, which arises in part from intimate personal considerations, Shelley adapted from *Julie* an ideal and tragic sexual passion, which he united to an equally ideal reconstruction of the failed Revolution that Rousseau had inspired, to create a vision for the century to come.

38 In manuscript Shelley first identified Godwin as 'The Author of "An Enquiry concerning Political Justice"', then deleted the MS note: *PS* II: 56.

39 *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Gary Kelly. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 88–90.

40 *Novels and Memoirs* I: 72; Pamela Clemit, 'Self-Analysis as Social Critique: The Autobiographical Writings of Godwin and Rousseau'. *Romanticism* 11.2 (2005), pp. 161–80 (pp. 174–6).

41 Rousseau's similar 'presence in absence' in 'Mont Blanc' is addressed in Benjamin Colbert, *Shelley's Eye: Travel Writing and the Aesthetic Vision*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, p. 111.

42 *Prose* I: 52. Shelley is no doubt here thinking principally of the sexual revelations in Rousseau's *Confessions*.

Chapter 5

‘Peter Bell the Third’, Contempt and Poetic Transfiguration

Stephen C. Behrendt

Part First: Prologue

The response among Shelley scholars to ‘Peter Bell the Third’ has historically ranged from disappointment to distaste. Dazzled by the brilliance of the canonical ‘great’ works of his *annus mirabilis* of 1819, critics have typically had little patience with what seems by comparison to *Prometheus Unbound* or *The Cenci* to be crude work that has been called ‘rancorous and slightly spiteful’.¹ Writing cautiously in 1839, Mary Shelley herself contributed to the devaluation of her husband’s poem by dismissing it as ‘a plaything’ despite her assertion that the poem epitomized ‘Shelley’s peculiar views with regard to the errors into which many of the wisest have fallen’.² It is a mistake, though, simply to dismiss ‘Peter Bell the Third’ as a second- (or third-) rate piece of nastiness – an exercise in personal rancour that couples bad taste with puerile pique in a clumsy ‘sub-Byronic personal satire on Wordsworth’.³ For the poem comes, after all, from the year in which Shelley reached his full stride as a sophisticated poet whose commanding voice and astounding intellectual sweep inform diverse productions in political and philosophical prose (‘A Philosophical View of Reform’ and the letter to the *Examiner* concerning Richard Carlile), literary translation (his translation of Euripides’s *The Cyclops*), tragic drama (*The Cenci*), ‘conversation poetry’ (*Julian and Maddalo*), esoteric lyric / heroic drama and lyric poetry (*Prometheus Unbound* and *Ode to the West Wind*) and exoteric political poetry (‘The Mask of Anarchy’, ‘England in 1819’); moreover, new evidence suggests that the satirical prose essay ‘On the Devil, and Devils’ was also composed or at least begun in 1819.⁴ As Richard Cronin argues, ‘Peter Bell the Third’ proclaims Shelley’s

1 Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987, p. 158.

2 ‘Note on *Peter Bell the Third*, by Mrs. Shelley’. *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. G.M. Matthews. London: Oxford University Press (Oxford Standard Authors), 1970, p. 363. Mary Shelley’s ambivalent and ambiguous word ‘peculiar’ epitomizes her unease about publishing the poem, even as late as 1839.

3 The phrase comes from P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 199. Dawson contends that Shelley’s poem is no mere exercise in immature invective but, instead, ‘an unjustly neglected work’ that is far more subtle and substantial than scholarship has recognized.

4 Dawson and Webb, *BSM* XIV: xvi–xviii.

allegiance to ‘the Cockney School of Poetry’ organized around Leigh Hunt, the *Examiner*, and a strong class consciousness.⁵ That ‘Peter Bell the Third’ is a fully ‘engaged’ poetical as well as polemical performance is evident from the care with which Shelley prepared the poem for Charles Ollier to publish and then reminded him repeatedly to do so.⁶ The ideological agenda of ‘Peter Bell the Third’ is both ambitious and complex, and Shelley’s ‘deep contempt for establishment values and their protagonists’ is seldom out of view.⁷ Steven Jones claims that this poem in particular demonstrates the paradoxical ‘double bind’ of most of Shelley’s satire, the conflicting (and apparently irreconcilable) impulses to ‘reject demonization as ideologically untenable and rhetorically counterproductive’ while still indulging his own temperamental attraction to this recurring device of much of the social and political satire with which Shelley was himself familiar.⁸

In fact, ‘Peter Bell the Third’ may very well be, as Jones suspects, the literary embodiment of Shelley’s own deep ambivalence about satire’s role and function as a genre. Conventional satire, as Jones reminds us, relies upon painting with a broad brush in largely monochromatic tones. Its rhetorical force rests upon a polarized, bifurcated perspective that paints one side black and the other white, as illustrated in the writings of the radical journalist William Cobbett, whose rhetorical system relies upon both a demonology and a martyrology to frame its polemical arguments. As Jones suggests, such rhetorical shorthand characterizes paradigmatic works like Hone and Cruikshank’s *Political House that Jack Built* (1819) and their *Political Showman – at Home!* (1821), which brilliantly combine verbal and visual elements. To demonize the object of one’s satire is also to cast oneself in the ‘opposite’ role either of God as judge, arbiter and ultimate orderer of hierarchies, or as martyr and victim. This is, of course, a familiar trope for the artist, who is not just by coincidence usually called the ‘creator’ (with a small ‘c’) who calls his or her work into being seemingly from the void and orders the chaos of materials (intellectual and tactile) from which it is ‘created’. For Jones, ‘Peter Bell the Third’ ‘raises the question of the poet’s social responsibility’ because it seems that by the time Shelley composed his poem he may have begun to question ‘whether the violent medicine (or poison) of satire can ever contribute to that responsibility’,⁹ since it does so much damage and repairs so little. This is Stuart Curran’s conclusion, too, who opines that Shelley may have feared that his satire compromised his own ideals about responsible behaviour by employing ‘the terms of hell to attack hell’ and thereby reducing himself to the level of his adversary.¹⁰ Timothy Webb puts it this way: in Shelley’s opinion, satire

5 Richard Cronin, ‘Peter Bell, Peterloo, and the Politics of Cockney Poetry’, in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays*, Kelvin Everest (ed.). Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992, pp. 63–87 (p. 66).

6 See *SPP*: 338.

7 Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 354.

8 Steven E. Jones, *Shelley’s Satire: Violence, Exhortation, and Authority*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994, p. 69.

9 Jones, *Shelley’s Satire*, p. 69.

10 Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Anus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975, pp. 151–2.

'cannot arouse the conscience of the offending author nor can it reverse the harm he has done. ... satire in the realm of literature is the equivalent of revenge in the moral world: both are born of a desire to hit back, to secure an eye for an eye, and both are ineffectual and devoid of social value.'¹¹ In short, violently dialectical satire precludes any measured, temperate response because it violates the inherent open-endedness of dialogue. This point would not have been lost upon Shelley, who consistently rejected revenge as a motivation for human action and who wished to avoid closure where any progress or reconciliation might still be possible.

Part Second: Ambivalence

Shelley's own difficult relationship with Wordsworth has received much attention, most notably from G. Kim Blank, who has traced how Shelley confronted in Wordsworth's poetry both the poetic output and the authorial presence of a powerful precursor who formed the other 'half' (or 'pole') of a complicated attraction–repulsion (love–hate?) relationship with the younger poet. Blank reads this relationship in psychoanalytical terms, seeing there the development and maturation of a poetic 'son' who must at least figuratively 'kill off' the father figure whose influence he fears may misdirect, corrupt or cripple his own work. Hence for Shelley, according to Blank, Wordsworth is 'man and poet, contemporary yet predecessor, who is to be praised, pitied and scorned[,] ... emulated and subverted'.¹² This is why Shelley's poem is so much more than a mere *ad hominem* attack on Wordsworth, and why Blank believes that when read from a fully contextualized perspective the poem reveals 'a genuine concern over Wordsworth's fate, a certain responsibility determined by the conscientiousness of a younger poet who was aware of his debt to an older poet'.¹³

Blank sees in Shelley's poem a profound ambivalence. Both Jones and Blank suspect that this ambivalence involves Shelley's own uncertainty, in 1819, about his public stature. His energy and ambition running high, Shelley was awaiting some sign of a sympathetic (if not enthusiastic) response from a public beyond dependable supporters like Leigh Hunt. Dispirited by consistently negative reviews, Shelley was by 1819 increasingly portraying himself (at least in his public posturings) as an unappreciated prophet, a victim hounded from the public forum by the reactionary powers (and their agents) who stood to lose most under the revisionist humanitarian socio-political scheme he had begun to outline in prose and poetry alike. In his view, a reactionary reading public predisposed to reject any oppositional vision was also inherently hostile to an esoteric poetry – like his – of 'beautiful idealisms'. Thus he tells Charles Ollier early in 1820 that *Prometheus Unbound*, which he calls 'my favourite poem', 'cannot sell beyond twenty copies', not *despite* 'its merits' (by which he means both style and content) but precisely *because of* them. This grim prediction notwithstanding, he still hoped that more immediately accessible and

11 Timothy Webb, 'Shelley and the Ambivalence of Laughter', in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays*, pp. 43–62 (p. 55).

12 G. Kim Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, p. 6.

13 Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley*, p. 65.

dramatic works might garner larger public audiences: *The Cenci*, he tells Ollier, being ‘written for the multitude’, ‘ought to sell well’.¹⁴ Shelley never realized that by the time of his premature death his work was beginning to attract the serious attention he had sought and that real public influence might not lag far behind. Given his alternately excited and dejected state of mind during the period between *Alastor* and ‘The Triumph of Life’, and given, too, his sanguine view, from his self-imposed exile in Italy, of the events transpiring in England in 1819 to which he felt himself able to contribute only from afar, it is not hard to understand his ambivalence about his own career. Dedicated to both a life of ‘public service’ and a ‘life of the mind’ (which he considered entirely compatible), Shelley alternated between passionate engagement in ‘real’ activities and a detached intellectualization that involved reading, speculation and – frequently – a self-defensive, aloof dismissal of an unresponsive public. Nevertheless, I believe that Shelley’s attitude to Wordsworth and his poetry (or his public, poetic voice and vision), as we glimpse it through the satirical lens of ‘Peter Bell the Third’, is less fundamentally ambivalent than previous scholarship has imagined.

As a young poet passionately attached to humanitarian political ideals and whose adolescent years coincided with the conclusion of his country’s conflict with Napoleonic France, the devastating effects of Regency-era agricultural and economic reversals, the double spectre of the king’s madness and the Prince Regent’s obscene profligacy, and the rise of the unimaginative and decidedly un-heroic values of the culture of the decades preceding Victoria’s reign, Shelley was disheartened by the decision of his famous friend and rival, Byron, largely to opt out of any principled struggle to improve the situation for Britons of every stripe.¹⁵ Convinced that little good could be expected of human nature, Byron increasingly portrayed human behaviour as essentially comic – but a comedy tinged with nihilism. Shelley found this position too painful to accept, for it shut out any prospect for genuine hope. Byron’s apparent defection from the cause of liberty (however defined) therefore left the field, it seemed to Shelley, to the younger poet whose fame was little and whose notoriety was great: himself. This was not an auspicious situation for a poet possessed of ‘a passion for reforming the world’.¹⁶ Further complicating matters was the apparent apostasy of Wordsworth, whose words had so powerfully influenced his own earlier, formative works. The anger that informs Hunt’s review of *Peter Bell* (*Examiner*, 2 May 1819) stemmed, Richard Cronin argues, from Hunt’s conviction that the poem revealed ‘a poet who had lapsed into Methodistical selfishness, content to carry his “egotism” and “saving knowledge” about with him, ready to side with “the oldest tyrannies and slaveries”, rendered indifferent to human misery

14 *Letters* II: 174 (6 March 1820).

15 On Shelley’s relationship with Byron see especially Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; and Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

16 Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. *SPP*: 208. Quotations follow this edition. Shelley’s phrase (which he encloses within quotation marks) comes from Robert Forsyth, *The Principles of Moral Science*. Edinburgh, 1805.

by a gloomy sense that most of his fellows are damned'.¹⁷ It was not simply that Wordsworth had apparently deserted the cause and embraced the Tory perspective; so too had Coleridge, Southey and countless others of lesser repute. Alan Weinberg cites the 1817 'Apologetic Preface' to Coleridge's 'Fire, Famine and Slaughter' as evidence of what liberals like Shelley regarded as that poet's 'capitulation, his betrayal of the liberal cause'.¹⁸

Nor was it just that Wordsworth's ideological shift to the right seemed to have coincided with – indeed perhaps to have produced – the serious decline in his poetic abilities that was lamented by still committed anti-establishment authors like Godwin, Hazlitt, Hunt and Byron.¹⁹ The point is that it was *Wordsworth*, by 1819 a revered contemporary poet, who had decamped; nothing is more devastating for a literal or figurative son than the fall of his 'father'. This is especially so when the 'son' has so sincerely engaged and internalized the apparent human values and societal 'position' (or cultural status) of the 'father'. The fall of such a father inevitably implies both the *possibility* of the son's fall and the failure of humanistic creative imagination that triggers it. If Shelley's poetic 'father' could disappoint – not just his son but also his nation, his culture – in this fashion, if so elevated a mind could turn from republican egalitarian principles to venality and moral hectoring, what terrible reversals might lie ahead for his son – for Shelley?

I pose these questions to frame a somewhat different perspective both on 'Peter Bell the Third' and on the Shelley–Wordsworth relationship. For that relationship strikes me as both very *personal* – involving Wordsworth and Shelley themselves, as practising poets and 'speakers' in a public arena – and *typological* – involving these poets as very particular *types* of poets pursuing poetic and socio-political agendas within discrete and definitive external cultural circumstances. If ambivalence is to be found, it is less at the personal level than at the rhetorical level, where it involves the moral commitments that are understood to inform their public obligations as cultural spokespersons – *as poets*. Thus, Hugh Roberts perceptively observes that Shelley's poem has not received the critical attention and respect it deserves because of its critics' failure to understand the terms of Shelley's attack. Roberts sees in the poem Shelley's attempt to situate Wordsworth as a naive ideal of a poet and then 'to use that reading of him as a way of exploring the political limitations of that position'.²⁰ For, as Timothy Webb notes, while Shelley had always appreciated the extraordinary virtues of Wordsworth's poetry, he seems to have believed that, ironically, those virtues were 'intimately connected with a dangerous limitation' involving what he regarded as the elder poet's growing egocentricity and his consequent inability to 'open himself to the achievements of others'.²¹ Taking these points as seriously as

17 Cronin, 'Peter Bell, Peterloo', p. 75.

18 Alan Weinberg, "'Yet in its depth what treasures": Shelley's Transforming Intellect and the Paradoxical Example of Coleridge'. *Romanticism on the Net* 22 (May 2001), paragraph 6. Available at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/22weinberg.html>.

19 See Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, pp. 353–4.

20 Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, p. 119.

21 Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice not Understood*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977, pp. 69–70.

Shelley evidently did enables us to see the poem's carefully calculated intellectual and socio-political propositions. For Richard Cronin, it boils down to a clash of perspectives upon humanity and its prospects in 1819: Wordsworth's gloomy religiosity *versus* Shelley's liberal humanitarian optimism.²² What Shelley writes (as Miching Mallecho, Esq.) about Wordsworth applies not just to that poet but also to the entire social, political, intellectual and spiritual milieu that Wordsworth has elected to represent and to speak for in Regency England:

He had a mind which was somehow
At once circumference and centre
Of all he might or feel or know[.] (ll. 293–5)²³

Wordsworth (and Peter) is therefore the representative of this fallen poetic ideal, which justifies using a satirical demonology to delineate and to mythologize his fallen condition within the broader context of the generic Fall. But Wordsworth/Peter is also the representative of those *to* whom and *for* whom he speaks (himself included), and it is this complex and multifaceted figure – not simply Wordsworth the private individual – that is the object of Shelley's sophisticated satire in 'Peter Bell the Third'.²⁴

Part Third: Shame

Perhaps Shelley recognized in *Peter Bell's* much belated publication in 1819 a sort of unrelenting 'old-fashionedness' in Wordsworth. The poem had been begun, after all, some two decades earlier, according to Wordsworth's own prefatory remarks. *Peter Bell* reprises, in a longer and in many ways more grotesque fashion, both the materials and the rhetorical structure of 'The Thorn', which had appeared in the original *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, and a detail of which Shelley had paraphrased in the summer of 1818.²⁵ As in that earlier poem, in *Peter Bell* Wordsworth presents a tale told by a narrator whose dependability (or authority) is very much in question. At crucial points, for instance, Wordsworth's narrator declares that he has only a partial knowledge of the events described in the poem. Consequently, he cannot answer questions posed either by the auditors within the poem or by the readers for

²² Cronin, 'Peter Bell, Peterloo', p. 76.

²³ *Peter Bell the Third*, in *SPP*: 337–65. See also Reiman, *BSM* I: 62–3, and Carlo M. Bajetta, *William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Hamilton Reynolds. Peter Bell: the 1819 Texts*. 2nd rev. edn. Milano: Mursia, 2005, which reproduces all three Peter Bell poems.

²⁴ Weinberg's explanation of Shelley's ambivalent treatment of Coleridge in 'Peter Bell the Third' is analogous to my argument about Shelley's treatment of Wordsworth. Weinberg notes that despite the apparently reactionary turn indicated by Coleridge's publications in the post-Waterloo era, Shelley 'was loath to repudiate a greatly learned poet who had already found a revolutionary home in his poetic being' (paragraph 8), because such an absolute rejection would have too much self-rejection about it.

²⁵ *Letters* II: 25–6 (to Thomas Love Peacock, 25 July 1818). Shelley's paraphrase of the description of the infant's grave indicates that the poem was still fresh in his mind only a year before he commenced 'Peter Bell the Third'.

whom those internal auditors serve as rhetorical stand-ins. Like 'The Thorn', *Peter Bell* features both the narrator's first-person account and the interpolated comments and questions of listeners and participants within the poem. Like 'The Thorn', too, the tale is filled with events and phenomena that are reported as though they *may be* supernatural in nature, but again Wordsworth implies that these ostensibly supernatural doings are rooted in the narrator's superstitious and gullible nature and not in what the reasoning reader might consider to be 'actual facts'.

All of this rhetorical and narratological manipulation in *Peter Bell* is well and good as an exercise in verbal and intellectual virtuosity, Shelley might have reasoned, but in 1819 it must have seemed also to be relatively 'old hat', coming as it did some 20 years after *Lyrical Ballads*. Indeed, the full title of the original parody of Wordsworth's poem, John Hamilton Reynolds' *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad* (published a week before Wordsworth's poem appeared), underscores the retrogressive link.²⁶ The world had changed dramatically from what it had been in 1798, and what may have 'worked' (and indeed have appeared innovative and compelling) now worked no more. Wordsworth's verses now seemed to Shelley to be, like Peter's, 'the ghosts of what they were, / Shaking dim grave clothes in the wind' (ll. 612–13). James Chandler contends in *England in 1819* that by 1819 writers were unusually aware of the historicity of their lives and writings.²⁷ They were all conscious of their common participation not just in quotidian experience but also in that larger, more formalized, and more performative pageant which they understood as 'history', a pageant being played out in a world that now seemed immeasurably complex and largely resistant to any comforting notions of 'safe' political, social or personal insularity. A world that had witnessed the horrors of Austerlitz, Moscow, Waterloo and 'Peterloo' could scarcely be expected any longer to be much moved by a faithful grinning ass, a cowardly bully and a soul-shaking Methodist preacher. Indeed, such a world might well ask of a poem (and a tale) like *Peter Bell* whether it was expected even to take the work seriously in the first place.

And yet take it seriously some among the establishment press surely did. The poem was widely reviewed and although the reviews were decidedly mixed there was a good deal of praise. The *European Magazine*, for instance, placed Wordsworth 'in the first rank of the bards of our own day' and praised his ability to 'shed over his uninviting and apparently sterile subjects an elegance and brilliance'. The review concludes warmly: 'Let the frivolous scoff at and the hard-hearted despise such poems as this; but we do not envy that man his strength of mind who reads Peter Bell without being beguiled of tears, or who rises from the perusal without the finer and more amiable feelings of his nature being strongly excited.'²⁸ But for others, it was all too much. The *Examiner* called *Peter Bell* 'another didactic little horror of Mr. Wordsworth's'. Hunt condemned 'the philosophy of violence and hopelessness' in Wordsworth's poem, asking 'Is Mr. Wordsworth in earnest or is he not, in thinking

26 [John Hamilton Reynolds], *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad*. London: Taylor and Hessey, 1819.

27 James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

28 *European Magazine* 75 (May 1819), pp. 445–8. The reviewer, 'J.B.', is unknown.

that his fellow-creatures are to be damned? If he is, who is to be made really better or more comfortable in this world, by having such notions of another? If not, how wretched is this hypocrisy?"²⁹ Hunt's point went directly to the question of whether Wordsworth had repudiated his earlier humanitarian impulses; if so, his current bleak view of the human condition served no useful purpose, and if not, then the poem was indeed an exercise in both moral and poetic hypocrisy. Hunt took Wordsworth's poem very seriously indeed, the satirical tone of his review notwithstanding, and so did Shelley, unlike the *Monthly Magazine's* critic, who deemed Wordsworth's poem to be 'so superlatively silly, as to be beneath ... any expression of contempt contained in the idiom of the English language'.³⁰ I shall return to this matter of 'contempt' later.

It is not surprising that Wordsworth's attempt some 20 years later to 'respond to Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"'³¹ should have yielded mixed results. In a sense, Wordsworth was attempting in *Peter Bell* to reclaim for his readers – and presumably for English culture of 1819 – the sort of simplified world-view that the poem might be said to contain if we are willing to read it as a straightforward account. That is, Wordsworth's moral fable in verse offers a history of a lost soul reclaimed from vice and inhumanity through the timely intervention, first, of the natural world (epitomized in the preternaturally humane and faithful ass); second, of the world of nuclear human society (represented in the broken family circle of Rachael and her children); and, third, of the moral and spiritual world betokened by the Methodist preacher and his cries for repentance. This is a tale not of double *damnation*, but rather of double salvation: not only is Peter 'saved' (or reclaimed) within the tale itself, but so too – presumably – is the narrator's little circle of listeners (and by extension Wordsworth's contemporary audience). If, as Wordsworth had presciently warned nearly 20 years earlier, 'the world is too much with us', then *Peter Bell* offers a fundamentally – and impossibly – nostalgic alternative world in which that desensitized and dehumanized materialist culture is subverted by human activity rooted neither in material economics nor in an impersonal mass culture but rather in a primarily 'local' human dynamic grounded in a decisively *non-urban* milieu characterized by conversation, tale-telling and religious fervency. But for Shelley and his generation's liberals, the growing domestic class warfare, coupled with parliament's crass resistance to meaningful political reform and the abdication of moral leaders – like the Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey* – made *Peter Bell's* moral fable impossible to swallow. Indeed, they made it laughable – which is perhaps the clearest reason why Shelley chose to respond to Wordsworth's poem as he did.

One of the difficulties that 'Peter Bell the Third' poses for its readers is rhetorical in nature. The poem is alternately 'playful' (Shelley calls it 'a joke') and serious, light-hearted in its satirical effects at one moment and brutal in its mockeries at the

29 *Examiner* 592 (2 May 1819), pp. 282–3.

30 *Monthly Magazine* 47 (June 1819), p. 442.

31 Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998, p. 578.

next (he also calls it a 'party squib').³² Even the Dedication teeters uncomfortably on this rhetorical divide, beginning with the playful opening paragraph addressed to 'Thomas Brown' (Thomas Moore) and moving directly into the send-up of Leigh Hunt in the second. Shelley's deliberately ironic vilification of Hunt is so far 'over the top' that it is tempting to read his comments simply as a sort of public 'ribbing' purposely staged for the amusement of friends. Shelley's remarks about Hunt are, after all, the conventional stuff of conservative outrage directed in print toward liberal politics, as Hunt and Shelley knew all too well from their own experience. But this 'inside joke' among the Shelley circle nevertheless ran a real risk of being misunderstood among a broader public were it to appear in print, even in an obviously satirical vehicle like 'Peter Bell the Third'. This may explain why an ambivalent Mary Shelley queried Hunt directly about it in 1839 before publishing the poem. Even then, she suppressed that part of the preface that explicitly attacked William Gifford and John Murray.³³ Elsewhere, too, Shelley's tone shifts unexpectedly from earnestly acidic satire to self-mocking pomposity in his footnotes (like the early note that corrects 'polygamic Potter' to 'A *dodecagamic* Potter', with appropriately inflated elaboration).

In fact, much of the poem operates in just this way, alternating between evident regard (even affection) for the 'early' Wordsworth (and his works) and contempt for the new Peter-Bell-ish one. Hence in the poem's fifth section (significantly titled 'Grace') Shelley inserts unmistakable echoes of Wordsworth's own verses as he describes some of Peter's poetic subjects: songs 'On moor, and glen, and rocky lake, / *And on the heart of man*' (ll. 406–7 [my italics]; *Tintern Abbey*, ll. 97–9); verses about the 'strange mystery / Of what beyond these things may lie, / And yet remain unseen' (ll. 410–12; 'Intimations Ode', ll. 145–56); and his uncanny ability 'whenever he should please' to be able to 'speak of rocks and trees / In poetic metre' (ll. 420–22; 'A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal', l. 8). These slightly comic references suggest a mixed style that combines censure with admiration and that anticipates the bathos that lies ahead. This 'early' Wordsworth/Peter was the poetic father/potter Shelley had admired, whose 'verse was clear, and came / Announcing from the frozen hearth / Of a cold age, that none might tame / The soul of that diviner flame / It augured to the Earth' (ll. 433–7). Shelley affectionately recalls the magical precursor poet: 'For language was in Peter's hand / Like clay while he was yet a potter' (ll. 443–4). Shelley's 'yet' is crucial, for it signals his recognition that Peter is a potter no more, no more an aspiring Promethean creator-God shaping a paradisaical world from clay, but something else entirely – something that is signalled by the almost immediate appearance in the poem of the Devil, the deceiving counter-creator of fatal illusions, and by the sudden acerbity of the language and the caustic imagery that characterize the poem's two final parts.

32 *Letters* II: 164 (to Charles Ollier, 15 December 1819), 135 (to Leigh Hunt, 2 November 1819).

33 Mary Shelley silently suppressed the paragraph's most offensive language in 1839 (*BSM* I: 10–11). But Betty T. Bennett argues that Mary Shelley probably did so at Hunt's express request (though no letter from him to that effect survives), not out of personal fear of attacking Murray. See *MWS Letters* II: 326 n. 1. The Preface in its full form was rescued by Reiman and Powers as recently as 1977 (see *SPP*: 322).

This tonal alternation differs from the earlier one where the increasingly vicious rhetoric of Part Third counterpoints the predominantly genial tone of Part Second.³⁴ Part Second opens in an almost conversational idiom:

The Devil, I safely can aver,
 Has neither hoof, nor tail, nor sting;
 Nor is he, as some sages swear,
 A spirit, neither here nor there,
 In nothing – yet in every thing.

He is – what we are; for sometimes
 The Devil is a gentleman;
 At others a bard bartering rhymes
 For sack; a statesman spinning crimes,
 A swindler living as he can. (ll. 76–85)

This is blunt, yes, but yet vaguely off-hand in manner. However, Part Second marks the last time that the narrator's first-person presence functions explicitly within the poem's rhetorical framework. The pose of familiar tale-teller, which Shelley's narrator adopts in Part First (as if aping the narrator of *Peter Bell*), largely vanishes when the scene turns to London/Hell at the beginning of Part Third. Moreover, this rhetorical turn is underscored by the way the opening verses first seem to echo the tone of their counterparts in Part Second and then swerve dramatically toward genuine savagery:

Hell is a city much like London –
 A populous and smoky city;
 There are all sorts of people undone
 And there is little or no fun done;
 Small justice shewn, and still less pity.

There is a Castles, and a Canning,
 A Cobbett and a Castlereagh;
 All sorts of caitiff corpses planning
 All sorts of cozening for trepanning
 Corpses less corrupt than they.³⁵ (ll. 147–56)

Hell/London is for Shelley in 1819 the seat of all corruption, the officially sanctioned – indeed the self-anointed and self-perpetuating – power-base not just of those

34 Alan Weinberg has pointed out in correspondence a comparable mock playfulness in Shelley's 'On the Devil, and Devils' (1819–20), which we agree may well be an exploration in prose of ideas introduced in verse in 'Peter Bell the Third'.

35 Timothy Webb says these names are composed 'with an alliterative gusto reminiscent of popular verse'. *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb. London: J.M. Dent and Sons (Everyman), 1977, pp. 203–4. The poem's alternating passages of 'fun' (and funny) writing and harsh (even cruel) writing are never reconciled in the poem, perhaps because Shelley did not care to devote enough time to the poem to fully accommodate their contrasting tones, and perhaps because he wished deliberately to retain their mutually incompatible natures. The effect is remarkable: Shelley's playfulness actually underscores the more caustic element.

persons and institutions (like the Chancery Court) that had wronged him personally but also of those whom he regarded as his nation's real enemies, the 'great and little robbers' (l. 189) who collectively constitute the real Satan of 1819.³⁶ It is 'a hellish urban world of intemperance, food taxes, and corruption',³⁷ a world of crass and conspicuous consumption. Shelley's deliberately telescoped gerundive constructions in Part Third ('Thrusting, toiling, wailing, moiling, / Frowning, preaching ... [ll. 197–8]) recall the analogous 'getting and spending' of 'The World Is Too Much With Us'. Indeed, the obsessive materialistic self-interest that motivates Shelley's band here produces the same deleterious effect that Wordsworth had noted 17 years earlier. Just as Wordsworth's misguided contemporaries 'lay waste [their] powers', each of Shelley's self-destructing characters 'cheat[s] his own heart of quiet' (l. 201).

That even Shelley's first-person narrator seems unwilling to 'show' himself in this section and afterwards is surely significant. More significant, however, is the cast of characters who – by name or by implication – *do* show themselves. All are placeholders within a corrupt Establishment, whether Castlereagh selling his political soul or Southey, 'who has lost / His wits, *or sold them*, none knows which' (ll. 157–8; my emphases). The pregnant final phrase ('none knows which') identifies the greatest danger when once principled leaders defect: even percipient observers can no longer distinguish principle from folly or plain greed on the part of their discredited ostensible leaders. Recognizing the Devil, who always comes to us in disguise – as vice disguised as virtue, deformity masked as beauty – is difficult enough in its own right; knowing his true motivation poses an even greater challenge, especially when in contemporary English society 'a gentleman still plays the devil, just as heartless and hypocritical as before, just as worthy of condemnation'.³⁸ It is the London/Hell crowd of Castlereaghs, Cannings and Southseys to which Shelley consigns Peter/ Wordsworth, whose crimes (from compromised principles to plain dullness) the rest of the poem catalogues. Notably, Shelley cautions in almost Dantesque fashion that it is not only the 'sinners' who are confined to this hell; so too are would-be reformers like himself, Hunt and others:

And some few, like we know who,
 Damned – but God alone knows why –
 To believe their minds are given
 To make this ugly Hell a Heaven;
 In which faith they live and die. (ll. 242–6)

36 Cobbett's inclusion here is interesting: Shelley came to a grudging respect for Cobbett's rhetorically effective demonologies but distrusted both his motives and his methods. See Kevin Binfield, 'Demonology, Ethos, and Community in Cobbett and Shelley', in *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press*, Stephen C. Behrendt (ed.). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997, pp. 157–69. Richard Cronin has noted Cobbett's influence on Shelley's thinking and his writing by late 1819 (Cronin, 'Peter Bell, Peterloo, and the Politics of Cockney Poetry', pp. 80–84).

37 Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 104.

38 Weinberg, "'Yet in its depth what treasures'", paragraph 5.

Shelley did not know William Blake's poetry, but his point recalls the one that Blake makes in his enigmatic triple-voiced poem, 'The Clod and the Pebble' (*Songs of Experience*), where it is the power of 'Love', that 'seeketh not Itself to please' that 'builds a Heaven in Hell[']s] despair'.³⁹ It is the overwhelming commitment to *self-interest* – instead of the humanitarian self-sacrifice that Shelley everywhere advocates – that Shelley condemns in the Wordsworth of *Peter Bell*, for all such self-interest is inherently a failure to *love*. It is the ultimate violation of the great levelling humanitarian dictum that Wordsworth had himself announced in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', that 'we have all of us one human heart' (l. 153). Throughout his career, Shelley consistently endorsed the humanitarian and egalitarian principles he found in Wordsworth's earlier poetry; with devastating effect, 'Peter Bell the Third' turns Wordsworth's own principles against him to expose his apostasy.

Part Fourth: Contempt

In his study of language, class, society, and conservative thought, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders*, Don Herzog says this about the relationships that may develop between individuals and precursors whom they once respected – and whom they now respect no more:

The centrality of hierarchy suggests a crude distinction between anger and contempt. One is angry at a rough equal, not a patent inferior. ('But you can be angry with a small child, with a pet, with the stone that makes you stumble!' Yes, but notice how easy it is to rein in your anger by reminding yourself of the status of its object.) Imagine being betrayed by a friend, a colleague, a beloved family member. You are bitter, sad, angry. But then you reflect on what sort of person could have done you such a debilitating injury. If you revise her status downward ('only a worm could have done that'), your anger will fade into contempt.⁴⁰

This observation is especially relevant to 'Peter Bell the Third' and to Shelley's relationship in 1819 to Wordsworth both as a major poet and as a literary *and cultural* spokesperson. The parenthetical language Herzog quotes is from Walter Scott, writing in 1821, which establishes that the difference between anger and contempt was being discussed in these terms when Shelley composed his satire.

After reading *The Excursion* in 1814 the Shelleys were, as Mary put it, 'much disappointed'; her journal records their conclusion that Wordsworth was now 'a slave'.⁴¹ Mary's term is no mere coincidence. Few issues had so preoccupied England over the preceding three decades as slavery. The word 'slave' figured prominently in political and social discourse throughout the period, coming to be applied not just to black slaves but also, increasingly, to white labourers. Conservative writers

³⁹ *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. edn, ed. David V. Erdman. New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 236. Herzog appends this note after 'contempt': 'Note *Life of Dryden* [1821], in *Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 1:164'.

⁴¹ *MS Journals* I: 25 (14 September 1814).

regularly chastised abolitionists by reminding them that many white British working citizens struggled with conditions worse than those experienced by black slaves. This double-edged reactionary argument relegated the white labourers, rhetorically, to a position even lower than that of the black slaves, in effect damning both without materially crediting either. As Herzog deftly points out, in such rhetoric 'contempt is ubiquitous'; this 'contemptuous assignment of low status' permitted the writer to express both 'caustic hostility' and 'stately sympathy' toward the supposedly degraded victims.⁴² That rendered all discussion about 'slaves' and 'slavery' ambivalent, both rhetorically and practically, for 'to be a subject was to be a slave'.⁴³

But what made one a slave? Capture, imprisonment, transportation, bondage and an inflexible system of corporeal victimization predicated on the loss alike of individual liberty and personal dignity, certainly, in the case of the black slave; this much was largely conceded. What, then, was the nature of the white labourer's slavery? Presumably a loss of liberty and dignity that was analogous rather than identical. Given the nearly universal view (among whites) of the superiority of the white race to the black, the nature of a white person's 'enslavement' required a depiction that was much less immediately visceral (or physical) in nature and that instead involved larger elements of social, economic and psychological intimidation. In the most popular reading of such white slavery, it is one's absolute and inescapable dependence upon wages – upon money and material goods – that renders one a slave. Like his black counterpart, the white economic slave is literally 'bought' (and 'sold') for cash or trade goods. Everyone suffers, however: in 1827 the *Westminster Review* put it plainly: 'the greater part of the population of every country are in fact in some degree slaves in reality, though not in name.'⁴⁴

If *The Excursion* had struck the Shelleys as a philosophical and intellectual sell-out,⁴⁵ so too had Wordsworth's 'Ode, 1815' struck them (and many others) as a political and humanitarian sell-out, a self-congratulatory celebration of slaughter in the cause of imperialism. The poet whose life and work had previously seemed grounded in the natural world and the ethical lessons it taught appeared to have sold himself to the materialistic urban culture, where was to be found wealth, reputation (if not fame) and the company of the well-connected. Under these cultural conditions, the individual becomes estranged from his innate self and 'wilfully alienated from the recognition of the false society and condition to which he condemns himself'.⁴⁶ This is why Wordsworth fails to recognize his own apostasy. The Wordsworth who has devolved from naive poet to conniving poetaster is blind to his fall, just as 'Peter knew not that he was Bell' (l. 107).

42 Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds*, p. 357. On the rhetorical function of 'slave', see especially pp. 354–62, 383–402.

43 Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds*, p. 396.

44 *Westminster Review* 7.14 (April 1827), p. 463.

45 See B. Colbert, *Shelley's Eye*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005 pp. 64–72 and esp. n. 60: 'Shelley refigures the Wordsworthian subject position in *The Excursion* so as to undermine the kind of "natural piety" recommended by the Wanderer and the Pastor in which the wedding of mind and nature become analogical arguments for religious orthodoxy, political conservatism, and the imperial export of counter-revolutionary values' (p. 72).

46 Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 203.

Mary Shelley wrote to Maria Gisborne in the summer of 1818: ‘Wordsworth has published an address to the freeholders, in which he says, “they ought not to choose so poor a man as Brougham – riches being the only guarantee of political integrity – he goes further than this, and actually asserts, that the Commons ought to be chosen by the Peers”’.⁴⁷ As Michael Scrivener notes, even beyond penning this anti-reform pamphlet Wordsworth ‘assisted the Lowthers in every way he could’, including writing letters to the local papers.⁴⁸ Only by thus rejecting his personal and poetic ‘roots’ and opting instead to court the favour of the privileged elite, his critics reasoned, could Wordsworth have repudiated the principles of his youth (and the works of that time) and concerned himself with taking a poem nearly 20 years old and trying ‘to fit it for filling *permanently* a station, however humble, in the Literature of this Country’.⁴⁹ Nor would they have missed the intimation of (personal) immortality in this prefatory phrase or the self-important rhetorical inflation represented in Wordsworth’s capitalization, both of which explode the poet’s posture of apparent humility. Shelley’s own dedication, addressed to Thomas Moore in his fictional identity as Thomas Brown (historian of the Fudge Family), mocks Wordsworth’s dedication to Southey, right down to the honorific ‘Esq.’ and the capitalized abbreviation, while crediting Moore, whose satirical poem, *The Fudge Family in Paris* (1818), was one of the models for Shelley’s.

I remarked earlier that by 1819 Shelley had come to regard his situation as a poet and public prophet with an ambivalence that is evident in his rhetorical posturing: alternately expressing passionate enthusiasm for his works (in all genres) and professing seeming nonchalance over their reception. This ambivalence is particularly apparent with exoteric works like ‘Peter Bell the Third’, which Shelley seemed to believe somehow ‘beneath’ him as a serious poet and yet worthy of serious public regard. When he sent ‘Peter Bell the Third’ to Hunt, for instance, his initial irony quickly turned deadly serious:

Now, I only send you a *very heroic* poem, which I wish you to give to [Charles] Ollier & desire him to print & publish immediately; you being kind enough to take upon yourself the correction of the press.—NOT however with my name, & you must tell Ollier that the author is to be kept a secret, & that I confide in him for this object, as I would confide in a physician or lawyer or any other man, whose professional situation renders the betraying of what is entrusted a dishonour.—My Motive in this is solely not to prejudge myself in the present moment, as I have only expended a few days on this party squib & of course

47 *MWS Letters* I: 75 (to Maria Gisborne, 26 July 1818). Wordsworth’s pamphlet supporting Lord William Lowther, the eldest son of his patron, the Earl of Lonsdale, who was being opposed for Parliament by Henry Brougham, appeared in 1818. It is unclear whether the Shelleys had firsthand knowledge of the pamphlet: Mary Shelley wrote that ‘one of our friends says – Brougham is standing for Westmoreland against the Lowthers’ (p. 75).

48 Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 219.

49 William Wordsworth, *Peter Bell*, ed. John E. Jordan. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 41; dedication to Southey.

taken little pains. The verses & language, I have let come as they would, & I am about to publish more serious things this winter. — Afterwards, that is next year—if the thing should be remembered so long —I have no objection to the author being known but *not now*.—I should like well enough that it should both go to press & be printed very quickly; as more serious things are on the eve of engaging both the public attention & mine —⁵⁰ (Shelley's emphases).

I have quoted the entire passage for what it reveals about Shelley's visibly mixed feelings. Timothy Webb writes that in adopting a seeming nonchalance toward 'Peter Bell the Third', 'Shelley is minimizing the serious achievement of his poem', an achievement that is in some ways all the more striking because, despite the harshness of many of its judgments, 'the poem is basically generous in spirit and frequently playful'.⁵¹ Shelley's ambivalence may relate to his hope for the success of the more ambitious literary productions to which he had devoted so much time in 1819. At the beginning of November 1819 he was anticipating the publication of *Prometheus Unbound, and Other Poems*, which he knew represented his best poetry to date in the elevated, esoteric style. At the same time, he was still hoping to learn that *The Cenci* would be staged in London, having asked Thomas Love Peacock to act as his agent in securing its performance at Covent Garden.⁵² Shelley had enjoined Peacock to conceal his identity (as he did two months later with Hunt regarding 'Peter Bell the Third'), saying that preserving 'a complete incognito' was 'essential, deeply essential to it's success'. However, he continued, 'After it has been acted & successfully (could I hope such a thing) I would own it if I pleased, & use the celebrity it might acquire to my own purposes.'⁵³ Expecting *The Cenci* to be a hit, in other words, Shelley envisioned confounding his detractors by revealing his authorship. He did not yet know that the play had already been refused by Covent Garden. Nor did he know the fate of the exoteric political poems – including 'The Mask of Anarchy', 'England in 1819' and 'Song to the Men of England' – he had sent to Hunt at summer's end following the Peterloo massacre: Hunt had suppressed them as too inflammatory for print. Nor did he know, either, that his remarkably prescient essay, 'A Philosophical View of Reform', which he had only just begun to draft in late 1819 (and which he probably completed in January 1820), would not see publication in his lifetime and indeed not for another hundred years. In short, he had not yet descended to the nadir of 1821, when, as Donald Reiman writes, 'Shelley had been forced to realize that he would probably be neither a popular nor influential poet immediately.'⁵⁴

50 *Letters* II: 134–5 (to Leigh Hunt, 2 November 1819).

51 Webb, 'Shelley and the Ambivalence of Laughter', p. 57.

52 Shelley had *The Cenci* printed in Leghorn; he sent copies to London, where it appeared in 1820. But Shelley had already sent a copy to Thomas Love Peacock in September 1819 after inquiring in July whether Peacock would undertake to secure its presentation at Covent Garden. *Letters* II: 118–19 (9 September 1819); 101–3 (c. 20 July 1819).

53 *Letters* II: 112.

54 *SC* V: 424.

Part Fifth: Transfiguration

Why was Shelley so keen in late 1819 to conceal his identity as the author of both *The Cenci* and 'Peter Bell the Third'? 'Public relations', plain and simple. Not wishing to doom those works by attaching his notorious name, he was entrusting them to popular judgement, confident that the public could not fail to appreciate the works on their own merits. Shelley's comments to Ollier about all his projects, including both the *Prometheus Unbound* volume and 'A Philosophical View of Reform', demonstrate that he saw himself on the verge of literary and cultural stardom. Byron may have opted misanthropically for *Don Juan*, nihilism and (eventually) Greece, but Shelley was prepared to seize the moment and raise the standard – in every sense. His impatience with those who failed to remain steadfast in their commitment to the cause of liberty and humanity undoubtedly informs Shelley's contemptuous treatment of Wordsworth in 'Peter Bell the Third' as the formerly great poet who had made the tragic (but unforgivable) incorrect choice between 'the two poles' of 'creative imagination and the cash nexus'.⁵⁵ Less than two years later in 'A Defence of Poetry' Shelley explicitly polarizes in these very terms the distinction between 'the God and the Mammon of the world': 'Poetry' is the former, while in the modern world the latter is 'the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation'.⁵⁶ Wordsworth/Peter is dismissed into the double damnation of dullness not just because he has surrendered,⁵⁷ allowing himself to be 'bought' like a slave by a reactionary, self-congratulatory materialist culture of political and artistic elites, but also because he has revealed himself as an anachronism, a worn-out, exhausted poet trying to blow life into a worn-out, exhausted paradigm of the moral fable and in the process, laughably, to assume the moral high ground. The world has moved on, moved ahead, while Wordsworth/Peter, hopelessly mired in the moral and intellectual mud of an old order whose corruption was (Shelley fully believed) soon to be expunged, clings to the old forms, the old ideas, the old platitudes, the old superstitions. And no one cares. Or so 'Peter Bell the Third' argues. Like his titular hero, Wordsworth is irrelevant in 1819. This is what Shelley regarded as the fundamental tragedy of rampant self-centredness among the great, whose self-infatuation ultimately blinds them to their own irrelevance within the context of that new and altered world.

It is worth noting Don Herzog's other point about the consequences of casting the object of one's contempt as a slave. Drawing a rhetorical analogy between the black slave and the oppressed white labourer, Herzog argues, did more than merely threaten 'the tidy logic of race'. It 'threatened the masculinity of English workers ... because dependence was a brand of effeminacy', while at the same time it threatened as well 'the comfortable and comforting somnolence of dutifully loyal subjects'. Most important – and most immediately relevant to Shelley's situation late in 1819 – is what Herzog describes ironically as 'the recipe for producing self-respect and dignity': 'evade cosmopolitan views; fix one's attention on a local comparison; make

⁵⁵ Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 222.

⁵⁶ *SPP*: 531.

⁵⁷ 'A poet can cease serving liberty only after ceasing to be a poet, only after destroying the imagination', Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 222.

sure it's someone lower than oneself; then hold the underling in contempt and use him as a stepping stone to one's own newly elevated status.⁵⁸ This last part strikes me as especially apropos, for it recalls Hunt's reference to Shelley as a 'Cosmopolite-Poet', by which he means a poet 'whose chief interest is in the well-being of the polity, not simply of himself or his narrow circle', a poet who 'wants others happy, not himself privileged'.⁵⁹ It is to just the reverse of this generous selflessness, to an insistent narrowness and anti-cosmopolitanism, that Shelley objects so strenuously in the egotistical Wordsworth of 1819.

Shelley's poem at once repudiates and bypasses Wordsworth by isolating and disenfranchising him. In 'emasculating' the formerly ideal poet by revealing him precisely as *Peter Bell* reveals him, Shelley enlists a complex intertextuality to make Wordsworth a 'stepping stone' to his own rising status. The poem's conspicuous name-dropping and richly allusive text delineate the nature of Wordsworth's 'fall' and the glittering poetic company from whom his freely elected self-damnation excludes him. It is therefore no accident that Shelley's satire concludes with the extended description of dullness that occupies 'Part the Seventh: Double Damnation'. Shelley's readers (like Wordsworth's) would have recognized in this paean to dullness the echoes of Pope's *Dunciad* and would have recognized too how his poem rhetorically consigns Wordsworth/Peter to that satire's congregation of dunces.

Comparing the endings of 'Peter Bell the Third' and *The Dunciad* reveals how Shelley saw himself eclipsing Wordsworth. Concluding his poem, Pope reports that – among other implosions – Truth has retreated to her cavern, Philosophy has decamped, Religion has covered 'her sacred fires', and Morality has expired:

Lo! Thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;
Light dies before thy uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And Universal Darkness buries All. (IV, 653–6)⁶⁰

For Shelley, this debacle paralleled the contemporary cultural and intellectual implosions epitomized in Wordsworth's recent works and in the man himself as *Peter Bell* reveals them. To the spectral vision of this 'new' but retrograde reign of darkness, chaos, dullness and uncreation, Shelley counterposes the alternative prophetic vision represented in his own life and works. Shelley conceives his 'new' world not as some dreary resuscitation of an old and worn-out one but rather as a resurrection of a world of primal (or primordial, mythic) energy. This new world is characterized not by the darkness of Pope's 'Night Primæval' (IV, 630) but rather by the surging apocalyptic flames that light the conclusion of *Ode to the West Wind* (written in late October 1819 and published in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume in 1820), not by blindly chaotic anarchy but rather by the 'new order' envisioned

58 Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds*, pp. 400–402.

59 Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis*, p. 150. The latter quote occurs in a review of *Rosalind and Helen* in *Examiner*, no. 593, 9 May 1819, where Hunt explicitly contrasts Shelley and Wordsworth (and *Rosalind and Helen* and *Peter Bell*), much to Shelley's advantage.

60 *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963, p. 800.

in the utopian final act of *Prometheus Unbound* (completed likewise in autumn 1819), not by ‘uncreation’ and burial but rather by creation and ‘a new birth’ (*Ode*, l. 64). The public world of materialism, conservatism and comfortable, paid public celebrity with which the new (old) Wordsworth of 1819 had aligned himself, Shelley clearly believed, was the *Dunciad*’s world where ‘Nor *public* Flame, nor *private*, dares to shine; / Nor *human* Spark is left, nor Glimpse *divine*!’ (IV, 651–2), a world in which Wordsworth’s early republican, humanitarian principles had been largely extinguished. Against this darkness Shelley opposes the sparks from his still *unextinguished* hearth, whose private flame he seeks – through the agency of the blowing (‘in-spiring’) west wind – to translate into a liberating, consuming public flame, reversing the pernicious effects of Wordsworth and company.

Chapter 6

Scratching at the Door of Absence: Writing and Reading 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'

Timothy Webb

????!! – ????.;.?!

(Part of postscript by Percy Shelley to letter by
Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne, 8 May 1820)

If the pattern of buff is sufficiently like to make the front breadth and sleeves of a gown,
the rest of which is made, be so kind as to send it.

(Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne, 6 January 1820¹)

Shelley was acutely conscious (even defensively self-conscious) about the status of the poem known as 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' and carefully placed it in a literary tradition. The draft manuscript (in Bodleian Shelley MS adds e. 9) is fluent but underpunctuated and shows no sign that the poem was originally intended as a transmission which was primarily postal.² In this respect, it differs from the early verse-letter to Edward Fergus Graham which luxuriates in its postality: 'As you will see I wrote to you / As is most fitting right & due / With Killjoy's frank'.³ 'Killjoy' was Shelley's Gothic personification of his authoritarian father, Sir Timothy, who as a Member of Parliament enjoyed certain postal privileges (hence the 'frank'). 'Letter' was enclosed with a letter in prose, rather than forming a complete communication in its own right like the verse-letter to Graham; it is an instance of actual correspondence and, in its highly particularized fashion, draws heavily on the traditions of letter-writing. Yet it is also, obviously and sometimes performatively, a poem in rhyming couplets, a form which belongs to the distinct, if flexible, category of 'verse-letter' or 'verse-epistle'.

Shelley's poem has been occasionally admired, but it has been afforded surprisingly little critical attention and its true character has rarely been acknowledged. Though

1 *MWS Letters* I: 416, 123.

2 Draft manuscript reproduced and transcribed in Dawson and Webb, *BSM* XIV: 104–19. Text used in this chapter derived from Leader and O'Neill (*Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) who follow John Gisborne's fair-copy transcript.

3 *Letters* I: 87.

there have been a few, notable, exceptions,⁴ most critics have tended to ignore ‘Letter’, or to minimize it, perhaps because it seems too relaxed, or uncharacteristic, or generically trivial, or damagingly ‘occasional’. Perhaps they are put off, or deceived, by its apparently quotidian nature. Donald Davie, who did admire it, and described Shelley as ‘the master of the familiar style’, celebrated its virtues precisely because they seemed unusual in Shelley’s *oeuvre* and exhibited a rare and welcome ‘urbanity’. He identified it as an example of Shelley’s ‘base style’, as opposed to the ‘mean style’ which can be found in ‘Julian and Maddalo’ and the ‘high style’ which is demonstrated by poems like ‘The Cloud’. Davie devoted some attention to the poetic function of Maria Gisborne, noted an unexpected connection to the tradition of Donne and Browning, and declared that Shelley’s poem was neither Spenserian nor Byronic. He also expressed a caution about the poem’s apparent interest in ordinary things:

This poem is prosaic only in the relatively unimportant sense that it introduces things like hackney-coaches, Baron de Tott’s Memoirs, ‘self-impelling steam-wheels’, and ‘a queer broken glass With ink in it’. But like Donne’s verse or Browning’s, Shelley’s is far more figurative than normal prose.⁵

Davie’s critical perceptions are acute and suggestive and raise important issues about the status of ‘Letter’ and its potential connections to the work of other poets who are not often associated with Shelley; according to his pronouncement, hackney-coaches and steam-wheels have more in common with the compasses, medicine bottles and phosphorescent matches of Donne and Browning than most people would immediately imagine.⁶ Unfortunately, Davie also seems to value ‘Letter’ at the expense of Shelley’s wider poetic achievement and, although he recognizes its stylistic originality, he does not explicitly acknowledge the generic consciousness (that is, Shelley’s sense of the potential of an epistle in verse) which helped to make the poem possible.

A helpful way to bring ‘Letter’ more fruitfully into focus would be to recognize its status as one of a series of epistolary communications from the Shelleys to Maria Gisborne or her husband John, or to the two Gisbornes, or to Maria’s son Henry Reveley. They had interests and contacts in common with the Shelleys, and Maria Gisborne had obvious liberal tendencies; it was therefore not so surprising that the Gisbornes had become close friends of the Shelleys (who had few English friends in Italy), before they returned to London on a business visit in the summer of 1820. As early as April 1819, Shelley had invited the Gisbornes to the house at Naples which, in the end, the Shelleys never rented: ‘There is no society which we have regretted or desired so much as yours, & in our solitude the benefit of your concession would be greater than I can express.’ A few sentences further on, he reiterated the invitation

4 Especially, Ann Thompson, ‘Shelley’s “Letter to Maria Gisborne”: Tact and Clutter’, in *Essays on Shelley*, Miriam Allott (ed.). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982, pp. 144–59.

5 Donald Davie, ‘Shelley’s Urbanity’, in *Purity of Diction in English Verse*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1952, pp. 133–59 (p. 141).

6 Davie, ‘Shelley’s Urbanity’, p. 141.

in terms which partly look forward to 'Letter': 'What shall I say to entice you? We shall have a piano & some books, & little else – beside ourselves.'⁷ There were to be several further invitations, some very pressing especially when the Shelleys were living at Pisa, but no extended visit materialized. In the end it was the Shelleys who moved to the Gisbornes' residence at Casa Ricci in Leghorn – on two occasions, from 17 June to 30 September 1819, and – in the period when 'Letter' was written – from 15 June to 4 August 1820.

The central and most charismatic figure of the small family was Maria Gisborne (1770–1836), who had grown up in Constantinople where her father was an English merchant and had afterwards lived in Italy, and especially in Rome. Maria Gisborne, who was old enough to be mother to both Shelleys, had been proposed to by William Godwin, was for some years friend to Mary Wollstonecraft, had briefly looked after the young Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin after her mother's death in childbirth and, much more recently, had acted as Spanish tutor to Shelley.⁸ John, a retired businessman, and brother-in-law to Clementi and John Varley, was older than his wife, and her second husband. Shelley admired his business capacities but regarded him as 'a great bore'. In September 1819 when Gisborne was visiting England, Shelley expressed his feelings to Peacock: 'This Mr. Gisborne is a man who knows I cannot tell how many languages and has read almost all the books you can think of but all that they contain seems to be to his mind what water is to a sieve.'⁹ Henry Reveley, who was only slightly older than Shelley, was Maria's son by her first husband and had spent nearly all his life in Italy, to the extent of being 'more fluent in Italian than English'.¹⁰ By training, Henry was an architectural engineer; with Shelley's financial and moral support, he planned to establish a steamboat service which would link Livorno, Marseilles and Genoa. Sadly, on their return to Italy in October 1820, the Gisbornes immediately fell out with the Shelleys. Although by this time the Shelleys had left Casa Ricci ('you will have found the bird flown from your nest'), Mary Shelley visited the Gisbornes in Leghorn on 16 October and on the following day Shelley delivered her letter of invitation to Maria Gisborne. In spite of renewed entreaties to visit ('There can be no real cordiality until I have seen you here'[that is, at the Baths of San Giuliano]), the Gisbornes did not pay the Shelleys a visit till 26–30 April 1821 and then on their own initiative ('My manners to them have been gentle, but cold', reported Shelley). Hurt feelings must have lingered, so that friendly relations were not fully resumed till the end of July when John and Maria Gisborne set out again to settle in England.

Shelley's Italian correspondence shows that before 'Letter' (which he seems to have despatched on 30 June 1820, though on publication it bore the date 1 July) he had written 21 letters to the Gisbornes (jointly or separately) and four to Henry Reveley (the correspondence includes 17 later letters to the Gisbornes, mainly to John, and another five directed to Henry); before Shelley's poem, Mary Shelley had

7 *Letters* II: 91.

8 For a rare account of Maria Gisborne, see the article by David Kaloustian in DNB.

9 *Letters* II: 119–20.

10 James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography: Exile of Unfulfilled Reknown* [sic] 1816–22. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005, p. 65.

written separately to Maria Gisborne on 45 occasions, once to John and twice to the two Gisbornes (she was to write nine more letters to Maria Gisborne in the remaining months of 1820, 14 in 1821 and ten in 1822).¹¹ There might be several claimants to be considered a particular model for ‘Letter’: Shelley’s letter of 26 June addressed to both Gisbornes; or perhaps the letter of 30 June, addressed solely to John Gisborne; or the letter of the same day directed again to husband and wife, in which Shelley probably included his poem (‘some verses I wrote the first day I came’). Another claimant must be the letter written by Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne on 18 June beginning with a passage which moves from one addressee to another with a teasing sureness derived from the closeness of friendship: ‘Where am I? Guess! In a little room before a deal table looking out on a podere – Whose voice is that? Henry, does not your heart beat?’¹² A reading of Shelley’s poem which bears such parallels in mind, and is prepared to set the verse-letter alongside its prose counterparts, by one or both Shelleys, introduces a variety of suggestive contexts which have been too easily ignored.

Frustratingly, the draft allocates no title to the poem, perhaps because it seemed that none was needed since the poem was enclosed with a prose letter; in this matter, later editors have tended to follow the editorial lead of Mary Shelley, who herself directed nearly all her Gisborne correspondence to Maria and who seems to be observing the most obvious tendencies of her husband’s verse letter. A recent edition (followed in textual matters by the present essay) prints the same title which was given by John Gisborne in his fair-copy transcript of 1831, based evidently on the original but now missing letter (Abinger Dep. d. 475). ‘Letter to Maria Gisborne’ may well have been Shelley’s intended title; yet, because of the omission in the draft, a reader might acknowledge, however briefly, that in this case even apparent certainties might be open to question. Rather like the quicksilver it playfully mentions, the poem itself is curiously shifting and resistant to easy capture: it opens not with an address to, or an invocation of, a specific correspondent, but with a long and detailed self-portrait. When an addressee is finally invoked, the second person could be plural as easily as singular (that is, Gisbornes rather than solely and exclusively Maria): ‘You are not here ... the quaint witch Memory sees / In vacant chairs your absent images, / And points where once you sat’ (ll. 132–4). The same applies to the passage on London intellectual and social life: ‘You are now / In London ... / ... You will see’ (ll. 192–6 and ff.). The manuscript shows that Shelley did write ‘ye’ in line 254 before altering this to ‘you’ (‘I bid you look upon the night’),¹³ so there is some concrete evidence that, at least at times, he had all the Gisbornes in mind and was exercised by the question of address. Admittedly, the uses of ‘we’ sometimes seem more specific to Maria but resist accurate definition to readers outside the magic circle of remembered friendship. When the poem does unmistakably direct itself to Maria Gisborne (‘wisest lady!’), Shelley signals the intimacy of the relationship by employing the singular form (‘thou wert then to me’). Sometimes the train of

11 These letters can be found in the second volume of *Letters* or in the first volume of *MWS Letters*.

12 *Letters* II: 201–3; *MWS Letters* I: 152, 146; *Letters* II: 206–8.

13 *BSM* XIV: 116–17.

discourse also seems to suggest that 'we' or 'our' embraces Shelley and Maria (as in the passages which directly precede and follow the tribute to Calderón).

John Gisborne is a shadowy presence (although Shelley trusted him sufficiently to give him the responsibility for correcting the proofs of *Prometheus Unbound*). Yet he remains an unexpressed possibility who remains elusive but cannot be entirely discounted by readers. On the very day on which he probably despatched the verse-letter, Shelley concluded a business letter to John Gisborne with the formulation, 'Always affectionately your's & your's'.¹⁴ This phrasing strongly suggests that, although Shelley was addressing John Gisborne, in finishing, at least, he was conscious of a double audience and writing to Maria as well as John. Though Mary continued to remind Maria (even if one of her letters seems to widen the range when it suddenly asks the opinion of 'my dear Sir')¹⁵ that she had a special duty to visit the Shelleys, it was to both Gisbornes ('My dear Friends', a phrase repeated in the letter's final sentence) that Shelley had addressed himself in a painfully revealing letter of 11 March in which he discussed both his own character and that of Mary and the difficult nature of their relations.¹⁶ Although, like Mary herself, Shelley is effectively inviting Maria Gisborne (who was nothing less than a responsible mother-figure and a calming recourse) to visit Pisa and to exert a benevolent influence on his alienated wife, his letter is addressed to husband and wife and admits both of them to the delicate intimacies of his troubled marriage.

In the published text Maria Gisborne gradually claims priority but there is a sense of family presence, especially that of her son, who was close to Shelley in various ways. Not only is Henry Reveley the first of the Gisborne family to be mentioned but he also exerts a recurrent, if never identified, influence. On 18 June Mary Shelley told Maria Gisborne 'Shelley has taken possession of Henry's study', an appropriation confirmed by Shelley himself when writing to both Gisbornes on 30 June and to Peacock on 12 July.¹⁷ The implied presence of Reveley exerts its effect on the poem's imagery, though the exact source of Shelley's wit is never explicitly identified:

dark spells and devilish enginery,
The self-impelling steam-wheels of the mind
Which pump up oaths from clergymen, and grind
The gentle spirit of our meek reviews
Into a powdery foam of salt abuse,
Ruffling the dull wave of their self-content. (ll. 107–12)

Even at an early stage, Shelley's self-portrait is shaped by the lingering but unexplained influence of Reveley, and by his workshop:

... a mighty mechanist,
Bent with sublime Archimedean art

14 *MWS Letters* I: 152.

15 *MWS Letters* I: 132.

16 David M. Stocking and Marion Kingston Stocking, 'New Shelley Letters in a John Gisborne Notebook'. *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 31 (1980), pp. 2–8.

17 *MWS Letters* I: 149; *Letters* II: 207, 213.

To breathe a soul into the iron heart
 Of some machine portentous, or strange gin,
 Which by the force of figured spells might win
 Its way over the sea, and sport therein;
 For round the walls are hung dread engines ... (ll. 17–22)

The concept of the enchanter might accord with Shelley's Gothic predilections, just as the coy use of 'gin' might suggest a Spenserean context, but the strange gin turns into 'dread engines', while the 'figured spells', which might point to the world of necromancy, can also indicate the mathematical calculations which are essential to marine engineering. Here the 'sublime Archimedean art' involves the use of arithmetical formulations rather than the revolutionary lever which Shelley had invoked in the epigraph to *Queen Mab*, while the label 'mechanist' which Shelley applies to himself seems very close to 'the Mac[c]hinista' ('Macchinista' for Mary Shelley) which he had used to indicate Reveley in a letter to the Gisbornes of 10 July 1818 (Mary Shelley also referred to him as 'Il Re della Macchina').¹⁸ The long description of Shelley's study (ll. 15–105) is at the same time a poetical account of Reveley's workshop, which explains the constant references to mathematical and engineering components of the scene and Shelley's recurrent (if playfully exaggerated) puzzlement at the objects in his own study ('not to be understood', 'unimaginable', 'inexplicable' and, especially, 'Henry will know / The thing I mean, and laugh at me—if so / He fears not I should do more mischief' [ll. 76–8]). Even near the end (of the poem), when Shelley seems to have asserted his own identity, he implies the difficulty of entirely escaping from the absent Henry's clutches by acknowledging the prevailing force of 'cones and parallelograms and curves' (l. 313).

This issue of address is not trivial, or pedantic, since it relates to the very nature of Shelley's poem. Because no clear answer can be produced either from external evidence or from the text itself, it is best to be cautious. Although the poem seems to be centrally directed to Maria Gisborne, and although her presence seems to exert a powerful gravitational pull, the careful reader should remember the undeclared presence of Henry Reveley, and consider the enigmatic status of 'you' and how easily singular or plural usages can slip or transmute into one another. Perhaps 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' needs to be interpreted as an epistle which, at least, implies the concept of a family readership or the complicated dynamics of friendly communication in which writer and reader (or readers) can enjoy shared intimacies. A suggestive example here is that of Keats writing a letter to Richard Woodhouse and referring to their mutual friend John Hamilton Reynolds. He acknowledges the common but rarely-admitted facts of letter-writing and letter-reading when he suggests: 'you two must write me a letter apiece – for as I know you will interread one another – I am still writing to Reynolds as well as yourself – As I say to George [his married brother in America] I am writing *to* you but *at* your wife'.¹⁹ The practice of inter-reading seems especially probable where a family group is concerned

¹⁸ *Letters* II: 21; *MWS Letters* I: 73, 71.

¹⁹ *The Letters of John Keats 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958, vol. 2, p. 173.

and 'inter-reading' can mean passing the letter from hand to hand, or reading it together, or discussing its contents, or any combination of all three. There must also be a foundation based on points of reference which make sense to all the parties involved.

That such complexity of address also features in the poem is made even more likely by two pieces of evidence. First, there is the letter which Mary Shelley had written to Maria Gisborne very shortly before Shelley composed 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'. In the middle of this letter she seems to move towards a premature ending and to remember the Gisbornes, who, against her repeated advice, were all then in London, with particular force: 'Shelley & Claire send their love to All [underlined four times] of you – there you are.' The final phrase places the Gisbornes 'there' in London but it also indicates a moment of recognition, almost an epiphany, like the closing sentence in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*: 'For there she was.' The letter continues in a form which is hard to reproduce exactly:

Il bravo giovane – Arrigo –
 m
 La Orna Sig Maria Δ Il erudito Sig. Giovanni²⁰

All three names are rendered in Italian, partly because Mary Shelley often employed Italian phrases in her correspondence with Maria Gisborne but, even more appropriately, because she was granting the Gisborne trio honorary Italian status, particularly when they were exiled in 'desolate & enslaved England' (as she had called it in a letter to Maria Gisborne of 14 March). But the most significant detail is the triangle: clearly this implies some force by which all three were bound together and consociated. It was not an accident that, elsewhere, and less charitably, Mary Shelley referred to the three Gisbornes as the 'trinity' (a religious term which she employs more than once and with more than one implication).²¹

Secondly, there is the testimony of Maria Gisborne herself which confirms Mary Shelley's ideas about family unity and provides them with a special gloss. Writing in 1832 after Henry Reveley (who was then in his forties) had abandoned his mother and step-father and emigrated first to South Africa and then to Western Australia, Maria Gisborne remembered a much closer family relationship:

Through a long course of years, I firmly believed that 'we three' were so intimate, amalgamated together, that no 'human power' could separate us – As far as 'two' were concerned, I can say, that it had become to us – a natural – an instinctive – sentiment, that we were – (the long-united triad) – but 'one being' –²²

Reading this lament for a lost unity, one recognizes the strength of maternal will which bound the Gisbornes together: as Mary Shelley had also noticed as late as August 1819, Henry Reveley was 'the pattern of good boys' and though 'only

20 *MWS Letters* I: 148.

21 *MWS Letters* I: 116, 153.

22 Stocking, 'New Shelley Letters', p. 7.

thirty years of age ... always does as he is bid'.²³ The 'long-united triad' in Maria Gisborne's nostalgic account is Mary Shelley's 'trinity', or the curious triangular structure which features in her letter to the Gisbornes in London. One also suspects that a private joke is not far away, since when the Gisbornes were living at Leghorn Shelley told them mysteriously but comically: 'We believe that your right angled Triangle will contain the solution of the problem of how to proceed.'²⁴ Once again, this figure is appropriately geometrical but it might also suggest a triangular unity in which one side is more significant than the other two to which it is necessarily joined.

Whatever the moral or social cement which united the Gisbornes, it seems clear that 'inter-reading' might be an expected outcome for a poem which was so personal in its orientation. Nor would the concept of sharing or of inter-reading come as a surprise to the Shelleys themselves, who regularly read together (see the evidence of Mary's journal) and who occasionally added their own postscripts to letters to the Gisbornes which had been largely written either by wife or husband in the first instance. There are, for example, Percy's postscripts to letters by Mary to Maria Gisborne on 18 January and especially on 8 May 1820 (which ends with a further nudge in the direction of inter-reading by advising, 'You may shew it [probably 'Chameleons feed on light and air'] Hunt if you like').²⁵ This epistolary evidence suggests an obvious nexus of friendship and communication, but one journal entry and a letter from Maria Gisborne to Mary Shelley point towards an even wider spread of intimacy. On 23 August 1820 she reported that the Gisbornes had been thwarted in their plan to follow Shelley's recent injunction and to share his verse-letter with his close friends the Hunts with whom the Shelleys were in regular communication when they moved to Italy: 'We have not been able to show the Hunts the delightful and laughable and exquisite description in verse of Henry's work-room; we took it on purpose one evening to read to them, but, unluckily, Mr. Hunt was out, and now it is packed up with other papers in the case.' Leigh Hunt (who was often out when the Gisbornes called) would have provided an ideal audience for this reading since he features significantly in Shelley's poem (which devotes 17 lines to a Hunt character-sketch) and since, with the Gisbornes as readers and interpreters, there is little which he could not have understood with immediate effect. The journal entry for the following day records that, in spite of this hitch, communication was not entirely impeded: 'We talked much in praise of the S[helley]s, and amused the H[unt]s by reading parts of their letters to them.'²⁶

The presence of the Gisbornes in London provided Shelley with yet another, if indirect, opportunity to persuade the Hunts of the irresistible virtues of life in Italy ('Now Italy or London, which you will' acquires an extra resonance if one imagines this choice directed at the Hunt family as well as the Gisbornes). Even more pertinent, the poem takes advantage of the ironical choreography which

²³ *MWS Letters* I: 104.

²⁴ *Letters* II: 172.

²⁵ *MWS Letters* I: 126, 146.

²⁶ *Maria Gisborne & Edward Williams (Shelley's Friends): Their Journals and Letters*, ed. Frederick L. Jones. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951, pp. 66, 47.

allowed Shelley to correspond with Maria Gisborne, or the Gisbornes, who had recently left Italy and returned to London, while he and Mary had moved into the house at Leghorn (Livorno) which the Gisbornes had once rented. In some ways, the verse-letter draws strength from earlier communications between the parties in the form of prose. For instance, in a prose letter of 26 May, addressed to both Gisbornes (the same day he also wrote from Pisa to Byron and Leigh Hunt), Shelley reported on an earlier, reconnoitring, visit to the Casa Ricci ('your old fortress at St. Elmo') and informed the Gisbornes of the local memory of '*An English family that lived here in the time of the French*'. Part of this report is mundane but surely of interest to Shelley's correspondents: 'I slept in your house & departed early the next morning to Casciano. Every thing seems in excellent order at Casa Ricci – garden pigeons tables chairs & beds – As I did not find my bed sealed up, I left it as I found it.' Shelley immediately continues to record the view from the Gisbornes' old house in appreciative detail: 'What a glorious prospect you had from the windows of St Elmo!' The scene is then described with picturesque precision and Shelley concludes by admitting 'I was altogether delighted.'²⁷ Although this account is strongly personal it obviously invites a shared pleasure; the evocative description also serves the function of memory (as a photograph might do at a later period).

This capacity for projection and for sharing delights also informs other parts of the letter and extends to the experiences of travelling: 'Well how do [you] like London, & your journey, the Alps in their beauty & their eternity – Paris in its slight & transitory colours, & the wearisome plains of France, & the *moral* people with whom you drank tea last night?' (On 8 May Mary Shelley had anticipated this kind of question when she had asked Maria Gisborne: 'What think you of the Alps, and how did you cross Cenis?')²⁸ Shelley's compressed travelogue is less open-ended than that of Mary but both the Shelleys were anxious for news and opinions and, in their different ways, both were prepared to place themselves in the position of the travelling Gisbornes. As the eager questions suggest, there was also something vicarious about the Shelleys' pleasure as they imagined the Gisbornes moving across the European map. As Mary Shelley put it: 'You who are travelling must write long letters, and we that stay at home must ask questions, having nothing better to do.'²⁹ That the Shelleys were staying 'at home' in Italy, is an interesting irony, especially because their temporary Italian home was soon to be that in which the Gisbornes themselves had lived while the English Gisbornes were 'exiled' in London. In the same letter, Percy Shelley also reminded Maria Gisborne that she was to keep a journal during her visit to England. She did, though, as she herself confessed, irregularly; the Gisbornes called on, or were visited by, nearly all the contacts suggested by Shelley, even if Godwin harangued them too freely and Hogg ('your wicked friend') delighted and shocked them by his views. It seems unlikely that this journal ever reached the Shelleys, though one letter did.³⁰

27 *Letters* II: 202.

28 *Letters* II: 201; *MWS Letters* I: 145.

29 *MWS Letters* I: 145.

30 *Maria Gisborne & Edward Williams*, pp. 35–48, 63–7.

Such concern with the complexities and the ironies of travel to England also left their impress on Shelley's verse-letter from Livorno. The biographical facts add a special piquancy to the lines concerning the absence of the previous residents: 'You are not here ... the quaint witch Memory sees / In vacant chairs your absent images, / And points where once you sat, and now should be / But are not' (ll. 132–5). Not only are the Gisbornes (if one interprets this use of 'You' as plural) not in Italy; very specifically, they only persist in their own house as memories or phantasmal presences from the past. Shelley had engaged with such a phenomenon before. On October 13 (or 14) 1819 he had replied to a letter from Maria Gisborne to Mary Shelley which had mentioned the dog Oscar, who 'continued for several days [after the Shelleys' departure] at dinner-time to howl piteously, and to scratch with all his might at the door of your abandoned house'. Shelley responded with characteristic courtesy: 'His importunate regret is ... a type of ours as regards you. Our memory – if you will accept so humble a metaphor – is forever scratching at the door of your absence.'³¹

A particularly resonant example of these movements and of house-letting dynamics and ironies can be found in the apparently simple but powerful passage where Shelley imagines London as it may present itself to the visiting Gisbornes and then reports on his own immersion in a part of Italy which the Gisbornes knew particularly well. London is introduced by way of a shared nightscape and a question:

But what see you beside? – a shabby stand
 Of Hackney coaches – a brick house or wall
 Fencing some lordly ³²court, white with the scrawl
 Of our unhappy politics, – or worse –
 A wretched woman reeling by, whose curse
 Mixed with the watchman's, partner of her trade,
 You must accept in place of serenade – ... (ll. 265–71)

There is a precision and a directness about these lines which is striking. Some of the subjects – prostitution, the corruption of aristocracy, and the unhappy rivalries and aggression of contemporary politics – haunted the consciousness of Shelley, yet within the limits of the verse-letter he is able to control and present them with genial sharpness. There is an admirable concision about 'white with the scrawl / Of our unhappy politics', and especially about 'the scrawl' (originally, and much less sharply, 'a scrawl'),³³ which contrasts interestingly with the hysterical and almost surrealistic denunciations of the political songs written in the previous year and intended for a quite different readership. Shelley's seemingly untroubled use of the possessive plural in 'our' (in contrast to Mary Shelley's 'your Country') is also worth notice: the word may suggest that Shelley identifies himself (though regretfully) with the unfortunate strife of contemporary English politics to which the Gisbornes,

³¹ *Letters* II: 124.

³² 'l. 267 *lordly*. The draft reading; the copy-text [Gisborne] and Huntington MS [Mary Shelley] read "lonely"', Leader and O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 786.

³³ *BSM* XIV: 117.

as 'Italians', are strangers, but it also allows for an inclusive possibility and relies on a belief that the Gisbornes will not be alienated by what he has written. This seemingly insignificant word takes on still further significance when set alongside Mary Shelley's letter of 8 May: 'I long for your English letters, and all the queer, and I fear, the many disagreeable things that will strike you at first sight: in that unhappy land Perhaps you will know more of the state of your Country from reading Galignani at Leghorn, than in England itself.'³⁴

The description of Italy which competes with that of an imagined (or recollected) London is richly animated, though essentially serene, and recalls a number of passages both in other poems and in letters, not least the atmospheric and sharply observed reports to Peacock (see, for example, the passage running from 'I see a chaos of green leaves and fruit' to 'Now Italy or London – which you will' [ll. 274–91]). Very obviously, this evocation is part of an antithesis between Italy and London, and between the rural and the urban. The terms of the contrast were well known to the Gisbornes; on 7 July Mary Shelley teasingly wrote 'Dalla bellissima e superbissima villa del Grand Capitano Gaetano Ricci' (that is, the house which the Gisbornes had rented and where the Shelleys were now happily installed): 'The sun shines all day long – the north breezes blow – & the weather is actually paradisiacall – I give you joy of London smoke ... there must be a fierce battle I think between bella Italia & smoky London.'³⁵ In the terms of his contrast in his verse-letter, Shelley (like Mary in her prose letter) is drawing on an old disputation (touched on some years before by William Cowper and very recently by Byron in *Beppo*). As usual, the terms of competition are not equally balanced and, as usual, Italy is the winner; in this case Shelley accords significantly fewer lines to London, which is presented in a strongly negative light, and weights the 'contest' by granting Italy the last, and longest, word. Alan Weinberg formulates the terms of this one-sided disputation with clarity: 'In the context of man's growing industrial and technological concerns which repress natural instincts, the ordinary town of Leghorn seems like a paradise. By opposing the settings dialectically, Shelley raises the stature and the value of the Italian.'³⁶ In this instance, too, 'Italian' is almost a synonym for 'Gisbornian'; Shelley's unbalanced exercise in contrast is both a traditional argument and a teasing (even persuasive) evocation of nostalgia.

The personal element in this communication is further strengthened by Shelley's invocation of Calderón in a passage (ll. 170–85) which includes two detailed tributes to Maria Gisborne's prowess as a sympathetic teacher of Spanish. Perhaps its main achievement is its sense of the electric effects of shared reading (compare 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer') and of literary influence which can work across the intervening and apparently disconnecting deserts of time, language and separate nationalities ('which found / An echo in our hearts'). In his evocation of a fruitfully collaborative reading-experience and mutual memories, Shelley combines an appreciation of Calderón ('that majestic tongue') and the political effects of his

34 *MWS Letters* I: 145.

35 *MWS Letters* I: 153.

36 Alan Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 12.

drama ('winged with thoughts of truth and majesty') with gratitude to Maria Gisborne who had participated in his enthusiasms and induced him into the language.

One of the most notable features of Shelley's epistolary manner is its ability to incorporate the quotidian and the seemingly 'unpoetic' (what Ann Thompson suggestively calls 'clutter'), its facility for absorbing or naming things which might seem more easily at home in the form of a letter in prose. Though Shelley is often figurative (as Donald Davie suggested), there are numerous instances where the inclusion of an object seems to signify nothing more than itself. Mary Shelley's letters to Maria Gisborne provide many such objects: a comb, a box, a gown of 'a close pink stripe', arrowroot, tapioca, tea, black shoes of stuff kid or morocco, a bath, stockings, a bonnet, a chip hat, a piano, darning needles. Shelley must have been well aware that the Gisbornes were not only good friends but agents, especially for his wife, who were charged with the responsibility of acquiring and despatching, to Pisa or to Livorno, very specific things. Although such matters do not feature directly in the 'Letter', Shelley's unusual interest in the way that things help to constitute an environment may reflect something of the nature of that apparently genial relationship.

The poem admits these objects in abundance but, while doing so, expresses some dismay at the necessity. Ostentatiously, but with a sense of inadequacy, the 'Letter' includes a list but qualifies the inclusion with a strong sense both of its inappropriateness to Shelley himself and its 'thingy' resistance even to this kind of verse:

next

Lie bills and calculations much perplexed,
 With steam-boats, frigates and machinery quaint
 Traced over them in blue and yellow paint.
 Then comes a range of mathematical
 Instruments, for plans nautical and statical;
 A heap of rosin, a queer broken glass
 With ink in it; a china cup ...
 Near that a dusty paint-box, some odd hooks,
 A half-burnt match, an ivory block, three books
 Where conic sections, spherics, logarithms,
 To great Laplace, from Sanderson and Sims,
 Lie heaped in their harmonious disarray
 Of figures – disentangle them who may.
 Baron de Tott's Memoirs beside them lie,
 And some odd volumes of old chemistry. (ll. 78–99)

These lines controvert many expectations about Shelley's verse and display interesting and suggestive characteristics. As we have seen, many of the emphases and particularly the prevalence of inexplicable objects, especially associated with mathematics or engineering, are testimonies to the invisible presence of Henry Revely. Yet, as Shelley reminds his readers (originally and primarily the Gisbornes), these objects also constitute a challenge for his own poetics.

Shelley frankly admits that there is a difficulty in listing all these seemingly unrelated objects or fitting them neatly into verse. As he puts it in a slightly earlier passage which introduces 'Great screws, and cones, and wheels, and grooved blocks': 'Upon the table / More knacks and quips there be than I am able / To catalogize in this verse of mine' (ll. 52, 54–6) (according to the OED, he is here employing an obsolete word in 'catalogize', which is in keeping with the deliberately archaic flavour of parts of the diction). At first sight, these knacks and quips appear to be tangible; yet the unusual, perhaps unprecedented, introduction of 'quips' to mean curious things (first used in this sense by Shelley in this poem, according to the OED³⁷) might imply that there is some connection between the world of objects and the language which claims to record it. The seemingly inferior mode of the verse-letter also attracts its own language of playful self-deprecation ('Too vast a matter for so weak a rhyme'), but on several occasions its inadequacies are further demonstrated by the ways in which Shelley is apparently forced to override the metrical boundaries (for example, 'table' and 'able' in the earlier passage, 'nautical and statical' and, possibly, 'logarithms'). If such unyielding material is to be included, it insists on its own intransigence and demonstrates an awkward resistance (a performative tactic worthy of Shelley's friend, the author of *Don Juan*). The tensions and dynamics of achieving such a balance are well captured by Shelley's oxymoronic formulation, 'harmonious disarray' (compare Herrick's 'sweet disorder') which might function as a useful formulation for much of the poem.

The strangeness of all this can be traced in Shelley's use of the symptomatic adjective 'odd' which is supported by 'strange' ('strange and dread / Magical forms') and 'queer' ('a queer broken glass', where 'queer' is a significant choice since Shelley originally used the more literal adjective 'green'³⁸). The word 'odd' occurs twice in the second passage: 'some odd hooks', 'some odd volumes of old chemistry' (where at first sight it looks like an intensification and almost provokes a curious internal rhyme). The phrase 'odd volumes' denotes a broken set and there is a sense in which the contents of Shelley's study do not add up to a predictable or conventional collection; but 'odd' also suggests that there is something inexplicable and teasing both about the whole scene and its component parts. An unexpected copy of Baron de Tott's *Mémoires sur les Turcs et les Tartares* (1784) is discovered next to three books on conic sections, spherics and logarithms, and the odd volumes of old chemistry.³⁹ Even if the collection is less startling than might appear, the baffling juxtapositions of Shelley's text do not elicit the careful delineations and distinctions of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (another possible ancestor) as in 'Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles,

37 'An odd or whimsical trifle; a knick-knack' (2.b.).

38 BSM XIV: 109.

39 François de Tott, whose *Mémoires* 'were an important source of knowledge of Ottoman culture and habits in Europe', might seem at first to represent one of Shelley's literary concerns: in fact, he founded the Imperial School of Naval Engineering in 1773, which makes him of special relevance to Henry Reveley, while his Turkish experience might also have interested Maria Gisborne who had been brought up in Constantinople. See Franca Dellarosa, 'Reading the Nights: Echoes of The Arabian Nights Entertainments in the Romantic Era', in *Poetic and Dramatic Forms in British Romanticism*, Franca Dellarosa (ed.). Bari: Editori Laterza, 2006, pp. 164–5.

Billet-doux' (1. 137); but Shelley's text finds its own way of indicating confusion and disorder among plenitude. His inventive 'oddity' is very different from that of Belinda's boudoir but, like Pope's poem though less indicatively, Shelley's verse-letter does recreate a world which is made up of tangible objects and things with their own distinct identities. In 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' things are oddly, or strangely, or queerly, or even inexplicably, themselves. No formula, or shape, or size, can adequately or comprehensively indicate this awkward but pleasing variety of things which are distinctly individual in their separate identities.

Shelley is much concerned with the question of audience, or readership (and, by extension, with friendship), and these issues feature both in his prose letter of 26 May and in 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'. In the prose letter he mentions Godwin ('the only sincere enemy I have in the world', but an object of special admiration), Hunt ('To see Hunt, is to like him') and Hogg (who is hard to know but 'very unlike & inexpressibly superior <to> the great mass of men').⁴⁰ The verse-letter includes Godwin, Coleridge (whom Shelley did not know personally), Hunt (here accorded 17 lines), Hogg ('One of the richest of the deep'), Peacock and, briefly, Horace Smith. The list is similar to that in the letter but more expansive since it runs to six names rather than three and introduces Coleridge, Peacock and Horace Smith. In the event, five of these six were specifically encountered by the Gisbornes (the exception was Peacock).

In the last paragraph of the poem, Shelley offers an invitation: 'Next winter you must pass with me; I'll have / My house by that time turned into a grave / Of dead despondence and low-thoughted care'. And he admits that among his guests he wishes to include most of the literary celebrities the Gisbornes were to visit in London: 'Oh, that Hunt, Hogg, Peacock and Smith were there, / With every thing belonging to them fair!' The absence of Godwin and Coleridge is not surprising; the other four were Shelley's closest friends and all associated with possible travel to Italy (famously, Hunt did arrive in Leghorn scarcely a week before Shelley's drowning and Horace Smith did set out for Pisa but ended up in Paris). Both kinds of letter serve as a kind of introduction and both listings are animated by Shelley's double desire that the Gisbornes should move in the most interesting intellectual circles and that they should transmit news of his friends. Since the poem recurrently addresses questions of literary reputation and enduring fame, and since it is engaged by the distorting effect of tiresome and ephemeral reviewers ('The idle buzzers of the day') and bigoted readers posing as objective critics ('clergymen'), its short catalogue is particularly interesting; it identifies a high percentage of those in England to whom his work was primarily addressed (others in Italy such as Byron, Claire Clairmont, Mrs Mason and the Gisbornes themselves should not be forgotten).

This final paragraph envisages the possibility that much of this small but ideal audience will join him as house-guests and participate in a 'friendly philosophic revel'. The imagined presence of Maria Gisborne would certainly explain the provision of 'lady-like luxuries', just as the mild vegetarian diet is in accord with Shelley's own practice, while the drinking of tea seems to be a private joke shared by the Shelleys and the Gisbornes (see 'We'll toss up who died first of drinking tea'

40 *Letters* II: 202–3.

[l. 90]).⁴¹ The poem also flouts the usual requirements of an *invitatio*, or invitation poem, by substituting tea and toast for wine (much later at Pisa, Shelley was to complain of Byron's dinner-parties where he was forced to contemplate 'the rest making themselves vats of claret &c. till 3 o'Clock in the morning'⁴²). Shelley's poem had already remembered 'how we often made / Feasts for each other, where good will outweighed / The frugal luxury of our country cheer'), so that the final invitation is freighted by these earlier memories and carries the remembered past into the anticipated future. There may even be an intended connection between the 'frugal luxury' (another self-deprecating oxymoron) of previous occasions and the 'lady-like luxuries' which he now promises. Once more, as in the case of 'feast', such 'luxury' redefines the received meaning and practice of self-indulgence.

Characteristically, or generically, the *invitatio* insists on the humbleness of the offered fare yet, by introducing an alternative menu of tea, toast, custards, syllabubs, jellies and mince-pies, Shelley's verse invitation seems to imply that feasting can be a sensual pleasure which need not involve the heavy excess so widely common at this time (as in the case of the public banquets organized for the Prince Regent and much scorned by Shelley). In the draft Shelley had explored the possibility of introducing his wife as presiding presence of the kitchen: 'These Mary will provide.' This suggestion he cancelled, with the effect that, although Mary was a very good friend of the Gisbornes and in particular of Maria, she is never mentioned in the poem, while Maria Gisborne is accorded final centrality; nor did Shelley pursue the metaphorical possibilities of the philosophic revel which he had also raised in the draft when mentioning 'The welcome sauce of the divinest smiles'.⁴³ The prominent word 'Feasting' (emphatically placed, like 'Feasts', at the beginning of a line) reclaims such apparently self-indulgent activities for positive purposes; a 'friendly philosophic revel' with its 'thought-entangled descant' suggests an alternative *Symposium*. This version of Plato's dialogue (which Shelley had translated), or of Peacock's cerebral novels, gently introduces a new set of values and awards climactic position to luxuries which are challengingly defined as 'lady-like'. Here, as elsewhere in Shelley's poem, there is an obvious element of self-deprecation, but the transaction carries larger and more significant possibilities. Like the substitution of a seemingly 'weak' verse-letter for sterner and more elevated poetic forms, Shelley's touches of Augustan delicacy and decorum and his implied tribute to the virtues of friendship unmistakably intimate that there is something therapeutic and refreshingly positive about a mode which so easily could be dismissed as the trivial discourse of 'babbling gossips', or the simplicities of a verse-letter which is merely 'lady-like'.

In fact, the strategy of 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' is not only positive but, at least temporarily, transformative. Shelley's poem introduces many of the themes which haunt his more 'serious' texts but, within the framework of this verse-epistle, they are suspended and held in place (though not forgotten) by the processes of genial translation and the restraining conventions of the verse-epistle. Among many

41 See, for example, *Maria Gisborne & Edward Williams*, pp. 35, 36, 38, 40, 44, 45, 46; *MWS Letters I*: 110, 129, 132, 143.

42 *Letters II*: 379.

43 *BSM XIV*: 119.

other topics, the 'Letter' treats of the following: the Inquisition, torture, volcanoes, contemporary politics, the desolation of the city, and the Spanish Armada, subjects which had featured with memorable force in his most recent work: *The Cenci*, *Prometheus Unbound*, 'England in 1819' and the Political Songs, 'Peter Bell the Third', 'The Mask of Anarchy' and 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (the last four unpublished in Shelley's lifetime), and in 'Ode to Liberty' (which very soon would be published with *Prometheus Unbound*). Not least because of Maria Gisborne, Spain with its political evolutions, and contemporary revolutions, was a particular point of focus.

These Spanish contexts afford a particular cogency to the tribute to Calderón. Primarily, this is a personal tribute to Maria Gisborne but (like 'A Defence of Poetry' which dates from early in the following year) 'Letter' specifically celebrates the liberating powers of creative imagination and of the medium of language. The poem explicitly asserts the ultimate political consequences of a fearless and inventive literature: 'The language of a land which now is free / And winged with thoughts of truth and majesty / Flits round the tyrant's sceptre like a cloud' (ll. 176–8). Or as Shelley puts it in the very different generic context of 'A Philosophical View of Reform': 'Whose country produced Calderon & Cervantes, what else did it, but breathe into the tumult of the despotism & superstition which invested them, the prophecy of a glorious consummation?'⁴⁴ Likewise, the mechanist (who will soon represent the unimaginative and routinely calculating tendency in contemporary society in 'A Defence of Poetry') is here identified with the poet himself and given a favourable shading by Shelley's use of Spenser's preferred adjective 'mighty'. Even the Shelley persona's repeated insistence on his own intellectual limitations (for instance, 'a horrid mass / Of tin and iron not to be understood' [ll. 48–9]) is only food for gentle mockery, in place of that grand prophetic denunciation of imaginative failure which animates the much earlier excluding criterion, 'not understood by all' ('Mont Blanc', l. 81).

Shelley's verse-letter is also much concerned with personal reputation which, as he knew only too well, was often inextricably connected with the question of literary standing. His correspondence at this time reveals that the household was troubled by other urgencies: the fate of the 'Neapolitan child'; blackmailing servants (notably Paolo Foggi, whose machinations Shelley hoped to thwart by moving into Casa Ricci, where he might be advised by a shrewd Livornese lawyer); and financial matters involving Godwin ('this detested business of the house, and the torturing correspondence it gives rise to',⁴⁵ as Shelley described it to John Gisborne when he entrusted him with the difficult responsibility of concluding this protracted and troubling affair on his London visit). In the letter to the two Gisbornes which probably contained the verse 'Letter', he gave vent to his painful feelings on the subject of scandal, reputation and fame: 'The reflection is full of bitterness, as most of the draughts are which life presents to me.'⁴⁶ Only a few days later, he reported to the Gisbornes that his 'Neapolitan charge' was dead: 'It seems as if the destruction

44 Text of 'A Philosophical View of Reform' from *SC* VI: 986.

45 *MWS Letters* I: 152.

46 *Letters* II: 206.

that is consuming me were as an atmosphere which wrapt & infected everything connected with me An ounce of civet good apothecary to sweeten this dunghill of a world.⁴⁷ At more than one point, the poem alludes to these disturbing matters, only to place them in a perspective which is dismissive but concerning: 'The jarring and inexplicable frame / Of this wrong world' (ll. 159–60). This is a momentary but disturbing intrusion of that darker external reality which earlier in the poem troubles his Livornese seclusion. These plangent lines remind us that the apparently exuberant 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' has a melancholy undertow which is kept in place, even if troublingly admitted, by the overriding structure of the poem as a whole, and the vivid, compensating evocation of 'such things'. As Alan Weinberg has argued,⁴⁸ the genre of the verse-epistle provides a necessary distance; it also introduces the focusing and restraining effect of rhyming couplets, an intimate atmosphere which implies at least some coincidence of interests and values, and the presiding and controlling presence of Maria Gisborne (or the Gisborne family).

There is at least one other way in which the model of the letter illuminates Shelley's practice in 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'. When the poem was eventually published in 1824, it carried the usual freight of punctuation. This may have had the effect of making it more immediately intelligible but it also separated the verse-letter from its origins. In the absence of the original letter, the draft may carry a special validity, although John Gisborne's transcript may be a faithful copy; both are underpunctuated by traditional standards, yet they provide food for textual reflection. Crucially, what holds 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' together is not the conventional structure of punctuation but a system of dashes which is still evident in the published version but even more strikingly present in the draft.

Although the 'Letter' is often self-critical and seems to question its own significance, Shelley's poetic skills are quietly but unmistakably at work from the very beginning where readers are introduced to the image of the poet as spider in a paragraph which comprises one long sentence; this opening sets the tone for the whole poem which the spider/poet is about to weave (or create) and which the Gisbornes are expected to read. Such preliminary acrobatics are even surpassed by the sustained audacities of the second paragraph, which runs from lines 15 to 54 and further demonstrates Shelley's assured grammatical and rhetorical control of a long sentence with a dazzling equipoise of movement and detail. Here as elsewhere, Shelley is exercising both his performative and transformative skills and showing the Gisbornes (and us, as secondary readers) what inventiveness can achieve. The poetic process demonstrates its own creative capacities by turning sublime Archimedes into a weird Archimage or by running a riff, though only for part of the verse-letter, on words beginning 'qu' ('quick', 'quips', 'quaff' [twice], 'quicksilver', 'quaint' [twice], 'queer', 'Quenching'). The unexpected connections and juxtapositions, the sudden switches, the linking of the intimate and the generalized, are licensed by the code of the verse-letter; but such adventurous poetic manoeuvres are also made more easily possible by the medium of light or permissive punctuation which enables the relaxed virtuosities of the improvisatory imagination.

47 *Letters* II: 211.

48 Alan Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience*, p. 10.

'Letter to Maria Gisborne' cannot readily be compared to the letters of Keats or Byron but, like them, it employs a system of punctuation which is constantly and deliberately open-ended. In this way, Shelley is always ready to surprise the Gisbornes. Even at the very end, the poem which celebrates community and friendship, twists away from its expected conclusion. Although its final Miltonic quotation seems to suggest a 'happy' ending and clicks satisfyingly into place with a concluding harmony, the previous line is oddly out of key: 'Sweet meeting by sad parting to renew.' This formulation implies that, in spite of seemingly happy contiguities, the prevailing pattern of life is one of 'sad partings'. Even at the time of writing, the Gisbornes (who had frequently proved elusive when they lived in Italy) were far away in London, as were nearly all Shelley's closest friends, in spite of importunities and frequent invitations. And yet the word 'renew' is a balancing positive; perhaps renewal can only exist in such bittersweet circumstances. If the poem remains surprisingly open to the end, perhaps that is a tribute not only to Shelley's subtle imagination but to the open-endedness of the medium itself.

Chapter 7

Shelley's Neapolitan-Tuscan Poetics: 'Sonnet: Political Greatness' and the 'Republic' of Benevento

*Michael Rossington**

I

First published by Mary Shelley in *Posthumous Poems* (1824), Shelley's poem beginning 'Nor happiness, nor majesty, nor fame' was there accorded the title 'Sonnet II. / Political Greatness', and placed second in a sequence of four sonnets, the other three identified by number alone.¹ Timothy Webb has summarized the interpretative consensus thus: 'The poem suggests that political revolutions are of little value unless they are accompanied or preceded by an interior, psychological revolution.'² P.M.S. Dawson's refinement of this gloss sees the poem's essence, 'Man who man would be, / Must rule the empire of himself' (ll. 10–11),³ as the expression of philosophical anarchism, a view reinforced by its title's echo of that of Godwin's

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1 *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. London, 1824, p. 223.

2 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb. London: Dent (Everyman), 1977, p. 216.

3 Citations from the sonnet in my opening paragraph are from the version published in *Posthumous Poems*.

most celebrated work, *Political Justice*.⁴ Support for other kinds of interiorized readings has been provided by Earl Wasserman who comments that “‘Being himself alone’ was Shelley’s standard phrase for self-possession, or for absoluteness and autonomy”,⁵ and by Donald Reiman. The latter notes, in the words from lines 10–11 quoted above, an echo of Shelley’s pained and deeply private letter of 11 March 1820 to the Gisbornes in which he contemplates the means by which Mary Shelley, then in a state of acute dejection, ‘would obtain empire over herself’.⁶

In contrast, and by close reference to its prompt, the Neapolitan revolution of 1820, this chapter seeks to explore other aspects of the poem’s analysis of, and antidote to, ‘voluntary servitude’. By invoking this phrase, which was used by Shelley in a letter to Peacock of 25 February 1819,⁷ I identify the sonnet’s preoccupations with Étienne de la Boétie’s *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (c. 1553) that Claire Clairmont translated, then fair copied, in the spring of 1820.⁸ La Boétie’s scrutiny of the obstacles to political liberty is adopted within a predominantly republican tradition, familiar to Shelley, that takes in not only Plato but Dante, Machiavelli and Alfieri who may all be described as Tuscan (if not, in Alfieri’s case, by birth).⁹ Moreover la Boétie’s essay had a distinctively rebellious incarnation in Cesare Paribelli’s Italian translation published in Naples in 1799, or, as its title-page asserts, ‘Anno Settimo Repubblicano [*sic*]’, that is, the seventh year of the French revolutionary calendar adopted by the Parthenopean republic after the Neapolitan revolution of January that year.¹⁰ A possible distant echo of la Boétie’s essay in the title of Shelley’s sonnet

4 P.M.S. Dawson, “‘King over Himself’: Shelley’s Philosophical Anarchism”. *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 30 (1979), pp. 16–35. Michael O’Neill observed to me in conversation another echo of Shelley’s title in Caleb’s questioning of the adjective ‘Great’ as applied to Alexander in *Caleb Williams*, in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp. 8 vols. London: Pickering, 1992, vol. 3, pp. 98–101.

5 *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, p. 181 n. 2.

6 SC VIII: 1063 n. 12. The letter was first published in David M. Stocking and Marion Kingston Stocking, ‘New Shelley Letters in a John Gisborne Notebook’. *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 31 (1980), pp. 1–9 (pp. 2–4).

7 The context was a visit to the Grotto del Cane, near Naples, where, as a spectacle for tourists, dogs were pushed into the cave to show the fatal effects of the carbon dioxide it naturally produced. Shelley explained: ‘we ... wd. not allow the dog to be exhibited in torture for our curiosity. The poor little animals stood moving their tails in a slow & dismal manner as if perfectly resigned to their condition; a curlike emblem of voluntary servitude’ (*Letters II*: 78).

8 *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968, pp. 131–7. Claire records translating from 1 to 22 March then ‘transcribing’ from 24 March to 3 April. The essay is praised by Mary Shelley in her ‘Montaigne’ in *Mary Shelley’s Literary Lives and Other Writings*, ed. Nora Crook. 4 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002, vol. 2, p. 306.

9 For an account of la Boétie within such a tradition, see Michael Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude: False Consciousness and the Theory of Ideology*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, pp. 54–100.

10 Nicola Panichi, *Plutarchus Redivivus? La Boétie e i suoi interpreti* seguito da *Discorso di Stefano della Boétie Della schiavitù volontaria o il Contra Uno*. Naples: Vivarium, 1999

may be found in the following passage where, identifying three kinds of tyrant, who obtain their kingdoms either by force of arms, or by birth, or by popular election, he comments of the last:

Celui à qui le peuple a donné l'état devrait être, ce me semble, plus supportable, et le serait, comme je crois, n'était que dès lors qu'il se voit élevé par-dessus les autres, flatté par je ne sais quoi qu'on appelle la grandeur, il délibère de n'en bouger point. [The person to whom the people have granted the state ought to be, in my opinion, more acceptable and would be so, I think, were it not for the fact that from the very moment when he sees himself raised above the others, flattered by something of that quality which we call greatness, he plans not to be moved from that position].¹¹

Certainly three of the six popular magazines and literary journals which reprinted the sonnet in 1824 and 1839, soon after its publication in Mary Shelley's editions of those years, testify to its adoption by English readerships of a republican cast.¹²

But Shelley's concern is also, as it had been in 'Ozymandias', with the function of art in furthering liberty. Built into the craft of 'Political Greatness' is an adaptability similar to the earlier sonnet that makes it both a commentary on an historical predicament *vis-à-vis* tyranny at once particular and universal, and, in Paul Hamilton's usage of the term, a 'metaromantic' reflection on the role of art in providing the means by which such a commentary can take place.¹³ The title ultimately given to the sonnet by Shelley is thus a rebuttal of an injunction by Peacock, probably made in one of the many letters eventually destroyed by the latter, to which Shelley refers in a letter of 21 March 1821: 'the news in the papers will tell you far more than it is prudent for me to say; and for this once I will observe your rule of Political Silence—the Austrians wish that the Neapolitans & Piedmontese would do the same.' He went on to request Peacock to procure two seals, 'the device, a dove with outspread wings & this motto round it. Μάντις εμ' εσθλων αγώνων.—' ['I predict a victory in the struggle!']¹⁴

[p. I].

11 Étienne de la Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, ed. Simone Goyard-Fabre. Paris: Flammarion, 1983, p. 143.

12 See Karsten Klejs Engelberg, *The Making of the Shelley Myth: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism of Percy Bysshe Shelley 1822–1860*. London: Mansell, 1988, p. 98. The reprinting of the sonnet in *The Newgate Monthly Magazine; or Calendar of Men, Things, and Opinions* 2.8 (1 April 1826), pp. 343–4, is one example: the journal was dedicated to Richard Carlile. The other two are *The London Democrat* 1 (13 April 1839), p. 8, and *The National: A Library for the People* [26] (29 June 1839), p. 353.

13 See Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 1–22.

14 *Letters* II: 276–7, though the Greek motto is given here as it appears in the original MS of the letter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, [Abinger] Dep. b. 214/4) in which Shelley (correctly) cancelled the iota he had written at the end of the second word. The accents and breathings, which are in paler ink and done with a finer nib, were almost certainly added by Peacock, perhaps just before the letter's first publication in *Fraser's Magazine* 61 (March 1860), pp. 315–17 (where, however, *Fraser's* fails to reproduce accurately the second of the six accents supplied by Peacock). The Greek, used as epigraph for *Hellas* (1822), is from

As well as examining the sonnet's politics, there is also an attempt in what follows to address various problems it has posed to editors, including the question of which of Shelley's two manuscript fair copies is to be taken as copy-text. In this regard, a reader of the poem in two recent paperback selections of his poetry and prose, one edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (*SPP*), the other by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, might justifiably be intrigued. Reiman and Fraistat chose as the basis of their text the intermediate fair copy entitled 'Sonnet: To the Republic of Benevento' in the Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter *Harvard MS*).¹⁵ The poem in Leader and O'Neill's edition is based on the neat fair copy in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (hereafter *adds. c. 5*, see Fig. 7.1).¹⁶ Like Webb in his edition,¹⁷ Leader and O'Neill add a comma to line 7 after 'fleet' (meaning 'hurry' or 'hasten'), to the *adds. c. 5* text,¹⁸ an entirely defensible intervention that ensures the reader takes in the emphasis of that verb, on which lines 4 to 9 hinge:

Sonnet.

Political greatness

- Nor happiness, nor majesty nor fame,
 Nor peace nor strength, nor skill in arms or arts
 Shepherd those herds whom Tyranny makes tame:
 Verse echoes not one beating of their hearts;
 5 History is but the shadow of their shame;
 Art veils her glass, or from the pageant starts
 As to oblivion their blind millions fleet
 Staining that Heaven with obscene imagery
 Of their own likeness. What are numbers, knit
 10 By force or custom? Man, who man would be,
 Must rule the empire of himself; in it
 Must be supreme, establishing his throne
 On vanquished will; quelling the anarchy
 Of hopes and fears; being himself alone.

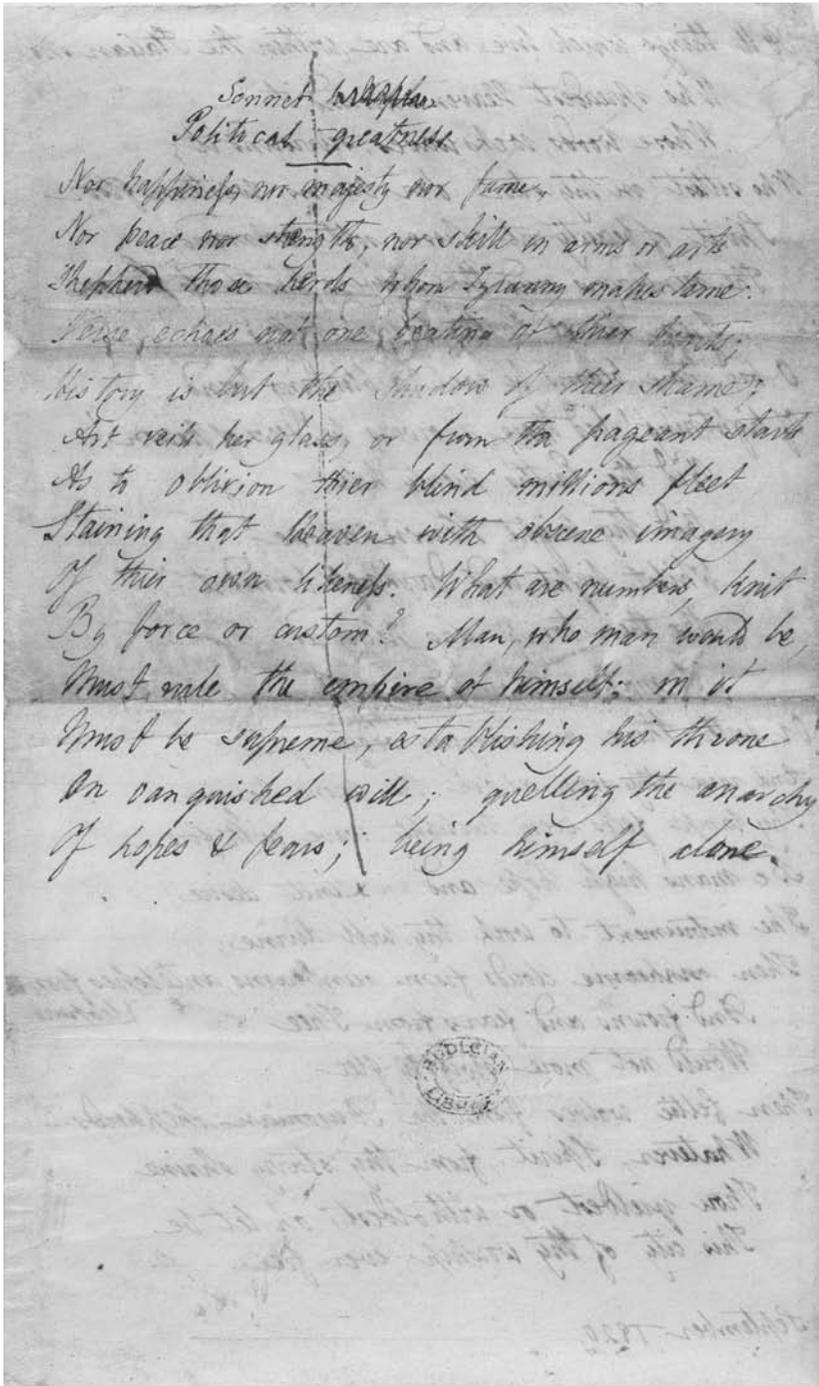
Oedipus Coloneus l. 1080. The translation supplied here is from *Sophocles*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 533. James Bieri notes that one of the seals was probably 'intended as [a gift] from Mary Shelley to [Alexander] Mavrocordato' (*Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography. Exile of Unfulfilled Reknown [sic], 1816–1822*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005, p. 233).

15 *SPP*: 327. For a facsimile of Harvard MS Eng. 258.2, p. 152 (*Harvard MS*), see *MYR* V: 149.

16 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 510. For a facsimile and transcription by Alan Weinberg of Bod. MS Shelley *adds. c. 5*, fol. 132v (*adds. c. 5*), see *BSM* XXII (2): 318–19.

17 Webb, *Selected Poems*, pp. 123–4.

18 I read a colon in *adds. c. 5* after 'tame' in l. 3, not a full-stop as given in *BSM* XXII (2): 319.



7.1 MS fair copy of 'Sonnet: Political Greatness'

Versions of the poem different to those presented in the above-mentioned editions were published in two earlier, and similarly comprehensive, selections. Francesco Rognoni,¹⁹ like the first (1977) Norton edition of Reiman and Powers, follows *Harvard MS* whereas Webb largely follows *adds. c. 5* but adopts the *Harvard MS* title. As a means to exploring further the poem's double textual life, itself worn under differently-titled guises, this chapter finds itself preoccupied with when its different versions were composed. This is another matter on which recent editors' judgements are various: 'uncertain, probably sometime after July 1820' (Leader and O'Neill); 'between July and September 1820' (*SPP*); 'Probabilmente ... nel settembre del 1820' [probably in September 1820] (Rognoni) and 'Probably ... at the end of summer 1820' (Webb).²⁰

II

It was an insurrection at Nola near Naples on 1–2 July 1820, initiated by army officers and *carbonari*, which created a crisis for the Spanish Bourbon king, Ferdinand IV (1751–1825, renamed Ferdinand I of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1816). He was forced to accede to the demand of the rebels' leader, Guglielmo Pepe, for the Spanish Constitution of 1812 that had been proclaimed by another mutinous army general, Rafael de Riego at Cadiz on 1 January 1820.²¹ Claire Clairmont greeted the 'Report of the Revolution at Naples' on 16 July with a pithy pronouncement on its genesis: 'This is glorious & is produced by the Revolution in Spain.'²² A few days later Mary Shelley's report of events to Maria Gisborne in London from the Gisbornes' house in Leghorn displayed a similar confidence. Buoyed by the ostensibly lasting success of the liberal cause in Spain, she envisaged an epochal change in the Italian peninsula:

Are you not, or will you not be delighted to hear of the Revolution at Naples. The Duke of Campochiaro was at the head of it—They assembled before the gates of the palace, and the old pastry Cook ordered the Soldiers to fire on them—they refused, and he was obliged to compromise by turning out his old ministry and filling their places by popular nobles and entreating the people's patience until a constitution should be formed. Thirty years ago was the era for Republics, and they all fell—This is the era for *constitutions*.

19 Shelley, *Opere*, ed. Francesco Rognoni. Turin: Einaudi-Gallimard, 1995, pp. 722–5.

20 Leader and O'Neill, *Major Works*, p. 794; *SPP*: 327; Rognoni, *Opere*, p. 1603; Webb, *Selected Poems*, p. 216.

21 Harry Hearder notes that this Constitution 'granted universal male suffrage, direct elections and a single-chamber legislature' (*Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento 1790–1870*. London: Longman, 1983, p. 137). As well as Hearder, I am indebted to accounts of Italy in the Napoleonic and Restoration periods by Robert Gildea, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800–1914*, 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, Alexander Grab, 'From the French Revolution to Napoleon' and David Laven, 'The Age of Restoration', in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century 1796–1900*, John A. Davis (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 25–50, 51–73, and Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy 1700–1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change*. London: Routledge, 1991.

22 Stocking, *Journals of Claire Clairmont*, p. 156.

I only hope that these latter may in the end remove the mother of the former. What a glorious thing it will be if Lombardy regains its freedom—and Tuscany—all is so mild there that it will be the last, and yet in the end I hope the people here will raise their fallen souls and bodies, and become something better than they are.²³

This sketch emphasizes the imminent possibility of the Italian states recovering that liberty constitutive of their independent identities since at least the medieval period articulated by Sismondi in *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge* (1818), a work the Shelleys began reading enthusiastically at Naples in January 1819.²⁴ Mary Shelley hopes that ‘constitutions’ will remove the Bourbon monarchy, ‘the mother’ (that is, in a Greek tragic sense, the cause),²⁵ of the unstable and short-lived Napoleonic Republics of 1797–99, including the Parthenopean republic. But her letter was misguidedly optimistic. She underestimated the durability of the Restoration régimes generally as well as the treachery, brutal vindictiveness and infinite capacity to be restored to his throne, specific to the anti-liberal Ferdinand, at 69 then the most senior monarch in Europe. But her ridicule is perceptive, making that king, in the idiom of ‘England in 1819’, if not ‘old, mad, blind ... and dying’, then senescent and certainly ‘despised’. The contemptuous reference to him as a ‘pastry cook’ alludes to his setting up a confectioner’s shop and to his wide renown for preferring common trade over the duty of government proper to majesty.²⁶ Moreover the final sentence of the above quotation, in its hope that the Tuscans will now be roused from their characteristic torpor, is so close to the sentiment of Shelley’s sonnet that it may be seen as part of a shared outlook and tentatively advanced in support of those editors who see the sonnet as first drafted at this time. She later sought to redeem the failure of the constitutional revolution in Piedmont in March 1821, arguing that ‘if the attempt had not been made, the Italians would have lost their characteristic of being slaves “ognor frementi,” and have sunk into as degraded an existence as that of the Fanariotes of Constantinople’. But at the same time she noted, witheringly, the recalcitrant serenity of another Italian state: ‘Tuscany alone was tranquil. They talked of liberty, but their enthusiasm began and ended in talk.’²⁷

23 *MWS Letters* I: 156 (I read ‘mother’ [l. 7] in the MS of this letter, where Bennett gives ‘[?mothes]’). The Duke of Campo Chiaro was one of five members of the new cabinet according to *Annual Register ... for the year 1820* (London, 1822), p. 311.

24 See *MWS Letters* I: 85.

25 In this regard, see Shelley’s application of Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* ll. 759–60 to the Greek cause in a letter to Mary of August 1821 (*Letters* II: 325).

26 See Maria Gisborne’s letter to Mary Shelley of 23 August 1820, in *Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams: Shelley’s Friends. Their Journals and Letters*, ed. Frederick L. Jones. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951, p. 65.

27 ‘The English in Italy’ (1826), in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, ed. Nora Crook. 8 vols. London: William Pickering, 1996, vol. 2, pp. 151–2. The phrase ‘*schiavi ognor frementi*’ is used in the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*. Nora Crook translates it as ‘perpetually restless slaves’ (*Novels and Selected Works* I: 191 n. a) and notes that Mary is likely to have recalled ‘*ognor frementi*’ in De Staël, *Corinne, ou l’Italie*, 3 vols. Paris, 1807, vol. 1, p. 169: ‘*Servi siam sì, ma servi ognor frementi. / Nous sommes esclaves, mais des esclaves toujours frémissans, dit Alfieri*’. But, given her use of the word ‘*schiavi*’ not ‘*servi*’, Mary may also have known the source: Sonnet XVIII, in Alfieri’s *Il Misogallo: Prose, e Rime*

A likely source of the Shelleys' sanguine view of events in Naples in the immediate aftermath of Pepe's *coup* was *le Constitutionnel*, a Paris-based daily founded in 1815 by an ex-Jacobin, that was available at Leghorn (Livorno).²⁸ In its report from Naples dated 17 July the origins of the uprising are ascribed not to a small group of men but, in grandiloquent language, to a whole populace willing to be enlightened:

On se tromperait étrangement, si l'on imaginait en Europe que le mouvement de quelques hommes a été le seul ressort de la révolution napolitaine. Nous pouvons aujourd'hui le publier: c'était une vaste entreprise, conduite avec constance et générosité et avec les sentimens d'humanité, fruit nécessaire des progrès de la civilisation; pas une goutte de sang n'a souillé ce triomphe. [One would be oddly mistaken if in Europe one thought that the movement of a few men was the only impulse behind the Neapolitan revolution. We are able to make it known today that it was a vast enterprise, conducted with perseverance and generosity and with the feelings of humanity that are the inevitable result of the progress of civilisation; not a drop of blood tarnished this triumph].²⁹

The *Examiner*, allied in its politics with the *Constitutionnel*, expressed similar satisfaction at the exemplary course of events noting the 'completion of a great revolution in seven days, without the loss of a single life, and in the most perfect order and good humour'.³⁰ As Kenneth Neill Cameron notes, Leigh Hunt had silently co-opted Shelley to the wider cause of Italian liberty by quoting, though not sourcing, a passage from a verse paragraph about Padua (ll. 256–82) in 'Lines Written among the Euganean Hills, October, 1818' (published in *Rosalind and Helen: A Modern Eclogue; with Other Poems* [1819]) in his leading article on the Neapolitan Revolution of 30 July 1820.³¹ But by then fissures were apparent amidst the revolutionary unrest even if Shelley was unable to see them.

His letter of the same date conveys to Mary the 'bad news from Palermo' of 'a terrible slaughter' that ensued when the new constitutional government of Naples did battle with Sicilians demanding a return to their pre-1816 independence. Shelley's understanding of the initial outcome, from what he acknowledged to be an unauthoritative source – 'the brief & partial accounts of the Florence Paper' (possibly the *Gazzetta di Firenze*) that 'The event how ever was as it should be—Sicily like Naples is free', was woefully beside the mark.³² To most recent historians the uprising in Sicily confirmed the successful strategy of the continued fragmentation of Italy bequeathed by Napoleon and reinforced by Metternich. But Shelley's outsider interpretation followed the liberal English desire to believe in a

[‘The Francophobe: Prose and Verse’]. Londra [i.e. Florence], 1799, p. 72: ‘Schiavi or siam, si; ma schiavi almen frementi’ [At present we are slaves, but at least restless slaves].

28 See *Letters* II: 234. It was published under this title from 1819, as noted in Stendhal, *Rome, Naples and Florence*, trans. Richard N. Coe. London: John Calder, 1959, p. 522.

29 *Constitutionnel* (28 July 1820), p. 2.

30 Extract of a letter dated 14 July in *Examiner* (6 August 1820) in *The Examiner*, 1808–22, introd. Yasuo Deguchi. 15 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996–98, vol. 14, p. 501.

31 *Examiner* (30 July 1820) in *The Examiner*, vol. 14, p. 481. *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 371.

32 *Letters* II: 223.

unified, as opposed to factionalized, Italian patriotism, and adhered to the reformist agenda of the *Constitutionnel* by which the Sicilians would come to abide by constitutional principles as opposed to revolutionary or quiescent ones.³³ On 17 August, her information based on *Galignani's Messenger*, the Paris-based English-language daily to which the Shelleys subscribed, Mary Shelley told Amelia Curran that 'Austrian troops are coming here' ('here' meaning Tuscany).³⁴ On 21 August, the *Constitutionnel* published a report, dated 30 July, announcing the threat of an Austrian invasion, and another, on 28 August, that troops would arrive by the end of September. In these circumstances, at the end of August, Shelley wrote 'Ode to Naples' with the intention of alerting the readership of the Whig London daily, the *Morning Chronicle*, to the crisis in the constitutionalists' cause.³⁵ On 1 September, in Leghorn with Claire, he was party to news 'by private letters from Merchants', that suggested Europe-wide commotion, including 'an attack made by the populace on the Tuileries', and the constitutional party's threat to kill all members of the royal family 'if the Emperor [Francis I of Austria] should make war upon them'. In another twist upon the vocabulary of the sonnet, Shelley remarked of the latter 'measure': 'That kings should be every where hostages for liberty were admirable!' He then speculated in nervous anticipation on the fate of liberal expatriates, possibly having in mind the similar position of Mary Wollstonecraft in France in 1793: 'What will become of the Gisbornes, or of the English at Paris.—How soon will England itself & perhaps Italy be caught by the Sacred fire? And what, to come from the solar system to a grain of sand, shall we do.'³⁶ But by the spring of 1821, with short-lived constitutional revolutions in Piedmont and Massa overcome, it was clear that Russia and Prussia, the two other members of 'The Holy Alliance', would acquiesce in Austria's predicted re-establishment of control in Italy by use of armed force.³⁷ The 'Sacred fire', fanned from the 'sacred flame' of liberty invoked by Hunt, was now almost extinguished. Late in 1820 Ferdinand had escaped from captivity in Naples and Metternich's Congress of Powers, which met at Troppau in October and Laibach in January 1821, deployed the Austrian army to recover his kingdom. The inevitable defeat of Pepe took place at Rieti on 7 March 1821, and Ferdinand's brutal execution, followed the re-occupation of Naples later that month. On 4 May, Shelley confided bleakly to Byron: 'This attempt in Italy has certainly been a most unfortunate business. With no strong personal reasons to interest me, my disappointment on

33 See Laven, 'The Age of Restoration', pp. 52–7, and Gildea, *Barricades and Borders*, pp. 65–6. In his 30 July letter Shelley contrasts the prospect of 'a Revolution' to 'a Reform', hoping for the latter (*Letters* II: 223).

34 *MWS Letters* I: 158.

35 On the circumstances of the Ode's composition, see my 'Claire Clairmont's Fair Copy of Shelley's "Ode to Naples": A Rediscovered Manuscript', *Review of English Studies* n. s. 56 (2005), pp. 59–89 (63–4).

36 *Letters* II: 234. On Wollstonecraft's situation in France, see Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life*. London: Phoenix Press, 2000, Chs 20–22.

37 The revolution at Massa is noted in Mary's journal entry of 28 March 1821 (*MS Journals* I: 358), and her 1839 edition of Shelley's poems (*PW* II: 343).

public grounds has been excessive. But I cling to moral and political hope, like a drowner to a plank.³⁸

III

Whereas Mary Shelley placed the sonnet amongst ‘Poems written in 1821’ in her first 1839 collected edition of Shelley’s poetical works,³⁹ recent editors, as noted above, date its composition to the previous summer. This view is given weight by the evidence of the extant manuscript sources. Rough drafts of the sonnet are to be found on facing pages in a notebook in use between early 1820 and the spring of 1821 (hereafter *adds. e. 8*).⁴⁰ The first of these comprises a draft of the opening six-and-a-half lines, and is untitled.⁴¹ Added above the second draft, of the whole poem, is the title ‘Rex sui’. Its most obvious English translation, ‘King of himself’, makes explicit the frequently-noted parallels between lines 10–11 of the sonnet (‘Man, who man would be, / Must rule the empire of himself’) and the description of ‘man’ in *Prometheus Unbound* III, iv, 196–7 as ‘the King / Over himself’.⁴² Given that *Rex* means ‘master’ as well as ‘king’ in Latin, this title also draws attention to the draft of line 12 where the self-possession required of man is seen more overtly as the assumption of kingship than it is in the final version (where the word ‘King’ is not used): ‘A King [] [establishing his throne *canc.*]’.⁴³ ‘Rex sui’ is written above another title, ‘The true Republican’ (the word *true* inserted with a caret), itself a cancelled modification of a first attempt, ‘The Republican’.⁴⁴ In lighter ink than the body of the poem, the three titles were probably added later. In respect of their dating, B.C. Barker-Benfield argues that ‘the close proximity of an abortive address “To the Illustrious assertors of Neapolitan Liberty” ([p.] 148 rev.) supports the sonnet’s

38 *Letters* II: 290–91.

39 *PW* IV: 147.

40 Bod. MS Shelley *adds. e. 8*, pp. 151–150 rev. For a facsimile and transcription by Carlene A. Adamson, see *BSM* VI: 396–9. On the date-range of this notebook’s contents, see Barker-Benfield, *BSM* XXIII: 44.

41 *adds. e. 8*, p. 151 rev.

42 Kelvin Everest (*PS* II: 610) notes that these lines recall *Prometheus Unbound* I, 492. The sonnet also parallels stanzas 16 and 17 of ‘Ode to Liberty’, drafted early May – late June 1820 and published in August 1820 in *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts, with Other Poems*.

43 *adds. e. 8* p. 150 rev. Most of the second draft is on *adds. e. 8* p. 150 rev., but the final wording of the second half of line 12 and the first half of line 13 is on p. 151 rev.

44 As Alan Weinberg commented to me in conversation, there may be a reference in the first title to the journal of that name founded by Richard Carlile in 1819. Shelley would almost certainly have known of it through *Cobbett’s Weekly Register* or the *Examiner*, sent to him regularly from England by Peacock. The ‘Letter to the Examiner’, 3 November 1819, in protest against Carlile’s trial, reflects Shelley’s monitoring of radical publications and their exposure to vindictive censorship. Dawson, “‘King over Himself’”, p. 16, reads the modification to the original title in *adds. e. 8*, p. 150 rev. (unconvincingly in my view) as “‘The Eng[lish?] Republican’.”

accepted context and date [that is, July–September 1820]'.⁴⁵ This view is broadly supported by Carlene Adamson who, however, notes that the draft of *Epipsychidion* also on p. 148 rev. 'clearly written in *after* the fragment was entered', establishes a *terminus ante quem* of February 1821 for the fragmentary address which '[b]y extension ... could safely be applied to the sonnet'.⁴⁶

A similar balance of evidence pertains to *Harvard MS*, the subject of remarks by Reiman which deserve close scrutiny. Of the Harvard MS Eng. 258.2 notebook in general, he comments that the poems 'first written in ... date from the last half of 1819 through the middle of 1820', and judges that, 'The Shelleys ... when they began to use this pristine notebook as a fair-copy book, copied into it intermediate fair copies of recently drafted poems before they retranscribed press copies of them for transmittal to England.'⁴⁷ *Harvard MS* is identified as one such poem. In respect of date, Reiman states, "'Sonnet: To the Republic of Benevento" was written and this fair copy made between July and September 1820.' However he also allows for a separate, distinctively psychological iteration in 'Sonnet: Political Greatness', though whether outside the summer of 1820 time-frame is not stated: 'Shelley's disappointment at the rapid extinction of this brief flickering of the republican ideal expressed itself when he internalized the message of the sonnet in a later version called "Political Greatness"'.⁴⁸ Moreover, in describing the fair copy itself, he notes, 'The text, written entirely in the hand of PBS, shows revisions made by him on two separate occasions, some at the time he was copying the sonnet (from a source yet to be identified) and others later, when he wrote smaller with a finer pen point.'⁴⁹ That the source of this intermediate fair copy may not be *adds. e. 8*, though of interest, is less pertinent for my purposes than Reiman's attention to the evidence in *Harvard MS* of three stages of creative labour, the transcription, then the immediate, followed by the subsequent, revisions to it. This is a reminder of the sense of responsibility in respect of dating that weighs particularly heavily on editors of Shelley's poems. His and Adamson's comments suggest the poem resists fixity in this regard because of the multiple stages of composition and revision for which the manuscript versions provide evidence. The poem's making thereby shows it to be, so to speak, repeatedly beyond itself, a quality that is integral to its theme.

The title of *Harvard MS*, 'Sonnet / To the Republic of Benevento', has been taken to allude to a satellite of the main narrative of the Neapolitan revolution that also began in July 1820. Benevento, a town thirty miles or so north-east of Naples, was one of two Ecclesiastical States within the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies that had been ceded by Henry III to Pope Leo IX in 1053 in exchange for the Bishopric of Bamberg. Vincenzo Cuoco's *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli* [Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution] (1800), a celebrated analysis of the earlier Neapolitan revolution, which Claire Clairmont had begun to read with uncanny prescience in May 1820, notes that Benevento had asserted itself as part of the Parthenopean republic in

45 B.C. Barker-Benfield, *Shelley's Guitar*. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1992, p. 153.

46 *BSM* VI: 26.

47 *MYR* V: xviii.

48 *MYR* V: xxxix.

49 *MYR* V: 193.

1799.⁵⁰ It remained a Papal state until 1806 when Napoleon granted it to Talleyrand with the title of Prince then, in the Restoration settlement of 1815, was restored to the Papacy. As noted by Richard Keppel Craven, who witnessed events in Naples in July 1820, ‘the inhabitants of Pontecorvo and Benevento could not be debarred from all intercourse with those of the surrounding districts: and the fire which had thus been silently kindled was not likely to be extinguished by the inefficient hand of the vicar of pontifical authority.’⁵¹ Soon after the events of 1–2 July at Nola, Andrea Valiante, a hero of the 1799 uprising in Benevento, returned to occupy its fortress and the Papal Delegate fled.⁵² However the constitutional government at Naples refused the requests of Benevento and Pontecorvo for annexation on strategic grounds, as Craven explained:

These two states openly threw off their allegiance to the Court of Rome, and declared their intention of abiding by the fortunes, and sharing the independence, of their neighbours; but the Vicar-General and the new Cabinet wisely disclaimed any wish to avail themselves of these friendly overtures, and even prohibited all Neapolitan subjects from taking any part in the proceedings, which might give umbrage to a power whose goodwill and friendship they were anxious to maintain.⁵³

As a result of the constitutional government’s betrayal of the aspirations of the two states, events took what the *Constitutionnel* described as ‘une tournure singulière’ [a remarkable turn]: ‘les deux états se sont constitués en gouvernements indépendants’ [the two states established themselves as independent governments].⁵⁴ By late August, the same source described them in language that resonates directly with the *Harvard MS* title as ‘complètement organisés en petites républiques’ [completely formed as small republics].⁵⁵ In a passage possibly based upon this last report, the *Military Register*, a liberal weekly which was to reprint Shelley’s ‘Ode to Naples’ in October 1820, remarked, ‘Their baptized bells, which they formerly believed had the power of driving away the devil, are now melted into cannon, for the purpose of keeping out the Pope.’⁵⁶ While such circumstantial evidence supports the editorial

50 Vincenzo Cuoco, *Saggio Storico sulla Rivoluzione di Napoli*, 2nd edn. Milan, 1820, p. 194. Claire read Cuoco between 6 May and 16 August 1820, as noted in Stocking, *Journals of Claire Clairmont*, pp. 146–71.

51 Richard Keppel Craven, *A Tour through the Southern Provinces of the Kingdom of Naples*. London, 1821, p. 448. There may, incidentally, be an allusion to *The Cenci* V, iv, 1–27 in Craven’s preceding sentence: ‘The persevering pertinacity so peculiar to the Romish See, and which, as a modern author observes, forms the distinctive character of a government composed of old men, has obtained the restoration of Benevento by every treaty of peace which has been signed by the Popes and Kings of Naples during the lapse of eight centuries.’

52 See *Galignani’s Messenger* (5 August 1820), p. 4, and Gianni Vergineo, *Storia di Benevento e Dintorni*. 4 vols. Benevento: Gennara Ricolo Editore, 1985–89, vol. 3, p. 21.

53 Craven, p. 448.

54 *Constitutionnel* (22 August 1820), p. 3.

55 *Constitutionnel* (28 August 1820), p. 3.

56 *Military Register* (17 September 1820), p. 365.

consensus about when the sonnet was drafted, it is worth noting that riots against the carbonarist 'junta' in Benevento took place in February 1821.⁵⁷

The revolutionaries who took control of Benevento in July 1820, *carbonari* as well as veteran patriots of 1799, discovered that the historical legacy of Papal authority intimidated the moderate leadership of the constitutional government into denying their incorporation for fear of antagonizing the Holy Alliance. Thus, if *Harvard MS* was written, as Barker-Benfield suggests, in 'late summer 1820',⁵⁸ it may be seen as being prepared to serve, like the 'Ode to Naples', an occasional function. That is, its intention was to raise amongst the British public awareness of, and support for, the cause of Valiante and his citizens in their tenuous hold upon republican autonomy. In fact it may be read as an exhortation to them to prefer their establishment of a republican identity independent of external powers of any kind to one they had sought to validate through association with a constitutional government premised on monarchy. In this way the sonnet emblemizes a problem specific to Italy confronted most overtly by Machiavelli in *Il Principe*. Italian republican city-states had, since the medieval period, found themselves restlessly engaged in tactical manoeuvring against one another. This was because they were the locus of conflicts between external powers: the Holy Roman Empire, then Napoleon, and most recently Austria, on the one hand, and the Papacy on the other. Addressed to a tiny and fragile symptom of this condition, Shelley's poem represents an idealized hope for the lasting realization of what he knew might be merely a temporary manifestation of a genuine republicanism uncompromised by monarchical associations, and a political state liberated from the usual dependency consequent on factional divisions.

But the interest of Benevento for Shelley antedates its anomalous post-medieval status. Founded by the Samnites, an early form of its name, *Malventum* (evil wind), was changed by the Romans to *Beneventum* after they seized it in 275 BC.⁵⁹ As has been noted,⁶⁰ the grounds for the name-change were superstitious. *Beneventum* may be taken to mean 'good/kind wind' and, by extension, through the combination of *bonus* and *eventum* include the sense of 'favourable outcome'.⁶¹ This albeit poetical etymological possibility cannot have escaped Shelley's notice and is singularly appropriate to the poem in its *Harvard MS* form. During the Roman era, the city had strategic military and commercial significance and its arch of Trajan was no doubt a reason why Shelley proposed an excursion there from Naples in December 1818.⁶² In the first volume of his *Histoire*, Sismondi notes that 'un prince lombard, presque indépendant des rois de sa nation, s'étoit établi au centre des provinces qui forment aujourd'hui le royaume de Naples, et y régnoit avec le titre de duc de Bénévent'

57 Vergineo, *Storia di Benevento* III: 21–2.

58 Barker-Benfield, *Shelley's Guitar*, p. 153.

59 John W. Barker and Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Benevento', in *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz. 2 vols. New York: Routledge, 2004, vol. 1, pp. 106–7.

60 'Benevento', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn, 29 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910–11, vol. 3, p. 727.

61 'Benevento', *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*. 44 vols. Rome: Istituto Giovanni Treccani, 1929–81, vol. 6, pp. 628–35 (p. 629).

62 *Letters* II: 61.

[a Lombard prince, virtually independent of the Kings of his people, established himself at the centre of the provinces which today form the Kingdom of Naples and reigned there as Duke of Benevento].⁶³ The sole Lombard stronghold south of Rome in the sixth century, Benevento also enjoyed independence from the Lombard realm in the north. This suggests an originally dynamic and independent strain in Benevento's identity in contrast to its later fate, trapped and weakened by Papal rule. For Sismondi, Benevento is thus an example of the commercial and artistic energy bequeathed by the Lombards to the medieval city-states. In a manner similar to that of other early-nineteenth-century commentators who wrote about southern Italy,⁶⁴ Sismondi sees the phenomenon in terms of southern sloth benefitting from the injection of northern vitality:

Ainsi, la conquête des Lombards fut, en quelque sort, pour l'Italie, l'époque de la renaissance des peuples. Des principautés indépendantes, des communautés, des républiques, commencèrent à se constituer de toutes parts, et un principe de vie fut rendu à cette contrée, long-temps ensevelie dans un sommeil léthargique. [Thus the conquest achieved by the Lombards was, in a way, for Italy, the period of the rebirth of its various nations. Independent principalities, communities and republics began to be established everywhere, and a fundamental condition of life was restored to this region which had for a long time been buried in a lethargic slumber].⁶⁵

Benevento was also a site movingly memorialized in Dante's *Purgatorio*.⁶⁶ There, in 1266, Manfred was killed in battle with Charles of Anjou whose army was supported by the Pope, then denied proper burial. The brutality of Charles's troops towards the citizens of Benevento is recorded vividly by Sismondi,⁶⁷ as it had been by Pietro Giannone in his avowedly secular *Dell'Istoria Civile Del Regno di Napoli* (1723) – for which the author was exiled and imprisoned – which Claire Clairmont began to read in October 1820. Manfred, reputedly an Epicurean, about whom Mary Shelley later began to write a tragedy,⁶⁸ is eulogized thus as a model ruler by Giannone: 'By his great Courage, Liberality, and Love of Justice, he kept his Dominions always in a flourishing and plentiful State.'⁶⁹

63 J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, 2nd edn. 16 vols. Paris, 1818, vol. 1, p. 13.

64 See Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, Chs 1 and 2.

65 Sismondi, *Histoire* I: 13.

66 *Purgatorio* III, 124–35.

67 Sismondi, *Histoire* III: 354–5.

68 Godwin told her in a letter of 15 November 1822 that 'Manfred is a subject that nobody interests himself about', and criticized her drafts in a letter of 27 February 1824 (Oxford, Bodleian Library [Abinger] Dep. c. 524).

69 Pietro Giannone, *The Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples*, trans. James Ogilvie. 2 vols. London: 1729–31, vol. 2, p. 36.

IV

Clearly adopting revisions made in *Harvard MS*, the *adds. c. 5* neat copy of the sonnet is disciplined in its pointing. Dashes are omitted and the semi-colons in lines 11, 13 and 14, echoing those in lines 4 and 5, assist the poem's argumentative transition from the many to the one. It is on the verso of a leaf of flimsy paper that was originally part of one of the home-made booklets the Shelleys customarily used when transcribing poems to be sent for publication. On the recto, in Mary's hand, is a fair copy of lines 151–76 of 'Ode to Naples'. Barker-Benfield's insight that 'The vertical deletion-stroke in ink down the centre of the whole sonnet was added later, after the sheet had been folded and unfolded' implies that the line was not an authorially-sanctioned cancellation.⁷⁰ The visible folds in the leaf suggest the booklet had been enclosed in the letter to Ollier of 16 February and that this is the sonnet identified in that letter as accompanying the Ode and *Epipsychidion*. Alan Weinberg's comment that 'The appearance of the sonnet after the ode suggests Shelley intended the shorter poem on Naples to complement the longer one on the same subject'⁷¹ is supported by the original title in *adds. c. 5*: 'Sonnet to Naples'. The last two words are cancelled and 'Political greatness' is written beneath. Its non-publication in his life-time may be explained by the failure of *Olliers Literary Miscellany*, a magazine in which Shelley hints ode and sonnet could be placed, in a further letter of 22 February.⁷² It would seem that, at her request, *adds. c. 5* had been returned to Mary Shelley by Ollier in late 1823 since, though the pointing is different, it forms the basis of the text as first published in 1824.⁷³

In an unpublished note, the late Geoffrey Matthews gives support to Mary's dating of the sonnet arguing it was 'written probably immediately after finishing *Epipsychidion*' in February 1821.⁷⁴ Such a hypothesis contradicts the material evidence Reiman adduces in his chronological placing of *Harvard MS* but is not inconsistent with Adamson's *terminus* for *adds. e. 8*. Matthews's grounds, that Shelley's letter to Claire Clairmont of 18 February 'repeats very closely what was said in the sonnet' sent to Ollier two days previously, are illuminatingly sensitive to the poem's immediate political contexts. According to Matthews, Shelley's letter of 18 February is a reply to Claire Clairmont's to him from Florence where she had been living since October 1820. In it she must have mentioned the visit from the *improvvisatore* Tommaso Sgricci that is recorded in her journal entry for 6 February: 'Sgricci calls. He says the Neapolitans—those few who were for the Constitution cried Viva la Costernazione [Long live Consternation] instead of Costituzione [Constitution].'⁷⁵ Claire's function as mediator from Florence of news that Shelley,

70 Barker-Benfield, *Shelley's Guitar*, p. 153.

71 *BSM* XXII (2): 27.

72 *Letters* II: 269. Jones misleadingly states in n. 2 that the sonnet referred to was 'probably "Ye hasten to the grave".'

73 Weinberg, *BSM* XXII (2): 28.

74 I refer to papers in the Matthews collection belonging to Reading University Library.

75 Stocking, *Journals of Claire Clairmont*, pp. 207–8.

based in more parochial Pisa, was anxious to hear,⁷⁶ is highly significant as the opening of the following extract from his letter makes clear:

You send us news of Naples & Neapolitan affairs; we know nothing of them except what we hear from Florence. Every post may be expected to bring decisive news, for even the news that they defend themselves against so immense & well appointed a force, is decisive.—I hate the cowardly envy which prompts such base stories as Sgricci's about the Neapolitans: a set of slaves who dare not to imitate the high example of clasping even the shadow of freedom, alledge the ignorance {?&} excesses of a populace, which oppression has made savages in sentiment & understanding. That the populace of the city of Naples are brutal, who denies to be [?] they cannot improvise tragedies as Sgricci can, but is it certain that under no excitement they would be incapable of more enthusiasm for their country? Besides it is not of them we speak, but of the people of the Kingdom of Naples, the cultivators of the soil; whom a sudden & great impulse might awaken into citizens & men, as the French & Spaniards have been awakened, & may render instruments of a system of future social life before which the existing anarchies of Europe will be dissolved & absorbed.— ... If the Austrians meet with any serious check—they {?may} as well at once retire, for the good Spirit of the World is out against them.—If they march {?to} Naples at once—let us hide our heads in sorrow, for our hopes of political good are vain.—⁷⁷

With this letter in mind, Matthews's assessment of the sonnet's occasion, that it was 'evidently provoked by Sgricci and directed at non-participating Italians', seems convincing. Read thus, it chides Florence for its unwillingness to assist in the Neapolitan cause in terms that resonate clearly with a contemporary account of Italy's cultural heritage much admired by Shelley, Joseph Forsyth's *Remarks*:

The virtues, however, of the Florentines are all of the timid, passive, Christian kind. Though ready to relieve and to toil for a friend, they will not face danger, nor the displeasure of the great, to defend him. Their sturdiness of spirit is vanished with the republic. Prone to revolution in that lusty period of independence and hardihood, they have exchanged the more turbulent virtues for meekness, long-suffering, obedience, and every quality that can adorn a slave.⁷⁸

Thus the sonnet seeks to convince a coward or a chauvinist or a sceptic that the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies generally (rather than

76 Mary Shelley notes: 'in 1821, Shelley, as well as every other lover of liberty, looked upon the struggles in Spain and Italy as decisive of the destinies of the world, probably for centuries to come. The interest he took in the progress of affairs was intense' (*PW* II: 344–5).

77 Shelley to Claire Clairmont, 18 February 1821, MA 406 fols 2r–3r, Morgan Library and Museum. My transcription differs in some respects from *Letters* II: 266–7. A question-mark within space in square brackets indicates the presence of illegible words, space enclosed within curly brackets a hole created in the MS by a burn, a question-mark before words within curly brackets a conjectural reading.

78 Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, ed. Keith Crook. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001, pp. 200–201.

the *Lazzaroni*, the name given by the Spanish to the poor of the city of Naples), hitherto viewed as beyond redemption by Tuscan liberals such as Sgricci, have the potential to redeem themselves and to achieve what the last sentence of Shelley's letter, in an echo of 'Political Greatness', identifies as 'political good'. Moreover, the letter argues, such a possibility has precedents in both the recent French and Spanish Revolutions. Its admonition against the enslaved mentality exemplified by Sgricci may be found in what Shelley described as 'the most perfect and beautiful piece of writing of modern times',⁷⁹ Henrietta's plea with the misanthropic protagonist of Godwin's *Mandeville* (1817) for 'virtue and benevolent energy':

I will tell you what a slave is, and what is a freeman. A slave is he who watches with abject spirit the eye of another: he waits timidly, till another man shall have told him, whether he is to be happy or miserable to-day: his comforts and his peace depend on the breath of another's mouth. No man can be this slave unless he pleases. If by the caprice of fortune he has fallen as to externals into another's power, still there is a point that at his own will he can reserve. He may refuse to crouch; he may walk fearless and erect; the words that he utters may be supplied by that reason, to which the high and the low, the rich and the poor, have equally access. And, if he that the misjudging world calls a slave, may retain all that is most substantial in independence, is it possible, that he whom circumstances have made free, should voluntarily put the fetters on his own feet, the manacles on his own hands, and drink the bitter draught of subjection and passive obedience?⁸⁰

Shelley's denomination of the likes of Sgricci as 'slaves' in contrast to the potential 'citizens and men' of Naples corresponds to Henrietta's refusal to discriminate between slaves and freemen according to the 'misjudging world'. Set during the conflict between royalists and commonwealthmen in the English Civil War, Godwin's novel offers an historical precedent for struggle against monarchy readily available to the intended English audience, in addition to the recent continental examples of France, Spain and Naples. But the letter also helps to focus attention on the enlightenment of art. The question posed in the sonnet, 'What are numbers, knit / By force or custom?' (ll. 9–10) is given added weight if 'numbers' is understood in the sense of 'metrical periods or feet; lines, verses' (*OED* 17a) of the kind that Sgricci spoke in his *accademie* [performances] as well as the more obvious sense, in the context of 'blind millions' (l. 7), of 'the multitude' (*OED* 8d). The two senses are conjoined in the question posed in Shelley's letter, 'they cannot improvise tragedies as Sgricci can, but is it certain that under no excitement they would be incapable of more enthusiasm for their country?' While the fourth line of the sonnet, 'Verse echoes not one beating of their hearts', implies that under the dominion of liberty as opposed to tyranny, the rhythms of poetry will correspond to those of a living body, the sonnet's question may be interpreted as a reminder to artists such as Sgricci of their responsibilities. 'Numbers' deployed properly by artists like Sgricci have the power to be a means of political inspiration, as Shelley noted in the draft of an unpublished review of Sgricci's performance of *La Morte d'Ettore* written, as

79 'On "Godwin's Mandeville"', *Examiner* (28 December 1817), *Prose* I: 278.

80 *Collected Novels and Memoirs* VI: 155.

Nora Crook notes, ‘shortly after ... 22 January 1821’.⁸¹ In language that echoes the attention to oratorically-inspired ‘excitement’ in Plato’s *Ion* which he had probably begun to translate at the end of 1819,⁸² Shelley writes thus of Sgricci’s art, albeit in faulty Italian:

In questo talento, e tutto d’Italia—l’imaginatione fa, fra di noi in un momento l’opra che l’intelletto consumma fra gli altri in lungo tempo, o dopo molte tentative. E questo dono e il pegio del nostro presente destino, ed il pegno del futuro. [In this ability, is the most distinctive characteristic of Italy—among us the imagination performs in an instant the work which reason accomplishes among others in a long period of time, or after many attempts, and this gift is the glory of our present destiny, and the pledge of our future.]⁸³

In respect of its date of composition, it is possible to argue not just that the poem was written between July 1820 and February 1821 but that it may have a doubled conception. The rough draft and intermediate fair copy were very possibly done in the summer of 1820, but that the final version was written immediately before 16 February 1821 is almost certain. Thus while *adds. e. 8, Harvard MS* and *adds. c. 5* are recognizable as in some respects the same creative entity, the trajectory of the separate instances of the poem’s evolution suggest an affirmation of the future-oriented poetic theory so forcefully articulated in February–March 1821 in ‘A Defence of Poetry’. The poem takes on new meanings in new contexts (and will continue to do so). Against the view that events in Benevento the previous summer were an exclusive context of the poem, his letter to Peacock, written a few days before the above letter to Claire, is a further reflection on its genesis. For the poem’s argument could now be applied to the acute phase of the current crisis in which Shelley anticipated that the Ecclesiastical States would be the locus of a battle between the troops of Austria and Naples of the proportions of 1266.⁸⁴

We are now in the crisis and point of expectation in Italy. The Neapolitan and Austrian armies are rapidly approaching each other, and every day the news of a battle may be expected. The former have advanced into the Ecclesiastical States, and taken hostages from Rome, to assure themselves of the neutrality of that power, and appear determined to try their strength in open battle. I need not tell you how little chance there is that the new

81 *BSM XII*: xlii.

82 Fraistat, *BSM IX*: xlv.

83 Bod. MS Shelley *adds. e. 17*, p. 19. There is a facsimile of the review and a diplomatic transcription with commentary by Nora Crook in *BSM XII*: 28–49. My transcription omits cancellations and differs from Crook’s only in that I read a comma after ‘talento’. Crook’s notes (*BSM XII*: 45) record Shelley’s mistakes in the passage (for example, ‘il pegio’ instead of ‘il pregio’) but of the draft as a whole she says, ‘Some “solecisms” might be justified in terms of an archaic, poetic, or regional form’ (*BSM XII*: xlii). From his extensive reading of Italian authors, Shelley would have known that, when used to mean ‘is’ ‘e’ is accented (è). Some of this passage’s linguistic faults may thus result from a carelessness with pointing characteristic of many of his drafts. The translation is P.M.S. Dawson’s in ‘Shelley and the Improvisatore Sgricci: An Unpublished Review’, *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 32 (1981), pp. 19–29 (pp. 28–9).

84 *Letters II*: 263.

and undisciplined levies of Naples should stand against a superior force of veteran troops. But the birth of liberty in nations abounds in examples of a reversal of the ordinary laws of calculation: the defeat of the Austrians would be the signal of insurrection throughout all Italy.⁸⁵

The final sentence resonates with the renewed significance of the challenge to assert independence in Shelley's sonnet. However it needs to be noted that distinct kinds of political independence corresponding to different phases of the Neapolitan revolution are captured in its intermediate and neat copy versions. The *Harvard MS* title, 'Sonnet to the Republic of Benevento', reflects Shelley's defence of the right of Benevento in the summer of 1820 to be a republic independent of the constitutionalist government of Naples. But the first title of the *adds. c. 5* version, 'Sonnet to Naples', asserts the need for that constitutionalist government to be preserved against the depredations of the Austrian army in February 1821. In its 1820 incarnation Shelley's poem is a defence of a republican polity untainted by monarchical values. But by 1821, its title suggests that 'greatness' is now tantamount to expediency. The urgent need to support the constitutional monarchy is the only alternative to 'anarchy' (used in the plural in the letter to Claire, cited above, to refer to the Restoration regimes). A true republic is thus deferred but its future realization not entirely obscured.

Stuart Woolf comments that under Metternich's system, ratified at the Congress of Vienna, 'monarchy was the only sure foundation of order, and although the prince could no longer claim divine approbation ... his authority remained absolute ... Constitutional monarchy was thus inadmissible in principle'.⁸⁶ Metternich's 'system' may be juxtaposed with Shelley's transcription in *adds. e. 8*, p. 1 of Hippolytus's speech to Theseus after he has been accused of incest with Phaedra in Euripides's *Hippolytus*: 'But will you say that to be king is a tempting pleasure even to the virtuous? Not at all, since kingly power has corrupted the minds of all those who love it.'⁸⁷ But the basis of the sonnet's idiom, in which the needs of the *polis* may be understood by reference to self-mastery, is articulated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*:

'[...] in the soul of a single person there is a better part and a worse part. When the naturally better part is in control of the worse, this is what is meant by "master of himself." It is a term of approval. But when as a result of bad upbringing or bad company the better element, which is smaller, is overwhelmed by the mass of the worse element, this is a matter for reproach. They call a person in this condition a slave to himself, undisciplined.' ... 'Now, if you take a look at this new city of ours, You will admit that it can quite legitimately be called master of itself, if something in which the better rules the worse can be called self-disciplined and master of itself.'⁸⁸

85 *Letters* II: 261–2.

86 Woolf, *History of Italy*, p. 232.

87 Euripides, *Hippolytus*, ed. David Kovacs. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 221.

88 *Republic* IV 431a–b, in Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 125.

A passage on the origins of inequality in his draft essay 'On Christianity' (1817) is informed by the views of Plato and Diogenes on genuine majesty: 'Too mean spirited and too feeble in resolve to attempt the conquest of their own evil passions, and of the difficulties of the material world, men sought dominion over their fellow men as an easy method to gain that apparent majesty and power which the instinct of their nature requires.'⁸⁹ The successive titles of the sonnet in *adds. e. 8*, 'The Republican', 'The true Republican' and 'Rex sui', refer to the foundations on which virtue in the polity must be laid according to *Republic*, the last deriving from the remark that "'The best and most just character is the happiest. This is the one who is the most kingly, the one who is king over himself.'"'⁹⁰ The language of sovereignty is legitimate only when there is no-one to regulate but oneself. Or, put another way, the sonnet argues that the only context in which kingship is necessary is self-rule. It seems possible, especially in light of the first of the titles in *adds. c. 5*, 'Sonnet to Naples', that Shelley was aware of a variation on this insight in Cuoco's *Saggio Storico*. In her journal entry for 29 June, two days before the insurrection at Nola, Claire Clairmont noted in relation to her reading of Cuoco: 'one thing for the people to remember—that they can do very well without a king but there was never heard of a king without a people.'⁹¹ The previous day's entry includes the following free translation from *Saggio*: 'The author affirms that all the people of the middling class & all the nobles were republicans and that so far from the revolution failing from a want of patriotic feeling it fell as it were through the overpowering virtue of the republicans.'⁹² This sense of the nobility of some of the impulses which require containment is present in the sonnet's reference to 'quelling the anarchy / Of hopes and fears' (ll. 13–14). In this way, the sonnet leaves the reader with a paradox: the peace of Tuscany, which had the most enlightened of all governments in the Italian states under the Restoration, exemplifies a too facile self-possession that is singularly inferior to the energy exemplified by the revolutionary struggle of the *carbonari* in Benevento – a struggle which Shelley acknowledges may issue, as had that of the Neapolitan revolution of 1799, in failure. The injunction to 'rule the empire of himself' follows Plato in acknowledging that conflict with 'anarchy' necessarily pertains in a republican polity as it does in man's (or woman's) being.

89 *Prose I*: 263.

90 *Republic IX* 580c, in Plato, *Republic*, p. 297. The translation in Edmund Massey's *Platonis De Republica*. 2 vols. Cambridge, 1713, vol. 2, p. 253, the Greek/Latin parallel-text edition of Plato's *Republic* used by Shelley, is '*se ipsum regentem*' not '*Rex sui*'. For an account of the editions of Plato in which Shelley is likely to have read *Republic*, see Nora Crook and Timothy Webb, *BSM XIX*: xl–xlii. Shelley's extant translations from Plato Bks II, III and VI are identified by Alan Weinberg in *BSM XXII* (2): 23–5.

91 Stocking, *Journals of Claire Clairmont*, p. 153.

92 Stocking, *Journals of Claire Clairmont*, p. 152. The source is Cuoco, *Saggio*, p. vii.

Art

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Chapter 8

Shelleyan Inspiration and the Sister Arts

Nancy Moore Goslee

Citing Demogorgon's oracular statement in *Prometheus Unbound* that 'the deep truth is imageless',¹ critics tend to assume that Shelley's iconoclastic verbal scepticism, which attacks received cultural ideas as if they were sculpted idols to be broken, disavows the visual and plastic arts. Now that his manuscript notebooks are available in facsimile, it is time to re-evaluate this assumption. For the notebooks reveal a material richness of visual sketches and other graphic elements that mark Shelley's verbal composing process. Further warrant for such a challenge comes from recent studies by Jennifer Wallace and David Ferris which analyse his intense study of the literature and plastic arts of classical Greece as material signs of a culture of liberty.² Developing rapidly through 1817, this interest prepares him for encountering the archaeological riches of Italy. Surprisingly, his sketches in the Italian draft notebooks seldom directly reflect this deepening interest in and residence among the artefacts of classical culture. Instead, he incorporates descriptions of those artefacts into the verbal texts drafted in those very notebooks. Moreover, this disjunction between the content of the sketches in his material composing processes and the verbal rendering of his aesthetic experiences in Italy points Shelley toward a reflexive exploration of relationships among various arts in the creative process. While Demogorgon's sceptical resistance to the truth-claims of representation echoes Shelley's earlier iconoclasm, the poet simultaneously develops a Promethean impulse that Shelley later describes in *Adonais* as 'plastic stress', a creative structuring of the material world into meaningful, beautiful forms. Yet he later develops a critical use of those beautiful plastic forms to evaluate different modes of imaginative expression.

Such attention to Shelley's critical and material uses of graphic or plastic arts should not, however, completely replace the linguistic turn of a deconstructive scepticism with a 'pictorial' or 'plastic' turn, to adapt W.J.T. Mitchell's phrase.³ Instead, I argue that Shelley's encounters with the monumental materiality of classical sculpture and architecture in Italy encourage him to locate the sceptical, 'disfiguring' iconoclasm

1 *Shelley's Poetry and Prose (SPP)* II, iv, 116. Citations to Shelley's works, unless otherwise noted, will be to this edition.

2 Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism*. London and New York: Macmillan, 1997 and David Ferris, *Silent Urns: Romanticism, Hellenism, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. For primary sources delineating the background of this movement, see Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism, 1700–1824*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.

3 In *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 11–12.

of his writing from *Queen Mab* through his 1816 lyrics in the interstices among the various arts and their differing representational capacities both for critiquing and for rebuilding cultural forms or ideological structures – for destroying icons believed in as idols and for constructing icons framed in scepticism. This approach modifies Stephen Larrabee's Winckelmann-influenced analysis in *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*, and also revises my own earlier work on *Prometheus Unbound*. In *Uriel's Eye* I argued that Shelley's reading of A. W. Schlegel leads him to develop 'ekphrastic' verbal representations of plastic and pictorial art both as local figures and as structural models for his drama; and in a separate essay, 'Shelley at Play', I analysed in detail the range of creative functions performed by sketches in his draft *Prometheus* notebooks.⁴ In this chapter I integrate these two approaches, although my emphasis shifts as I turn from work to work.⁵ My first section traces how Shelley's sketches of Thames-valley trees and riverbanks frame his epic of a Greek liberty revived through meditation on the ruins of classical sculpture. The second and third sections analyse two indirectly ekphrastic uses of a bas-relief of maenads, encountered in the Uffizi in Florence during the fall of 1819. Described briefly in his gallery note, the bas-relief leads to the powerful simile of the maenad in *Ode to the West Wind*; its influence is both less direct and more ominous in 'The Triumph of Life'.⁶

Shelley's early, limited interest in the visual arts first takes creative shape as iconoclasm, a verbally represented ekphrasis of idol-smashing as political critique.⁷ Yet even before leaving England, he transforms this literal and symbolic iconoclasm as he learns more of the aesthetic and political significance of classical Greek culture and of its material remains in monumental sculpture. His writing of *Laon and Cythna* in 1817 repeatedly negotiates this challenge. Because Shelley's verbal texts so frequently evoke sculptural figures even as late as *Laon and Cythna* only in order to label them personifications, concepts falsely idolized by social and political tyrants

4 Stephen Larrabee, *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943; Nancy Moore Goslee, *Uriel's Eye: Miltonic Stationing and Statuary in Blake, Keats, and Shelley*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985, and 'Shelley at Play: A Study of Sketch and Text in his *Prometheus* Notebooks'. *Huntington Library Quarterly* 48 (1985), pp. 210–55; W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', Ch. 15 in *Picture Theory*. See also James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 119–24; and Grant Scott, 'Shelley, Medusa, and the Perils of Ekphrasis', in *The Romantic Imagination: Literature and Art in England and Germany*, Frederick Burwick and Jurgen Klein (eds). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996, pp. 312–32.

5 This chapter grows out of a longer study of the generative, iconic pages in the draft notebooks and Shelley's repeated use of allegorical personifications as verbally-represented visual images. In that study I consider the sketches in more detail than I can do here.

6 See Donald Reiman's note to the Ode in *SPP*: 299 n. 9. Reiman also cites the appearance of the maenads in 'The Triumph of Life'. See also Timothy Webb, *Selected Poems and Prose*. London: J.M. Dent (Everyman), 1977, p. 389.

7 See Kim Wheatley, *Shelley and his Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics*. Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999, esp. Ch. 3. See also Alan Weinberg, 'Mythic Revisionings: Shelley's Dispute with Religion and the Figure of Ahasuerus'. *Myth and Symbol* 3 (1998), pp. 58–92.

that may be desacralized, we can appropriately use Paul de Man's term 'disfiguring' for this early stage. As Shelley encounters classical sculpture and architecture *in situ*, in the Mediterranean landscapes and climate of Italy, we can use the term 'monumental' quite literally to describe his Winckelmann-influenced interpretation of these fragments as embodying the unified, liberating culture of classical Greece. This less iconoclastic, more iconic stance also leads him toward a view of signification closer to what de Man terms 'monumentality', a system of motivated or natural signs representing and also incorporating – or positing at least heuristically – some transcendent spirit or significance.⁸ In various drafts of essays on aesthetics, most notably in his gallery notes describing the sculptures in the Uffizi, Shelley develops (as Larrabee has argued) a Winckelmannian interpretation of a cultural 'form' or spirit of the age that works through multiple arts as a natural, continuous and motivated expressivity.⁹ When he incorporates the gallery note describing a bas-relief of dancing maenads into his drafting of the *Ode to the West Wind*, both the poem and the ambiguous source of this 'naturalness' begin to raise questions, but the Winckelmannian optimism of a spirit finding expression in all arts remains.

In a final section, this chapter follows the traces of the maenads' dance in the manuscript of 'The Triumph of Life', setting those figures within Shelley's return to a complex 'disfiguring'. When this renewed iconoclasm first appears in drafts of 'A Defence of Poetry', it is an optimistic defence of the power of language, as opposed to all other arts, but in 'The Triumph of Life', as de Man has famously argued in 'Shelley Disfigured', its scepticism risks shattering all meaning. Recently both Hugh Roberts and Orrin Wang have framed powerful revisions of de Man's reading by appropriating his visually-based terms and historicizing them. Roberts analyses 'The Triumph' as a culmination of Shelley's earlier oscillations between a 'therapeutic idealism' in which figurative language refers monumentally to some transcendent source of meaning and a revolutionary flux that threatens to collapse into an 'amnesiac' nihilism. Though Wang does not discuss Shelley's earlier work, he analyses in more detail the ekphrastic metaphors of monumentality and disfiguration in de Man's essay.¹⁰ Wang argues that although de Man describes a 'simultaneous monumentalization and disfigurement' in 'The Triumph of Life', Shelley's poem makes this "madness of words", ..., this guarantee of monumentalization ... the occasion for a tortured interrogation of the specificity of monuments, of what they replace, and of the politics of that replacement – in other words, of what it means to read history.¹¹ To supplement Roberts's and Wang's historicizing readings, I will place Shelley's last poem in the context of his earlier ekphrastic theorizing, and particularly in the context of his distinction of language from other arts in

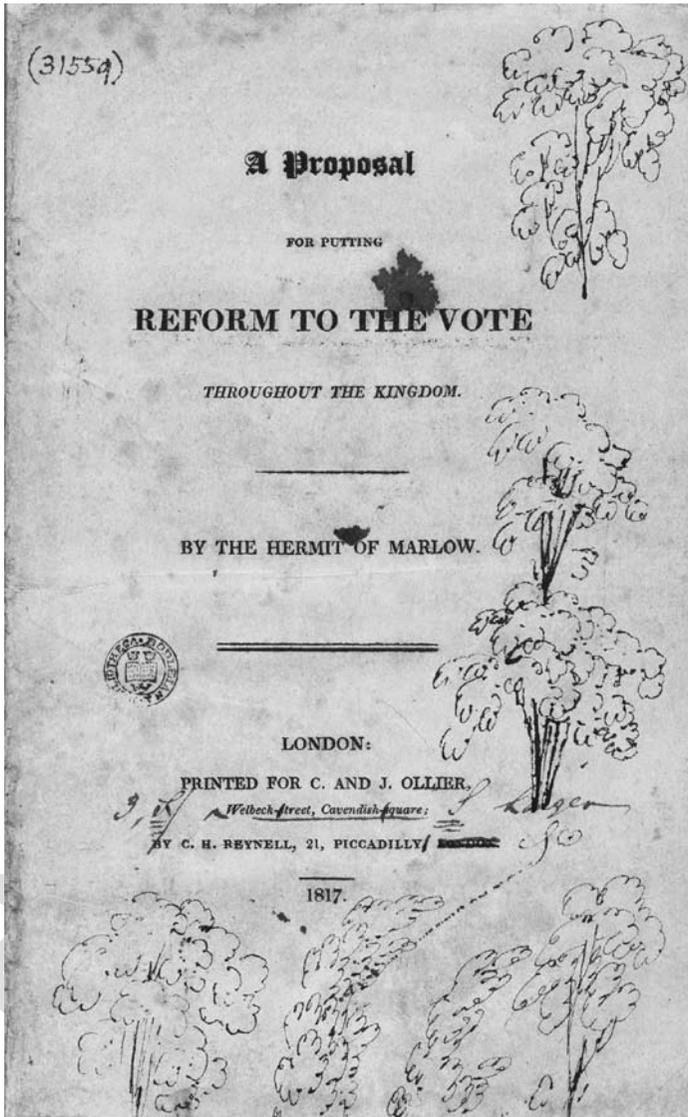
8 From 'Shelley Disfigured', in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, no eds. New York: Continuum, 1979, pp. 67–8 for 'monumentality' and p. 46 for 'disfiguring'.

9 Larrabee, *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*, pp. 184–5.

10 See Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997, esp. pp. 205, 398; and Orrin N.C. Wang, *Fantastic Modernity: Dialectical Readings in Romanticism and Theory*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996; rpt. 2000, pp. 48–53.

11 Wang, *Fantastic Modernity*, p. 53.

‘A Defence of Poetry’, a distinction that posits an affirmative power for language and thus might be called a positive ‘disfiguring’ – if still a disfiguring.



8.1 Title page of *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote*, with sketch of trees

I

In 1832, Leigh Hunt recalls how Shelley, correcting proof for his polemical 1817 pamphlet *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote ...*, covered its title page with ‘sketches of trees and foliage, ... a habit of his in the intervals of thinking, whenever

he had pen or pencil in hand While waiting ... at an inn ... [he would sketch] his elms and oak-trees on the walls ...' (see Fig. 8.1).¹²

In 1814 Shelley punctuates his holograph revisions to a printed copy of the 1813 *Queen Mab* with visual sketches, including several arrogant, possibly demonic profiles that may represent the tyrants condemned in the adjacent verbal text's critique of the 'envious Present'.¹³ Though we have little evidence for his drafting processes before his relationship with Mary, this interdependence of visual and verbal expression probably begins early.¹⁴ As in the 1817 pamphlet, the visual sketches in his manuscript notebooks less frequently illustrate an adjacent verbal text than distil his earlier picturesque training in drawing, to evoke sheltered, edenic sites for creative reverie: Constable-like trees, woodland sketches, rowboats and schematically Turner-like sailboats. If tyranny appears repeatedly through visual sketches of hostile profiles, liberty seems associated with visual sketches of the rural, riverine landscapes of southern England (see Fig. 8.2) – or with the textual representation of an iconic figure.

In the 1813 *Queen Mab*, Greek freedom appears, paradoxically, as an anti-iconic verbal icon. When Mab shows the dreaming Ianthe a Volneyan survey of the ruins of ancient cultures, she contrasts the 'Demon-God' worshipped in 'Salem's haughty fane' with the 'ghost of Freedom' who still stalks the ruined 'ancient fanes' of Greece and Rome.¹⁵ Mab's shift from 'Demon-God' to an allegorized 'ghost of Freedom' shapes the fairy's fundamental method of destabilizing deities by pointing out their status as mental concepts, constructs of a communal misguided imagination. It also, however, points toward a more positive role for the re-imagining of a concept such as Freedom as a corporeal if still 'ghostly' iconic form.

To judge from Mary Godwin's journals and occasional references in Shelley's letters, the couple's shared European travel in 1814 and 1816 and their intermittent residence in London led Shelley to an increased interest in the plastic and visual arts – as did their friendship with Hunt and Peacock.¹⁶ Thus in early 1817, Shelley prepared to write his long narrative poem of liberation set in modern Greece by ordering life-size casts of the Medici Venus and the Apollo Belvedere to preside over

12 See *Shelley's Guitar*, exhibition catalogue by B.C. Barker-Benfield. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1992, entry 64a. See also *Letters* II: 278–9, 12 April 1821, for one of Shelley's few comments on his own sketching habits, with a drawing; the letter is in the Pforzheimer collection but has not yet been published in *SC*.

13 See the facsimile of page 29 and back cover of the 1813 *Queen Mab* in *SC* IV: 535, 538.

14 See *CPPBS* I and II for textual witnesses to the early work. For extant manuscript notebooks, see *BSM* XXXIII.

15 *Queen Mab* II, 137, 150, 169 in *CPPBS* II: 177–8.

16 See *MS Journals* (rpt. in 1 vol., 1995): 10 (5 Aug 1814); 28 (22 Aug 1814); 59 (5–6 Jan 1815); 70 (17 March 1815); 78 (10 May 1815); 170 (24 May 1817); 193 (13, 17 Feb 1818, when Mary visits the Elgin marbles). See also *BSM* XI, the facsimile of Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 16, their shared Alpine notebook; the original manuscript shows clearly its usefulness as a sketchbook. For the Shelleys' modifying of grand tour perspectives, both in Switzerland and in Italy, see Benjamin Colbert, *Shelley's Eye: Travel Writing and Aesthetic Vision*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.



8.2 MS draft from *Laon and Cythna*, with sketch of trees in river scene

his study at Marlow.¹⁷ His earliest work on *Laon and Cythna* is a loose sheet which contains drafts of two opening stanzas and two carefully-drawn visual sketches of classical temple porticos and altars. From one of the altars, Bruce Barker-Benfield writes, ‘a semi-human figure bursts upward . . . in one manic spring’, as if to show the ‘moment of primary inspiration’ for his poem (see Fig. 8.3).¹⁸

17 See *MWS Letters* I: 38 n., for a letter from MWS and PBS to Leigh and Marianne Hunt, 30 June 1817. See also PBS’s 22 Jan 1817 letter to Hogg, in which he claims he prays daily to Apollo’s statue to cure his ophthalmia (*Letters* I: 451); see also Larrabee, *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*, pp. 193–9, and Grant Scott, *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994, Ch. 2.

18 The facsimile of this page (Bod. MS Shelley adds. c. 4, fol. 2v) is included both in *Shelley’s Guitar*, entry 69, and in *BSM* XIII: xi, 68–71. See also Reiman, *SC* V: 141–69. *BSM*

youth and change without specifying an ethical or political value for that change.¹⁹ Bodleian MS Shelley adds. e. 19, the first of Shelley's three extant notebooks for the poem, frames this affirmation of youthful change with a careful description of the classical Greek ruins that Laon and Cythna haunt, suggesting that their revolutionary movement emerges from those fragments. Yet this effect appears more forcefully in the manuscript than in either printed version of the poem. For even in this notebook Shelley clearly revises his first, explicit description of the ruins as Greek, as if to universalize such stirrings of liberty. As Laon 'walked among / wandered through the wrecks of days departed' (ll. 24–5), he learns, with no other instruction, from their combined visual and musical aesthetic.²⁰ Through the 'broken tombs, & columns riven' the 'soaring gale ... waked an [Aeolian] [its] enchanted wail' (ll. 35–9). Though Shelley apparently visualizes the classical ruins of Argolis as he writes, drafting a series of phrases referring to Greek religious architecture – 'temples ... fanes & altars'²¹ (ll. 10–13),²¹ he replaces these terms with less culturally specific phrasing: they become 'monuments of less ungentle creeds' (l. 14) than Laon's oppressive, modern and monotheistic culture offers. These monuments, he asserts, 'Tell their own tale to whosoever wisely heeds / The silent / The Truths awful silent language ...' (ll. 16–18). In Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 10, the public, prophetic language of the main characters – particularly of Cythna – is both profoundly iconic and profoundly reflexive. As Brian Wilkie and William Ulmer argue, both she and Laon wield a rational, sophisticated awareness of figuration as fiction and as effective rhetoric.²² Both characters question, as Queen Mab does, the negative monumentalizing of conceptual figure into idol. Yet one of Shelley's most complex explorations of this issue emerges from his description of a new, modern altar raised by Cythna and her temporarily-successful revolutionary forces. When Laon rediscovers Cythna, she is celebrating her successful revolution with a festival resembling those organized by David and Robespierre during the French Revolution. Because he first sees her high on the pyramid as 'a female shape upon an ivory throne', he cannot tell whether she is the sculpted icon of a deity, or a living human representing the concept, like the actress enthroned in Notre Dame to replace a statue of the Virgin with a living figure of Reason.²³ To add to this ambiguity, the living figure of Cythna sits beside three sculpted figures apparently representing revolutionary concepts. Both in Laon's initial description and in the stanza of Cythna's hymn addressed to the middle sculpted figure, Shelley's pencil-to-ink revisions show his struggle to leave open the exact concept

19 Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 163.

20 *BSM* XIII: 114–15, Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 19, p. 55 (*SP* II. II, x).

21 *BSM* XIII: 118–19, p. 57 (*SP* II. II, xi).

22 Brian Wilkie, *Romantic Poets and the Epic Tradition*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, p. 139, cited in William Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1990, p. 65. See also Ulmer pp. 102–3.

23 See *BSM* XVII: 16–7; adds. e. 10, p. 12, st. 167, l. 6 (Shelley numbers stanzas here but not cantos). I have also examined the original manuscript. See also Gerald McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969, pp. 116 ff., Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, and Lori Molinari, 'Revising the Revolution and Shelley's *Beau Ideal*'. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 53 (2004), pp. 97–126.

that the figure represents.²⁴ Cythna addresses this figure as ‘Mother & Soul of all ... / Nature, Love, or [?Peace] [God] or Pleasure’ (ll. 8, 16)²⁵. Though one might call this an iconoclasm redoubled, the verbal caution about assigning any single conceptual meaning preserves the icon for a positive revolutionary constellation of values at the centre of the crowd’s celebration. In the altar’s recalling and revising of Jacobin models, moreover, it evokes a highly specific history and is thus ‘monumental’ in the historicized sense Wang has proposed in his discussion of ‘The Triumph of Life’.

Following this heavily-revised draft sequence appears, on MS Shelley adds. e. 10, page 27, the sketch of a ghostly semi-human figure. Perhaps this is the veiled figure of Cythna. Perhaps, also, it is ‘the ghost of Freedom’, that verbal personification who stalks through the ruins of classical Athens in *Queen Mab*, or that ‘semi-human figure’ who makes a ‘manic spring’ from the Greek temple altar in Shelley’s first sketches for *Laon and Cythna*. Though Shelley’s earlier ideal of liberty has been one that demolishes idols as objects of worship, now the ‘ghost of Freedom’ takes on more palpable form in the materialized rhetoric of his main narrative.

II

Shelley’s move to that ‘Paradise of exiles’, Italy, prompts a series of ekphrastic speculations: how might moderns recover or adapt classical Greek culture by interpreting the iconic forms of their remaining sculpture and architecture? These plastic fragments reveal that ancient culture’s ‘sympathetic’ modulation among all the arts, a modulation expressive of a common spirit of beauty and liberty. As Shelley confronts the problem of emulating a lost Greek culture, moreover, he finds ways to open up that closed model of perfection by testing material and cultural differences within the continuum of an era’s arts. His ‘Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks’, drafted at Bagni di Lucca soon after the Shelleys’ arrival in Italy, eagerly anticipates an approach to the ‘harmonious & perfect form’ of classical culture in which all the arts possess a ‘sympathetic connection between each other, being no more than the various expressions of one internal power, modified [b] by the different circumstances either of the an individual & of society.’²⁶ As he analyses the erotic gaze that created such ideal sculptural models of the human body, however, Shelley gradually turns from a cautious defence of that era’s male homosexual practices to a hope that by educating and liberating women, modern heterosexual culture can perhaps surpass that ancient model while recreating its ‘sympathetic connection between’ each art.²⁷ Once he begins to travel further in Italy, his letters to Peacock,

24 See MS Shelley adds. e. 10, pp. 19–24, in *BSM* XVII: 22–9.

25 MS Shelley adds. e. 10, p. 19, st. 177 (Shelley’s numbering in MS), in *BSM* XVII: 22–3.

26 See Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley’s Italian Experience*. London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 21; and *BSM* XV: xiii. These phrases are from pp. 18–19 of the notebook (Bod. MS Shelley adds. 11). Shelley continues the ‘Discourse’ in a second notebook (adds. e. 6, pp. 45–59) but breaks off; see Adamson, *BSM* V; see also her introduction, pp. 2–3.

27 See Ferris, *Silent Urns*, pp. 23–35 and Ch. 3, ‘The Choice of Tragedy: From Keats to Schelling’; see also my essay, ‘Shelley’s Cosmopolitan “Discourse”: Ancient Greek Manners

intended as a travelogue of galleries, monuments and architecture, nervously reveal another sort of anxiety, one Brian Goldberg describes as ‘ekphrastic melancholy’.²⁸ After a day of visiting art collections in Bologna, Shelley writes, ‘my brain is at this moment like a ... connoisseur’s commonplace book.’²⁹ To deflect this anxiety, he seeks to create a fluid continuity from past to present, from the ‘state of feeling’ of an artefact to his own state.³⁰ This effort to communicate an ontological form or spirit of beauty *fluidly* across history might paradoxically, then, be called a form of ‘monumentality’.

Shelley’s ‘remarks’ on the sculptures in the Uffizi gallery in Florence, which he visited in mid-October 1819, posit a further development of this fluid ‘monumentality’. In these sculptures, beautiful or sublime mental ‘forms’ achieve lasting embodiment and yet overcome the limits of stone as they communicate a ‘spirit’ or energy that is both formal and trans-cultural.³¹ In the notes that describe sculptures of Dionysos or his maenadic followers, however, this paradoxical relationship of stasis and fluidity begins to question the civilizing ‘spirit of beauty’ in Greek culture. When Shelley incorporates one of these maenadic images into his powerful simile in the *Ode to the West Wind*, he expresses a further undercurrent of uneasiness.

Shelley’s drafting of the notes or ‘remarks’ on sculpture in the Uffizi is known to us only indirectly: first, through Mary Shelley’s laconic journal report on his visits while she waited at home in the last stages of a much-wanted pregnancy, and, second, through the introduction that Thomas Medwin provides when he publishes groups of the notes, beginning in 1832.³² Describing the draft notebook Shelley allowed him to copy from, Medwin writes, ‘Statuary was his passion ... these notes were written in

and Modern Liberty’. *The Wordsworth Circle* 36.1 (winter 2005), pp. 2–5.

28 In ‘Ekphrastic Melancholy in “Julian and Maddalo” and “Ode to the West Wind”’. Unpublished paper delivered at the 2000 North American Society for the Study of Romanticism conference, Tempe, AZ. In addition to Byron’s *Childe Harold IV*, published by Murray in 1818, and John Cam Hobhouse’s *Historical Illustrations of the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold*, the Shelleys’ guides were: Winkelmann, *Histoire de l’Art Chez les Anciens*, traduit de l’Allemand, avec des notes historiques et critiques de differents auteurs [trans. Huber, revised by Jansen], 3 vols, bound as 2. Paris: Bossange, Masson et Besson, 1802; John Chetwode Eustace, *A Classical Tour Through Italy* (1802), 3rd edn, rev. and enl., 4 vols. London: J. Mawman, 1815; and Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters in Italy in the Years 1802 and 1803*. 2nd edn. London: John Murray, 1816. See Keith Crook’s introduction to his edition of Forsyth’s *Remarks* concerning the politics of these guidebooks, Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001, and Colbert, *Shelley’s Eye*, Ch. 4. For the dates of the Shelleys’ reading, see Feldman and Scott-Kilvert’s alphabetical listing of references to reading in *MWS Journals* and also their note on p. 235, one-vol. edn. See also my discussion of the letters to Peacock in *Uriel’s Eye*, pp. 140–41.

29 *Letters* II: 49.

30 *Letters* II: 51.

31 Larrabee, *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*, pp. 175–8.

32 *MS Journals* (1 vol. edn): 298–9; 11, 13, 20 October, and ‘The Age of Pericles: With Critical Notices of the Sculptures in the Florence Gallery, by Percy Bysshe Shelley’. *The Athenaeum* 225 (15 September 1832), pp. 601–2, 617–18; in Thomas Medwin, *Memoir of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. London: Whittaker, Treacher and Co., 1833, pp. 135–52; and in *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. 2 vols. London: Thomas Coutly, 1847, vol. 1, pp. 342–66.

pencil, and thrown off in the gallery, in a burst of enthusiasm, proving that thoughts struck out in the fire of the moment, have a[n] inherent force of truth – give birth to a natural eloquence³³ From the evidence of his graphic text, Shelley seems himself possessed by his ekphrastic ‘sketching’.

Medwin had not yet arrived in Italy when Shelley made these ‘rough pencil notes’; he probably transcribed them in late 1820 when he visited the Shelleys in Pisa.³⁴ E.B. Murray and Alan Weinberg argue that Claire Clairmont made another transcription about the same time. Shelley’s original draft notebook has disappeared. Mary Shelley had it in her possession after Shelley’s drowning long enough to make fair copies of its contents, but by the time she was preparing her edition of Shelley’s prose in 1839, her fair copy notebook no longer contained the transcribed gallery notes, so she turned to Medwin’s now-published versions. The second transcription of the text was published by H. Buxton Forman in 1879, but as Murray points out, the notebook he followed – possibly, Murray and Weinberg argue, the transcription by Claire – has also disappeared.³⁵

In spite of the uncertain authority for these two lines of transmission, both versions of the notes clearly reveal Shelley’s fascination with the paradox of a stony, immobile medium and its expression of motion and emotion – as in the Niobe or the Laocoon groups, for example.³⁶ His extended note describing the bas-relief of sculpted maenadic dancers focuses upon this paradox by speculating upon the mysterious consciousness of the dancers. A figure of Minerva or Athena stands on a base containing ‘reliefs ... in a spirit wholly the reverse ...[,] figures of Maenads under the inspiration of the god’.

Nothing can be conceived more wild and terrible than their gestures The tremendous spirit of superstition, aided by drunkenness, producing something beyond insanity, seems to have caught them in its whirlwinds, as the rapid volutions of a tempest bear the ever-changing trunk of a waterspout, or as the torrent of a mountain river whirls the autumnal leaves resistlessly along in its full eddies. The hair, loose and floating, seems caught in the tempest of their own tumultuous motion; their heads are thrown back, leaning with

33 Medwin, *Life*, p. 351.

34 *Letters* II: 240.

35 See E.B. Murray, ‘Shelley’s *Notes on Sculpture*: The Provenance and Authority of the Text’. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 32 (1983), pp. 153–71; Alan Weinberg, *BSM* XXII (I): 19–20. Roger Ingpen and Walter Peck in the Julian edition follow Forman and include variants but miss several, including the one I focus on below. See *Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 7: Prose. London: Ernest Benn, 1929, pp. 309–33.

36 His description of the sculptural group of Niobe and her children explores this paradox through the myth of her punishment by Artemis and Apollo. Shelley’s note on the Laocoon group, probably the Bandinelli copy in the Uffizi, challenges Winckelmann by arguing that the figures successfully represent deep, anguished emotion but also challenges G.E. Lessing’s attack upon Winckelmann’s position, an attack based upon the inherent stasis of the visual or plastic arts. See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986, Ch. 4; Frederic S. Colwell, ‘Shelley on Sculpture: The Uffizi Notes’. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979), pp. 59–77 and my ‘Shelley’s “Notes on Sculpture”’: Toward a Romantic Classicism in *Prometheus Unbound*. *Comparatist* 4 (1980), pp. 11–20, though my essay should be corrected by Murray’s analysis. See also Weinberg *BSM* XXII: 48 n. 2.

a strange delirium upon their necks, and looking up to heaven, whilst they totter and stumble even in the energy of their tempestuous dance.³⁷

Here the tempest is a figure to describe the maenads' frenzy; in the ode, the maenad is a figure to describe the actual tempest, though that tempest is also the wind of a possibly transcendent inspiration.

In Medwin's *Athenaeum* text, his 1833 *Memoir*, and his *Life*, as in Mary Shelley's use of his two earlier texts for her 1840 *Essays, Letters from Abroad*, the maenads' heads 'are leaning with a strange *delirium* upon their necks'. In Forman's text of 1879, the passage reads, 'leaning with a strange *inanity* upon their necks ...' (my italics).³⁸ Though Medwin's word 'delirium' at first seems more plausible because more familiar in such a context, the alternate word 'inanity', meaning 'emptiness' from its Latin origins, is one that Shelley used to great effect at the end of *Prometheus Unbound* III, where human abilities if 'unclogged' might 'soar ... Pinnacled dim in the intense inane'. As he sometimes did, Shelley may have written both words in his rough draft without deciding which to cancel. In Medwin's version, 'delirium' suggests an intense, feverish, irrational consciousness, perhaps diseased, but perhaps also joyous. Certainly it suggests a specific content for the mind, though an uncontrolled content. In Forman's version, the maenads' intentionality and even their individual consciousness has been erased by the god's power: their subjective state is 'inanity', not a commonplace triviality but an emptying-out of self before the dominating god. Medwin's reading overcomes the strongly imprisoning medium of the bas-relief in a dissolving ecstasy we might call emotional and subjective; Forman's seems to thematize just that powerful immobility in a suppression of affect so strong that it denies any inwardness at all.

In a notebook now known as Huntington MS 2176, Shelley had drafted the first three stanzas of the *Ode to the West Wind* on several pages near another, related fragment, dated 'Oct. 20' – and thus very close to the dates of his Uffizi visits. In the pocket-sized notebook Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 12, he copied these three stanzas neatly, writing at the top of page 63 'Octr 25' – and then began further revision.³⁹ On page 64 he emends the line copied from the Huntington notebook, 'Like the loose hair [inserted locks] uplifted from the head' (ll. 24–5) to 'Like the bright hair uplifted' (ll. 6, 6a).⁴⁰ His revision deftly improves the sound of the line, makes the maenad's physical presence more specific, and also makes it more positive from 'loose', with its sexual overtones, to 'bright'. The pages that follow these three stanzas in adds. e. 12 return to his drafting of Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*; a very rough, incomplete draft of the ode's fourth stanza comes 90 pages later. There, pulling together the

37 *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mary Shelley. 2 vols. London: Moxon, 1840, vol. 2, p. 268.

38 *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, ed. Harry Buxton Forman. 8 vols. London: Reeves and Turner, 1880, vol. 7, pp. 42–77 (p. 63).

39 See Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, pp. 222–6; Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley*. Cleveland, OH: Case Western University Press, 1972, pp. 201–5; and MYR VI: xxxviii–ix and ff. *4r–*6v. For the passages from Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 12, see Goslee, *BSM XVIII*: 88–91 and, below, pp. 192–3.

40 HM MS 2176, fol. *5r, in MYR VI.

natural images of the first three stanzas, he begins to identify the lyric speaker with their passive reception of the wind's power: 'If I were a leaf ..., a cloud ..., a wave ...' (ll. 1–3).⁴¹ His composing process falters, however, as the speaker's sense of identity falters: 'If ever / Thy spirit had found / were had found no / early grave in me.' His struggle to deny such an early grave of the wind's spirit in him only succeeds in affirming both past and present collapses of inspiration. Thus he breaks off again.

Yet these collapses lead to a paradoxical continuity. In adds. e. 6, the notebook he had dedicated a year earlier to completing his 'Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks', he finds space for stanza four on a page surrounded by drafts of the *Ode to Liberty*, drafts written in mid-1820, and begins work on stanza five.⁴² Now the turn toward individual memory begun in the earlier draft of stanza four does affirm a continuous self. Yet it also creates a pattern of an exultant but terrifying rise and collapse, possession and abandonment by deity:

Oh lift me like a wave, a leaf, a cloud
I fall upon the thorns of life – I bleed.

Like the legendary nightingale, he sings prophetically out of self-consciously accepted pain, deliberately confronting 'A heavy weight of hours' – a weight of both personal and political anguish. Yet the order of the lines, the rising, falling and rising trajectories of the natural images, recalling the maenad's wild dancing with hair and self 'uplifted', all suggest that the falling describes not only the speaker's present condition but a future moment, once the wind he prays for has lifted and then passed over him.

On the following notebook page (p. 137 rev.) he makes a rough sketch of a tree like a fireworks explosion and recalls from drafts of other fragments in HM 2176 the 'ashes', 'sparks' and 'leaves' – his own pages – to work out the metaphor for a draft of stanza five.⁴³ This very rough stanza, however, still lacks its first two tercets. In the 1820 printed text of 'Ode to the West Wind', the stanza begins with a cry of submission: 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is' and then arrogantly appropriates wind to self: 'Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!'⁴⁴ Two pages have been torn out between the pages now marked 137 rev. and 136 rev., and they may have contained a draft of the opening tercets for the stanza.⁴⁵ Yet this gap returns us to the ambiguity in Shelley's gallery note on the maenads: do they feel 'delirium' or 'inanity' in their fierce tempestuous seizure by inspiration? In the ode, does the apparently external inspiration demand the subject's blank submission to the wind – 'inanity' – or does the subject's own creativity build upon and supplement that external inspiration – 'delirium'? Plato's *Ion* explicitly and Euripides' *Bacchae* implicitly question whether such inspiration carries any consciousness or active shaping of meaning by the maenads themselves.⁴⁶ Shelley's ekphrastic note on the

41 MS Shelley adds. e. 12, p. 155.

42 BSM V: xxviii.

43 Rogers, *Shelley at Work*, p. 225.

44 SPP: 300; the editors use the 1820 text.

45 BSM V: 416.

46 See Shelley's rough-draft translation of the *Ion*, especially fols 42r, 43r, 44r in Bod. MS Shelley e. 1, BSM IX: 175, 177, 179. Fraistat dates this draft to December 1819; see

sculpture suggests that in reading the *Ode* we should leave the question open. If ‘inanity’ points toward a disfiguring, a gap or absence in the transmission of meaning through the storm to the maenadic poet-prophet, ‘delirium’ points – if shakily – to a more conscious transmission or fluid contagion of meaning and thus to a more Winckelmannian ‘monumentality’ in which inspiration is doubly ‘naturalized’, both as appropriate natural wind and as part of a motivated sign system.⁴⁷ The shakiness of this motivation, however, suggests that such a monumentality is itself not so far from a disfiguring or slippage of meaning.

III

Slightly over a year later, taking up his friend Peacock’s witty challenge to the relevance of poetry in the modern world, Shelley develops a fuller analysis of differences among the arts that distinguishes further between ‘monumental’, and ‘disfiguring’ modes of expression. In Bod. MS Shelley d. 1, the earliest remaining draft of the ‘Defence’, he begins by arguing that *to poiein* or ‘making’ is one of the two essential powers of all thinking and thus will be necessary in all historical ages.⁴⁸ Describing how this ‘making’, this creative and synthetic thinking, expresses itself through ‘intellectual energy’ in a range of different arts, he defines ‘Poetry’ as ‘the ... / form according to which the exercise of the Imagination is < > perceived & communicated’.⁴⁹ His use of the term ‘poetry’, however broadly defined as *poiesis*, begins to shift his argument away from the ‘monumentality’ both of a natural, motivated expressivity and of sculpture as the norm for the coherent cultural spirit.

When he defines poetry more narrowly, his language remains densely iconic. Yet for the first time in this essay he explicitly distinguishes language from the other arts:⁵⁰

... the nature of language being which a more direct image of the motions actions & passions of the our sensitive & intelligent nature and is susceptible of more various &

his introduction, pp. xxxiii–xliv. Shelley’s repeated struggle with a phrase describing the bacchantes that he renders ‘divine insanity’ on fol. 44r may have some bearing on the term ‘inanity’ that Forman reads as an alternative to ‘delirium’ in his edition of the note on the bas-relief of the maenads. See also Euripides, *The Bacchae*, trans. William Arrowsmith in *Euripides V: Three Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959, esp. lines 1122–37.

47 In reading a version of this chapter, Alan Weinberg pointed out that Shelley makes the idea of contagion explicit in the ‘Ode to Liberty’ I, 4, where liberty is ‘scattering contagious fire’.

48 From *BSM IV* (2): 92–3, fol. 86v rev.

49 Fol. 85v rev, 85r rev.

50 See fol. 75r rev, and Susan H. Brisman argues in “‘Unsayings his High Language’”: The Problem of Voice in *Prometheus Unbound*. *Studies in Romanticism* 16 (1977), pp. 51–66, that Shelley explores in the play the distinction between a Hermetic language of referentiality and static visuality and a Promethean language of speech, of presence and of capacity for redemptive change. The ekphrastic mode I have been analysing here has, up to this point, attempted to locate presence within actual visual or plastic monuments as well as within speech.

delicate combinations than colour form or motion; and is more completely and plastic & ? and subject to the controul of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is the arbitrarily produced by Imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone ...⁵¹

‘All the other materials & instruments & conditions of art’, on the other hand, ‘have others relations ^among each other, which obscure interpose between, & limit the expression effects ...’. Modifying his Winckelmann-influenced theory of an uninterrupted, plastic expressivity flowing from artist’s mind to completed artefact, Shelley now posits differing points of continuity or discontinuity for individual arts. As a ‘more direct image’ of the mind in action than are other arts, language is ‘more plastic’ and more fluid in its continuity from the mind or ‘Imagination’ – hence more motivated and thus ‘monumental’ in de Man’s terms. Yet because a concept’s connection to the spoken or written word, its material means or signifier, is arbitrary and not natural, its outward referentiality is ‘disfigured’. In contrast, the relationship between a sculptor’s thought and his execution, Shelley suggests, is obscured both at the point when the artist’s ‘motions actions & passion’ lead toward conception and at the point of material embodiment – hence his revision in the printer’s copy to describe the relations among the ‘materials & instruments & conditions of art’ that ‘interpose between conception and expression’. This pre-Saussurean ‘disfiguring’ allows him to revise his earlier sceptical iconoclasm while including elements of iconicity.⁵²

If, as de Man has powerfully argued, such a scepticism is rooted in all figuration and in all language, bases for political and cultural reform may well collapse into nihilism. Both Orrin Wang and Hugh Roberts respond to this implication in de Man’s reading of ‘The Triumph of Life’ by re-interpreting his terms of disfiguring and monumentality. Although no actual monuments or sculptural artefacts appear in this poetic fragment, Wang begins from de Man’s own comparison of Shelley’s literary fragment to a sculptural fragment and then draws upon a number of earlier critics to point to Roman triumphs as visual, plastic models for a monumental process of history in the poem.⁵³ When we look closely at cancelled passages in the manuscript, moreover, we can see allusions to the maenads in a Bacchic procession and thus to the bas-relief from the Uffizi, to the *Ode to the West Wind*, and to its claims for individual inspiration and expression as socially significant.

In Shelley’s 1822 draft of ‘The Triumph of Life’, the dancers drawn into Life’s triumphal procession ‘Throw back their heads & loose their streaming hair’ in a

51 *BSM* IV (2): 138–9.

52 For the printer’s text, see *SPP*: 513, re-edited from Bod. MS Shelley e. 6. In *Shelley’s Style*. New York: Methuen, 1984, William Keach traces the eighteenth-century heritage of valorizing language over the other arts that lies behind Shelley’s thinking but also points out how he reveals ‘some latent uncertainty in the basic terms of his argument’, particularly as he turns to a description of language as ‘hieroglyphic’ a few pages later (see pp. 12–20). See also Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 283–5 for a discussion of language as mediation and of the essay as a whole as an exploration of ‘intertexture’ or ‘interstices’; she touches only tangentially on the interstices between arts.

53 Wang, *Fantastic Modernity*, p. 46.

gesture characteristic of Bacchic worshippers.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, their loss of human shape or figure, their ‘disfiguration’ in endless process, will become monumental in its inanity, its emptying-out of subjectivity. Here even more than in the *Ode to the West Wind*, Shelley recalls his Uffizi description of the maenads’ heads ‘leaning back’, as index of their ambiguous mental state. As he worked on ‘The Triumph of Life’ in May and June of 1822, the notebook describing the Uffizi sculptures was probably still in Pisa, but there is some evidence for his returning with it when the *Don Juan* capsized and he was drowned.⁵⁵ If he had planned to consult the notebook, he might well have been re-examining the nature of inspiration’s social and cultural transmission, in a way that the Ode tends to elide. In ‘The Triumph of Life’, his association of the captivated dancers with maenads already questions the continuity and transparency posited in the ode, and his manuscript revisions incorporate the resistances of medium and of culture that the earlier gallery note suggests.

It is not only the frenzied crowd in Life’s procession, of course, who succumb to a trance-like mental state. The narrator’s dream-vision itself is described as an involuntary trance, though it leads not to blankness but to a delirium-like, urgent account of Life’s procession and of Rousseau’s inner, supposedly explanatory narrative. That inner narrative is full of amnesiac moments: his waking in a paradisaical valley without knowing whether his life before that moment had been a heaven or a hell; his encounter with the ‘shape all light’ whose dancing feet ‘blot / The thoughts of him who gazed on them’, and the effect of her potion, turning his brain to sand just before the ‘cold glare’ of Life’s procession is rolled into his sight.

In his cogent reading of ‘The Triumph of Life’, Hugh Roberts suggests that the Bacchic dancers reflect the poem’s larger struggles between memory and amnesia, struggles which correspond to the ongoing thematic debate in Shelley’s work between a ‘therapeutic idealism’ in which the world can be born anew and a scepticism that threatens to become nihilistic or amnesiac.⁵⁶ To bridge this split, Roberts modifies de Man’s deconstructive, highly sceptical reading of the poem by returning to an essay that appeared just before de Man’s, David Quint’s more ideological but not idealistic reading of the poem. De Man reads the ‘shape all light’ as a figure who both violently creates and then destroys the possibility of a significant, enduring figuration: she dances into fragments ‘this “deadly Apollo, the positional language of figuration”’ (Quint quoting De Man). Quint argues that the loss of certainty in figuration, the loss of hypostatizing ‘monumentality’, is not the total or permanent annihilation of self but a necessary prelude to renewal, a freedom from enslavement to a ‘fictive, representational’ and in effect monumentalized ‘selfhood’.⁵⁷ Rousseau fails,

54 Bod. MS Shelley adds. c. 4, fols 25v, 26r; *BSM* I: 162–5.

55 See Weinberg *BSM* XXII (1): 24–5. The notebook PBS was bringing from Pisa and that was possibly retrieved from the capsized boat, Weinberg suggests, may have gathered together many of his prose essays on classical Greek culture. If so, perhaps it was already in part a fair-copy notebook, as might be suggested – if with limited reliability – by Medwin’s fusing of the opening of ‘A Discourse’ with the first of the gallery notes, on the Niobe, in his *Athenaeum* text.

56 Roberts, *Chaos of History*, Ch. 4.

57 David Quint, ‘Representation and Ideology in *The Triumph of Life*’. *Studies in English Literature* 18 (autumn, 1978), pp. 639–57 (pp. 651–2).

in Roberts's paraphrase of Quint's argument, 'by refusing to admit the necessity of the vacancy within [He] creates the shape in his imagination and then seeks from his own creation answers to the necessarily unanswerable questions of life. This is then the moment of his enslavement to ideology.'⁵⁸ Quint argues that Rousseau simply renews deity, creating a monumental idol, and alienates his own creativity. Roberts then extends Quint's argument beyond the latter's, positing an intellectual and creative freedom from enslavement to the possibility of political action. Thus 'amnesia' is not a permanent state of blankness but corrects the idolizing worship of one's own self.

Two aspects of the maenadic procession in the manuscript of 'The Triumph' offer some grounds for extending the Uffizi note's questioning of maenadic consciousness and for extending Quint's and Roberts's turn of vacancy to political and social purpose. One is the intensely communal nature both of the note's maenads and of the repeated appearances of Life's procession encircling the solitary dreaming narrator and the solitary dreaming Rousseau. This contrasts sharply with the simile of 'some fierce maenad' in the ode, as well as the insistent pleas for the wind to inspire 'me' and to transmit 'my dead thoughts over the universe'. The other aspect is the pattern of decisions Shelley makes in the process of drafting, as he moves away from the human figures of maenadic dancers. First he revises the initial and fullest descriptions of the dancers, given early in the poem by the frame narrator; and second, he transforms the dancers into the increasingly emptied-out 'shadows' that appear in Rousseau's narration at the end of the manuscript as we have it.⁵⁹ This enclosed narrative tells of Rousseau's first encounter with the procession. Shelley's revisions to the first appearance of the maenadic dancers in Life's procession, I argue, point him toward their more profound re-creation and/or disintegration in their second appearance, as a product of Rousseau's misguided search – but also, however grotesquely, as a process of re-authorizing the making and transformation of images.

Once the narrator's trance reveals the strange triumphal procession whirling along on the 'public way / Thick strewn with summer dust', the frantic 'multitude' first catches his attention, and he compares them, echoing the *Ode to the West Wind* and its echoes of *Paradise Lost* and earlier epics, to 'autumnal leaves' (ll. 15–16; l. 16).⁶⁰ After the chariot of Life appears with its 'crouching ... Shape' leading the procession of 'mighty captives', the narrator returns to the 'ribald' Dionysian 'crowd'. At the bottom of fol. 25r, at the point in the *terza rima* scheme where a new rhyme is required, he originally writes, 'The maniac dance, the dithyrambic hymn', 'dithyrambic' referring explicitly to the worship of Dionysos. He then replaces 'hymn' with 'strains' – still a musical term but less associated with ritual worship; it also may be a pun. Crossing out 'maniac', he starts to replace it with 'maddening', then makes the line more active by changing from adjective to verb: 'maddens'. With these open 'a' sounds – dance, maddens and van – we become singers or gasping dancers as we read aloud. On fol. 25v, Shelley cancels several phrases that again would point more specifically to Dionysian worship, first 'in wild steps sing notes of wilder' and then 'singing savage music' (ll. 5, 15). One of his scribal gestures

58 Roberts, *Chaos of History*, p. 202.

59 MS Shelley adds. c. 4, fol. 49r, in *BSM I*: 254.

60 Fol. 20r, fol. 21r, in *BSM I*: 140–41, 144–5.

When the 'ruin' of Rousseau speaks to the narrator, neither narrator nor Rousseau directly discusses the just-described 'ribald crowd' of dancers. As Rousseau recalls his first encounter with the procession, however, an encounter that we are to believe took place well before the narrator's entrance into the vision-narrative, he describes the dancers as far more dehumanized than in the narrator's preceding description. Even though 'more did follow, with exulting hymn', recalling the maenadic parallel, a page earlier Rousseau says, 'the crew / Seemed in that light like atomies that dance / ... Within a sunbeam' (ll. 10–15).⁶¹ The dancers disintegrate into 'Phantoms' or 'shadows', 'dim forms' like 'vampire bats'. In their vampire praxis, they become perhaps themselves involuntary creative and political agents who inhabit empty skulls and tiaras, pointing out the 'inanity' of rulers by usurping the physical spaces of their subjectivity. They also throw off the wreckage of their own subjectivity as grotesque epipsyches. These shadows, in turn, are 'distorted' and moulded by the 'cars creative light / Vision/ray', 'Compelling them ... curdling the shapeless mass'. And finally, in an echo of maenadic ecstasy, 'most some grew weary of the ghastly dance / And sank fell, as I have fallen by the wayside'.⁶²

In this Lucretian flurry of simulacra is a view of the relationship between individual 'creative' self and creation that makes more complex the emptied-out or delirious subjectivity of the maenads in Shelley's 1819 gallery note. While the maenadic dancers in this procession may seem victims of their own ecstasy, their possession by an enslaving communal inspiration seems in this second stage to produce a weird interchange of separate fragments from one dancer to another in a very un-Habermasian public sphere – the public way that the chariot's wheels grind through. Thus they echo not only the passages that both Quint and Roberts cite from 'On Life' to support vacancy as liberating, but also that essay's description of the changing configurations of individual subjectivity as temporary collocations or constellations, 'assemblages of thoughts, ... different modifications ...'.⁶³ Further, to return to the issues addressed in the 'Defence' and cast them in terms of modern textual theory, as these 'assemblages' move from individual self's or author's ideas to more public forms of communication, they illustrate an ironically-framed vision of collaborative authorship or publication, and beyond this the collaborative or fragmented social reception of a single author's imagined desires for self or for community.⁶⁴

61 Adds. c. 4, fol. 47r, fol. 46r.

62 Fol. 52r, v.

63 See *SPP*: 507–8; the fragment, from his *Philosophical Reform* notebook, proposes a sceptical view of language but not in relation to other arts. See p. 505 n. 1 for textual history. Though Mary Shelley included it in her fair-copy collection of Percy Shelley's prose, Bodleian MS Shelley adds. d. 6 (*BSM* XXII [1]), along with the gallery notes and other material that was probably included in his missing holograph notebook recovered from the *Don Juan*, we have no evidence that he had included a draft of it in that now-missing text in addition to the one in the *Philosophical Reform* notebook.

64 See Andrew Franta, 'Shelley and the Politics of Political Indirection'. *Poetics Today* 22.4 (winter 2001) for readings of the *Ode to the West Wind* and the 'Defence' as 'prophecy in reverse' (p. 774), as 'ground[ing] poetic authority in the material conditions of poetic production and reception' (p. 765); that essay does not consider 'The Triumph of Life'.

In this terrifying new unity of individual artistic and communal civic forms, a unity that the narrator attempts to challenge, Shelley assesses even more profoundly and enigmatically than before the complex ways in which investigating boundaries among the arts, both in the 'pictorial' and in the 'linguistic' frameworks of disfiguring and monumentality, forces us also to investigate the shifting boundaries or stages of creativity: from individual 'inspiration', to the nature of the mind or minds that receive that impulse whether in delirium or inanity or conscious agency – to the material 'forms' taken by that impulse, and the transmission or production of those forms.

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Chapter 9

Noises On: The Communicative Strategies of Shelley's Prefaces

Hugh Roberts

'There is no living author', wrote Leigh Hunt, 'who writes a preface like Mr. Shelley.'¹ Shelley critics, when they have considered his prefaces – *qua* prefaces – at all, have not tended to agree with this judgement. The functions which they see Shelley's prefaces performing are all to be found enumerated as among the most common in Gérard Genette's *Paratexts* – perhaps the most thorough account of the varieties and purposes of literary prefaces. The primary function of the preface, according to Genette, is 'to ensure that the text is read properly'.² This is achieved in various ways, including: by demonstrating the importance of the subject;³ by providing information the reader needs in order to properly understand the work;⁴ by specifying appropriate and inappropriate readerships;⁵ and ('most important') providing an authoritative interpretation of the work.⁶ The preface, in Genette's view, is a principal instrument of the assertion of authorial control – control over both the meaning and reception of the author's work.

The assertion of a controlling authority is also what Shelley critics have hitherto found in Shelley's prefaces. Elise Gold, describing the prefaces as 'traditional in many ways', suggests that Shelley's aims are 'to teach readers how to appreciate, interpret, and above all, experience his poems'.⁷ In particular, she focuses upon his use of the preface as a kind of bouncer, letting in the (intellectually) beautiful people, and keeping out the unenlightened. She describes Shelley's prefaces as 'screening devices not only for defining but for reducing his readership'.⁸ Stephen Behrendt,

1 Leigh Hunt, untitled review of Shelley's *The Cenci* in *The Indicator*, July 26 (1820) in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers. Part C: Shelley, Keats, and London Radical Writers*, ed. Donald Reiman. 2 vols. New York and London: Garland, 1972, vol. 2, p. 475.

2 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 197.

3 Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 199.

4 Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 209.

5 Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 212.

6 Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 221.

7 Elise M. Gold, 'Touring the Inventions: Shelley's Prefatory Writing'. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 36 (1987), pp. 63–87 (p. 64).

8 Gold, 'Touring the Inventions', p. 73.

similarly, sees them as fulfilling the standard Genettian functions: 'limiting his audiences'⁹ and engaging in 'special pleading' in an attempt to 'maneuver the reader into reading and evaluating the text as the author directs'.¹⁰

One function that Behrendt identifies – using the preface as a platform from which to respond to unfavourable criticism¹¹ – is the focus of Michael Laplace-Sinatra's recent study. Like Behrendt, he suggests that the prefaces' insistent concern with the issue of plagiarism is intended to deflect John Taylor Coleridge's charges in the *Quarterly Review* that Shelley was an 'unsparing imitator'.¹² But if Shelley sometimes makes these gestures of 'defiance towards the critics',¹³ he is also not above signalling, in the preface to *The Cenci*, that the work is very different from his earlier ('unsuccessful') productions, in the hope of winning over readers who have been prejudiced by earlier criticism.¹⁴

The common theme of these readings is the use of the preface for the assertion of the author's power over his work and its reception. Hunt, however, for whom Shelley's prefaces are such nonpareils, praises them for precisely the opposite qualities. It is Shelley's willingness to relinquish control that impresses Hunt, his deliberate self-exposure – in the preface – 'to the chance of being doubted by those whom he would benefit ...'.¹⁵ There is no doubt, either, that at least one contemporary audience – the critics – seized this 'chance' of doubting Shelley, and his prefaces, with both hands. To these readers, Shelley's prefaces constituted something of a puzzle, as the range of their responses demonstrates. On the one hand – bolstering the Genettian reading – several of the reviewers professed to find Shelley's prefaces 'very arrogant' (to quote John Gibson Lockhart's anonymous review of the *The Revolt of Islam* in the January 1819 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*¹⁶). Lockhart also comments on the 'presumption' of Shelley's preface to *Alastor* in his November 1819 review,¹⁷ while the anonymous reviewer (possibly John Chalk Claris) of the *The Revolt of Islam* in the November 1818 *Man of Kent* tries for ironic understatement in referring to Shelley's 'somewhat confident preface'.¹⁸

On the other hand, Shelley's prefaces come in for the same criticism as his poems as being needlessly obscure. Thus Lockhart, on *Alastor* again, refers to the first paragraph of the preface (which he quotes in full) as a 'dim enunciation'.¹⁹ The anonymous reviewer in the October 1816 *Eclectic Review* also takes the

9 Stephen Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*. Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p. 162.

10 Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 22.

11 Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 169.

12 Quoted in Michael Laplace-Sinatra, "'I Will Live Beyond this Life': Shelley, Prefaces, and Reviewers". *The Keats-Shelley Review* 13 (1999), pp. 88–104 (p. 92).

13 Laplace-Sinatra, "'I Will Live Beyond this Life'", p. 99.

14 Laplace-Sinatra, "'I Will Live Beyond this Life'", p. 97.

15 Hunt, *Cenci* review, p. 476.

16 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* II: 97.

17 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* II: 118.

18 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed*, II: 656.

19 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, November 1819 in Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* II: 119.

preface to *Alastor* to task for failing to provide the key to 'Mr. Shelley's allegory' and for degenerating into 'jargon'.²⁰ The September 1820 *Literary Gazette* has an anonymous review of *Prometheus Unbound*, which complains of 'a preface, nearly as mystical as the drama ... [which] prepares us, by its unintelligibility, for the aggravated absurdity which follows'.²¹ Despite this jargonish obscurity, Shelley's reviewers consistently seek to engage with his prefaces. They seem to expect them to perform Genettian functions, but register their bafflement and frustration when they apparently fail to do so. The practice in reviews of the period of reprinting large sections from the work being reviewed, from both the preface and the work itself, allows the preface a free hand to assert the author's controlling voice within the review. Frequently, Shelley's reviewers seem puzzled by the prefaces' failure to take on that role. Lockhart's review of *Alastor* is again exemplary: he introduces a long quotation from Shelley's preface as a 'short explanation of the subject' of the poem, but immediately acknowledges that this is an explanation 'which we cannot say throws any very great light upon it' although without it the poem would be 'altogether unintelligible'.²² The October 1816 *Eclectic Review*'s anonymous reviewer of the same poem performs almost exactly the same shuffle, conceding that 'it is but justice to Mr. Shelley, to let him give his own explanation of this singular production' but then declaring that the explanation will not 'enable ordinary readers to decipher the import' of 'Mr. Shelley's allegory'.²³ The anonymous reviewer of *Prometheus Unbound* mentioned above, who derided the preface as 'mystical' and 'unintelligible', nonetheless quotes several lengthy passages from it, assuring the reader that he has 'upon honour, quoted verbatim'.²⁴

Some of these complaints, no doubt, can be discounted as willed blindness. But when the reviewer quotes these sentences from the *Prometheus* preface – 'As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it *creates* by combination and representation' – and then splutters in exasperation, 'What kind of creation the creation by representation is, puzzles us grievously',²⁵ we can feel some sympathy for him. In the context – a protest against those who might accuse Shelley of plagiarism – this sounds dangerously like the *post hoc* rationalizations of a guilty conscience.

Of course, Genette makes the point that 'from the fact that the paratext always fulfils a function, it does not necessarily follow that the paratext always fulfils its function well',²⁶ and one could argue that Shelley's prefaces are merely incompetent attempts to assert authorial control over the reader's response to the poems. But even those who are thoroughly persuaded by the 'control' model find something unsettling about Shelley's prefatorial style. Elise Gold concludes her essay with a brief acknowledgment of the 'paradoxical' nature of Shelley's prefaces, which are

20 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* I: 327–8.

21 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* I: 544.

22 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* II: 118.

23 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* I: 327.

24 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* I: 544.

25 Reiman, *Romantics Reviewed* I: 544.

26 Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 409.

As much opaque barriers as revealing guides to the texts. In them, the poet is purposefully secretive and manipulative. He distorts and fabricates information to test our powers of perception. He is at times unappealingly defensive, elitest [sic], and antagonistic as if to make certain that we possess the necessary sympathetic and empathetic qualities of devoted readers.²⁷

Gold's solution to this 'paradox' is to read these 'barriers' as tests of our commitment to the kind of active reading Shelley demands: 'If we can penetrate the introductory obstacles ... then we are admitted not only into the poems and their worlds but into a special group of kindred souls who participate in the search for truth.'²⁸ But this is a paradox itself. Unless we are working on the Groucho Marx principle – that only those clubs that seek to exclude us are worth joining – what is it that encourages us to fight past these 'barriers' unless we are already in the 'kindred souls' club? If we are not convinced by the poem itself, a repellent preface is hardly likely to change our minds. How can Gold's – and, indeed, *any* – functional reading of prefatory writing be convincing if all strategies, seductive or rebarbative, are equally (in)effective?

This is a familiar paradox. As Genette himself observes, the uselessness of prefaces is itself a traditional theme in preface writing.²⁹ Such explicitly ironic acts of framing draw attention to the general problem of the preface, which is its uncertain relationship to the 'bare poem'. Is the preface to be considered as an integral part of the poem or not? If it is not, then why is it called for? It is possible, under certain conceptions of the nature of the work of art and the role of the artist, to answer these questions quite straightforwardly. If we think of the poem – in the terms of information theory – as information being transmitted from a sender to a receiver, then the function of the preface would be to provide a measure of redundancy to protect against the potential 'noisiness' of the message channel. Information in these terms is defined as the reduction of uncertainty: prior to the sending of the message, many different messages are possible and the receiver is in a state of maximal uncertainty; when the message is sent, the receiver's uncertainty is reduced. From out of the universe of possibilities – whether minimal (yes/no) or maximal (all possible poems in the English language) – *this* is the one specified by the sender. Having received that information, the receiver can act accordingly. Noise in the channel – any random interference in the transmission of the message – inhibits the reduction

27 Gold, 'Touring the Inventions', p. 86.

28 Gold, 'Touring the Inventions', p. 86.

29 Genette, *Paratexts*, pp. 230–31. The preface to Shelley's unpublished early poem, 'The Wandering Jew' is a good example:

Many sage monkish writers have supported ... the reality of his existence. But as the quoting them would have led me to annotations perfectly uninteresting, although very fashionable, I decline presenting to the public any thing but the bare poem With respect to the omission of elucidatory notes, I have followed the well-known maxim of 'Do unto others as thou wouldest they should do unto thee'. (*CPPBS* I: 43)

One need not be versed in the Derridean 'logic of the supplement' to note that the claim to be presenting the 'bare poem' undoes itself, adding an authorial frame in the very act of claiming to eschew such frames.

of uncertainty, however. If the receiver cannot be sure that 'no' means 'no', then the receiver's uncertainty is not reduced quite as much, even by a correctly received message. If noise cannot be entirely removed then the only means of countering such uncertainty is by message redundancy.³⁰

Thus, if we regard the poem as a message sent to the reader by the poet, the preface appears as an opportunity to provide certain kinds of significant redundancies. We all know how 'noisy' literary interpretation is, and how much uncertainty remains to be reduced for even the most attentive reader. For the most part, poetic prefaces seek to limit the possibility of misunderstanding. When Shelley tells us in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* that he has refused to be constrained by what we know of the plot of Aeschylus's lost original, he saves us from the potential error of trying to read the play as a genuine attempt at literary reconstruction. When he tells us in the preface to *The Cenci* that the fascination of Beatrice Cenci's story lies in the 'restless and anatomizing casuistry' that it provokes,³¹ he reassures us that our moral uncertainty about Beatrice's 'crime' is not the result of a garbled or incomplete message.

A related way to think of the function of the preface in a sender/receiver model would be as 'metacommunication'. I take the term from Gregory Bateson, who uses it to describe those messages that are sent which convey information about the communicative situation, messages of the logical type 'this is play'.³² Here, too, we can see the function of the preface being to reduce potential 'noise' in communication. Bateson's archetypal case is the play-fight between animals. Any individual 'play' bite is not necessarily different in substance from a 'real' bite. The receiver's uncertainty is prevented, however, by metacommunicative signals that mark the situation as 'play'. Similarly, when Shelley tells us, in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, that he writes for 'the more select classes of poetical readers',³³ rather than suggesting that he is here seeking to limit his audience (something which Shelley probably thought came all too easily to him), we could argue that he is preparing his readers to read what follows in a particular way – as a highly wrought piece of art or as necessarily esoteric, rather than as, say, an ephemeral political satire. The problem with this model of the preface's function is that it does not accord well with the Romantic conception of the nature of poetry. From the perspective of organicist Romanticism, poems are not the vehicles of 'messages' sent from the author to the reader; rather, they are – like objects of natural beauty – occasions for the exercise of the reader's imaginative powers. From this perspective, poetry has less the character of a message than that of an epiphany, or the occasion for an epiphany; as Friedrich

30 If one in every nine 0's come through as 1's (and vice versa), then I can only be 90% sure that any given 0 means 0. If, however, each message is sent twice, I can be 99% sure that each 0,0 means 0, and that each 1,1 means 1. I will also be 100% certain that each 0,1 and 1,0 represents an error.

31 *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edn. New York: Norton, 2002 (hereafter *SPP*), p. 142. All references to Shelley's works are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

32 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1987; see, for example, pp. 9–21, 364–78.

33 *SPP*: 209.

Schiller puts it, 'Beauty is ... an *object* for us ... but it is at the same time a *state of our personality* In a word, it is at once our state and our act.'³⁴ Mere communication from author to reader, on the other hand, takes us out of the realm of the organic aesthetic, and returns us to our individual existence, appealing in a one-sided way to the inharmonious wills and intellects of sender(s) and receiver(s).

The origins of this conception of the role of the Beautiful are Kantian, the *zweckmassigkeit ohne zweck*, or 'finality apart from an end', that makes the 'natural' object of disinterested aesthetic contemplation (that 'subjective harmonizing of the imagination and the understanding' in a 'free conformity to law'³⁵) the autoteological organic. The preface considered as metacommunication is doubly antithetical to such a conception.³⁶ The work, like speech, should be natural, self-sufficient, organic. A preface – *a fortiori* a 'metacommunicative' preface – 're-presents' the work, making it artificial, complex and willed. As such, the work must then be understood as the product of the sender's intention, depriving it of that 'finality apart from an end' essential to genuine aesthetic appreciation. The work as 'message' appeals to the understanding, negating the free play of the reader's imagination.

It is not surprising, then, that the late eighteenth century sees the rise of a general anxiety about the preface which has stayed with us (in our post-Romantic condition) down to the present day. Even before the full development of Romantic organicism, the age of sensibility sought the authentic directness of honest feeling. The literature of sensibility – and its close cousin, the gothic – abound with fictive prefaces which frame the narrative to follow as a true account, a collection of letters 'edited' or a long lost manuscript 'translated' by the author.³⁷ This 'fictive' preface is still metacommunicative (it tells the reader 'read what follows as "true"'), but it is an act of metacommunication that in principle rescinds all claims of authorial control, and, indeed, any other metacommunicative action; once the reader is past the preface, she is free to make of what follows what she will. Most important, the preface promises the minimum possible noise in the transmission of the message: here, it says, is the original story, unaltered and undegraded.

34 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell. New York: Continuum, 1989, p. 122.

35 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952 [1928], p. 86.

36 In its uncertain 'supplemental' status, the preface undermines the organic totality of the work. Indeed, the preface stands in relationship to the work much as writing stands in relation to speech in Derrida's analysis of Rousseau's logic of the supplement. For Rousseau, argues Derrida, 'speech being natural or at least the natural expression of thought, the most natural form of institution or convention for signifying thought, writing is added to it, is adjoined, as an image or representation. In that sense, it is not natural. It diverts the immediate presence of thought to speech into representation and the imagination. This recourse is not only "bizarre", but "dangerous"' (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 144).

37 Examples include such seminal works as Richardson's *Pamela*, Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of the Young Werther*, and that ur-gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.

These attempts to defuse or evade the metacommunicative functions of the preface help us to understand the problems posed by prefatory writing for the Romantic poets. The canonical metacommunicative preface renders the work that follows 'inauthentic'. It signals to us that what we are going to read is a construct, a noisy simulacrum of spontaneous utterance. The preface is, thus, the ironic genre *par excellence*, if the essence of the ironic is heteronomy – the suspicion, at least, that an utterance falls under more than one 'regime' of significance, responds to more than one 'speech situation'. (Note how close any definition of 'irony' is to a definition of 'noise'.) Not even the fictive preface can avoid this irony; the 'freedom' it offers the reader is necessarily somewhat artificial, its fictionality always quasi-transparent. The classic (or anti-classic) example of the ironic preface is Tristram Shandy's preface to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Emphatically declared to be the work of the narrator,³⁸ the preface itself is a sustained attack upon the work's real-world critics, whose quarrel was with Laurence Sterne, clergyman.

The humour of Sterne's fictive preface is the flip side of a genuine anxiety, an anxiety that Romantic thought holds to be constitutive of modern subjectivity and which we commonly label 'Romantic irony'. In his essay 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry', Schiller gives us, indirectly, a Romantic theory of the preface: in the case of the 'poet of a naïve and bright youthful world', 'the object possesses him entirely. ... Like the divinity behind the world's structure he stands behind his work; *he* is the work, and the work is *he*; to ask only for *him* is to be unworthy of it, inadequate to it, or sated with it.'³⁹ For the modern – that is, Romantic – writer, however, 'art divides him and cleaves him in two'.⁴⁰ It is true that 'through the ideal he returns to unity', but 'because the ideal is an infinitude to which he never attains, the civilized man can never become perfect in *his* own wise, which the natural man can in his.'⁴¹ Thus the modern writer, a subject cut adrift from the world of objects, is also cut adrift from his own writing, unable to claim it as authentically *his*, constantly seeking to 'restore by means of a higher Art this wholeness in our nature which Art has destroyed'.⁴²

The preface writing of high Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge reflects the burden of this ironic condition, although it also seeks to escape from it. When Wordsworth writes his famous prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads* he is aware of the paradox of writing a prose defence of poems, which, he claims, have themselves the transparency of good prose. But Wordsworth does everything in his power to insulate his preface from the paradoxes of supplementarity. He acknowledges at the start that it is absurd to try to 'reason' the reader 'into an approbation of these particular Poems', unless, of course, he had the space 'to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is

38 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Oxford's World Classics), 1983, p. 152.

39 Friedrich Schiller, 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry', in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller and Goethe*, H.B. Nisbet (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 191.

40 Schiller, 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry', p. 194.

41 Schiller, 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry', p. 194.

42 Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education*, p. 45.

healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without ... retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself'.⁴³ By suggesting that the only adequate explanatory framework for his poems would be the entire history of writing and human society, Wordsworth removes his poems from the context of individual intention (or message), and presents them as the logical consequences of world history. Instead of the necessarily incomplete self-effacement of the fictive preface, Wordsworth chooses the opposite tactic, an assertion of the poem's – and the poet's – universality. This, of course, is the special gift of the Romantic poet, to discover within 'his own passions and volitions' the 'volitions and passions ... manifested in the goings-on of the Universe'.⁴⁴ The poet who 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'⁴⁵ has – although perhaps only temporarily – overcome the ironic self-division of the modern subject, and is capable of producing a poetry whose most striking quality is its very ordinariness: so plain, so minimal, so devoid of specific 'message', that the reader can discover within them 'the beautiful and permanent forms of nature'.⁴⁶

This argument, that Wordsworth overcomes irony by embracing it, accepting an infinity of possible readings as so many diverse paths to the truth, might seem odd if we recall the close relationship between irony and noise, and remember Wordsworth's frequent tirades against the noise and 'din' of modern life.⁴⁷ But the contradiction is only apparent. Consider, for example, the Bartholomew Fair episode in the *Prelude*. If Wordsworth is 'oppressed' by the 'anarchy and din' of this scene's 'blank confusion' (VII, 599, 660, 696), and sees within it the same perpetual flow 'Of trivial objects, melted and reduced / To one identity, by differences / That have no law, no meaning, and no end' (ll. 702–5),⁴⁸ he finds relief from this noisy flux by learning to see 'the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole' (ll. 735–6). Rather than try to bring into focus a particular 'message' from each disparate object – the Albino, the horse of knowledge, the Invisible Girl – he simply moves through each element to discover the totality that encompasses and defines them.

The quintessential Coleridge preface, to *Kubla Khan*, cannot emulate Wordsworth's sublime confidence, but similarly works to establish the poem as a fact of nature rather than as the 'message' of an individual poet. The preface renounces any claims to control either over the reader or, indeed, the process of publication: the poem is

43 William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge et al., *Lyrical Ballads and Related Writings*, eds William Richey and Daniel Robison. Boston, MA and New York: Houghton Mifflin (New Riverside edn), 2002, p. 391.

44 Wordsworth, Preface, p. 399.

45 Wordsworth, Preface, p. 403.

46 Wordsworth, Preface, p. 393.

47 Consider the reference in 'Tintern Abbey' to the 'din / Of towns and cities' (ll. 26–7), or in the Preface to the 'rapid communication of intelligence' that reduces the modern mind to a state of 'savage torpor' (Wordsworth, Preface, p. 395).

48 (1805 edn). William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 483, 484, 485, 486.

only appearing 'at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity [Byron]'.⁴⁹ But more than that, the poem itself is framed as an accident, an event that occurred to the poet rather than an object produced by him: 'all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort.'⁵⁰ Its current fragmentary form is also the result of accident: the famous visit of the man 'on business from Porlock'. Poet and reader both encounter the poem as a brute fact, an enigmatic clue to the supersensible, rather than the partial and artificially constructed product of a particular subjectivity.

Against this background, the peculiar nature of Shelley's prefatorial strategies starts to come into focus, and in particular, their very different relationship to the related problems of noise and irony. Shelley's prefaces come in two main types, which we might call the 'fictive' and the 'non-fictive'. The fictive preface – with its ironic ambiguities – appealed to Shelley from a young age and at various times throughout his career. The *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, which he published in 1810, purport to be poems written by the deranged would-be regicide who attacked George III with a dessert knife in 1786. Shelley's preface is written in the persona of John Fitzvictor, nephew of 'this poor female', who presents these 'fragments' 'in the same state in which they came into my possession'.⁵¹ A better-known example is the preface to 'Julian and Maddalo' (composed in 1819), in which the preface-writer is given no definite persona, but the events and characters of the poem are treated as matters of historical fact. The preface-writer seems to know both Julian and Maddalo, but tells us that he can give us no information about the Maniac beyond what appears in the poem. Like the more straightforward examples above, this preface appears to negate its own claims to special interpretive authority over the story that follows whose 'author', Julian, the preface-writer gently mocks as 'rather serious'.⁵² Similarly, the preface to *Epipsychidion* (1821) opens by telling us that 'the Writer of the following lines died at Florence'.⁵³ Each of these prefaces displays the kind of playful but 'noisy' slipperiness that characterizes Shelley's ironic use of the form. If Wordsworth's and Coleridge's prefaces seek (in part) to free the work from the author's metacommunicative control, Shelley's (like Sterne's) make the inevitable artifice of that act of liberation transparent.

'Julian and Maddalo' serves again as a good example. Newman Ivey White was the first to suggest that Shelley wished to publish this poem anonymously in order to distance himself from what White took to be its nakedly confessional content, an argument which has been widely accepted.⁵⁴ But this argument ignores the ease with which the contemporary audience would have identified the poem's eponymous protagonists. If we place the poem in the light of the emerging culture of celebrity

49 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 295.

50 Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, p. 296.

51 *CPPBS* I: 92.

52 *SPP*: 121.

53 *SPP*: 392.

54 Newman Ivey White. *Shelley*. 2 vols. London: Secker & Warburg, 1947, vol. 2, pp. 49–50. See also Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 262–3.

and its ongoing fascination with Byron, the preface begins to seem like a complex joke. An ‘anonymous’ poem about an encounter with Byron invites comparison with such ‘insider’ fiction as Lady Caroline Lamb’s ‘anonymous’ *roman à clef*, *Glenarvon* (which the Shelleys had read when it appeared in 1816). The ‘key’ to such works is, of course, meant to be universally accessible – how else can such works deliver on their promise of an insider’s view of the fashionable world? – but when we ‘unlock’ the pseudonyms of Shelley’s characters, we find a preface whose only trustworthy ‘information’ is already public knowledge. This seems in keeping with a poem that itself performs an elaborate refusal to share the narrative’s fundamental secret: the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the Madman’s story (‘she told me how / All happened – but the cold world shall not know’ [ll. 616–17]).

A somewhat different use of the transparently fictive preface can be found in Shelley’s satirical ‘Oedipus Tyrannus: or Swellfoot the Tyrant’ (1820). The preface (or ‘Advertisement’) by the purported ‘translator’ of this ancient Greek tragedy attributes it to ‘some *learned Theban*’⁵⁵ – a deliberate clue to the ironic fictitiousness of the preface-writer’s persona. The phrase ‘learned Theban’ is King Lear’s, applied in his madness to Edgar who is passing as Poor Tom (Act 3, scene 4). A deluded misrecognition of a man in incognito, it is a (refractively) transparent placeholder for the author. We are meant to see behind this mask, but at the same time we are meant to remember the response when Lear asks his learned Theban, ‘What is your study?’: ‘How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin’ (III, iv, 101–3). That is plausible shorthand for what Shelley is trying to do in his political satire.

The effect of these prefaces’ pseudo-editorial stance is complex, however. The transparency of the disguise does not mean that the preface fully retains the metacommunicative rights of the text’s ‘sender’. Shelley, whose fragmentary ‘Satire on Satire’ declares that ‘rough words beget sad thoughts’ (l. 37),⁵⁶ is always in two minds about the exercise of power through poetry, and concerned, therefore, to disrupt the poem’s – and the poet’s – potential control over a passive or subdued reader. Shelley’s ‘Defence’ proposes passivity as the great enemy of poetic creativity: poetry’s ‘vitally metaphorical’ language must remain labile or become ‘dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse’.⁵⁷ But metaphor, like irony, can be seen as a form of ‘noisy’ communication, the uncertainty of its ‘message’ stubbornly refusing to be reduced.⁵⁸ The transparent – or, rather, translucent – fictiveness of Shelley’s prefaces generates precisely this kind of noisy instability. The reader who triumphantly ‘decodes’ the *poème à clef* ‘Julian and Maddalo’ is baffled to find the knowledge unlocked by the keys strangely beside the poem’s point; the reader who pats herself on the back for having recalled Edgar’s determination to ‘prevent the

55 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (rev. G.M. Matthews). Oxford: Oxford University Press [Oxford Standard Authors], 1970, p. 390.

56 See Steven E. Jones, ‘Shelley’s Fragment of a “Satire Upon Satire”: A Complete Transcription of the Text with Commentary’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 37 (1988), pp. 136–63 (p. 0000) and MS draft in Reiman, *BSM* VII: 0000.

57 *SPP*: 512.

58 I am deeply indebted to William Paulson’s *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1988) for this insight into the close relationship between literature and ‘noisy communication’.

fiend' cannot help but feel in retrospect that the allusion was clearly signposted from the start. Shelley's fictive prefaces, then, promote an active engagement with the poem on the part of the reader. The reader of these poems is neither subject to the metacommunicative control of the authoritative 'sender', nor subjected to the strong fiction of Wordsworth's or Coleridge's prefatorial disclaiming of control. It is the very instability of these prefaces – their openness to the chance of being doubted – that makes them so effective for Shelley's purposes.

We should, at this point, recall Shelley's celebration of 'a restless and anatomizing casuistry' in the Preface to *The Cenci*. Casuistry, the recognition that 'circumstances alter cases', is premised upon an awareness of circumstantial noise in the 'messages' of moral precepts. The 'restlessness' of the casuistry that Shelley embraces is generated by an inherently ironic world, in which 'cases' cannot be brought definitively under stable regimes of interpretation or prescription. The restless casuistry that Shelley recommends for us in relationship to Beatrice's inherently indeterminable morality tale is only a particularly poignant example of the ever-open 'chance of being doubted' essential to Shelley's poetic purposes. One might expect Shelley's 'non-fictive' prefaces – those in which the persona of the preface-writer and the (actual) author are, or may be presumed to be, the same – to play a more straightforwardly metacommunicative role than the fictive ones. In fact, although these prefaces are very different from those we have examined thus far, they present what are in some ways even more complex challenges to interpretation. A peculiarly unstable example with features of both types is that of *Alastor* – composed in 1815 – the preface to which has, as we have seen, struck many readers, including the first critics of the poem, as bearing an uncertain relationship to the poem it accompanies. It may be unfair to call it a 'dim enunciation', as Lockhart did, but many readers have had problems reconciling the preface with the poem. Earl Wasserman, in his classic study, identified the voice of the preface-writer with the persona of the poem's 'Narrator', a Wordsworthian poet incapable of fully understanding the story he is telling.⁵⁹ To my mind, though, what is striking about the preface is not its obtuseness but its lack of reticence, the detached matter-of-factness with which it offers analysis and evaluation. We are not merely told that the poem 'may be considered as allegorical', but we are given both an extensive key to the allegory and a pointed application of the allegory's lessons to 'actual men'.⁶⁰ Insofar as we identify this writer with the poem's actual author (and, unlike the above examples, there is no direct claim that this is not the case), the preface represents a gross affront to the autotelic 'organicism' of the High Romantic poem. A preface as prose paraphrase demotes the text to merely redundant 'message'. As Shelley himself puts it in, ironically, another preface (this time to *Prometheus Unbound*): 'nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse.'⁶¹ It is no wonder that Wasserman should seek to weave the preface back into the organic unity of the 'work' by attributing it to the poem's 'Narrator'.

⁵⁹ Earl Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, pp. 39–40.

⁶⁰ *SPP*: 73.

⁶¹ *SPP*: 209.

I raise the example of *Alastor* here not because I want to propose yet another 'solution' to its famous riddles. Rather, it is the basis of the riddle itself that is of interest, and which helps us to identify one of the major threads of Shelley's 'non-fictional' prefaces: their consistent preoccupation with redundancy and repetition. One of the principal forms this preoccupation takes is Shelley's anticipatory deflections of charges of plagiarism. Both Laplace-Sinatra and Behrendt see these in 'functional' terms as responses to charges levied at Shelley by hostile reviewers. As Laplace-Sinatra puts it, Shelley is using his prefaces 'to prevent further misinterpretation of his works'.⁶² Such an argument ignores, however, the striking fact that Shelley's obsession with plagiarism *precedes* any critical charges of this kind, and indeed almost certainly provoked them when they came. When John Taylor Coleridge dismissively labelled Shelley an 'unsparing imitator' of Wordsworth in his savage attack on *Laon and Cythna* in the *Quarterly Review*, there can be little doubt that he knew the charge would frustrate Shelley all the more because Shelley had (he thought) prepared against it in the poem's preface:

I have avoided . . . the imitation of any contemporary style. But there must be a resemblance which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age In this view of things, Ford can no more be called the imitator of Shakespeare, than Shakespeare the imitator of Ford.⁶³

Sure enough, Shelley noted bitterly in a letter about the review to his publisher Charles Ollier that 'The only remark worth notice in this piece is the assertion that I imitate Wordsworth. It may as well be said that Lord Byron imitates Wordsworth, or that Wordsworth imitates Lord Byron A certain similarity all the best writers of any particular age inevitably are marked with, from the spirit of that age acting on all. This I had explained in my preface, which the writer was too disingenuous to advert to.'⁶⁴

The argument that Shelley advances in his letter is essentially the same as the argument advanced in the preface to *Laon and Cythna*, and, as we shall see, in prefaces to later poems. To see this quite consistent stance as being born of a frustration with critical misreadings is to miss what is really peculiar about this as a theme in Shelley's preface-writing. To raise the spectre of plagiarism is to invite a suspicion that is otherwise unlikely to arise: *Laon and Cythna* is hardly a Wordsworthian poem, after all. But in preface after preface, Shelley raises these questions of plagiarism and imitation. In the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley devotes a long paragraph to an exploration of the relationship between poetic imitation and poetic creativity. A poet, he tells us

Might as wisely and as easily determine that his mind should no longer be the mirror of all that is lovely in the visible universe, as exclude from his contemplation the beautiful which exists in the writings of a great contemporary. The pretence of doing it would be a

⁶² Laplace-Sinatra, "I Will Live Beyond this Life", p. 93; see also Behrendt, *Shelley and his Audiences*, p. 169.

⁶³ *PS* II: 41–2.

⁶⁴ *Letters* II: 127.

presumption in any but the greatest; the effect, even in him, would be strained, unnatural, and ineffectual.⁶⁵

The preface to *The Cenci* (1819) has only one direct reference to 'plagiarism'.⁶⁶ But the preface as a whole is much preoccupied with imitation more broadly conceived. The preface's first order of business is to identify the source of Shelley's story as a 'manuscript ... copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome',⁶⁷ a 'copying' that draws our attention to the play itself as a kind of 'copying' of this copied source. Shelley assures us, after all, that he has 'avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry',⁶⁸ and that he has 'endeavoured ... to represent the characters as they probably were',⁶⁹ insisting upon the play's closeness to his sources. The very success of the play is dependent upon its faithfulness as mere record: 'In fact it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success. Nothing remained, as I imagined, but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts.'⁷⁰ And this mimetic practice is itself 'copied' from illustrious precedent. *King Lear* and 'the tale of Oedipus ... were stories which already existed in tradition ... before Shakespeare and Sophocles made them familiar to ... all succeeding generations'.⁷¹

Similar observations can be made about later prefaces. The preface (or 'Advertisement') to 'Peter Bell the Third' (1819), for example, although obviously playful, derives much of its humour from its intense insistence upon the 'awful mystery' of the triune identity of the three Peter Bells.⁷² And as in the *Cenci* preface, Shelley appeals to classical precedent for his willingness to retell a twice-told tale.⁷³ Lastly, the preface to *Hellas* (1821), although initially describing the poem as a 'mere improvise', is careful to note that the '*Persae* of Aeschylus afforded me the first model of my conception', and to apologize for the 'newspaper erudition' that provided the details of the poem's story.⁷⁴

One fictive preface is also worth mentioning in this context: in *Epipsychidion* (1821), the preface (again in the form of an 'Advertisement') plays a complex game in which the fictive writer who 'died at Florence' is insistently paralleled with Dante.

65 *SPP*: 208.

66 In a footnote, Shelley scrupulously identifies an 'idea' for one speech in the play borrowed from Calderon's *El Purgatorio de San Patricio* as 'the only plagiarism which I have intentionally committed in the whole piece' (*SPP*: 143).

67 *SPP*: 140.

68 *SPP*: 143.

69 *SPP*: 142.

70 *SPP*: 142.

71 *SPP*: 142.

72 *SPP*: 340.

73 'The present history can be considered only, like the *Iliad*, as a continuation of that series of cyclic poems, which have already been candidates for bestowing immortality upon, at the same time that they receive it from, [Peter Bell's] character and adventures' (*SPP*: 340).

74 *SPP*: 430–31.

The preface identifies the poem's verse epigraph as a 'literal translation from Dante's famous Canzone *Voi, ch'intendendo, il terzo ciel movete, etc*';⁷⁵ it compares the poem as a whole to Dante's *Vita Nuova*, and, most intriguingly, quotes in the original Italian – without identifying the source – Dante's claim from the *Vita Nuova* that '*gran vergogna sarebbe a colui, che rimasse cosa sotto veste di figura, o di colore rettorico: e domandato non sapesse denudare le sue parole da cotal veste, in guisa che avessero verace intendimento*'.⁷⁶ To proclaim, in Italian, in another poet's words, while pretending not to be the author of the poem, that it would be shameful for a poet not to be able to tell us simply and straightforwardly the meaning of his poem, is to leave us very uncertain as to the authority of the preface-writer's voice.

The overall effect of these prefaces – and particularly of the two longest and most theoretically reflective, those to *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound* – is to break sharply with the high Romantic conception of the poem's 'naturalness'. When Shelley speaks of a poet who would pretend to 'exclude from his contemplation the beautiful which exists in the writings of a great contemporary', it seems likely that he is thinking of Wordsworth. The poet who eschews 'poetic diction' in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, and insists upon the 'spontaneity' of his poetic utterance is the very opposite of the poet Shelley presents in his prefaces. Here, Shelley repeatedly urges the reader to see his texts as existing within a noisy pre-existing universe of circulating poems, stories, manuscripts and even newspaper accounts, which inevitably shape his own writing, and the reader's potential responses to that writing. He makes the general point in remarkably similar terms in both the above-mentioned prefaces. In the preface to *Laon and Cythna* he tells us that poets 'cannot escape from subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live, though each is in a degree the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded'.⁷⁷ In *Prometheus Unbound* he develops the point further:

A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations, of their age.⁷⁸

These passages are remarkable in their implications, and all the more so for appearing in prefaces. It would be easy to mistake this for the familiar Romantic dialectic of poet-subject and object-universe, in which the poet who – in Wordsworth's words – 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society' is effaced as 'sender' of the poem by achieving representative species-being. Shelley's vision is radically different. The poet, for Shelley, has no mystical capacity to expand

⁷⁵ *SPP*: 392.

⁷⁶ *SPP*: 392 and n. 3 (translation).

⁷⁷ *PS* II: 41.

⁷⁸ *SPP*: 208.

his soul to encompass the universe, to see 'the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole'. What Shelley describes is a poet open only to local (and 'partial') influence, to those effects that can 'act upon his consciousness' – but radically so open. Shelley imagines the poet entering into a circulation of cultural action in which the influences that act upon the poet are – via an unknown number of intermediary steps – the final steps in circuits of influence within which the poet himself is an agent: the creator and the creation of his age.

It is this circulatory vision of cultural (re-)creation that Shelley was describing in that paragraph on 'mimetic creativity' from the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* that so exasperated the *Eclectic Review*'s reviewer:

As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation. Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had not previous existence in the mind of man, or in nature, but because the whole produced by their combination has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought, and with the contemporary condition of them⁷⁹

We could describe this as a theory of poetry – genuine poetry – as an emergent property of the poet's reiterative and combinative use of language. 'Emergent', because such a system of continual feedback circulation does not result in the massive redundancy we might expect, but – thanks to the inevitable noise within the system – continually generates novel and unexpected results. William Paulson has argued from the standpoint of systems-theory that the distinctive cultural function of literature is precisely to be such a moment of noise:

... literary language, by its very failure as a system for the communication of pre-existent information, becomes a vehicle for the creation of new information. For this to be the case, literature must be, to a degree, both obscure and repetitive; were it perfectly clear, nothing new could arise in the transaction between author and reader, and were each of its utterances original, its relative obscurity would destroy information faster than it could create it. Self-organization depends on both noise and redundancy.⁸⁰

Poetry, writes Shelley in his 'Defence' 'defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions', it 'creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration'.⁸¹ It does not, one notices, erase or lift the 'curse' – we are 'subject to the accident of surrounding [or local] impressions' – but it 'defeats' it, defeating it from the inside. Poetry, he says elsewhere in the same work, '*reproduces* all that it represents',⁸² a statement we can take to be a gloss upon the claim in the preface to *Prometheus* that poetry 'creates by combination and representation'. Poetry, for Shelley, *is* local, *is* constrained to 'combine and represent', operating as part of the globally 'reiterative' circuit of cultural reproduction. But at the same time, it

⁷⁹ *SPP*: 208.

⁸⁰ Paulson, *The Noise of Culture*, p. 101.

⁸¹ *SPP*: 533.

⁸² *SPP*: 517.

combines 'noise' with its 'redundancy', acting to re-produce and reinvent what it represents.

Here, finally, is the clue to the strangeness of Shelley's prefaces, and to why Hunt's claim that they expose Shelley 'to the chance of being doubted by those whom he would benefit' captures that strangeness so well. Shelley's prefaces are remarkably 'noisy', they tell us too much: too much about the sources of the poem; too much about possible interpretations of the poem; too much about the author's poetic and aesthetic theories; too much, certainly, to maintain the high Romantic pretence of the poem's 'spontaneity'. But at the same time, the prefaces show everywhere Shelley's recognition that the poem necessarily escapes from the control of the writer, that it cannot be a 'didactic' package of controlled – and controlling – 'information'. In some ways the preface to *Epipsychidion* is exemplary, telling us that the poet is already dead, and using Dante's (untranslated) words to tell us that it would be shameful not to be able to offer us the plain meaning of the poem. The writer can offer his 'meanings', but in a sense these are always in another 'language' from those of the poem, and all poetry circulates as 'posthumous' writing. Thus, the *Alastor* preface tells us in plain language what the poem 'means', but leaves us unable to determine the authority of that declaration. The preface to *Hellas* confidently predicts the overthrow of Turkish (and European) tyranny, while the poem itself ends in doubt and confusion. The preface to *Prometheus Unbound* tells us a great deal about the poem, but also that any meaning that could be stated in prose would be 'tedious and supererogatory' in the poem.

The net effect of Shelley's willingness to take the 'chance of being doubted' is to free the reader to participate in what William Paulson calls 'the production of new meaning by readers':

By this 'production of new meaning' I do not refer to the solipsistic and arbitrary replacement of textual meaning by readerly creations but, rather, to the participation of reading in cultural systems of invention that cannot be reduced to transmission and reception. New meaning is produced not in a context of communication and reception but at a different level or moment within a system of which communication is but a part, a stage at which the work's position cannot be simply that of input to a transmission channel.⁸³

The ironic success of Shelley's noisy prefaces, then, is not that of a bouncer at the door, but that of a good host, making sure that conversation does not flag, but not trying too hard to direct its unpredictable flow.

⁸³ Paulson, *The Noise of Culture*, p. 171.

Chapter 10

Contemplating Facts, Studying Ourselves: Aspects of Shelley's Philosophical and Religious Prose

Merle A. Williams

Despite their appearance of random dispersion, Shelley's philosophical and religious essays gain weight and coherence from a number of consistently examined themes. Shelley engages in far-reaching speculations on metaphysics and moral theory, and sets out to refute deism or to attack Christianity, as well as religious doctrine generally, yet defends the integrity of Jesus as a profoundly ethical thinker. The prose, much of it unfinished or fragmentary, embodies a variety of tones and moods, as calmly reasoned passages give way to the polemical or satirical. The joyously burlesque treatment of the role of the Devil and a bevy of subsidiary devils adds comic relief without deflecting the reader unduly from a tight nexus of interwoven philosophical concerns. Clearly, Shelley has fallen under the enchantment of the great empiricist thinkers of his day in their rejection of any semblance of contrived and untested terminology, as well as setting aside the rationalist reliance on a mind shaped by innate ideas. While the diverse materials which Shelley moulds are compelling, the intellectual stimulus for his writing is drawn from an impressively wide range of philosophical thinkers, from Socrates through to the Baron d'Holbach, William Godwin and Tom Paine. Yet Shelley's vivid response to the path-breaking enquiries of the British empiricists, Locke, Berkeley and Hume, is significant. As Earl R. Wasserman has aptly noted, 'Shelley's thought must be understood as generically derived from British empiricism and its eighteenth-century developments.'¹

This strong empiricist influence is in its turn refined by the methodological example of Socrates, as Shelley perceives him in his *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*. If Socrates stands as the emblem of the non-dogmatic thinker, who has dared to question 'established opinions', his relentlessly searching, open-ended approach to philosophical problems is typical of Shelley at his most incisive.² This is not the Socrates of codified Platonism with its scrupulously derived hierarchy of forms, but the Socrates of the *Euthyphro*, who wittily teases out in an intricately interlocked and unresolved enquiry whether piety is a key value because the gods love it, or whether the gods love it because it is a key value – all to the understated discomfiture

1 See Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965, p. 5.

2 *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, in *Prose I*: 64.

of the stodgily complacent Euthyphro.³ The kind of practical, exploratory reasoning enacted here is later described by the American pragmatist, William James, as *ambulatory* rather than *saltatory*. It does not leap dramatically from its starting point to the demonstrated outcome, but works towards understanding by ‘ambulation through the intervening experiences’, illustrations or pertinent case studies.⁴ In this way, theoretical knowledge (which often moves schematically from premise to conclusion) is securely linked to the concreteness of lived experience, which it aims to explain. Clearly, such an approach to cognition carries ethical implications too, for it demands unbiased engagement with facts and a readiness to revise interim judgements in the light of current evidence. In recognition of such relations, Shelley associates Socrates with Jesus in his letter to Ellenborough, since Jesus attempted to ‘supercede the ritual of Moses’ in its putatively predetermined rigidity with ‘regulations more moral and humane’, which meshed creatively with the existential contingencies of his time.⁵ This analogical relationship is reinforced in Shelley’s fragmentary piece, ‘On Christianity’; as E.B. Murray argues, both Jesus and Socrates are seen to ‘demonstrate an independent mind, a sceptical attitude, and a moral empiricism particularly concerned with reassessing traditional dogmas according to humanistic standards’.⁶ So the methodological and the ethical become imbricated, just as Socrates reminds his friend in the *Crito* that ‘the opinions of the wise [are] good’ (in the fullest sense of the last word), precisely because they have been achieved by a process of concretely sustained reasoning rather than the mere assertion of established views.⁷

Although the discussion in this chapter ranges broadly, it is also selective in its guiding empiricist conception. Shelley’s commentary on Plato’s *Symposium* and his treatise entitled ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’, to give a couple of instances, are treated elsewhere in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, because their central concerns are examined from predominantly cultural, aesthetic and political perspectives. Yet the current investigation seeks to probe Shelley’s philosophical and religious enquiries in at least three distinctive ways. Firstly, his writing is outlined against the emergent intellectual patterns of his day, so that his frequently questioning interaction with prevailing ideas can be comparatively charted and elucidated. Secondly – and in accordance with *ambulatory* reasoning – each piece is interpreted in its singularity, at once recognizing its uniqueness and its placement within a wider landscape of philosophical interrogation. Thirdly, Shelley’s thought is shown to be nascent, provisional, constantly unfolding. The incomplete state of many of these texts captures the mood of a curious mind in dialogue with itself and not always

3 *Euthyphro*, in *Plato: The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, pp. 26–33.

4 See William James, ‘A Word More about Truth’, in ‘Pragmatism’ and ‘The Meaning of Truth’, introd. A.J. Ayer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 246, but also pp. 245–52.

5 *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, *Prose* I: 69.

6 See *Prose* I: 461. Socrates and Jesus are also linked as belonging to ‘the sacred few’, ‘they of Athens and Jerusalem’, in Shelley’s last poem, ‘The Triumph of Life’, which explores a range of challenging philosophical concerns: see ll. 128 and 134 (*SPP*: 487).

7 *Crito*, in *Plato: The Last Days of Socrates*, p. 85.

settled in its findings. The commentary begins under the emblem of Socrates with an exploration of the tentative notebook fragments on 'Metaphysics' and 'Morals' (which can be dated between 1814 and 1821), before shifting its emphasis to tracing Shelley's lively engagement with a series of complicated religious issues under the admonitory emblem of Jesus as spontaneous ethical innovator.

The Fragments on Metaphysics and Moral Theory

In a fragment jotted with several other early philosophical musings in the miscellaneous notebook collection now identified as Bodleian MS. adds. c. 4, Shelley starts to consider some fundamental errors in the approach of his contemporaries to exploring metaphysics:

We do not attend sufficiently to what passes within ourselves.—We combine words, combined a thousand times before. In our minds we assume entire opinions, & in the expression of those opinions intire phrases, when we philosophize. ... Our words are dead, our thoughts are cold and borrowed.

Let us contemplate facts; let us in the great study of ourselves resolutely compel the mind to a rigid consideration of itself. We are not content with conjectures, & syllogisms in sciences regarding external objects. ... As in these, let us also in considering the phenomena of mind severely collect those facts which cannot be disputed:—metaphysics will possess this conspicuous advantage over every other science, that each student by attentively referring to his own mind may ascertain the authorities upon which any assertions regarding it are supported.⁸

It seems to me that Shelley is preoccupied with the principles and practice of empiricism in its *ambulatory* guise. He objects to the undisciplined pursuit of metaphysical enquiries which rely on words as empty counters drawn from outmoded systems and is wary of naively employing idealist vocabulary. His emphasis on facts is strongly, perhaps reductively, empiricist in the spirit of both Locke and Hume, who require philosophical language to function at once accurately and scientifically. If the mind is to become its own case study, one which putatively admits no deceptions because the observing subject is also the object observed, then metaphysics becomes introspective general psychology. Before the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis, there is no suspicion that consciousness, thoroughly examined as far as it can be understood, may not prove satisfactorily transparent to itself. This kind of confidence

8 Murray, *BSM*. XXI: 188–91. The folio is reproduced consecutively to highlight Shelley's argument; thus deletions and insertions are not included. An edited and consolidated version of this text (reflecting minor variations) is printed as 'What Metaphysical Errors are Errors in the Usual Methods of Considering Them', in 'A Treatise on Morals', in *Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1966, p. 184. Clark notes that Mary Shelley rearranged the notebook fragments into two separate essays, 'Speculations on Metaphysics' and 'Speculations on Morals', which she published in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad* (p. 181). Shelley's earlier speculations (c. 1815–18) are reproduced in Murray, *BSM* XXI; his later thoughts (1819–21) may be found in Murray, *BSM* IV (1).

inadvertently traps Locke into an awkward dualism of mind and impenetrable matter, precisely because the mind, given its inherent limitations, cannot achieve certitude beyond the processes of its own ideas and their immediate accessibility.

It is against this backdrop that one should read Shelley's related comments on the imagination in his methodological consideration of how an appropriate philosophical analysis might be pursued.

M[ost]any of the errors of philosoph[y]ers have arisen from considering the human being in a point of view too detailed & circumscribed. He is not a moral & intellectual,— but also and preeminently, an imaginative being. His own mind is his law ; his own mind is all things to him. If we would arrive at any knowledge which should be serviceable from the practical conclusions to which it leads, we ought to consider, the mind of man and the universe as the great whole on which to exer[s]cise our speculations⁹

Here Shelley would seem to be strongly influenced by Hume's treatment of the imagination in his *Treatise on Human Nature*. Not only does the imagination perform a crucial function in the connection or association of ideas, but it also has an advantage over memory in its 'liberty' to '*transpose and change its ideas*'. Nonetheless, Hume stresses that all human ideas are copied from (predominantly sensory) impressions; since no two impressions are intrinsically inseparable, the imagination may collate or mutate any sets of ideas at whim.¹⁰ To view the question from a slightly altered perspective, consciousness is its own domain in which the individual may roam without restraint, although Shelley's reference to 'law' suggests that the mind must still remain subservient to the basic rules of its own operation. There is nonetheless an important symbiosis between the mind and the world, because the world ensures the supply of impressions without which the mind would come to lack ideas. This is why Shelley disputes the distinction between '*external*' and '*internal*', astutely realizing that the so-called 'objects of thought' are broadly one of the 'forms' or functional aspects of thought (thus partially outflanking dualism by concentrating on the ways in which the mind relates to the diversity of the surrounding universe).¹¹ Conversely, he does not explicitly manage the transition from the *ambulatory* to the *saltatory*, so as to arrive theoretically at a considered existential-phenomenological position in which there is a sustained dialogue between consciousness and the world, with each locating, shaping, confirming and reinforcing the other according to clearly interrogated and thematized patterns. Timothy Clark intriguingly suggests that Shelley modifies 'Humean scepticism' about the provable existence of an external world into a 'form of phenomenology', but this seems a freely colloquial description; it certainly does not take into account the rigorous phenomenological method initially developed by Edmund Husserl early in the twentieth century and

9 Bod. MS adds. c. 4, fol. 185r (Murray, *BSM XXI*: 197). Deletions are not shown here. Square brackets denote first wording visible beneath revision. For an edited and slightly different version, see Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 186.

10 *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Peter Nidditch. 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989: Bk I, iii and iv, pp. 8–13.

11 Bod. MS adds. c. 4, fols 185r and 185v (Murray, *BSM XXI*: 197–9).

then steadily adapted by his successors.¹² At most, Shelley's thinking might be construed as an intuitively embryonic phenomenology, which is yet to hatch out of the nurturing empiricist egg and to find its complex expression in his creative work.¹³

If there is a more markedly poetic element in Shelley's metaphysical speculations, as implied by his reference to humans as 'imaginative beings', this comes to light when philosophical registers elude him and he turns to allusive, metaphorical writing. In trying to plumb the demands of analysing consciousness, he paradoxically returns to the world, converting his store of past impressions into fresh configurations of engagingly imagined ideas.

But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid & perpetual stream flows outwards;— like one in dread who speeds thro the recesses of some haunted pile & dares not look behind. The caverns of the mind are obscure & shadowy, or pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals.¹⁴

Allowing for a touch of the gothic, this statement is perhaps reminiscent of the opening of 'Mont Blanc', a poem in which Shelley grapples with the perennial philosophical question of the relationship between the mind and the world; here he explores related concerns through his extended metaphor of the ravine of the River Arve. 'The everlasting universe of things' flows 'through the mind', impressions become ideas, consciousness and its environment lock together in an uncertain and shifting embrace which reintroduces the problematics of elusive imaginative activity. A subtle, yet flexible scrutiny of such creative intellectual engagement is sustained until the end of the poem.¹⁵

Shelley's brief essay 'On Life' (composed in 1819 and included in the same notebook as 'A Philosophical View of Reform') provides an important gloss and variation on some of these absorbing themes. He opens by pondering the sheer mystery and fascination of life: 'Life, and the world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing.' The balanced casting of this sentence gives a valuable clue to Shelley's orientation by linking so closely existence and its context, being and feeling. Soon he moves towards endorsing the core principle of George Berkeley's philosophy by asserting that 'nothing exists but as it is perceived' — *esse est percipi* — even though this is a 'decision against which all our persuasions

12 See Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 39–41.

13 In his later essay, 'A Defence of Poetry', Shelley more characteristically gives precedence to the imagination over reason, dismissing Hume (and Locke) as 'mere reasoners' (see *SPP*: 530, n. 2); but this view is almost certainly shaped by Shelley's determination to respond forcefully to the claims for the superior capacities of reason made in Thomas Love Peacock's 'The Four Ages of Poetry'.

14 Bod. Shelley MS add. c. 4, fols 184r–v (Murray, *BSM XXI*: 192–5). Deletions are not shown here. For an edited version, see Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, pp. 185–6.

15 *SPP*: 97 (ll. 1–2).

struggle'.¹⁶ Berkeley himself clearly acknowledges the oddity, in common-sensical terms, of classifying all existents as 'ideas', but the third of his *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* adroitly defuses much of the incongruity.

Phil. I own that the word *idea*, not being commonly used for *thing*, sounds something out of the way But however oddly the proposition may sound in words, yet it includes nothing so very strange or shocking in its sense ... that there are only things perceiving and things perceived; or that every unthinking being is necessarily, and from the very nature of its existence, perceived by some mind; if not by a finite created mind, yet certainly by the infinite mind of God, in whom 'we live and move, and have our being' Is this as strange as to say that sensible qualities are not on the objects ...?¹⁷

Berkeley's assumptions seem to provide an elegant solution to the undesired dualism which Locke could not overcome, despite his introduction of graduated links and discriminations between matter and mind, sensory data and irresistible logical ideas. Apparently, Berkeley has conjured away the mismatch between thought and resistant external objects, although Shelley is thoroughly unsympathetic to the notion of an all-embracing deity, whose mental processes support the universe in its continuing existence. If this reservation is granted, 'nothing exists but as it is perceived' may also be plausibly aligned with Hume's sceptical-empirical view that the world can never be known *per se*, but only through sensory impressions assumed to be derived from that source.¹⁸ Such modes of thinking have, moreover, been shaped for Shelley by his enthusiastic reading of William Drummond's *Academical Questions* (1805), with its searching critique of the logical inconsistencies inherent in a Cartesian dualism founded on the principle of '*cogito ergo sum*' ['I think, therefore I am']. It is Drummond who has helped to release Shelley from the baffled and increasingly reluctant materialism of his earlier years, while throwing light on his persistent struggle to reconcile mind and matter. In these ways, the 'intellectual system' explored in 'On Life' has a crucial function, not simply in eradicating dubious contentions but also in expanding Shelley's intellectual horizons. It clears the ground for still more searching reflection and introspection.¹⁹

16 *SPP*: 505–6.

17 From *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists*, in *The Age of Enlightenment: The Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, ed. Isaiah Berlin. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 156.

18 This case is argued persuasively in Cian Duffy's *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 65–6.

19 See *SPP*: 507, as well as Earl R. Wasserman's incisive discussion in *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, pp. 138–40). In *Intervals of Inspiration: The Skeptical Tradition and the Psychology of Romanticism*. Greenwood, FL: Penkevill Publishing, 1988, pp.235–6, Donald H. Reiman emphasizes Drummond's role in liberating Shelley into sceptically following a variety of productive, but not altogether compatible, trains of thought. This analysis tends to underplay Shelley's close engagement with the developing trends of empiricist praxis. K.N. Cameron provides a useful clarification by suggesting that Shelley's scepticism was never 'thoroughgoing', but linked to an epistemologically motivated reservation of judgement when appropriate evidence was

Within this fertile context of repeatedly modified investigation, Shelley readily pursues the promise of Berkeley's reasoning. He comments, 'the words, *I, you, they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblages of thoughts, thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind.' This does not, however, lure Shelley into solipsism. He appreciates that various individuals are effectively portions of 'that one mind', which Timothy Clark aptly links to such widely accepted collective concepts of nineteenth-century discourse as the 'public mind'; these pronominal positionalities mark practically recognized distinctions between persons, while uniting human beings within a common medium which constitutes and supports all. Jerrold E. Hogle elucidates this analysis from the reverse direction when he proposes that 'a steadily increasing interplay among differences ... produces a greater and greater sense of resemblance among the diverse forms' in a dynamic melding of many into one.²⁰ Nonetheless, carefully weighed qualification takes over in the closing paragraph, when Shelley acknowledges that 'mind, as far as we have any experience of its properties, ... cannot create, it can only perceive'. This expression of constraint points back disconcertingly to Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in which all ideas, however rich and alluring, find their origin in the data of sensory perception and so cannot be self-generated by the mind.²¹ After the elation of exploring innovative modes of theorizing and seeming to touch the palpable workings of consciousness, Shelley concedes the force of those empiricist presuppositions which have guided him elsewhere. There is no magical transformation disclosing the sources of reality, only the regular and ineluctable functioning of perception in its multiple modalities and with its varied consequences (which implicitly entail an ethical aspect).²²

While Shelley's metaphysical endeavours are to a large degree co-ordinated with prevailing empiricist paradigms, varied by flashes of incipient expansion or ingenious invention, his fragmentary ventures into moral theory (1815–18) are disappointingly derivative, depending heavily on Hume and Godwin. He argues that 'material happiness produced by ... common efforts & preserved by the common care' should be distributed in terms of the just claims of each individual. The ideal of benevolence thus becomes 'the desire to be the author of good, & justice the apprehension of the manner in which good ought to be done'.²³ There is none of the robust argumentative energy of Hume's (admittedly conservative and unShelleyan)

lacking (see *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 157).

20 See *SPP*: 508; Clark, *Embodying Revolution*, p. 40; and Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of his Major Works*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 272.

21 Refer to Ch. II, xii–xv in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. P.H. Nidditch. 3rd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 18–20.

22 See *SPP*: 508.

23 Bod. MS d. 1, fol. 2v (Murray, *BSM* IV: 30–31). See also the edited version in Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 187; here Shelley's scattered writings on moral concerns are compiled into a continuous essay, although this integration of diverse material obscures the disjunctures in Shelley's enquiry.

explanation as to why justice is an artificial – rather than a natural – virtue, essential to preventing conflict among potentially selfish individuals who have chosen to live together in society. The property of each is protected from violence by mutual interest, while wealth can safely be accumulated to the advantage of all under an established system of regulation and distribution. Godwin takes such thinking a stage further – and closer to Shelley’s values – by contending, ‘it is impossible for me to confer upon any man a favour; I can only do him a right.’ Justice requires the meeting of everyone’s needs as a strict priority, as well as sharing a surplus with those in unfortunate circumstances, thus promoting the purposes of political justice.²⁴ When Shelley discusses benevolence in his turn, he correlates it with disinterestedness and commitment to the common cause; he suggests in Socratic fashion that selfishness is generally the result of infant self-preoccupation, ignorance or error. He also points to the generously self-sacrificing potential of love, not to mention the acquired virtues of patriotism and chivalry. But the draft is too *saltatory* in asserting opinions and stating conclusions to make much progress with an original line of reasoning. Again, there is a sharp contrast with even so short an essay as Hume’s treatment of ‘self-love’, which rigorously defends the notion of altruism, in the same gesture carefully undercutting prevailing beliefs about the narrow selfishness of humanity.²⁵ Interestingly, P.M.S. Dawson associates Shelley’s views on benevolence explicitly with Godwin and particularly William Hazlitt, whose *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* strives to establish the case for moral disinterestedness. Yet Dawson too comments that Shelley’s meaning in his fragment is not always clear, while recourse to Hazlitt proves helpful in ‘restor[ing] steps in the argument’ that Shelley has elided.²⁶

Contesting Religion: Deism and Christianity (1811–14)

Where Shelley’s aptitude for applied ethics comes into its own is in his examination of the theory of deism, not to mention his passionate rejection of established Christian religion. Despite the danger of pursuing such topics, Shelley reasons his way through a minefield of conflicting claims with controlled acuity. Once again, his method is one of rigorously sustained Socratic interrogation. At no stage will he tolerate what Socrates describes to Phaedo as ‘becoming misologic’ or believing an argument to be true ‘without reference to the art of logic’. Instead, he moves consistently from deduction to deduction, just as Socrates obliges Phaedo and his companions relentlessly to examine the grounds for acknowledging the immortality

24 See Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (Bk III, Pt ii: I), pp. 477–84, and Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Isaac Kramnick. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 (Bk II, Ch. ii), pp. 168–77.

25 See Bod. MS adds. c. 4, fols 192r, 192v and 193r (Murray, *BSM XXI*: 210–15); also pertinent is ‘Of Self-Love’ (from the Appendix to *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*), in *Hume’s Moral and Political Philosophy*, ed. Henry D. Aiken. New York: Hafner, 1972, pp. 270–75.

26 *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 230–31 and p. 235.

of the soul.²⁷ Shelley is quite aware, as he suggests in the opening section of *A Refutation of Deism*, that not everyone may be capable of pursuing such intricate and intellectually demanding debates. Yet this does not vitiate his guiding concern: the pressing need for informed enquiry, reflective self-examination and the bold questioning of widely sanctioned beliefs.

The Necessity of Atheism (1811) has come to be closely associated with the scandal of Shelley's expulsion from Oxford. The text appears to have grown out of a lively exchange of opinions with his friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, although Shelley took full responsibility for the publication of such explosive material.²⁸ Leaving aside these tense historical circumstances, *The Necessity* remains a spare and lucid piece of philosophical writing. The neatness of its formulation compensates for the low-key smugness of the geometrically styled conclusion, which functions as a tactical ploy to suggest that the series of preceding deductions must be incontrovertible. The title page of the pamphlet bears an epigraph ostensibly drawn from Bacon's *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, although no legitimate source has ever been identified: '*Quod clara et perspicua demonstratione careat pro vero habere mens omnino nequit humana*' ['The human mind cannot in any way accept as true that which lacks a clear and logical demonstration'].²⁹ From the outset, the Baconian principle of consistently rigorous induction is emphasized; no vague conjectures are to be tolerated. The sceptical and pragmatic presuppositions which guide Shelley's methodology are clearly stated, since only solid empirical evidence is to count as valid. Shelley's opening gambit both considers and defines the nature of 'belief'. Following Locke, he argues that the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of the ideas composing any proposition presented for its consideration. Perceiving agreement is called 'belief', which is largely passive, whereas the exploration of the possibilities for verification is an active process. Shelley therefore insists that disbelief can in no sense be regarded as blameworthy, since it (like belief) is seen under Locke's influence as an involuntary function of the mind.³⁰ Unless belief is reconstrued within a different paradigm as the antithesis of rational assent (hence invoking the conventional distinction between 'faith' and 'reason'), it cannot be induced by compulsion, but should be invited through persuasive discussion. And as Shelley and Godwin both observe frequently, the resort to aggression signals the collapse of rational exchange.

Shelley then moves to the range of conditions which might produce belief in the existence of a deity. The first and strongest case would be sensory evidence, having God actually appear to one. But this has never been recorded; as Ludwig Wittgenstein acknowledges in the final aphorism of his positivist *Tractatus Logico-*

27 *Phaedo*, in Plato: *The Last Days of Socrates*, pp. 144–6.

28 For an appraisal of the extent of Hogg's probable collaboration with Shelley, see *Prose I*: 321–2. Useful elaborations are offered by K.N. Cameron in *The Younger Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1951, pp. 74–8 and 328–30, and James Bieri in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography. Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792–1816*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004, pp. 146–7.

29 *Prose I*: 1.

30 *Prose I*: 3. See also John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton. 2 vols. London: Dent (Everyman), 1972, vol. 2 (Bk IV, Ch. I), pp. 133–7.

Philosophicus, 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'³¹ Given this vast absence, Shelley moves on to rational investigation. Traditionally, it is accepted that anything which cannot be shown to have a beginning must have existed from eternity. Since there is no available and concrete proof of the creation of the universe, it makes sense to deduce that it must have existed for all time. As water finds the lowest environmental level and shortest route, so logic approves the least complicated explanations. Alternatively, Shelley raises the question of each person's ignorance of the cause of human existence. Yet causes need to be proportioned to their effects and no corresponding cause can be identified. The rational response is simply to own up to the obscurity of the problem, rather than randomly nominating God as a convenient First Cause. The weakest claim to belief is in Shelley's terms exercised by testimony, which should not run counter to reason. If certain people claim to have seen God, the probability of their assertions needs to be weighed against the likelihood of some deception, which Shelley readily accepts. His intellectual choreography is impressive, for it leads him by relentless steps to the outcome that attempted proofs for the existence of God are invalid. Hence there is no God, while no-one is morally culpable for expressing disbelief in a Divine Creator, since such a claim can be validated only on rational grounds.³²

Compact and focused as the demonstration of *The Necessity* may be, Shelley returns to the same conspectus of issues in a note on his avowedly philosophical *Queen Mab*;³³ VII, 13 clearly states 'There is no God.' This assertion is set against the backdrop of a forceful attack on the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which treats Jehovah as a disturbing projection of human arrogance and self-preoccupation. Shelley now rehearses and enriches his core concerns through a loose collation of quotations, transcribed without commentary. A lengthy extract from the London edition of Holbach's *Système de la Nature* of 1781 combines without differentiation passages from three separate locations within the text, but still poses a seemingly irresistible question: '*S'il a parlé, pourquoi l'univers n'est-il pas convaincu?*' ['If He has spoken, why is the world not convinced?']. This challenge encapsulates Holbach's characteristic scorn of religion as the superstition of the uneducated, whose intellectual laziness enslaves them to traditionally transmitted reverence for a capricious deity, on whose precise nature even theologians cannot agree. His invocation of socio-cultural instances supplements Shelley's approach, fleshing out more tightly reasoned philosophical investigations and giving Shelley useful ammunition when he assigns the very idea of God to unhealthy imaginative projection and sloppy thinking about causality. Holbach insists that God is made in the image of man, while the transformations celebrated in accounts of miracles border on the ludicrous. Perhaps most damning are the internal contradictions within approved Christian theology; if, for example, God is portrayed as just and compassionate, He

31 Aphorism 7 of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 74.

32 *Prose I*: 4–5.

33 Subtitled 'A Philosophical Poem with Notes'.

cannot consistently be construed as harshly punitive too. Religion becomes a tawdry tissue of illusions and misconceptions.³⁴

The passage from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (a text which Shelley later translated: see footnote 45) impels another shift in conceptualization. Lifted from his opening chapter, 'On Prophecy', it contends that human ignorance of God's powers is co-extensive with an ignorance of nature. By implication, a fuller understanding of the workings of spatio-temporal phenomena might deliver quite ordinary explanations for assumed wonders and portents. From Spinoza's perspective, nature is nothing if not the power of God, made manifest in the world familiar to human beings. However, this does not entail that a God-Creator should intervene proximately in routine occurrences to change the course of human lives, as might be expected by those who hold a paternalistic view of God as the watchful dispenser of rewards or punishments. Spinoza's attitude is perfectly congruent with the deep respect in which Newtonian physics was held by both Shelley and the leading empiricist philosophers, some of whom (like Locke) even aspired to Newtonian precision in a science of the mind.

Yet the cheekiest and most charming of the quotations is taken from the chapter on God in Pliny's *Natural History*. Provocatively, Pliny reminds his readers that God can neither commit suicide (an option at least available to mortals) nor reverse the past in the guise of human history. He also proposes with obvious frivolity that God cannot invalidate fundamental mathematical truths.³⁵ Pliny thus exposes his attractive lack of seriousness even as he touches on the teasing relationship between a putative deity and analytic truths, those which are eternally valid but convey no new information about experience. Since Shelley gives no response to his collection of extracts, one can only guess that Pliny's irreverence and sharp wit must have delighted him. There are no hints of his engaging in Kantian fashion with the pertinence of a distinction between the analytic and the synthetic, attracted as he was to empirically searching (rather than formally logical) elucidations of rationality, causality and psychological processes. Once more, Shelley's commitment to a Baconian, factually motivated eradication of error is evident.³⁶

The diverse strands of Shelley's thinking on both deism and Christianity are skilfully and comprehensively re woven in *A Refutation of Deism*, which was published in 1814, and reprinted in the *Theological Inquirer* in April and May 1815.³⁷

34 See *CPPBS* II: 263–77 for these notes and pp. 630–32 for the corresponding translations. Holbach's account of the punitive God-figure so frequently revered in Judaeo-Christian worship calls to mind the portrayal of Jupiter as a merciless and self-regarding tyrant in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

35 See *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson. London: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 318 and Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 102, with a translation on p. 357. (In *CPPBS* II, Murray reproduces Clark's translation of Pliny.)

36 Bacon's strong appeal to Shelley lay in his curiosity about the natural world, his rejection of superstition and his commitment to clearly substantiated, consecutive reasoning. For a fuller analysis of Shelley's interest in Bacon, see Alan M. Weinberg, 'The Art of Creative Intervention: Shelley as Poet Engagé', in *The Most Unfailing Herald: Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792–1992*. Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1996, pp. 214–15 and 227.

37 *Prose* I: 365.

Here Shelley makes full use of his prior researches, integrating notes and formerly published passages, refining his analysis and shrewdly driving home his key points. The *Refutation* takes the form of a polished dialogue, based doubtless on familiar Platonic models and the remarkable philosophical achievement of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, thus combining both ancient and contemporary prototypes. Shelley's essay is deliberately and symmetrically structured. First Eusebes puts the case for Christian belief and Theosophus energetically rebuts him; then Theosophus, nervous of the alienating implications of atheism, develops a defence of deism, which Eusebes contests for the sake of argument. The encounter is left open-ended. Disconcerted by Eusebes' discrediting of deistic assumptions, Theosophus promises further reflection and a possible (if unlikely) conversion to Christianity. Read dispassionately, the discussion effectively undermines both deism and Christianity, although it allows space for divinity as the informing spirit of the universe. While Shelley's project must be judged on its own terms, a brief comparison with Hume's *Dialogues* seems apt, not only because that text canvasses the reasons against deism from almost every angle in the sheer exuberance of its intellectual virtuosity, but also because common trends or expectations are clearly identifiable. Hume too avoids fixed conclusions, involving the reader in the debate as a shadow participant in the assessment of evidence and the interplay of theoretical premises, some of which are barely supported by their own proponents. From Part II right through to Part VIII, Hume rings the changes on the classic theological argument from design, highlighting the mechanistic interpretations which it invites if the world is compared to architectural structures, not to mention the risk of measuring the creator by the imaginative resources of the creature. Hume's disputants give considerable prominence to the threat of anthropomorphism, a topic which gains little currency in Shelley's *Refutation*. By Part V the exchange has become extravagantly playful, allowing for deities in human form (who perhaps procreate sexually), or a group of deities collaborating on a shared project, since design does not necessarily presuppose a single designer. On the analogy of improvements in shipbuilding, Philo further suggests that the universe might have arrived at its current state by trial and error, as a frustrated creator sought to surpass his last unsatisfactory effort.³⁸ Comments of this sort invite comparison with Lucretius, an ancient thinker who has scant sympathy for religious myths or rituals, and who also appealed to Shelley for his intelligently interested enjoyment of the natural structure and rhythms of the universe. In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius calmly demonstrates that the world is too flawed to have been divinely created, not least because two-thirds of it is useless to human beings, while the remainder requires cultivation at the cost of hard labour. With the same candour as Hume, Lucretius points out that the gods have no home in this world and could scarcely have been inclined to form it for the special benefit of humankind.³⁹ Again, robust *ambulatory* reasoning shows such projections to be fancifully implausible.

38 See David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Martin Bell. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, pp. 51–97, especially pp. 75–9.

39 *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, rev. Martin Ferguson Smith. London: William Heinemann, 1975: V, ll. 149–225, pp. 390–95.

In Part IX of the *Dialogues*, Hume adjusts his emphasis to another classic position which is briefly cited in *The Necessity of Atheism*. Demea states, 'whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence; it being absolutely impossible for any thing to produce itself, or be the cause of its own existence. In mounting up, therefore, from effects to causes, we must either go on in tracing an infinite succession, without any ultimate cause at all, or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause' Demea chooses the ultimate cause, absolutely beyond the range of human apprehension, only to embroil himself in a fresh set of uncertainties and contradictions. He escapes the pitfalls of anthropomorphism at the cost of foundering on the rationalist vocabulary of *a priori* hypotheses, nothingness and necessarily existing beings.⁴⁰ In the last three parts of the work, though, the atmosphere darkens as Hume's characters ponder the problem of evil in the world, while persuasive explanations persistently elude them. Shelley does not venture into this vexed speculative terrain, contenting himself with circumstantial moral comments.

It is the second part of Shelley's *Refutation* that is most readily aligned both with Hume's *Dialogues* and *The Necessity of Atheism*. Eusebes begins by attacking the deistic argument from design at its root by showing that it begs the question; design must be proved before it can simply be assumed as inherent in the matter of the universe. He then proceeds to the crux of Hume's demonstration: that design is generally deduced from human artefacts in relation to human capabilities for planning and completing purpose-driven projects. It is dubious to apply this reasoning to some supposedly divine and transcendent being. The treatment of cause and effect, in its turn, maps quite closely onto Hume's procedure. If the accomplishment of the universe, as an effect, presupposes the genius of the creator, then why should that creator not have been brought into existence by some still more richly endowed being? This leads on to the position adopted in *The Necessity of Atheism* that the universe may have endured for eternity. Yet Shelley is equally alive to the implications of Hume's balanced explication of causality in his *Treatise of Human Nature*; causality entails necessary connection, as well as the commensurability of effects to their corresponding causes. It seems unconvincing that there should be the same First Cause for animals as different as the snake, the sheep and a human being. From here it is an easy step to contending that the universe is governed by natural rather than supernatural laws, which control patterns of conspicuous regularity. The design would then have been disclosed by Isaac Newton and his peers rather than imposed by God. Even the adaptation of particular creatures to their environment – what today would be called natural selection in the wake of Charles Darwin – confirms the hypothesis of natural organization. Characteristically, Shelley works through Eusebes towards dissipating any whiff of mystery, just as Hume uses comedy and farfetched narrative to achieve a similar result.⁴¹ In effect, Eusebes as a Christian is obliged to plead his case on the grounds of faith and revelation, which come to constitute the only convincing tests of an Almighty God's inestimable significance.

40 Hume, *Dialogues*, pp. 98–102.

41 See *Prose I*: 112–18, as well as Hume's analysis of causality in terms of the prevailing conditions of 'contiguity', 'succession' and 'necessary connection' in the *Treatise*: Bk I, ii, pp. 73–8.

Rational explanations are rendered absurd and fruitless in the face of religious belief, thus highlighting again the irresolvable tension between a religion founded on faith and the unwavering rationality of deism.

Shelley's ethical response in this portion of the essay is revealing. While Hume's characters battle to make sense of the problem of evil if the universe is to be regarded as the creation of a benign deity – or even accepted as habitable – Shelley's Eusebes slips comfortably into moral perspectivalism – perhaps even relativism. Good and evil are neither facts in the world nor predetermined ethical absolutes; what matters is the situation of the persons involved. 'Earthquakes', for example, 'are injurious to the cities which they destroy, beneficial to those whose commerce was injured by their prosperity, and indifferent to others who are too remote to be affected by their influence.' Put slightly differently, 'it is manifest that we cannot reason with respect to the universal system from that which only exists in relation to our own perceptions.'⁴² The practical force of this approach is compelling, even as it opens the potential for parochialism and indifference. Yet the logic remains consistent with the preceding phase of the investigation; if the creator cannot be deduced from the creature, neither can universal ethical standards be extrapolated from a single, circumscribed moral orientation.

Although Eusebes promotes moral flexibility in his rejection of deistic values, Theosophus launches an uncompromising denunciation of established Christian religion. This section of *A Refutation* crystallizes Shelley's repugnance in the face of the doctrines, practices and deceptions of Christianity, as he understands it. The emphasis of the argument swings from the metaphysical to the moral; whereas Shelley regards deism as unconvincing and intellectually misleading, Christianity is presented as both personally and socially damaging, a stunting of individuality and vision. The catalogue of charges unfolds, starting with a reiteration that non-belief cannot be classified as morally reprehensible. Theosophus then reviews familiar textual sources to expose the vindictiveness of God for damning Satan once he has acted in accordance with his God-given impulses, not to mention the meanness of deliberately tempting Adam and Eve before punishing them. The New Testament doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ is further figured as patently illogical and unjust by the standards of both moderns and enlightened pagans, for millions become contaminated with sin in consequence of Adam's crime, committed long before they were born. Nor does Theosophus see how crucifying an innocent victim can clear the moral slate.⁴³ The parallel between this delineation of the Christian deity and the Jupiter of *Prometheus Unbound* is striking, especially in relation to Jupiter's vengefully brutal and ethically self-defeating treatment of Prometheus. It becomes the measure of Prometheus' hard-won expansion and refinement of consciousness that he is able to outstrip such disfiguring punitiveness, and to embrace his universe with visionary compassion.

If the widely accepted theological master-narratives repel Theosophus, he is equally appalled by the bloodthirstiness of the Old Testament, which is nonetheless revered as a sacred text. Shelley draws on Tom Paine's arresting description of

⁴² *Prose* I: 119.

⁴³ *Prose* I: 99–104.

Moses' ravages in his war against the Midianites, at the end of which most of the enemy women and children were murdered, while the virgins were kept alive for the satisfaction of the Israelite men.⁴⁴ Paine notes vehemently in *The Age of Reason* that 'the character of Moses, as stated in the Bible, is the most horrid that can be imagined. If those accounts be true, he was the wretch that first began war on the score or on the pretence of religion'⁴⁵ This foregrounds one of Shelley's prime objections to Christianity in *A Refutation*. In the guise of Theosophus, he argues that from the establishment of Constantinople as the seat of the Roman Empire in 328 until its capture by the Turks in 1453, war raged unrestrained; the people of Europe thus became enslaved while ignorance spread in consequence of a lack of peaceful enterprises. In effect, the Christian system of values is presented as promoting perverse distortions of human behaviour. The dialogue condemns a morality of willed humility and self-repression, whose sheer submissiveness allows tyranny and exploitation to flourish unchecked.⁴⁶ In these passages of *A Refutation*, Shelley's affinities with Hume's Socratic and agnostic approach to religious conviction are strongly evident.

Rethinking Jesus and the Devil (1817–20)

Eusebes' passionately presented view of Christianity is clearly one-sided, furthermore his initial praise of his religion in terms of Divine revelation, promised salvation and civilized moral practices contributes little to restoring a reasonable balance. Yet Shelley distinguishes sharply between Christianity as institutionalized religion and the figure of Jesus Christ, who serves as an ethical counterpart to Socrates. As intensely as he loathes the perceived perversions of Christianity by the churches, he admires and respects the integrity of Jesus. In the uncompleted fragment dated mid to late 1817, which Lady Shelley published as the 'Essay on Christianity' in 1859, Shelley describes the stature and qualities of Jesus:⁴⁷

We discover that he is the enemy of oppression and of falsehood, that he is the advocate of equal justice, that he is neither disposed to sanction bloodshed or deceit under whatsoever pretences their practise may be vindicated. We discover that he was a man of meek and majestic demeanor ... beloved to adoration by his adherents, unmoved and solemn and serene.⁴⁸

44 *Prose I*: 101–3 and Exodus XXXII: 26[–28].

45 Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1984, p. 91.

46 *Prose I*: 103–6.

47 Although Murray retains the title, 'On Christianity', he explains that this piece is concerned principally with the moral qualities of Jesus (see *Prose I*: 461). Michael Scrivener suggests that Shelley's interest in Jesus as an ethical figure may be linked to Spinoza's association of genuine religion with appropriate moral conduct rather than supernatural occurrences. According to Scrivener, Mary Shelley's journals record work as proceeding on a translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in November 1817 (that is, at roughly same time as the writing of the fragment about Christ), for several months during 1820 and again in 1821 (see *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 94–5).

48 *Prose I*: 260.

While Jesus uses the prevailing rhetoric to reassure and convince his followers, this figures simply as a logistical manoeuvre which only marginally aligns him with the expressions of Judaism enacted during his time or with the subsequent development of Christianity. According to Shelley, his conception of God is qualitatively different from Judaeo-Christian norms, since he draws on the sublime dramatic poetry of the Book of Job and the solemnity of Ecclesiastes, combined with the vivifying potentialities of pagan deities who have nonetheless retained close ties with the earth. In this way, the God of Jesus satisfies Shelley's value-laden expectations, for He is translated imaginatively into 'the interfused and overruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things'.⁴⁹

Because he is moved and invigorated by the exemplary moral status of Jesus, Shelley tries to release some of the most resonant sayings of the Galilean from the layers of dogma and prejudice which, he feels, have come to encrust them. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' is thus glossed as 'blessed are those who have preserved internal sanctity of soul, who are conscious of no secret deceit, who are the same in act as they are in desire, who conceal no thought, no tendencies of thought, from their own conscience, who are faithful and sincere witnesses before the tribunal of their own judgement of all that passes within their mind.' Shelley suggests that this comprehensive description may be condensed into the familiar adage of generations of moral philosophers that 'virtue is its own reward' – and again the analogical relationship with Socrates becomes clear.⁵⁰ However, there are also implicit affinities with one of William Blake's dramatic warnings in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* against shuffling dishonesty and tolerated self-deception – 'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.'⁵¹ Shelley's language is more lyrically measured and less calculatedly provocative, yet it too underscores an integrity of existence which fuses being, thought and action. At the same time, the encounter with God is presented in terms which deliberately avoid any hint of Judaeo-Christian theology, for the blessed will 'give forth divinest melody when the breath of universal being sweeps over their frame'.⁵² This implicit reference to an Aeolian harp calls to mind Shelley's evocation of Intellectual Beauty in the poem composed in 1816; there 'the awful shadow of some unseen Power / Floats though unseen among us' (ll. 1–2), and is experienced as 'music by the light wind sent / Through strings of some still instrument' (ll. 3–4).⁵³ At once natural and divine, this spiritual force renews energy and life, restoring the mutuality between individuals and their environment while alleviating the anguish of suffering, loss or personal alienation.

49 *Prose I*: 250.

50 *Prose I*: 250–51.

51 From Plate 10 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 185.

52 *Prose I*: 252.

53 *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, in *SPP*: 93–4. Stephen C. Behrendt also comments on the evocation of an Aeolian harp, citing Coleridge's writing as well (*Shelley and his Audiences*. Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p. 115).

The dignified tranquillity of such visions contrasts vividly with Shelley's joyfully ironic burlesque in 'On the Devil and Devils', yet the guiding concerns are closely intertwined. This irreverent Lucianic essay, which was written in 1819/20, seems to have taken its impetus from Shelley's amused reading about various improbable instances of exorcizing devils in Luke's Gospel. The immediate catalyst was almost certainly the mischievously jotted question, 'Who the devil is the Devil?'⁵⁴ Once again, Shelley is determined to expose the abuses of religious dogma, that brand of superstitious manipulation which according to Lucretius prompts the expedient sacrifice of Iphigenia to ensure the success of the Greek campaign against Troy: '*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*' (l. 101).⁵⁵ Yet the moral impulse is realized through a release of ludic humour, which sometimes becomes almost school-boyish in its overflow of sarcastic wit. So Shelley enters the realm of science fiction by suggesting that devils may live on the sun (most inappropriately in view of its brightness and symbolic significance), on the planets, or even in fiery comets. He speculates on whether they may take possession of people as bacteria invade the body, while the much-maligned serpent is pictured as hopping clumsily on its tail before incurring the curse of crawling on its belly. The more serious dimension of the essay reveals Shelley's settled dislike of a God who seems to delight in punishing his creation, tormenting relentlessly those stigmatized as sinners. But God is seen equally as a figure of sneaking malice and perverted honesty, who cynically employs the devil as his *diabolos* or 'accuser', although the role of prosecutor shifts seamlessly into the functions of informer, attorney general and 'jailor of the celestial tribunal'.⁵⁶ Particularly offensive is the predicament of Job, first favoured by God and then ear-marked for suffering and degradation through the agency of the Devil. Nonetheless, Shelley celebrates the resiliently defiant courage of the victim, whose 'expostulations ... with God are of the most daring character, it is certain he [God] would not bear them from a Christian'.⁵⁷ This aptly frames Shelley's sense both of scripturally conceived divine justice with its fondness for biased tests and spineless Christian submissiveness.

Shelley's critique becomes most pertinent and acerbic, though, when he addresses the configuration of the creation narrative. He highlights the intrinsic imperfection of God's endeavour by parodying the rationalizations of theology: 'He made [his creatures] as good as possible, but the nature of the substance out of which they were formed, or the unconquerable laws according to which that substance when created was necessarily modified prevented them from being so perfect as he could wish.'⁵⁸ This smacks of Hume's light-hearted submission that the flaws in the world

54 For a concise explanation of the context of this essay, see Timothy Webb's extended note in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poems and Prose*. London: J.M. Dent, 1995, p. 401. The dating is examined in the Introduction to Dawson and Webb, *BSM XIV*: xvii-xviii.

55 'So potent was Superstition in persuading to evil deeds' (*De Rerum Natura*, I, pp. 10-11).

56 Dawson and Webb, *BSM XIV*: 65 (MS Shelley e. 9, p. 57). See also Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, pp. 268-9.

57 *BSM XIV*: 75 (MS Shelley e. 9, p. 67) and Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 269.

58 *BSM XIV*: 51 (MS Shelley e. 9, p. 43), printed with slight variations in Clark, *Shelley's Prose*, p. 266. The deletions in the Bodleian manuscript are not shown here, although Shelley

may be attributable to the questionable workmanship of an infant or senile deity, or perhaps some inferior god who is the despair of his more accomplished colleagues.⁵⁹ Yet Shelley adds a further turn to the screw: God gives his creatures freewill both to disguise the inadequacy of his own performance and to secure a pretext for punishing them for their apparent misdemeanours. This tendency is revealed particularly in the fall of Satan, which Shelley condemns as most inadequately motivated from the literary point of view. Moreover, he playfully highlights the ethical inversion of the relationship between a notionally perfect deity and his theoretically corrupt creature:

Miltons Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity & torture; is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy,— not from any mistaken notion of bringing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity but with the open & alledged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments.⁶⁰

Shelley astutely recognizes the heroic qualities which Milton has conferred on the arch-fiend at the opening of his epic. Satan seems to be the individual triumphant; his vital ambition and malleable will-power set his verse alight: ‘The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven / Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven’ (I, 254–5, 263).⁶¹ Although Shelley retains his understanding of the petty manipulativeness of Milton’s God and the vivid self-assertiveness of Satan, his famous preface to *Prometheus Unbound* offers a more nuanced reading. Prometheus is now proposed as the ethically ideal representative of humanity because his characterization is unambiguous, carrying neither the taint of Satan’s viciousness nor surreptitiously excusing revenge on the basis of unjustly inflicted suffering.⁶² This interpretation of his own poem in relation to Milton’s text is subtly balanced, neatly summarizing the dilemma posed by Satan’s inextricably mixed motives and opportunistic values. At the beginning of Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Satan is assigned a soliloquy which seems designed to damn him through his own admissions, while his account of a repressively hierarchical heaven corroborates

refers in a cancelled aside to the ‘Platonic idea’, thus suggesting the yawning gap between the perfection of idealized forms and their actual embodiment. Such speculations point to the subtle integration of Shelley’s sustained ethical aspirations with his metaphysical enquiries.

59 Hume, *Dialogues*, p. 79.

60 BSM XIV: 55–7 (MS Shelley e. 9, pp 47–8; deletions and alterations are not shown, but the text is otherwise uncorrected. For a slightly different version, see Clark, *Shelley’s Prose*, p. 267.

61 *Paradise Lost*, in *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler. London: Longmans, 1968, p. 477.

62 See the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, in *SPP*, 206–7. Lucy Newlyn, while acknowledging the attraction of readers to Satan, aptly suggests that the challenge of *Prometheus Unbound* is to fashion a convincingly heroic figure who resembles neither Milton’s Satan nor his God; she notes that the Prometheus of the initial phase of the poem still bears traces of Satan’s resentful destructiveness (*‘Paradise Lost’ and the Romantic Reader*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 144–6).

Shelley's worst misgivings. In *Paradise Lost*, free will may legitimately be construed as the rift through which error (now ideologically constructed as sin) enters the sphere of considered action. Most unnervingly, Satan's version of the divinely mapped route to repentance promises little more than a downward spiral of renewed crime and intensified punishment.⁶³ If this vignette is taken to encapsulate the complex rationale of Christian ethics and theology, then Shelley's strictures, whatever their rhetorical tone, show themselves unusually acute.

Shelley's Pragmatism

From an integrated perspective, Shelley's commentaries on Christianity and the Devil clearly illustrate the robust ethical sensibility which marks his entire creative career, while his writings on metaphysics and deism reflect the workings of a lively awareness, constantly probing for validated knowledge and usable truth. He is scrupulously Socratic in his rejection of self-serving claims based on complacency, prejudice or a blank refusal to review the facts. In the sceptical tradition, he favours rigorous debate and careful, flexible argument. He is, with some qualification, alive to Holbach's eager endorsement of Enlightenment rationality, yet also discriminatingly responsive to the egalitarian orientation of William Godwin and the sharp cultural critique of Tom Paine. Most compellingly, though, Shelley has internalized the lessons of the distinguished empiricists of his time, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. As Wasserman acknowledges, 'the direction his thinking took was determined by his efforts to settle in his own way the kinds of questions raised by the British empiricists, whose heirs the Romantics were, not by his conviction of the truth of any one philosopher's system; and his abundant recourse to the ancient philosophers [one might include Jesus here too] was an eclectic search for partial aid in his quest.'⁶⁴ Yet such intensely critical alertness suggests that Shelley also qualifies as a committed pragmatist with respect to the criteria advanced by William James, and as already suggested by his commitment to an *ambulatory* approach to problem-solving.⁶⁵ For Shelley's thought is not simply abstract or academic, but avowedly practical. His enquiries are intimately linked to the changes which he wants to produce in his world; and James, following Charles Saunders Pierce, emphasizes that distinctions in thought must be connected with 'possible difference[s] of practice'. Nor is it anachronistic to regard Shelley as a pragmatist of this type. James comments, 'there is absolutely nothing new in the pragmatic method. ... Locke, Berkeley and Hume made momentous contributions to truth by its means.' But this method extends, and to some degree modifies, the scope and orientation of Locke or Hume's self-consciously rigorous enquiries. The description of the pragmatist which follows seems to deliver a thumbnail sketch both of Shelley's mode of thinking and of his social commitments.

63 See *Paradise Lost*, Bk IV, ll. 32–113, pp. 610–14.

64 *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound*, pp. 5–6.

65 There is regrettably no direct discussion of Shelley's writing in Kathleen Wheeler's thought-provoking chapter on 'William James and Early Pragmatist Rejection of Metaphysics' in *Romanticism, Pragmatism and Deconstruction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, pp. 75–98.

[The pragmatist] turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. This means the empiricist temper regnant It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth.⁶⁶

There can be little doubt that Shelley rejects dogma, artificiality and pretence in his philosophical and religious writings, while forming his judgements consistently on the basis of facts and discovering a rich reservoir of absorbing information in the multiple permutations of nature. Yet he shows himself a pragmatist in at least two further respects. In accordance with William James's explication of this intellectual position, Shelley is able to keep old, trusted truths and to adapt these to new discoveries.⁶⁷ As the preceding discussion has shown, he is not bound to a constraining system; instead he is able to evaluate ideas dispassionately, to dismantle and reconfigure sequences of argument, to assess and reformulate his own guiding assumptions. This capacity, in its turn, infuses his response to facts and his understanding of truth. As James penetratingly explains in 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth':

Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, it is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process of verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*.⁶⁸

Shelley's progress from *The Necessity of Atheism*, through his notes on *Queen Mab*, to *A Refutation of Deism* bears testimony to such a processive and revisionary notion of truth. If *The Necessity* ends on a note of complacent conviction, Shelley does not rest there. He adds to his store of materials, juxtaposing and recomposing. *A Refutation* is in dialogue form precisely to underline the importance of rational interaction and debate. The salient ideas may be accepted as true because they become true through sustained study and reflection, followed by discussion. A similarly searching critical approach, enlivened by ironic playfulness at the expense of damaging, misguided or ludicrous beliefs, is to be found in the later 'On the Devil and Devils'. In this context, the very disorderliness of multiple pieces, such as the metaphysical and moral fragments, shows truth under the constant pressure of its valid-*ation*. It is striking that apart from *The Necessity* and *A Refutation*, all the pieces examined in this commentary are unfinished, experimental, exploratory.

Shelley's pragmatism, then, leads him to apply his truths in the service of living; this is why he shows so little patience with outmoded or restrictive philosophical systems and religious doctrine. Such ossifications of thought and feeling come to constitute 'moralism' in the vocabulary of the existentialist philosopher, Marthinus Versfeld. 'Moralism' is 'the morality of false guilt, the morality of taboos, of legalism, of sheer convention, of the domination of man from the outside, of spurious being.'

66 William James, 'What Pragmatism Means', in '*Pragmatism*' and '*The Meaning of Truth*', p. 31. See also pp. 29–30 for the preceding commentary.

67 See James, 'What Pragmatism Means', pp. 36–7.

68 James, 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth', in '*Pragmatism*' and '*The Meaning of Truth*', p. 97.

'Moralism' induces the self-alienation which Shelley observes in the compliant Christians of his own day, who dare not deviate from established norms, repressing their needs and desires in the interests of superficial respectability. They make themselves subservient to the zeal for control and punishment exercised by the God of *Paradise Lost*, as Shelley reads that poem. The antithesis of this behaviour is seen in Shelley's Jesus, the individual of uncompromised self-consonance and radiating compassion. He and those resembling him see God. Such persons, Versfeld suggests, are guided by a key dictum of St Augustine in his guise as imaginatively gifted psychologist: '*ama et fac quod vis*' or 'love and do what you will'. Versfeld proceeds to explore the complex invitation offered by Augustine's wisdom. *Ama* is taken to mean finding one's unfettered humanity, which emerges only as a genuine reciprocity with God (and presumably Shelley's universal Spirit), one's fellow human beings and nature. *Fac quod vis* is condensed into freely expressing one's citizenship of the universe.⁶⁹ In this instance, such freedom might easily be construed as pursuing benevolence in Hume's terms or the political justice of Godwin. Yet again, there is no mismatch with Shelley's admiration for Jesus' inspired independence or his unwavering, Socratic conviction that rational investigation will pave the way for ethical action. To think lucidly is to act creatively with respect to one's fellow beings.

So Shelley's philosophical enquiries resonate within and beyond their time of writing, crystallizing the prescient thought of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but also meshing with pragmatic praxis and the austere self-realization of a situation ethics which admits no coercive rules. These are the consequences, then and now, of contemplating facts and studying ourselves.

⁶⁹ See Versfeld, 'Morality and Moralism', in *Persons*. Cape Town: Buren, 1972, pp. 81, 83 and 98.

Chapter 11

A Place to Stand: Questions of Address in Shelley's Political Pamphlets

Martin Priestman

'Only give me a place on which to stand, and I shall move the whole world.' Archimedes' famous claim for the strength-transforming powers of the well-positioned lever resonated strongly enough with the young Shelley to be used as an epigraph to his two most ambitious early works: *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*.¹ The quotation implies two fundamental questions of address: to whom is the author trying to speak, and how does he present the 'place' from which he himself speaks, socially, ideologically and even physically? To these can be added the related questions of literary genre and of 'address' in the more eighteenth-century sense of the kind of aplomb with which one can rise to a social occasion: with what choice and position of lever can the writer attempt to 'move' and convince his intended readership?

These questions arise particularly sharply in the case of Shelley's six published political pamphlets: *An Address to the Irish People*, *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* and *A Declaration of Rights*, arising from Shelley's youthful involvement in Irish affairs in 1812; *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, also from 1812; and *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote* and *An Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte*, both written by the pseudonymous 'Hermit of Marlow' in 1817.² The six pamphlets also offer a broadly symmetrical series of experiments in political genre: two 'addresses to the people' sandwiching two sets of 'proposals', themselves sandwiching two rather more one-off experiments: the broadsheet poster and the supposed 'letter' addressed to the public over the shoulder of a declared recipient not particularly likely to read it.

The content of Shelley's political thought – with its debts to the Foxite Whig tradition as well as the radical works of Godwin, Paine and Cobbett, and its anticipations of Marx – has been well covered in several studies since the 1980s.³

1 Title pages to *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*. *PS* I: 269; II: 30.

2 Shelley's unpublished letter 'To the Editor of the Examiner [Leigh Hunt]' may be considered a seventh written pamphlet. See n. 46.

3 See Paul Foot, *Red Shelley*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980; Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982; P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980; Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1988. See also Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works*. New York and Oxford: Oxford

Shelley's strategic reconfigurations of himself and his projected audiences have also received valuable attention – notably from Stephen C. Behrendt⁴ – but while building on such work I aim to focus afresh on the inventiveness and diversity of his attempts to intervene practically in the turbulent politics of the 1810s. I shall be paying particular attention to his increasingly circumspect use of the key word 'you', with its implicit picturing of a specific type of addressee, and then – in a concluding section – to the 'politics of print' impacting on the colourful, sometimes apparently comical, strategies of production and distribution Shelley felt pressured to adopt.

The 1812 Pamphlets

'Man cannot make occasions, but he may seize those that offer.'⁵ This remark from *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* epitomizes the way in which Shelley used grievances specific to Ireland as a springboard for an internationalist programme of reform. To the obvious question 'Why Ireland?', a great part of the answer lies in the clear injustice of Britain's recent treatment of its neighbour. The Catholic majority had no parliamentary representation or access to employment in responsible positions, and even the exclusively Protestant Irish Parliament had been abolished by the 1801 Act of Union with England, forcibly enacted in response to the failed United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798. Another part of the answer is that – far from being the wild step away from the English political scene one might imagine – the Irish Question was an important concern of the Foxite Whigs with whom Shelley's father, the wealthy MP Timothy Shelley, was theoretically allied. In particular, Catholic Emancipation was close to the heart of the Shelleys' political patron, the 11th Duke of Norfolk, who – though he had himself renounced Catholicism for political reasons – combined a comparatively radical stance with his family's traditional role of upholding Catholic rights. Shelley's furious feud with his father following his expulsion from Oxford over *The Necessity of Atheism* and subsequent marriage to Harriet Westbrook was in part patched up by an extended visit to the Duke in late 1811, which may have helped to inspire his Irish venture.⁶ Seeing himself as a martyr for atheism's sake clearly helped Shelley to identify with another group persecuted for their beliefs about religion. A third reason for his Irish venture may have been the existence of an already radicalized body, the remnants of

University Press, 1988, especially Ch. 5; and several essays in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (eds). Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

4 Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*. Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

5 *Prose* I: 41.

6 See Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1951, p. 128; Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*. London and New York: Viking Penguin, 1987, p. 95; and James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography. Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792–1816*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004, p. 216.

the United Irishmen, from whom he hoped to recruit for his projected internationalist 'association of philanthropists'.⁷

The *Address to the Irish People* consciously seizes the occasion of the Emancipation issue at a moment of crisis. King George III's continued mental incapacity had just led to the lifting of restrictions on the Prince of Wales's *de facto* powers – imposed on his becoming *de jure* Regent a year before – amidst widespread hopes that he would now promote the Foxite policy of Catholic Emancipation his father had always opposed.⁸ In Shelley's words, 'A crisis is now arriving, which shall decide your fate ... whether or no [the Regent] will consider the promise of a Prince of Wales binding to a King of England, is yet a matter of doubt.'⁹ The doubt was already resolving itself in the negative when Shelley recast some of the *Address*'s arguments in a more direct kind of 'address': an impassioned, invited speech to the Dublin Catholic Association on 28 February (1812), of which the Government spy Thomas Manning reported home that 'a young boy delivered a speech of considerable length and replete with much elegant language; the principle matter it contained of notice was, that he lamented that the Regent should abandon Mr Fox's principles.'¹⁰ Reported on approvingly in four Dublin newspapers, this speech was the nearest Shelley ever came to addressing 'the people' directly, though the Catholic Association audience was in fact more middle-class than the largely poor, working-class readership consciously aimed at in *Address*.¹¹ In the latter, with the Regent's position still in doubt, Shelley takes a double-pronged approach: after recommending a sustained campaign of non-violent resistance to gain Catholic Emancipation – as a matter of simple justice rather than the mealy-mouthed Whiggish idea of toleration, which, he acerbically points out, always 'seems to mean that there is some merit in the person who tolerates'¹² – he moves on to outline the more revolutionary goals of 'universal emancipation' the campaign should aim for if and when (he sees it as 'certain' in the long run) Emancipation is granted.¹³

It is important to stress Shelley's commitment to non-violence. But while his acclaimed mentor, William Godwin, opposed all forms of political 'association' as

7 For a good recent account of the issues briefly touched on here, see Paul O'Brien, *Shelley and Revolutionary Ireland*. London and Dublin: Redwords, 2002.

8 See J. Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III, 1760–1815*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 491.

9 *Prose I*: 20.

10 Dennis Florence MacCarthy, *Shelley's Early Life: from Original Sources*. London, 1870, pp. 238–41; quoted in Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, p. 125.

11 See *Prose I*: 291–301, for the newspaper reports. Paul O'Brien notes how 'the elite of Catholic society' flocked to this meeting, whose 'star attraction' was the Emancipationist leader, Daniel O'Connell; and also how a previous Catholic Association gathering (addressed by Shelley's hero Peter Finnerty) involved 'great pains ... particularly by the Catholic clergy, to keep the lower orders from attending in the streets' (O'Brien, *Shelley and Revolutionary Ireland*, pp. 89, 83).

12 *Prose I*: 5.

13 *Prose I*: 29.

resolving ‘all understandings into one common mass’,¹⁴ Shelley begins his political career by demanding just such an association in the very title of his second pamphlet and, in the first, by following the argument that ‘I can by no means think that assembling together merely to talk of how things go on ... come in any way under the head of force or violence’ with rousing cries of ‘Are you slaves, or are you men?’¹⁵ Godwin had himself visited Ireland between the 1798 uprising and Robert Emmett’s short-lived 1803 insurrection, and his appalled response – ‘Shelley, you are preparing a scene of blood!’¹⁶ – can be set beside Emmett’s own self-distancing from the violence he had unleashed,¹⁷ and against E.P. Thompson’s picture of a virtually armed Irish labouring class which, in the very year of Shelley’s Irish Campaign, led the Solicitor-General to deplore ‘the formidable consequences of an armed peasantry, and a disarmed gentry’.¹⁸

Shelley’s determination – like that of the revolutionary Jesus of his later ‘On Christianity’ (1817) – to ‘accommodate his doctrines to the prepossessions of those whom he addresse[s]’ raises some of the problems of ‘address’ described at the start of this chapter.¹⁹ In a ‘Postscript’ advertising his next pamphlet, Shelley makes it clear that ‘I have published the above Address (written in England) in the cheapest possible form, and have taken pains that the remarks which it contains should be intelligible to the most uneducated minds’ – or, as he wrote more bluntly to his platonic pen friend, Elizabeth Hitchener, ‘the lowest comprehension that can read’.²⁰ Given the doubly unknown nature of his imagined audience – in both class and national terms – Shelley’s attempt to bridge the gap by a direct ‘I–you’ mode of address often only serves to accentuate it.

Despite a fair attempt at the stylistic simplicity with which Tom Paine had broken through the political class-barrier with *Rights of Man*, Shelley’s repeated cries of ‘O Irishmen!’ address a ‘you’ of readers who may be oppressed but are also misguided. He is so concerned for his readers to transcend the ‘prejudices’ of ‘many Englishmen’ that he often echoes them, with repeated warnings against drunkenness and violent emotion: ‘do not spend your money in idleness and drinking.’²¹ Furthermore, he sometimes finds it hard to suppress a visceral dislike for Catholicism itself, in such would-be even-handed formulations as ‘You are not answerable for the faults of

14 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), IV.iii, quoted from *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, ed. Marilyn Butler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 162–3.

15 *Prose* I: 30.

16 *Letters* I: 269–70 (Godwin to Shelley, 14 March 1812).

17 See Timothy Webb, ‘Coleridge and Robert Emmett: Reading the Text of the Irish Revolution’. *Irish Studies Review* 8.3 (December 2000), pp. 303–24 (pp. 304–5).

18 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, p. 482. But see, by contrast, Harold Orel’s argument that in the context of the time the *Address* is ‘remarkably temperate’. (Harold Orel, ‘Shelley’s Relationship to Ireland’, in *The Most Unfailing Herald: Percy Bysshe Shelley 1792–1992*, Alan M. Weinberg and Romaine Hill (eds). Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1996, pp. 122–31, [p. 126].)

19 *Prose* I: 261. See Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 65.

20 *Letters* I: 256 (to Elizabeth Hitchener, 18 February 1812).

21 *Prose* I: 22.

your fathers any more than the Protestants are good for the goodness of their fathers.’²² The veiled confession of his personal atheism in the preceding statement that ‘I am not a Protestant, nor am I a Catholic, and therefore not being a follower of either of these religions, I am better able to judge between them’ was also unlikely to endear him to an audience uniformly self-identified as at least Christian. Some of the convolutions of his position are conveyed in his comment to Hitchens that the *Address* is ‘secretly intended ... as a preliminary to other pamphlets to shake Catholicism at its basis, ... without objecting to the Christian Religion, which would do no good to the vulgar just now’.²³

The first of those ‘other pamphlets’ marks an abrupt change in style of address and intended audience, following the shock of Shelley’s first actual encounters with the Dublin poor whom he had addressed so confidently, sight unseen, while composing the *Address* in the English Lake District:

I had no concept of the depth of human misery until now. – The poor of Dublin are assuredly the meanest & most miserable of all – In their narrow streets thousands seem huddled together – one mass of animated filth! ... These were the persons to whom in my fancy I had addressed myself; how quickly were my views on this subject changed!²⁴

Though the attempt to address the poor directly was in itself striking, and quite outside the tonal range of most middle-class reformists of the day, it is clearly with some relief that Shelley now resumes his ‘own natural style’ in the interests of ‘proselyting the young men at Dublin [that is, Trinity] College’ and other educated readers.²⁵ *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* calls for all lovers of humanity to unite in a society with three aims: Catholic Emancipation, repeal of the Act of Union and, much more broadly, the removal of all other kinds of ‘moral and political evil’.²⁶ The situation in Ireland is an occasion to be seized, but the final goal is to make a better-run world everyone’s country. With the Regent’s backsliding now clear, Shelley gives Emancipation less emphasis than in *Address*, arguing that in the short term it would benefit only the few: the already rich and powerful Catholics who would get the parliamentary seats and other offices at the expense of the many, as in the corrupt British system as a whole. There is a similar ambivalence in his support (more prominent than in *Address*) for repeal of the Union, less because a restored Irish Parliament would be a beacon of liberty than because at present the ‘aristocracy of Ireland suck the veins of its inhabitants and consume the blood in England’.²⁷

With both these major Irish issues presented as symptoms rather than the main class-based disease, Shelley turns his attention to the internationalist dimension of his proposed association. His double-edged formula, ‘[t]he minority in number are the majority in intellect and power’²⁸ suggests at once the problem, when set

22 *Prose* I: 10.

23 *Letters* I: 239 (to Elizabeth Hitchener, 26 January 1812).

24 *Letters* I: 268 (to Godwin, 8 March 1812).

25 *Letters* I: 263 (to Elizabeth Hitchener, 27 February, 1812).

26 *Prose* I: 41.

27 *Prose* I: 43.

28 *Prose* I: 45.

in stone by heredity, and the chance that an intellectual vanguard will have power to reverse it. This internationalist vanguardism smacks strongly of the Illuminati, the underground quasi-masonic organization blamed for the trans-European spread of revolutionary ideas prior to 1789 by the Abbé de Barruel, whose *Histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797–98) was a favourite part of Shelley's reading.²⁹ While still at Oxford he had written to Leigh Hunt arguing for a unification of all elements of the reform movement in imitation of 'the very great influence, which some years since was gained by *Illuminism*'.³⁰ Though inspired by the idea of such a worldwide organization – only represented in his day by belief-groups such as the churches and freemasonry – he regarded Illuminism's 'schemes of a completely-equalized community' as 'visionary',³¹ and insisted that his Philanthropist society must not keep its aims and activities secret but 'open as the beam of day',³² despite the undoubted opposition of the church and aristocracy. Addressing the question whether such an association is consistent with the Constitution, he punningly remarks that while 'Man has a heart to feel, a brain to think, and a tongue to utter', no political body is able to change 'the imperishable relations of *his* constitution' (my italics).³³

In marked contrast to *Address*, the word 'you' is now completely absent. The *dramatis personae* consist solely of 'I' on the one hand and 'those' of certain beliefs on the other. Thus: 'I invite to an Association of Philanthropy those of whatever ultimate expectations, who will employ the same means that I employ; let their designs differ as much as they may from mine, I shall rejoice at their co-operation.'³⁴ This apparent lack of browbeating fits well with the definition of 'philanthropy' Shelley is eager to promote, foregrounding the fundamental idea of 'disinterest' – on which Hazlitt also wrote, in his one philosophical work *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805) – and rhetorically setting it against the self-interest by which the dominant class has framed the British Constitution 'for their own benefit', and against the self-interested fear of damnation pandered to by the only public assemblies now legally permitted: church services.³⁵ Through the exercise of such collective disinterest, the 'palsied beldame Superstition' will eventually give way to the 'Temple of Religious Freedom', where 'Philanthropy kneels at the altar of the common God!'³⁶ Despite the apparent emotionalism of such terminology, its reliance on lofty personifications and use of such religious images as temples and altars to denote the reverse assumes a

29 See Hugh Roberts, 'Setting Minds Afloat: Shelley and Barruel in Ireland', in *A Brighter Morn: The Shelley Circle's Utopian Project*, Darby Lewes (ed.). London: Lexington Books, 2002, pp. 1–17. Roberts points out that Shelley read through Barruel's paranoid condemnation of the Illuminati: he gave Shelley a 'way of understanding how an intellectual class can work to prepare the ground for massive social, political, and cultural change; how, as Shelley puts it "the Revolution in France was occasioned by the literary labors of the Encyclopaedists"' (*Proposals* [*Prose* I:] 51), p. 7.

30 *Letters* I: 54 (to Leigh Hunt, 2 March, 1811).

31 *Letters* I: 54. See Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 159.

32 *Prose* I: 47.

33 *Prose* I: 49.

34 *Prose* I: 54.

35 *Prose* I: 47, 49.

36 *Prose* I: 43.

neoclassical, deistic and republican space where such images are publicly shared rather than privately generated. If, even so, 'philanthropy' sounds to modern ears a tame thing to get so worked up about, it was thoroughly tarred with Jacobinism in Shelley's day, as witness the gibes at 'Tom Paine, the Philanthropist' in the government-sponsored *Anti-Jacobin's* 1797 parody of the then-radical Southey, 'The Friend of Humanity and the Needy Knife-grinder', which concludes with the former kicking over the latter's grinding wheel 'in a transport of Republican enthusiasm and universal Philanthropy'.³⁷

The publication of a substantial extract from *Proposals* in the *Dublin Weekly Messenger* did attract some response, which throws interesting light on Shelley's success or otherwise in projecting his message. 'A Dissenter', writing to a rival newspaper *The Dublin Journal*, attacks Shelley as one of 'those literary nondescripts and political adventurers who figure occasionally on the Catholic stage' but (rightly) sees the passage quoted above as threatening to undermine Catholicism, under cover of the personificatory 'figures which Deism borrows from the old Heathen mythology, which are mere poetic smoke'.³⁸ Presenting Shelley as a noxious mix of revolutionary monsters like Marat and sentimentalists like Rousseau and Sterne, the Dissenter attacks his over-poetic prose as 'so redundant with words, which, like those often used by a celebrated female novelist, were probably never intended to represent any specific idea – one is tempted to think he must now and then compose under the influence of the moon'. The belittling intention behind this carefully-worked-up equation of madness and menstrual cycles is pre-empted but perhaps also reinforced in the generally laudatory *Weekly Messenger* article which includes the *Proposals* extract: 'by the political monopolist he will be considered the child of Chimera – the creature of Fancy – an imaginary Legislator, who presumes to make laws without reflecting on his materials.'³⁹ Though this negative anticipation of Shelley's 'unacknowledged legislator' is supposedly rectified by repeated references to his 'purity' of purpose and principles, the general picture projected already seems to lay the groundwork for the 'ineffectual angel' image which became prevalent from the mid-nineteenth century. The image was further boosted by Thomas Love Peacock's depiction in *Nightmare Abbey* of the Shelleyan Scythrop's treatise 'Philosophical Gas; or, a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind' whose Illuminati-modelled vanguardist politics – 'a few to think, and many to act, that is the only basis of perfect society' – closely echoes that of *Proposals*: 'the minority in number are the majority in intellect and power'.⁴⁰ The letter Scythrop receives 'from his bookseller, informing him that only seven copies had been sold, and concluding with a polite request for the balance' doubtless refers to a repeated Shelleyan experience (Peacock knew him best at the time of the later pamphlets *Putting Reform to the Vote* and *Princess Charlotte*), but it is arguable that

37 *Poetry of The Anti-Jacobin*, ed. L. Rice-Oxley. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1924, p. 9.

38 *Prose I*: 299.

39 *Prose I*: 297. The article was by John Lawless, for whose involvement with Shelley see *Prose I*: 292–3; Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, pp. 127–9; and Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, pp. 241–2.

40 Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey and Crotchet Castle*, ed. R. Wright. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, pp. 47, 92; *Prose*: 45.

Proposals for an Association above all set the pattern for later images of Shelley the ineffectually ‘imaginary Legislator’.

The last of Shelley’s three Irish texts is the shortest but in many ways the most daring. Arguably, the main message of *A Declaration of Rights* is its medium, the bill-posted broadsheet containing a brusquely numbered list of 31 ‘rights’, in the manner of the French National Assembly’s 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens*, as prominently reprinted and championed in Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man, Part One* (1791).⁴¹ Paine is closely echoed, not only in the whole vocabulary of ‘rights’ but in the insistence on government as a necessary evil whose only ‘right’ is to secure those of the governed (I), and in the direct repetition of Paine’s key argument against Burke’s attempt to derive English commoners’ rights solely from the oligarchic 1689 Revolution Settlement: ‘The present generation cannot bind their posterity. The few cannot promise for the many’ (XVI). Even more radically, Shelley attacks inequality of wealth: ‘No man has a right to monopolize more than he can enjoy; what the rich give to the poor, while millions are starving, is not a perfect favour, but an imperfect right’ (XXVIII). Interwoven with such points are defences of religious freedom on the grounds that ‘Belief is involuntary’ (XXIII), the key plank of *The Necessity of Atheism* as well as the defences of Catholic rights in the two preceding Irish pamphlets. But despite some verbal echoes of the latter, *Declaration* strikingly avoids all use of the actual terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’. Arguably, Shelley was already seeing it as a bridge back home, distilling the essence of his Irish campaign in a sufficiently abstracted form to be equally relevant to English politics.

The *Declaration* concludes with a dramatic shift into a different register:

Man! thou whose rights are here declared, ... [t]hey are declared to thee by one who knows thy dignity, for every hour does his heart swell with honorable pride in the contemplation of what thou mayest attain, by one who is not forgetful of thy degeneracy, for every moment brings home to him the bitter conviction of what thou art.

*Awake! — arise! — or be forever fallen.*⁴²

While the rest of the broadsheet has followed *Proposals* in representing ‘the people’ in the third person rather than the potentially embarrassing ‘you’ of *Address*, the second person returns here in a particularly strange form. The use of the singular ‘thou’ makes for a curious ambiguity as to the addressee ‘Man’. The capital ‘M’ starting the sentence allows this ‘man’ to be either an individual singled from the mass, or mankind as a whole – but if the latter, the ability to boil us all down into a singular Other suggests we are being ‘thou’d by a member of another species. If we are being addressed as individuals, it seems strange that the speaker should be so certain as to our personal degeneracy, but as a species, our failure to establish the stated ‘rights’ may well indicate our collective guilt. The latter hint becomes clearer when we realize – as most literate readers would – that the final italicized words are from Satan’s address to the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*: by a typical Shelleyan inversion, Satan becomes a Christ-like or Promethean bewailer of human fallibility.

⁴¹ See Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: being an Answer to Mr Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution*, Part I. London: J.S. Jordan, 1791, pp. 136–45.

⁴² *Prose I*: 59–60.

Written shortly after Shelley's and Harriet's disillusioned return to England, *A Letter to Ellenborough* (1812) takes a more well-established rhetorical detour round the problem of direct address: the published 'letter' to a figure who is more its subject than its recipient.⁴³ Accompanied by repeated 'My Lord's, the 'you' can now demonstrate all the flexibility, from high courtesy to disappointed anger, of which it is capable in discourse between well-bred equals. The occasion this time is the pillorying and 18 months' imprisonment of the printer and bookseller Daniel Isaac Eaton for publishing Part Three of Paine's proscribed anti-Christian polemic *The Age of Reason*, after a trial at which Lord Ellenborough was the presiding judge. Drawing once more on *Necessity of Atheism's* arguments about the involuntariness of belief, the polemic argues that the real reason for Eaton's draconian punishment was less the illegal publication as such than his refusal to disavow his own non-Christianity. The *Letter* derives some of its most dramatic effects from Lord Ellenborough's presence as the text's 'you', as in an upside-down vision of how Ellenborough's own arguments would work if 'some deistical bigot in power' had outlawed Christianity: 'if you my Lord were a christian bookseller and Mr. Eaton a judge, [... your own arguments would] justify Mr. Eaton, in sentencing you to Newgate and the pillory for being a Christian.'⁴⁴ Memories of similar situations actually arising at the height of the French Revolution here subliminally reinforce the overall impression of a British judge conducting his own version of the Reign of Terror. At another point, 'Has not Mr. Eaton an equal right to call your Lordship an Infidel, as you have to imprison him for promulgating a different doctrine from that which you profess?'⁴⁵ Indeed, Eaton has a greater right, since 'infidel' only really applies to backsliders from their own beliefs and Eaton is prepared to stand by his whereas Ellenborough hides behind the law while 'daringly avowing his unwillingness to answer' Eaton's objections to Christianity by argument.⁴⁶

The 1817 Pamphlets

With his marriage to Harriet finished and the storm over his European elopement with Mary Godwin apparently subsiding somewhat, Shelley's year or so in the Thames-side town of Marlow seemed to offer a brief glimpse of settlement at a regular English address. *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom* (1817) by 'The Hermit of Marlow' (see Fig. 8.1) marks Shelley's most deliberate attempt to insert himself into practical English politics – perhaps even to make a bid for the Whig parliamentary seat to which his family position might still be presumed to entitle him.

43 For a good account of *Letter* in relation to Shelley's wider views on issues of judgement and justice, see Timothy Webb, 'Shelley, the System of Judgement, and the Reputation of Poets'. *Litteraria Pragensia* 12.24 (2003), pp. 1–23 (pp. 10–11).

44 *Prose* I: 64–5.

45 *Prose* I: 66.

46 *Prose* I: 66. Shelley presented similar arguments seven years later in his letter 'To The Editor of *The Examiner*' [Leigh Hunt], *London*, 3 November 1819 – about the prosecution of Richard Carlile for a similar offence to Eaton's – which Hunt did not in fact publish. Though clearly written for publication, it can be found in *Letters* II: 136–48.

Distributing copies to leading reformers – such as Burdett, Cobbett, Cartwright, Place, Brougham, Owen and the Hunt brothers – Shelley proposes the apparently moderate step of ascertaining whether the people really want a wider franchise, by simply asking them if they do. Claiming no absolute commitment either way – though it does point out that the present state of domination by ‘a thousandth part of the entire community’ can elsewhere only be found in a ‘hospital for lunatics’⁴⁷ – the pamphlet’s detailed proposals for an army of canvassers to consult every single householder in the country as to whether they want the vote, with the findings to be vetted by a committee of radicals sworn not to disband till the results were all in, clearly amounts to a virtual system of alternative government only differing from the early days of the French Revolution by its more orderly means of assessing the general will.

Even more than the *Philanthropists* proposal, this one aims at impersonality in its apparently undirected suggestion:

That a meeting should be appointed to be held at the *Crown and Anchor Tavern* on the of, to take into consideration the most effectual measures for ascertaining whether or no, a reform in Parliament is the will of the majority of the individuals of the British nation.⁴⁸

Leaving the date blank, as if it were a minor detail to be filled in later, contributes to the initial effect of bustling practicality, but gradually emerges as a tacit confession of the author’s impotence to fill it in at all without the heavyweight support of ‘the most eloquent and the most virtuous and the most venerable among the Friends of Liberty’ to whom he had sent the first copies:⁴⁹

If it shall prove that I have in any degree afforded a hint to men who have earned and established their popularity by personal sacrifices and intellectual eminence such as I have not the presumption to rival, let it belong to them to pursue and develop all suggestions relating to the great cause of Liberty which has been nurtured (I am scarcely conscious of a metaphor) with their very sweat and blood and tears: Some have tended it in dungeons, others have cherished it in famine, all have been constant to it amidst persecution and calumny, and in the face of the sanctions of Power. – So accomplish what ye have begun.⁵⁰

The last sentence’s belated shift from third-person encomium to a curious mix of plea and command is balanced at the other end of the Archimedian lever when, despite his ‘Hermit’ disguise, Shelley fashions himself as a model for the middle-class support he is now aiming for, with a precisely personalized financial declaration: ‘I have an income of a thousand a year ... Should any plan resembling that which I have proposed, be determined on by you, I will give £100, being a tenth part of one year’s income, towards its object.’⁵¹ The ensuing account of his own ‘sentiments on this subject of reform’ is surprisingly moderate: the vote should be confined to those ‘paying a certain small sum in *direct taxes*’ and it would be folly to ‘abolish the

47 *Prose I*: 171.

48 *Prose I*: 172–3.

49 *Prose I*: 173.

50 *Prose I*: 174.

51 *Prose I*: 174.

regal and aristocratical branches of our constitution, before the public mind ... shall have arrived at the maturity which can disregard these symbols of its childhood'.⁵² However, as Holmes points out,

... ideologically speaking, Shelley's proposal *assumed already* what it pretended to question. Once the reader found himself agreeing that the whole of the 'individual adult' population of Great Britain had a right to be consulted on the reform issue – that is, on a fundamental political issue – then the principle of universal adult franchise was already in practice established.⁵³

The Hermit of Marlow's second utterance in 1817, *An Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte*, seizes the occasion of two ironically coinciding events: the death of the Prince Regent's eldest daughter in childbirth at the age of 20, which attracted almost as much popular sympathy as the death of Princess Diana in 1997, and the execution of three lower-class radicals for their part in the abortive Pentridge Rising, described by E.P. Thompson as 'one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian insurrection, without any middle-class support'.⁵⁴ Paul Foot vividly presents the mass lamentation over the former as the work of a right-wing press for which 'every royal marriage and birth was heralded as a miracle, every royal death as a calamity',⁵⁵ but the event also provided a focus for liberals who saw Princess Charlotte as a possible future monarch more sympathetic to reform than her father or grandfather. But though likely to be bought and read (if at all) by those expecting such views, Shelley's pamphlet rapidly twists away from them, juxtaposing the princess's death with the execution of rebels Jeremiah Brandreth, Isaac Ludlam and William Turner, whose failed uprising in the Midlands was a response to over-taxation, high bread prices and the destruction of the hand-loom industry by the new factory system.

The funereal opening – 'The Princess Charlotte is dead. She no longer moves, nor thinks, nor feels' – carries echoes of Wordsworth's Lucy poems,⁵⁶ and the solemn tone continues as Shelley contemplates the additional grief when such deaths occur during childbirth. However, he goes on to point out that this is the fate of thousands, and we do not publicly mourn them all. Such mourning should be reserved for the deaths of great public benefactors such as Milton, Rousseau or Voltaire, or for great catastrophes such as the conviction of Horne Tooke, Thomas Hardy and other radicals in the notorious 'treason trials' of 1794, had they not been acquitted. The princess 'was the last and the best of her race', but had done nothing good or evil for the country, having been prevented by 'the impotence of royalty', from understanding anything about it.⁵⁷ When people die naturally, our hearts can learn lessons about 'the burthen which must be borne', but murder – including the judicial murder of

52 *Prose I*: 176.

53 Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, p. 365.

54 Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 733.

55 Foot, *Red Shelley*, p. 55.

56 *Prose I*: 231. See 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal', ll. 5–6, *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Oxford Standard Authors), 1986, p. 147.

57 *Prose I*: 233.

the Pentridge rebels – yields no such improving message, and simply leads to an endless cycle of revenge.⁵⁸ The sufferings of Brandreth, Ludlum and Turner and their families far exceeded the Princess's, though Brandreth's was somewhat alleviated since, as an atheist, he at least did not fear hell. Shelley is not arguing that violence should go unpunished, but that their exceptionally cruel execution was a national tragedy, particularly since it let the real perpetrators off.

Shelley's concluding attempt to define the real causes of the Pentridge Rising combines politics and economics in a way that echoes Cobbett. Until the American War Britain was the freest nation on earth, but then a non-representative parliament gave a few aristocrats power to extend the national debt set up by William III in pursuance of earlier wars, creating a 'double aristocracy' by adding to the traditional landowners a new class of stock-jobbers and financial lawyers, 'petty piddling slaves' grown rich by managing the national debt.⁵⁹ The debt itself was funded by increased taxes on the poor, whose extra labour thus went directly to supporting this second aristocracy, as well as the army, monarchy and landowners. The doubling of the labour needed to pay these taxes, from eight to sixteen hours a day, has led to urgent demands for reform of the whole system. To stifle these, the Government has become (as in Shelley's great *Mask of Anarchy* of two years later) an agent of 'anarchy', 'conspiring' to send *agents provocateurs* to stir up trouble in the manufacturing districts, to give the impression that any concessions would themselves lead to 'common ruin'.⁶⁰ When the Pentridge Revolt began, 18 dragoons were standing by for a mass-arrest which frightened Parliament into allowing ever-more repressive measures. Technically, Brandreth was guilty because he did kill a man, but in reality all the rebels were victims of the leading *provocateur*, 'Oliver the Spy'. Quoting a description of the executions from Leigh and John Hunt's *Examiner*, Shelley does finally call for general mourning, but with a dramatic twist. The 'beautiful princess' who deserves such a national display of grief is not Charlotte, but Liberty. 'If One has died who was like her ... young, innocent, and lovely, ... it was a private grief. But *man* has murdered Liberty.'⁶¹ In strong anticipation of 'England in 1819' as well as 'The Mask of Anarchy', Shelley concludes: 'if some glorious Phantom should appear and make its throne of broken swords and sceptres and royal crowns trampled in the dust, let us say that the Spirit of Liberty has risen from its grave ... and kneel down and worship it as our Queen.'⁶²

With striking tact, when contrasted with the earlier 'Address' to the Irish People, *Princess Charlotte* almost entirely avoids the direct second-person plural 'you', except when using it in the same generalizing sense as 'one'. Thus the first 'you' occurs when Shelley has pointed out that many ordinary women die in childbirth, while 'You walk with a merry heart through the streets of this great city, and think

58 *Prose* I: 234.

59 *Prose* I: 235.

60 *Prose* I: 236–7.

61 *Prose* I: 238–9.

62 The link is well discussed by James Chandler, *England in 1819*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 25–6.

not that such are the scenes acting all around you'.⁶³ Far from the 'you' of haranguing superiority, this usage comprehends most of us most of the time, in sharp contrast to those driven to paroxysms of grief by the death of a princess.

Increasingly, this 'you' is replaced by the 'we' of common experience: 'Our alternatives are a despotism, a revolution, or reform';⁶⁴ 'We feel for Brandreth the less, because it seems he killed a man'; but in the face of the Government's destruction of 'our rights and liberties ... how ought we not to mourn?'⁶⁵ The 'you' of second-person address only returns at the start of the climactic last paragraph:

Mourn then People of England. Clothe yourselves in solemn black. Let the bells be tolled. Think of mortality and change. Shroud yourselves in solitude and the gloom of sacred sorrow. Spare no symbol of universal grief. Weep – mourn – lament. Fill the great City – fill the boundless fields, with lamentation and the echo of groans.⁶⁶

Far from being put in the wrong, as the Irish often are in the earlier *Address*, 'the people of England' are assumed to be reacting correctly rather than being told to do so: they are, after all, already in just such a state of mourning:

A beautiful Princess is dead: – she who should have been the Queen of her beloved nation, and whose posterity should have ruled it for ever ... LIBERTY is dead. Slave! I charge thee disturb not the depth and solemnity of our grief by any meaner sorrow.

It is notable that this sole use of the distancing, accusatory second person is in the singular: the individual who *has* been misguided enough to mourn Charlotte alone is made to feel like a solitary intruder on an 'us' who see deeper. By avoiding the collective 'ye', Shelley allows the reader to include him or herself in the 'we' of 'our grief'. So carefully does he lead us to this point that it is quite easy to see the public lamentation for Charlotte as the unconscious expression of a deeper suffering, which Shelley is bringing to the surface almost like a psychoanalyst. As Stephen Behrendt puts it, he makes his readers 'both the beneficiaries *and the agents* of all the positive values and symbolism that the culture was in the process of appending to the person and the role of the princess'.⁶⁷

The Politics of Print

The question of address in Shelley's political works has a more literal aspect than those discussed so far: the name and exact physical address printed on the front page. This could be that of a bookseller, a printer or simply the author. Booksellers were equivalent to today's publishers, shouldering legal responsibility for a work, ensuring sales by giving a shop address, and often advertising and distributing it

63 *Prose* I: 231.

64 *Prose* I: 237.

65 *Prose* I: 238.

66 *Prose* I: 238–9.

67 See Stephen C. Behrendt, *Royal Mourning and Regency Culture: Elegies and Memorials of Princess Charlotte*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p. 234.

more widely. Where there was a danger of prosecution or scandal they could either refuse to publish or – as John Murray did with the first two cantos of Byron's *Don Juan* – publish anonymously while using their established printers and distribution networks.⁶⁸ Printers, being artisans who had to get a living where they could, and might in any case have radical sympathies, could produce questionable texts more cheaply and still legally, as long as they named themselves so that they could be prosecuted if this was deemed necessary. Printing solely under the author's own name and address was against the law unless the author had a printer's licence and identifiable premises.

The methods by which Shelley produced and distributed his political pamphlets tell us a great deal about his perception of their subversiveness. His comparative wealth is certainly one reason why he was usually ready to carry the whole cost himself but, as Jon P. Klancher argues, the period from the 1790s to about 1817 saw the gentlemanly 'self-publishing ... essayist' replaced by the 'self-publishing radical writer forming an artisan public', a shift exemplified by Coleridge's abandonment of such self-managed projects as *The Friend* at the very moment (1816/17) of Cobbett's popular triumph with *The Political Register*.⁶⁹ In this rapidly-changing scene, Shelley's frequent use of the self-publishing option thus aligned him with the dangerous left.

As William St Clair points out, the first publication of *Queen Mab* in 1813 was 'dangerously illegal' because 'Shelley asked the printer to print the name and temporary address of P.B. Shelley as the publisher, but there is no record of his having taken out a printing licence'. When sending copies to friends, he 'clipped the pages which contained the illegal imprint, so increasing the aura of danger'.⁷⁰ But the revelling in the joys of underground subversion implied here needs to be set against the actual reception of this 'beautifully produced' edition: 'as with most privately-printed books, most copies stayed in the warehouse'.⁷¹ It was not until picked up and pirated by radical publishers including Erasmus Perkins and Richard Carlile that *Queen Mab* famously became 'by far, Shelley's most easily available ... and most widely read book',⁷² a change of fortune inaugurated by the Society for Suppression of Vice's successful prosecution and imprisonment of one such pirate, William Clark.

The case of *Queen Mab* helps to set in context the issues of print politics swirling round the flyleaves of Shelley's six political pamphlets. Like the poem, *Address to the Irish People* was printed with only Shelley's name and temporary Dublin address, not only breaking the law but making it hard for potential readers to acquire

68 See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 323–4.

69 Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, p. 48.

70 St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 318.

71 St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 319.

72 St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 320. As remarked in note 39 above, Shelley expressed strong support for Carlile's general track-record in illegal and 'blasphemous' publication in his letter 'To the Editor of *The Examiner*'. For a full account of the many piratings of *Queen Mab*, see *CPPBS* II: 507–19.

the 1,500 copies he had printed on arrival in Dublin. This partly accounts for the bizarre tactics Shelley adopted for distribution: as well as sending a number to leading liberal politicians, he hired a servant, Dan Healy, to help him leave copies in public houses and hand them to passers-by. As described by his wife Harriet,

I'm sure you would laugh were you to see us give the pamphlets. We throw them out of [the] window and give them to men we pass in the streets; for myself I am ready to die of laughter when it is done and Percy looks so grave. Yesterday he put one into a woman's hood of a cloak. She knew nothing of it and we passed her. I could hardly get on my muscles were so irritated.⁷³

Self-importantly humourless as Percy's gravity might appear in the midst of such goings-on, similar methods of targeting illegal and subversive writings at the masses had become commonplace since the Jacobin 1790s when, according to Hannah More's biographer, William Roberts, 'The friends of insurrection, infidelity, and vice, carried their exertions so far as to load asses with their pernicious pamphlets and to get them dropped, not only in cottages, and in highways, but into mines and coal-pits'; in towns and villages, the 'multitude' found temptation 'obtruded upon them in the streets, or invitingly hung out upon the wall, or from the windows'.⁷⁴ Though for most of its lucky recipients the *Address* clearly cost nothing, Shelley rushed to make political capital out of its nominal price of fivepence, declaring on the cover, 'The lowest possible price is set on this publication, because it is the intention of the Author to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state.'⁷⁵

The more 'respectably' targeted *Proposals for an Association* was addressed apparently more legally. The word 'Proposal' expects a response, at least rhetorically necessitating some stably identifiable address through which to reach the author. Nonetheless, Catherine Boyle has argued that the named printer, 'I. Eton, of Winetavern Street', may be a phantom.⁷⁶ There is no independent verification of his existence, and details of typeface such as the Gothicized 'Dublin' on the title pages link both this and *Address to the Irish People* to the house-style of the Dublin publisher John Stockdale, who had been imprisoned for publishing on behalf of the United Irishmen. Furthermore, in his intrigues against his father the old Etonian Shelley was fond of using pseudonyms such as 'Meyton' and 'Peyton' which might encode the ideas 'Me-ton' and 'P[ercy]-eton', to which the name 'I. Eton' would be a logical successor: to radically-attuned eyes it might also evoke that of [Daniel] Isaac Eaton, the radical publisher whom Shelley was shortly to defend in *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*. If Boyle is right that the real printer was Stockdale, all three of the Irish pamphlets may have been produced, not by the lordly Shelley finding a jobbing printer to run his musings off for him, but by his thoroughgoing involvement in a partly underground

73 *Letters* I: 265 (to Elizabeth Hitchener, 27 February 1812).

74 Quoted in Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998, 2nd edn, p. 74.

75 *Prose* I: 8.

76 See Catherine Boyle, 'Shelley in 1819: Poetry, Publishing and Radicalism'. PhD thesis, London: Roehampton Institute, June 1998, p. 89.

communications network linked to the proscribed United Irishmen. This network also included the radical journalist John Lawless, who offered to collaborate with Shelley in a new newspaper after praising his speech in *The Dublin Weekly Messenger*, and Peter Finnerty, the printer-journalist whose English imprisonment for questioning the government's conduct of the war is bitterly queried in *Address*, which deliberately emulates his offence with its own critique of that conduct.⁷⁷

Reverting to the full-blown illegality of the *Address*, the wholly anonymous *Declaration of Rights* solved the distribution problem in its format, being printed as a single broadsheet to be posted on public walls, theoretically in Dublin but in fact, following Shelley's abrupt disillusioned departure, in Sussex. This shift of outlet set the government more actively on his trail since he mailed the full run of copies, along with what was left of the other two pamphlets, to his disciple Elizabeth Hitchener, with instructions to billpost it in Lewes and neighbouring towns. Unfortunately, he failed to pay the full postage and what Harriet described as this 'large box ... of inflammable matter' was intercepted by British customs officers who alerted the Home Office, who in turn set a watch on Hitchener and later had Shelley's servant Dan Healy arrested for flyposting the *Declaration*.⁷⁸ Resettled in Lynmouth, Shelley broadcast the remaining copies by launching them into the Bristol Channel in bottles and miniature boats, and – hopefully – further afield in hot-air balloons. The famous plea to the West Wind to 'Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!'⁷⁹ presumably looks back to such enlistments of nature in overcoming his distribution problems. *Declaration* did, however, eventually reach the radicalized working-class audience for whom it was intended, when the indefatigable Richard Carlile published it in *The Republican* in 1819.⁸⁰

The *Letter to Lord Ellenborough* was also published with no name at all on the cover, and Healy's arrest led the *Letter's* printer, Syle (first name unknown), to destroy all he had left of the thousand copies printed, though 25 copies had already been sent to the bookseller, Thomas Hookham, and one, as if to save his agents the trouble, to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth.⁸¹ However, despite this almost complete suppression of the original text (only one copy now survives), five paragraphs did eventually reach a substantial readership thanks to their reappearance in one of the notes to *Queen Mab* which, as we have seen, the pirating by Carlile and others would eventually make Shelley's most widely read work.

By contrast to the unforesaid Syle and the spectral 'I. Eton', *Putting Reform to the Vote* was printed by the perfectly substantial C.H. Reynell and published by Charles Ollier, who went on to produce much of Shelley's subsequent work. This

77 *Prose I*: 33, 30–31. For an account of Finnerty's persecution by two of Shelley's later bugbears – Lords Castlereagh and Ellenborough – see O'Brien, *Shelley and Revolutionary Ireland*, pp. 27–33. Shelley's 1810–11 student poem and pamphlet, 'A Poetical Essay', written for Finnerty's defence fund, has recently been rediscovered: see Paul O'Brien, *The Guardian*, 14 June 2006.

78 See Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, pp. 136–7, 158–9; Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, pp. 243–4, 255–7.

79 *Ode to the West Wind*, ll. 66–7, *SPP*: 301.

80 See Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, p. 139.

81 See *Prose I*: 354–6.

was a matter of radical – or at least liberal – networking. Both were members of Leigh Hunt's circle which by now also included Shelley: Reynell being related to Hunt by marriage and Ollier just starting up in business as his protégé.⁸² Shelley paid for advertisement as well as printing and though he regarded breaking even as 'a secondary matter', his authoritatively detailed instructions to Ollier on marketing strategy suggest – as Charles E. Robinson points out – 'not only his own financial (as well as political) interest in his *Proposal* but also his awareness of the Olliers' need for such advice in their new undertaking'.⁸³ Thus the print run of 'no more than 500' was to be carefully targeted: 20 or 30 copies to be sent to a named bookseller, 20 to Leigh Hunt and a precise 59 to leading reformists such as Burdett, Cobbett, Cartwright and Owen.⁸⁴ Following Shelley's instruction to advertise the pamphlet 'in all the morning papers of note', Ollier did so in the *Times* and *Morning Chronicle*, and Hunt helpfully quoted from it in *The Examiner*. If the leading reformists did not leap to follow its advice, they had at least been given every chance to do so.

Though Ollier also agreed to publish *Address on Princess Charlotte*, its legal status is less clear. No original copy exists, the first available edition being an 1840 reprint, whose publisher Thomas Rodd states that Shelley himself only published 20 copies. Rodd's copy of the title page has no publisher's or printer's name, which, if an accurate imitation of the original, puts the latter in the same illegal camp as most of the earlier political writings.⁸⁵ The only trail back to Ollier is provided by Shelley's pseudonym 'The Hermit of Marlow', also used for *Putting Reform to the Vote*. Unlike the first two Irish pamphlets, the Hermit leaves no house address, so that while responses to the *Proposal* could be sent via Ollier, the *Address on Charlotte* expects no reply. Instead, its title page suggests a twofold aim: to join the massive outpouring of funereal Charlottiana as part of the popular reading of the hour, and to signal its real content – to radicals who will spot the reference – by quoting above the title Paine's response to Burke's praise of Marie Antoinette, 'We pity the plumage, but forget the dying bird', in letters so large that some have taken it for the actual title.⁸⁶

In his six pamphlets, then, Shelley tries to identify a variety of audiences from a shifting variety of addresses. In each case, his handling of the second-person 'you', 'ye' or 'thou' marks a different strategy: from the *Irish People* address's direct mass exhortations, to the *Charlotte* address's adroit singling-out of a lone 'thou' caught mourning for the wrong reason; from the *Philanthropists* proposals' disinterested

82 See Charles E. Robinson, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood: The Contexts of Early Nineteenth-century Publishing', in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, Kelvin Everest (ed.). Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983, p. 189.

83 Robinson, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood', p. 187.

84 As Scrivener points out (*Radical Shelley*, p. 115), a useful clue to Shelley's affiliations at the time is those he did *not* send copies to, including the populist Orator Henry Hunt and the *Black Dwarf* editor, Thomas Jonathan Wooler.

85 Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, p. 187; *Prose I*: 229.

86 For example, Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, pp. 133–4.

replacement of any 'you' at all by a like-minded 'those', to the *Reform* proposal's circuitously-approached 'ye' of the eminent radicals solely capable of getting Shelley's plan off the ground; from *Declaration of Rights*' Satanic-Promethean buttonholing of a singularized 'Man', to the focused direction of a shared anger onto a single imagined recipient in the *Letter to Ellenborough*. Though the lack of much verifiable impact on any of the readerships so skilfully conjured up – at least by the first editions – is disappointingly obvious, Shelley's readiness to skirt the very edges of legality almost guaranteed the problems of distribution, let alone publisher-promotion, which make up such a dramatic and at times apparently comic part of this story. Their greater success in later pirated versions suggests that at least some at last arrived at something like the addresses intended; with all of them Shelley's own 'address', in the sense of rising resourcefully to a series of given political occasions, is astonishing.

Chapter 12

Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet

Michael O'Neill*

Although there have been many attempts to describe Percy Bysshe Shelley's distinctive poetic style, comparatively little energy has been spent on the effort to capture the impact of his prose. True, Jerrold Hogle opens his brilliant study of 'Shelley's process' by referring to and illustrating the poet's 'shifting, evanescent style, whether he is writing in verse or in prose'.¹ The passage he proceeds to discuss is the celebration in 'A Defence of Poetry' of Dante, whose every word is said to be 'a burning atom of inextinguishable thought', a celebration which leads Shelley to assert that 'All high poetry' is 'infinite', 'the first acorn which contained all oaks potentially', and that a 'great Poem' is 'a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight'.² In the passage's movement from image to image, Hogle finds what he calls 'a palimpsest of several figural levels and a deferral of figures towards later transformations of them'.³ Helpfully he reads one sentence (that beginning 'Veil after veil') as 'an apt description of its paragraph's syntax', and he is alert to rhythm and sound: features close to the heart of good prose and the subject, among other things, of Tom Paulin's eye-opening study of Hazlitt.⁴ Although Hogle asks pertinent questions about the passage's revelation and enactment of what seems to be 'radical discontinuity', I wish, without disagreeing with his analysis, to give greater stress than he does to the force and assurance of the writing.⁵ The weighting of the phrases in the passage from 'A Defence of Poetry' which Hogle cites makes us linger over each image, even as we are propelled forward to cross the

* This chapter is a substantially revised version of an essay which appeared in *Keats-Shelley Review* 18 (2004), pp. 51–67.

1 Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 3. For passages of sensitive commentary on Shelley's prose, see also William Keach, *Shelley's Style*. New York: Methuen, 1984.

2 *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Oxford World Classics), 2003, p. 693. Unless stated otherwise, this edition is used for quotations from Shelley's prose and poetry (hereafter *SMW*).

3 Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, p. 3.

4 *SMW*: 693; Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, p. 4. See Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.

5 Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, p. 4.

gaps between images: 'His [Dante's] very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought.'⁶ The idea unfolds sequentially here; the language conveys a sense of development involving both qualification and apposition, while the syntax ensures that a steady focus is brought to bear on each phrase and each argumentative phase.

For all its forward propulsion, the passage is typical of Shelley's prose in that each detail counts, rather as is the case in the Greek of the *Iliad*, where phenomena and events are sustained by the shifting, stream-like medium. It is a style which has something in common with Coleridge's description of the way a reader should be affected by 'a just poem':

The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasureable [*sic*] activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward.⁷

Coleridge's 'pleasureable activity of mind' may describe a less driving and intense experience than that represented and induced by Shelley's prose; the older poet's prose here rocks backwards and forwards more sedately than is the case in 'A Defence of Poetry'. But Coleridge's commitment to a use of words that allows, however implicitly, for pauses, half-recedings and resumed onward momentum fits admirably Shelley's mode in 'A Defence of Poetry'. For evidence of 'resumed onward momentum', one might look at the impact of Shelley's assertion that Dante's 'very words are instinct with spirit'. There, the phrase 'very words' galvanizes the allusion to the description in Book VI of *Paradise Lost* of the 'chariot of paternal deity, / Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel undrawn, / It self instinct with spirit' (ll. 750–52).⁸ For Milton's chariot of paternal deity (also alluded to in and an influence on Panthea's vision in *Prometheus Unbound* IV, 236–61), Shelley gives us the exemplary poem, *The Divine Comedy*, driven onwards by its own god-like 'spirit'. His rhythm, one of assertion and revelation, brings out the life in Dante's language. Shelley begins with declarative statements full of short words, after which the polysyllabic 'inextinguishable' has an air of defiant affirmation, recalling the reawakening of 'Ashes and sparks' from 'the unextinguished hearth' at the close of *Ode to the West Wind* (ll. 67, 66), or, indeed, the 'inextinguishably beautiful' moon to which in *Epipsychidion* Emily is compared (in line 82); nothing, Shelley at once asserts and hopes, can extinguish the spark of great poetry.

If 'A Defence of Poetry' illustrates Shelley's prose at its most intellectually radiant and figuratively intricate, his rendering of Plato's *Symposium* in July 1818 shows it capable of fascinating changes of mood and conceptual acuteness. The *Symposium*

6 *SMW*: 693.

7 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. 2 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, vol. 2, Ch. 14, pp. 13–14.

8 Milton is quoted from *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler. London: Longmans, 1968.

gives evidence not only of Plato's 'surpassing graces of ... composition' (as Shelley put it in a fragmentary Preface) but also of his dialogue's heterodox challenge to contemporary assumptions about love.⁹ Primarily this challenge takes the form of estimating homosexual love more highly than heterosexual love. Plato's conception of love also challenges the reader in suggestive ways. Even as the *Symposium* thrives on dualisms, it dismantles them. Flesh merges into spirit in a fashion at odds with many versions of Christian thinking. The tricky word 'love' is variously redefined in Plato's dialogue. In Diotima's reported speech to Socrates, it refers to a drive in humans that leads to the summit of intellectual understanding: knowledge of the nature of Beauty, which is an eternal Form virtually interchangeable with Truth and Good. In an essay written to accompany his translation, an essay entitled 'A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love', Shelley shapes his own ethos – and poetics – of love out of his response to Plato: he argues that the 'gratification of the senses' 'soon becomes a very small part of that profound & complicated sentiment which we call Love, which is rather the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature; intellectual, imaginative & sensitive & which, when individualised, becomes an imperious necessity only to be satisfied by the complete or partial, actual or supposed fulfilment of its claims'.¹⁰ For Shelley, love is experienced as a 'universal thirst' (a phrase in which abstract and concrete terms fuse expressively). The pressure in Shelley's syntax is always towards a fusion or redefinition that will not allow words to sit back into comfortable semantic armchairs. Arguably, the *Symposium*, too, dismantles oppositions between the sensuous and the spiritual in the act of creating them. It is noteworthy that the wording of Diotima's vision, in Shelley's version, shapes, at its climax, a smooth glissade between the sensuous and the spiritual.

Here is the prelude to that climax in Shelley's rendering: 'In addition he would consider the beauty which is in souls more excellent than that which is in form': 'more excellent', the comparative allows the excellence of 'form' still to be acknowledged, and when the rhetorical wave of this paragraph reaches its topmost peak, Shelley restores a sense of the value of 'form' or 'forms':

... contemplating thus the universal beauty, no longer like some servant in love with his fellow would he unworthily and meanly enslave himself to the attractions of one form, nor one subject of discipline or science, but would turn towards the wide ocean of intellectual beauty, and from the sight of the lovely and majestic forms which it contains, would abundantly bring forth his conceptions in philosophy: until strengthened and confirmed he should at length steadily contemplate one science, which is the science of this universal beauty.¹¹

9 Quoted from the draft in Adamson, *BSM V*: 124–5 (facsimile of Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 6).

10 'A Discourse ...' was drafted in Bodleian MS Shelley adds. e. 11 and Bodleian MS Shelley adds. e. 6. The title given in the text is Shelley's: see Jones, *BSM XV*: 19 (facsimile of Bodleian MS Shelley adds. e. 11). The quotation is taken from *BSM XV*: 36–9, with some minimal tidying-up.

11 O'Neill, *BSM XX*: 402–5. Shelley's translation of the *Symposium* is quoted from *BSM XX* (facsimile of Bodleian MS Shelley adds. d. 8 – the relevant manuscript in the case of the

This sinuous eloquence illustrates Shelley's ability to find a language that rises to the challenge of, and serves as an aesthetic equivalent for, Platonic vision. Plotting its passage from subordinate to main clause and thence to the further expansion ushered in by 'until', the sentence-shape mimics the development and unfolding of the idea: an idea which allows, in Shelley's wording, 'forms' to return as 'lovely and majestic' when associated with the 'wide ocean of intellectual beauty', which, in a disciplined and affecting moment, the attention of the prose 'turns towards'. 'Forms' is Shelley's preferred single equivalent for what in Plato are different words (including 'bodies') for the object of the lover's attention; in its capacity to suggest both the physical and the spiritual, the choice by Shelley of 'forms' here shows an unsupine responsiveness to the Greek.¹² Again, 'intellectual' is not present in the Greek, nor in the Latin gloss of Ficino at the foot of Shelley's Bipont edition of the *Symposium* and often used by him when he was gravelled by the Greek.¹³ The adjective's insertion suggests that Shelley found in Plato a subject-rhyme with his own intuitions in his earlier *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*: in that poem, such beauty, though supra-sensuous, is tangled up with the sensuous through the writing's figurative mobility.

Shelley's language, in his translation of Plato's *Symposium*, shows a reluctance simply to jettison the sensuous in favour of the idea. Some contemporary critics of Plato attribute the same reluctance to Plato himself. Christopher Gill writes that 'what the passage describes [that is, the whole account of Diotima] is not the replacement of interpersonal love by philosophy, but the deepening of interpersonal love by the lover's growing understanding of the true nature of beauty.'¹⁴ Shelley is at his most responsive to Plato's Greek in the way that he captures this 'growing understanding' through the balance which his long sentences sustain, the way, for instance, the passage begins with 'contemplating' and circles round to a repetition that marks an advancement in 'steadily contemplate one science'. The prose, pivoting on its verbs, seems itself to 'steadily contemplate'. A brief contrast with Benjamin Jowett's version of the same passage shows how the eminent Victorian thinks of the climactic insight as equivalent to a quasi-religious leading from above rather than a

Symposium – and of Bodleian MS Shelley e. 6). Quotations in this chapter correct false starts and errors, restore censored cancellations made when the translation was prepared for its first publication by Mary Shelley in 1840 [1839], and introduce occasional punctuation. For discussion of Shelley's attempt 'to find language of his own that could communicate at least the echoes of Plato's persuasive music', see *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation*, ed. and intro., David K. O'Connor. South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2002, p. xliii.

12 For Shelley's use of 'forms' where Plato has (the Greek for) 'bodies', see James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949, p. 583 and the notes on that page referring to page 448, line 28, and page 449, line 38, of Notopoulos's book.

13 For Shelley's use of the Bipont edition of Plato's *Symposium*, with Ficino's Latin translation, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 41–2 and pp. 398–9. For his insertion of the word 'intellectual', see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 583. Shelley's 'Errors in Translation, Variants from the Greek, and Interpolations' in his translations of the *Symposium* and the *Ion* are gathered in Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 572–93.

14 Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. with intro. and notes, Christopher Gill. London: Penguin, 1999, p. xxxiv.

poetic intuition, earned and enacted, as Shelley's is, through steadily contemplative rhythms:

... beholding the wide region already occupied by beauty, he may cease to be like a servant in love with one beauty only, that of a particular youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded; but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and discourses in boundless love of wisdom, until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere.¹⁵

In Shelley, the initiate 'steadily contemplates'; in Jowett 'the vision is revealed'. For Shelley, the interplay between the visionary standing on the edge of the wide ocean of intellectual beauty and the forms of beauty is fluid and on-going in a way that it is not in Jowett, for whom the relationship between seeing and vision is more abrupt and unexplained. The result of the Romantic poet's rendering is a work that is quintessentially typical of Shelley and closer in spirit to Plato than virtually any other translation.

When Shelley moves on to translate the next section of Diotima's speech, in which she describes the supreme beauty, one that is 'wonderful in its nature', he again contrives in prose a rhythm suited to imaginative and intellectual encounter. By this stage, the translation has been through many twists and turns of mood and perspective. Now it evens out, having managed its ascent with great panache, breathing calmly and easily as it nears the summit. Shelley manages an effect of prolongation as he describes, in majestically sustained and balanced opposites, what this supreme beauty is not: it is

not, like other things, partly beautiful and partly deformed; not at one time beautiful and at another time not; not beautiful in relation to one thing and deformed in relation to another; not here beautiful and there deformed; not beautiful in the estimation of one person and deformed in that of another; nor can this supreme beauty be figured to the imagination like a beautiful face or beautiful hands or any portion of the body, nor like any discourse or any science. Nor does it subsist in any other thing that lives or is, either in earth or in heaven or in any other place: but it is eternally uniform and consistent and monoeidic with itself.¹⁶

Shelley takes advantage of the power that lies in negation, as often in his poetry and prose. An example is the account in 'A Defence of Poetry' of poetry as 'the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight'.¹⁷ Here, negation works to negate the world of necessary imperfection. The phrases spin themselves out, spiralling towards the affirmation that 'it is eternally uniform and consistent and monoeidic with itself', 'monoeidic' being a Greek-derived term Shelley uses to convey the supreme beauty's self-consistency. The 'ands' in this last sentence and in the whole

15 *The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions* by B. Jowett, 4 vols. 4th edn. Oxford: Clarendon, 1953, vol. 1, p. 542; hereafter Jowett. For the suggestion that Jowett's and Shelley's translations might usefully be contrasted, see *Shelley on Love*, ed. Richard Holmes. London: Anvil, 1980, pp. 99–100.

16 *BSM* XX: 404–5.

17 *SMW*: 693.

passage do not imply one thing after another, as is often the fate of 'and' to do; rather, they enact a turning of one term into its neighbour, until the writing evokes a succession of triumphantly reinforcing adjectives as Shelley discovers his own words for Plato's 'power of producing beauty in art', to borrow a phrase from a letter of August 1821.¹⁸ Shelley would read Johann Joachim Winckelmann a few months after he translated the *Symposium*. Here his prose recreates the neo-classical theorist's emphasis on calm and repose. At such a moment Shelley's prose is Romantic in its belated recreation of a Platonic absolute, so that there is, just below the surface of the prose, a note of longing, but it is also Classical (or neo-classical) in its admiration for balance and poise. The passage (in Shelley's handling) enacts one of Winckelmann's dicta in his *History of Ancient Art* (1764): 'All beauty is heightened by unity and simplicity.'¹⁹

In a subsequent passage Shelley dwells on moving 'towards that which is beauty itself', a process which involves 'proceeding as on steps from the love of one form to that of two, and from that of two to that of all forms which are beautiful'.²⁰ Imagining the lover ascending the ladder of beauty 'as on steps', Shelley does justice to an element of beautiful fiction-making, one that anticipates his praise in 'A Defence of Poetry' for the way, in the *Paradiso*, in 'which as by steps he [Dante] feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause'.²¹ There is a living link between those moments in Shelley and the more sceptical but still optimistic glimpse of meaning in Stevens's lines from *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*: 'Perhaps there are moments of awakening, / Extreme, fortuitous, personal, in which // We more than awaken, sit on the edge of sleep, / As on an elevation, and behold / The academies like structures in a mist'.²² The account, there, of 'moments of awakening' as those 'in which // We more than awaken' recalls Shelley's pressure of re-definition in his repeated use of the same word in a poem or passage of prose: a use which implies his self-awareness as maker of meaning. In the *Symposium* translation, 'as on steps' shows Shelley's fictionalizing self-awareness. There in the original Greek, it is brought out in the translation by a phrasing that shows accelerated confidence once the 'as if' is conceded. By contrast, Jowett has the relatively plodding, 'using these as steps only'.²³ The effect of Jowett's wording is of a narrowly defined logical ascent, lacking Shelley's deft consciousness of himself as engaged in aesthetic discovery and play.

If the *Symposium* offers Shelley an aesthetic vision, it also opens up an ethical one: one in which all things take their meaning from, and are measured by, the principle of beauty about which Diotima tells Socrates. This ethical vision explains, is tested by, and informs the final section of the work: Alcibiades' comic but moving

18 *Letters* II: 322.

19 *Winckelmann: Writings on Art*, selected and ed. David Irwin. London: Phaidon, 1972, p. 118. For Shelley's reading of Winckelmann, see *MS Journals*: 246–7, 253, 267 (1 vol. ed. [1995]).

20 *BSM* XX: 406–7.

21 *SMW*: 691.

22 'It Must Be Abstract', VII. Quoted from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. London: Faber and Faber, 1955.

23 Jowett I: 543.

account of his attempt and failure to seduce Socrates. Coming straight after Diotima's question-cum-exclamation, 'What must be the life of him who dwells with and gazes on that which it becomes us all to seek!', a life which ensures that one 'is in contact not with a shadow but with reality', this section occurs as an iridescent surprise. Diotima gives way to Alcibiades, the witty, self-mocking, glittering youth, who to the non-Platonist may seem to live among the realities of soldiery, drunkenness, partying, sexuality, Athenian politics and 'those Silenuses that sit in the sculptors' shops' to which he compares Socrates.²⁴ However, it is Alcibiades who suggests that Socrates has access to a reality denied to him, and who sees behind Socratic 'irony' to the 'divine images which are within when he has been opened and is serious'.²⁵ In Shelley's version, Alcibiades presents Socrates as an implicit anticipated cognition of Wordsworth:

... if any one will listen to the talk of Socrates, it will appear to him at first extremely ridiculous: the phrases and expressions which he employs fold around his exterior the skin as it were of a rude and wanton Satyr. He is always talking about great market asses and brass-founders, and leather-cutters, and skin-dressers; and this is his perpetual custom, so that any dull and unobservant person might easily laugh at his discourse. But if any one should see it opened, as it were, and get within the sense of his words, he would then find that they alone of all that enters into the mind of man to utter had a profound and persuasive meaning²⁶

The Wordsworth who courts mockery but deals in fresh and disconcerting insights in poems such as 'The Idiot Boy' is a remote but real relation of this apparently self-mocking 'Satyr'. In 'Peter Bell the Third' (written over a year after the translation of the *Symposium*), Shelley may see Peter as 'rude' (in the sense of 'coarse') – though not 'wanton' (in the possible senses of 'playful', 'irresponsible' or 'licentious'). His feelings about Wordsworth were more mixed than his feelings about Plato and Socrates, but in 'Peter Bell the Third' one finds interest in Peter's capacity for meditative reflexivity and subsequent understanding: Shelley praises how, in Peter's (Wordsworth's) thinking, 'An apprehension clear, intense, / Of his mind's work, had made alive / The things it wrought on' (ll. 309–11). Indeed, no poet engaged Shelley more deeply than Wordsworth did, even if, for Shelley, the latter's enclosed mode of self-consciousness differs from the imperturbable, near-Olympian alertness discernible in Plato's portrait of Socrates. Certainly Shelley's wording at this stage of the translation is alive to a blend of tones that makes it unsurprising when, in the closing paragraph, Socrates is found 'forcing' those still awake 'to confess ... that the foundations of the tragic and comic arts were essentially the same'.²⁷

In her introduction to her 1840 edition of Shelley's prose, Mary Shelley praises her husband's translation with eloquent perceptiveness:

24 BSM XX: 408–9, 418–19.

25 BSM XX: 426–7.

26 BSM XX: 442–5.

27 BSM XX: 450–51.

Shelley commands language splendid and melodious as Plato, and renders faithfully the elegance and the gaiety which make the Symposium as amusing as it is sublime. The whole mechanism of the drama, for such in some sort it is, — the enthusiasm of Apollodorus, the sententiousness of Eryximachus, the wit of Aristophanes, the rapt and golden eloquence of Agathon, the subtle dialectics and grandeur of aim of Socrates, the drunken outbreak of Alcibiades, — are given with grace and animation. The picture presented reminds us of that talent which, in a less degree, we may suppose to have dignified the orgies of the last generation of free-spirited wits, — Burke, Fox, Sheridan, and Curran.²⁸

Mary Shelley reminds us of the work's conviviality (her manuscript transcription follows tradition and entitles the translation, *The Banquet*). Furthermore, she locates the translation's idiom and tone of debate in the oratory and speech of four very different writers of the revolutionary generation. The four writers share an avoidance of what Hazlitt calls in his 'Character of Mr Burke' the 'artificial' style, a style 'all in one key'. In such a style, according to Hazlitt, 'The words are not fitted to the things, but the things to the words. Every thing is seen through a false medium.' Hazlitt goes on to claim for his contemporaries (by contrast with classical writers such as Cicero) 'genius' or 'high and enthusiastic fancy'.²⁹ In his individual way Shelley shows himself to be a writer of 'genius' in the prose of his translation of the *Symposium*, able to move between idioms and registers, and to trace the curve of talk and thought. Indeed, he relishes Alcibiades' praise for Socrates' speech compared with that of Pericles: 'For when we hear Pericles or any other accomplished orator deliver a discourse, no one, as it were, cares any thing about it. But when any one hears you, or even your words, related by another, though ever so rude and unskilful a speaker, be that person a woman, man or child, we are struck and retained, as it were, by the discourse clinging to our mind.'³⁰ The two uses of 'as it were' catch the speaker's baffled admiration, while the seemingly casual uses of 'any' suddenly turn to Socrates' advantage at the start of the second sentence. The extract also brings out the dialogue's and Shelley's fascination with reported speech, with the effect of words being transmitted from speaker to listener to a third person. The writing is superbly equal to the challenge presented by Plato's dialogue of presence and absence, of glowing immediacy and dim, recessive mystery.³¹

Mary Shelley's praise, quoted above, gives the lie to the notion that Shelley lacks a sense of humour. He does emphatic justice in the translation to Aristophanes' sardonic if intermittently tragic-comic explanation of the origins of love and desire: that in the beginning human beings existed in three forms (male, female and androgynous), and that in each form they were round, 'the back and the sides being circularly joined ... [with] two faces fixed upon a round neck, exactly like each other; one head between the two faces; four ears, and two organs of generation'.

28 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. Mrs Shelley. 2 vols. London: Moxon, 1840, vol. 1, pp. ix–x.

29 *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998, vol. 4, pp. 287, 289.

30 *BSM* XX: 420–21.

31 See David K. O'Connor, *The Symposium of Plato* for pertinent discussion of Shelley's use of the word 'obscure' in his translation, esp. pp. xxxiv–xxv.

Aristophanes goes on to explain that the gods feared the power of this creature, able when he 'wished to go fast' to make 'use of all his eight limbs'.³² Zeus decided, literally, to cut him down to size, cutting each form into two halves 'as people cut eggs before they salt them', leaving each half perpetually longing to be reunited with 'the other half of himself'. Shelley's prose captures the pungently physical quality of Aristophanes' flight of fancy, as in this version of Apollo's part in the operation: 'Apollo turned the face round, and drawing the skin upon what we now call the belly, like a contracted pouch and leaving one opening, that which is called the navel, tied it in the middle.' Short words, strong verbs, and a vigorous yet flowing syntax (shown in the chiasmic arrangement of main verbs and participles) do justice to fantastical imaginings, which are paradoxically grounded in detail, as when Aristophanes asserts two sentences later: 'He left only a few wrinkles in the belly near the navel to serve as a record of its former adventure.'³³

The body bears the trace of 'its former adventure': Shelley's translation is alert to the detail and to the larger picture of Plato's astonishing 'adventure' of thought and imagination, and this moment resonates in the context of the work as a whole. It is characteristic of Shelley to move through stages in a poem or piece of prose, to broaden or complicate perspectives, to reuse images with a new or deeper or more complex sense of their significance. As in sequences by Rimbaud or T.S. Eliot, or in symphonies by Mozart or Beethoven, Shelley's poems have remarkable intra-textual memories. In his translation of the *Symposium*, he found a work whose internal relations have a subtlety and density of implication to which he is attuned: an attunement so finely balanced that it can accommodate potential discord, able, as suggested, to hint at a sub-textual role for a problematic literary mentor, Wordsworth. Aristophanes' parable touches on the sadness which surrounds love, as he half-jestingly imagines how 'these divided people threw their arms around and embraced each other, seeking to grow together, and from this resolution to do nothing without the other half they died of hunger and weakness'.³⁴ The mood is serio-comic, but the writing brings into the work the idea of love as bound up with seeking and longing, an idea to which Socrates will turn in due course. One keeps hearing, as the *Symposium* develops, a verbal 'record of its former adventure'.

Mary Shelley is correct, too, to praise Shelley's dramatic grasp, his ability to do justice to 'The whole mechanism of the drama'. 'Mechanism' has a quasi-technical significance in literary criticism of the time; it means something like the 'adaptation of the parts' to the demands of a work's structure, or, to modify a further *OED* definition, 'the mode of operation of [the work's] process'. So, Shelley writes to Peacock of *Prometheus Unbound* with yet another echo of Milton, 'It is a drama, with characters & mechanism of a kind yet unattempted.'³⁵ 'Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme' (*Paradise Lost* I, 16): the Miltonic original reminds us that

32 *BSM* XX: 324–5.

33 *BSM* XX: 328–9.

34 *BSM* XX: 328–9.

35 *Letters*, II: 94. In the draft 'Preface' to the *Symposium*, Shelley calls the work a 'drama', 'for <so>', he writes, 'the lively distinction of the characters & the various & well wrought circumstances of the story almost entitl<e> it to be called', *BSM* V: 132–3.

prose has its own claims to deal with the 'unattempted'.³⁶ In his translation, Shelley values the 'mechanism' of Plato's dialogue, its interplay of different voices and perspectives, the journeying towards understanding: understanding which would not occur were it not for the qualifications and courteous disagreements that occur *en route*. Moreover, the *Symposium* translation plays a central part in the 'drama' of Shelley's career. It is as Shelley's imagination learns to dramatize and allow for opposing, shifting or altering views that he becomes a great poet in Italy. So, a major poem begun a few months after the translation is 'Julian and Maddalo': a poem that thrives on debate and conflicting perspectives, partakes, in places, of the Platonic dialogue's tone of urbane, civilized debate: it is subtitled 'A Conversation'.³⁷ The translation itself is alert to Jowett's point that, though the speeches 'are all designed to prepare the way for Socrates, who gathers up the threads anew, and skims the highest points of each of them', they 'are not to be regarded as the stages of an idea, rising above one another to a climax'.³⁸

Each speech is alive with suggestions, and Shelley's responsiveness to all the interlocutors reveals his fascination with cultural relativism. If he idealized classical Greek culture, his egalitarian sympathies were troubled by the slavery to be found in it as well as by the inferior position of women. Part of the purpose of translating the *Symposium* was more fully to understand the relative nature of all cultures, though, typically, he uses acknowledgement of imperfection as a spur towards something better: 'When we discover how far', he writes in 'A Discourse ...', 'the most admirable community ever formed was removed from that perfection to which human society is impelled by some active power within each bosom, to aspire, how great ought to be our hopes, how resolute our struggles'.³⁹ When Phaedrus in his attempt to prove how love inspires selfless devotion searches for an example, he alights, to Shelley's palpable approval, on Alcestis: 'Not only men but even women who love, are those alone who willingly expose themselves to die for others. Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias, affords to the Greeks a remarkable example of this opinion; she alone being willing to die for her husband'.⁴⁰ The aloneness of her selfless love finds expression in Shelley's floated participial phrasing, which achieves a more poignant expressiveness than Jowett's sturdily rational, even Roman formulation: 'she was willing to lay down her life on behalf of her husband'.⁴¹

Throughout his translation of the *Symposium*, Shelley responds to Plato's dramatizing imagination. At the heart of the work is the idea of eros as a desire for the beautiful and good, a desire which takes us out of ourselves, and in this sense the translation contains the germ of 'A Defence of Poetry', which sees off Plato's own objections to poetry by invoking the Platonic or *Symposium*-derived

36 Shelley may also have in mind, as Alan Weinberg has suggested to me, Ariosto's 'Cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima', *Orlando Furioso*, I, ii, ii, the source of Milton's line, as noted in and quoted from Carey and Fowler eds, *Poems of John Milton*, p. 461 n.

37 Ralph Pite argues that an influence on 'Julian and Maddalo' may have been Peacock's novels 'which proceed via pseudo-intellectual conversation', *PS*: II: 659.

38 Jowett I: 489.

39 *BSM* XV: 30–33 (the comma after 'bosom' is Shelley's).

40 *BSM* XX: 286–7.

41 Jowett I: 511.

notion of 'Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own'.⁴² Such a process of 'going out' and 'identification' allows for negotiation between Pauline agape and Platonic eros, Shelleyan 'Love' seeking to work as a daimonic messenger between these cultural opposites; it also captures well the relationship between translator and original. The process of going out and identification excites Shelley in 'A Defence of Poetry' to sentences that mime the awakening and sustaining of imaginative effort. In the unfinished Preface to his translation, he praises Plato in these terms: 'Plato exhibits the rare union of close and subtle logic with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, [melted] by the splendour & harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical [impressions] which hurry the persuasions onward as in a breathless career. His language is that of an immortal spirit rather than a man.'⁴³ That 'Pythian enthusiasm' associates Plato with Apollo, god of poetry, and alludes to the *Ion* which contains praise of poetry as inspiration; it also reclaims for Shelley's own creative project the transgressive possibilities of 'enthusiasm'. The prose itself in the Preface quotation is vibrant – especially in the comma-free draft – with a desire to convey a sense of speed, of having 'a breathless career'. At the same time, it wishes the reader to notice the connections and distinctions it is making. First, it offers a 'rare union' between 'close and subtle logic' and 'Pythian enthusiasm', but as if that were an achievement which, though rare, might seem in some way to be fixed or static, Shelley characteristically opens up the sentence to another refining thought: of the 'union' being '[melted] ... into one irresistible stream of musical [impressions]'. Plato's thought aspires to the condition of music in this sentence, itself a period marked by its own 'splendour & harmony'.

In his translation of the *Ion* Shelley conveys Plato's 'persuasions' with comparable artistry. At the centre of the translation is Socrates' double-edged account of inspiration as 'a chain and a succession' of magnetic influence, and the result of 'a state of divine insanity': double-edged since he is determined to prove to Ion that the rhapsode, like the inspired poet, does not create out of stores of knowledge, but from 'his participation in the divine influence'. As he argues, 'In other respects, poets may be sufficiently ignorant and incapable. For they do not compose according to any art which they have acquired but from the impulse of the divinity within them.' But Shelley turns Socrates' eloquence to his own advantage and confers on the portrait of inspiration an ennobling power. His translation embodies in itself 'the rhythm and harmony' ascribed to 'composers of lyrical poetry' and their counterparts, 'the Corybantes', as the following passage reveals:

For the souls of the poets, as poets tell us, have this peculiar ministration in the world. They tell us that these souls, flying like bees from flower to flower and wandering over the gardens and the meadows and the honey-flowing fountains of the Muses, return to

42 *SMW*: 682. See Notopoulos, *Platonism of Shelley*, p. 347: 'Poetry has for Shelley the same function as Eros in the *Symposium*.'

43 *BSM* V: 126–9. (I have tidied up some readings in the light of Mary Shelley's published text of the work in *Essays* I: 71. For Carlene A. Adamson's comments on the text, including her reservations concerning the received reading 'melted' for a word which replaces the cancelled 'moulded', see *BSM* V: 387.)

us laden with the sweetness of melody; and arrayed as they are in the plumes of rapid imagination they speak truth. For a poet is indeed a thing ethereally light, winged, and sacred, nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired and as it were mad; or whilst any reason remains in him.⁴⁴

The flow of the prose in this version renders the ‘peculiar ministration’ of ‘the souls of the poets’. There is, for one thing, a self-sealing yet onward-impelling circularity, caught in the momentary doubt whether ‘arrayed as they are’ refers to ‘the souls of the poets’ or to ‘the poets’ speaking about them. In fact, it is the latter, but the distinction dissolves, much as ‘reason’ passes into ‘rapid imagination’. Notopoulos notes that the phrase ‘arrayed as they are in the plumes of rapid imagination’ was ‘spun’ by Shelley out of a Greek word meaning ‘winging the air’.⁴⁵ The elaboration indicates a special pressure of interest on Shelley’s part, a recreation whose Romantic eloquence is its own justification. The dazzling close of the second sentence in this later version has come a long way from the reading in MS Shelley e. 1, ‘[?arrayed] as they are’ with ‘[?clo]’ written over ‘arrayed’ as though Shelley were about to write ‘clothed’.⁴⁶ Yet, otherwise, the draft, beset as it is by cancellations and provisional solutions, is not far away from the achievement of the later version. In both, Shelley’s enthusiasm for Plato’s idea of inspiration is prominent. A version of the same passage in the draft reads:

... for the souls of poets, as poets tell, have this peculiar ministration in the world; ... that flying like bees from flower to flower, & wanderg [*sic*] over the gardens & the meadows & the honey flowing fountains of the Muses these souls return to us, laden with the sweetness of melody — and they speak truth. For indeed a poet is a thing aetherially light winged & sacred, nor is he capable of composing poetry until he becomes inspired & as it were mad, or whilst any reason remains in him.⁴⁷

‘Composing poetry’ will become ‘compose any thing worth calling poetry’ in the final version, a revision that involves the injection of an almost colloquial note, a rationalizing voice at the heart of rapture. More generally, the particular success of the *Ion* translation lies in Shelley’s ability to do justice to Socrates’ complicated attitude to rhapsodizing inspiration.

Clearly *Ion* is, to some degree, the butt of Socrates’ scepticism about the capacity of rhapsodes to be more than ‘the interpreters of interpreters’, an indictment given that the original interpreters (poets) are themselves often ‘sufficiently ignorant and incapable’. Yet in Shelley’s hands Socratic scepticism goes hand in hand with wonder at the workings within poets and rhapsodes of ‘the divine influence’. The

44 Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 472, 473, 472, 472–3. The textual state of Shelley’s translation of the *Ion* is complicated. I have taken as my copy-text the text in Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, which derives from Mary Shelley’s 1840 [1839] edition of the prose. That text in turn, in part completed by Mary Shelley, derives from at least one missing manuscript, drafts for parts of which can be found in Bodleian MS Shelley e. 1; see Fraistat, *BSM IX*.

45 Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 590.

46 MS Shelley e. 1, f. 45r, in *BSM IX*: 182–3.

47 *BSM IX*: 178–9, 182–3.

prose, accordingly, never loses contact with logic and reason, even as it posits a force that puts reason and logic to flight and in the shade. In so doing, the translation typifies Shelley's response to Plato. When translating the passage about the poet and rhapsode as links in a magnetic chain of inspiration, Shelley's language is sharpened precisely by the sense that words can only come 'near to the truth':

We call this inspiration and our expression indeed comes near to the truth; for the person who is an agent in this universal and reciprocal attraction is indeed possessed, and some are attracted and suspended by one of the poets who are the first rings in this great chain and some by another.

The brace of 'indeeds' serves as clarification of the speaker's sense that what he proposes – that those caught up in the chain of inspiration are 'possessed' – will bear emphasis. Moreover, the writing allows for agency in the midst of possession, since the 'possessed' person is an 'agent' engaged in a process that is 'universal and reciprocal'. Shelley captures how inspiration involves a possession which is at once beyond reason and yet intelligible to some degree in rational terms; his own prose participates in the 'universal and reciprocal attraction' it describes, as the translator emerges as one of those 'suspended from the Muse itself as from the origin of the influence'.⁴⁸

In his rendering of the *Ion* Shelley discovers on the pulses of, and reveals through, his prose the truth he asserts in 'A Defence of Poetry': namely, that 'Plato was essentially a poet'. In 'A Defence of Poetry', he does so straight after dismissing the distinction between 'poets and prose-writers' as 'a vulgar error'.⁴⁹ It is likely that he is adding his own insights to the debate begun by Wordsworth's claim in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (present in 1800, though this essay's copy-text is 1802) that 'there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition'. As Wordsworth remarks, 'the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both'. The older poet's prose thinks its way into 'the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature', and has a movement in accord with the 'more subtle windings' of thought and feeling.⁵⁰ It is clear that Shelley has doubts about aspects of Wordsworth's procedures, as when he writes to Hunt that the 'familiar style' is not 'to be admitted in the treatment of a subject wholly ideal'.⁵¹ Shelley's sense that prose can be poetry

48 Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 473, 474, 474–5, 474. This section is based on the Claire Clairmont transcription of Shelley's translation of the *Ion*, a transcription known only as it appears in H. Buxton Forman's edition of the prose: for detailed accounts of a complex textual situation, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 462–7, Fraistat, *BSM IX*: xxxiv–xliv, Murray, *BSM XXI*: 499–502, and Weinberg, *BSM XXII* (1): 20–21.

49 *SMW*: 679. See Fanny Delisle, *A Study of Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry': A Textual and Critical Evaluation*, 2 vols. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974, vol. 1, pp. 217–20, for a synthesis of ideas about Shelley's sources for the statement that 'the distinction between poets and prose-writers is a vulgar error'.

50 *William Wordsworth*, Oxford Authors, ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 602, 598.

51 *Letters II*: 108.

is never a celebration of the merely prosaic; rather, he is closer to the Coleridge who in *Biographia Literaria* declares, 'The writings of Plato ... furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem.'⁵² In 'A Defence of Poetry', Shelley picks up Wordsworth's attempt to erase the difference between poetry and prose, and argues with Coleridge that great prose attains the condition of poetry. 'Plato was essentially a poet' for Shelley in terms that echo his praise for Plato in the Preface to the *Symposium* because 'the truth and splendour of his imagery and the melody of his language is the most intense that it is possible to conceive'.⁵³

Shelley's prose sustains a discriminating precision in the midst of 'intense' celebration; it seems to erode the differences between nouns even as it sustains them and challenges what is 'possible to conceive'. Such prose has an energy that makes it the reverse of orotund. Shelley explains Plato's rejection of poetic forms in terms that make him sound like a Greek forerunner of Whitman or Lawrence or of *vers libre*: 'he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action, and he forebore to invent any regular plan of rhythm which would include, under determinate forms, the varied pauses of his style.'⁵⁴ Once more the sound echoes sense, as the 'varied pauses' of Shelley's own rhythms flow past the barrier of that Latinate 'determinate' with its associations of something bounded, defined or completed.

Indeed, the incompleteness that is part of Shelley's ideal of style, that is, the leaving open by one sentence or clause of something new to be said by the next, dominates this passage of 'A Defence of Poetry', as Shelley applies to Bacon's style a tribute that grows out of his admiration for Plato's: 'it [Bacon's language] is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy.'⁵⁵ This wording mimics a notion of prose as breaking down the dykes that exist between the 'universal' and the individual, of prose as expanding the experiencing 'mind'. Sentence after sentence in 'A Defence of Poetry' 'bursts the circumference of the reader's mind'. Shelley concludes the third scene of Act 3 of *Prometheus Unbound* with a reference to the Lampadephoria, an Athenian ritual in which, in honour of Prometheus, a race was run by young men bearing torches: 'the emulous youths / Bore to thine honour through the divine gloom / The lamp, which was thine emblem; even as those / Who bear the untransmitted torch of hope / Into the grave, across the night of life' (III, iii, 168–72). As Timothy Webb has pointed out, the image is precisely not that of 'a relay race'; life is a race towards the grave in which we bear a 'torch of hope' that cannot be 'transmitted' – and yet it can be rekindled by exemplary emulousness.⁵⁶ Something analogous happens

⁵² Engell and Bate, *Biographia Literaria* II: 14 (Ch. 14). (I am grateful to Alan Weinberg for reminding me of this passage.)

⁵³ *SMW*: 679.

⁵⁴ *SMW*: 679.

⁵⁵ *SMW*: 679.

⁵⁶ Timothy Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*', first published in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, Kelvin Everest (ed.).

with Shelley's prose; each sentence transmits its energy to the next precisely by behaving as though such transmission were not straightforward. Or, to use the image a different way, the prose is aware of its complicated relationship with precursors, and its sentences often conduct themselves as though they were bearing a perilous torch of hope across the night of life.

Lest this essay should suggest otherwise, it is important to remember that Shelley wrote different kinds of prose: these kinds include the polemical bite of the Notes to *Queen Mab*; the casuistical argumentative cunning of *A Refutation of Deism*; the political power and fervour of the *Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte*; and the simultaneously hard-headed and libertarian persuasions of 'A Philosophical View of Reform'. Yet, as it develops, Shelley's prose assumes a manner suited to the sophisticated revolutionary in politics, the hopeful sceptic in philosophical matters, the dogma-rejecting seeker after spiritual intimations, and the rhapsodizing lover conscious of his own compulsion to idealize. 'You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object', he writes to Peacock after reading Tasso's handwriting as 'the symbol of an intense & earnest mind exceeding at times its own depth'.⁵⁷ One can see how Plato's *Symposium* would appeal to such a quester. But it is with one of the work's seemingly more self-contained speeches that I would like to finish: Agathon's prose poem in praise of love, excerpted by Mary Shelley for separate publication.⁵⁸ Arguably (as Socrates, for one, will argue), the speech has philosophical flaws, but Shelley rises to the heights in his rendering of the passage and makes us feel Agathon's errors in understanding the nature of love spring from his excusable poetic delight in its effect. These errors centre on his belief that love is beautiful rather than being, as Socrates points out, desirous of the beautiful. As a result, Agathon (from Socrates' perspective) talks about the impact of Love on those who experience it; he does not identify its true nature. This is left to Socrates, with Diotima's help. Still, as the following excerpt shows, there is great beauty in Agathon's description of Love.

He is young therefore, and being young is tender and soft. There were need of some poet like Homer to celebrate the delicacy and tenderness of Love. For Homer says that the Goddess Calamity is delicate and that her feet are tender: – 'Her feet are soft', he says, 'for she treads not on the ground, but makes her path upon the heads of men.' He gives as an evidence of her tenderness that she walks not upon that which is hard but that which is soft. The same evidence is sufficient to make manifest the tenderness of Love. For Love walks not upon the earth, nor over the heads of men, which are not indeed very soft, but he dwells within and treads on the softest of existing things, having established his habitation within the souls and inmost nature of Gods and men; not indeed in all souls – for wherever

Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983, pp. 37–62; rpt. in *SPP*. See esp. *SPP*: 710: 'The crucial word is *untransmitted*, which limits the scope of optimism; this is not a relay race and each man has to carry the torch for himself.'

⁵⁷ *Letters* II: 47.

⁵⁸ Mary Shelley reprinted a slightly edited version of the speech in her article 'The Loves of the Poets', *The Westminster Review* (1829). Reprinted in *The Mary Shelley Reader*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 365–71.

he chances to find a hard and rugged disposition, there he will not inhabit but only where it is most soft and tender.⁵⁹

The command of repetition is remarkable, as is shown by the shifting changes rung on the two words 'tender' and 'soft'. Again, the chiasitic frame is present. 'He is young therefore, and being young is tender and soft', the passage begins; it moves towards a close with the words, 'wherever he chances to find a hard and rugged disposition, there he will not inhabit but only where it is most soft and tender'. Shelley often produces fine verbal effects by restricting his diction and working words, until their meaning is inseparable from the halo or aura which his rhythms and syntax have generated round them. In this, he responds to the Greek, but he also shapes something typical of his own sense that language 'has relation to thoughts alone'.⁶⁰ By this stage 'tender and soft' have left behind their physical meanings, even as they stay in touch with the possible joke in the original at Socrates' expense (who may be teased by Agathon for not possessing a head which is 'soft').⁶¹

Shelley follows Agathon in his conversion of prose into poetry in the latter's final paragraph:

Nor can I restrain the poetic enthusiasm which takes possession of my discourse, and bids me declare that Love is the divinity who creates peace among men, and calm upon the sea, the windless silence of storms, repose and sleep in sadness. Love divests us of all alienation from each other, and fills our vacant hearts with overflowing sympathy; he gathers us together in such social meetings as we now delight to celebrate, our guardian and our guide in dances and sacrifices and feasts. — Yes — Love — who showers benignity upon the world, and before whose presence all harsh passions flee and perish; the author of all soft affections; the destroyer of all ungentle thoughts; merciful, mild, the object of the admiration of the wise and the delight of Gods; possessed by the fortunate, and desired by the unhappy, therefore unhappy because they possess him not; the father of grace, and delicacy, and gentleness, and delight, and persuasion, and desire; the cherisher of all that is good, the abolisher of all evil: our most excellent pilot, defence, saviour and guardian in labour and in fear, in desire and in reason; the ornament and governor of all things human and divine; the best, the loveliest; in whose footsteps every one ought to follow celebrating him excellently in song, and bearing each his part in that divinest harmony which Love sings to all things which live and are, soothing the troubled minds of Gods and men. —⁶²

Lavishing verbal attention on a passage whose attitudes and ideas Shelley knows will be superseded in the dialogue, the writing displays control in the midst of 'poetic enthusiasm': one reason why Shelley is an artist in prose as well as in poetry. The writing's rhythms, with their balance of poise and power, are central to its achievement. One source of this mingling of calm and buoyancy is the use of parallels and catalogues, as Love's qualities spill out in a series of augustly appositional

⁵⁹ *BSM XX*: 346–9.

⁶⁰ 'A Defence of Poetry', *SMW*: 678.

⁶¹ See *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, 'Lysis', 'Symposium', 'Gorgias', trans. W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1975, vol. 3, p. 155 n.

⁶² *BSM XX*: 354–7.

phrases. An example is ‘calm upon the sea, the windless silence of storms, repose and sleep in sadness’, where the tranquillity does not exclude surprise and awareness of all that opposes love. By ‘windless silence of storms’, Shelley appears to mean to say that love brings windless silence to storms, but his precise wording says something more compelling: that at the eye of storms there is a windless silence locatable by love. Shelley also uses a technique one might call controlled chant, as when he celebrates love as ‘the father of grace, and delicacy, and gentleness, and delight, and persuasion, and desire’. Brought together by the repeated employment of ‘and’, the abstractions join hands in an incantatory dance that confers new and renewed dignity on words we have met a thousand times, but which, because of the saraband-like stateliness of the wording, turn towards us semantic features we have ignored before. There is a secular sacredness about the writing, as Shelley achieves in his cadences and counterpoisings a heterodox rival to the heartenings and affirmations of the Authorized Version.

‘[D]esired by the unhappy, therefore unhappy because they possess him not’: Socrates will offer a critique of this view of unhappiness, seeing dispossession as the force that drives love. But the delicacy with which Shelley translates at this point, displaying a consciousness of unhappiness in the midst of joy, reveals the double-mindedness that pervades his work. Ultimately, one might gloss Agathon’s speech, with its idealizing of love, rather as Shelley himself glosses his evocation of religious hope in ‘On Christianity’:

All evil and pain have ceased forever ... We see God, and we see that he is good. How delightful a picture even if it is not true! How magnificent and illustrious is the conception which this bold theory suggests to the contemplation, even if it be no more than the imagination of some sublimest and most holy poet, who impressed with the loveliness and majesty of his own nature, is impatient, discontented, with the narrow limits which this imperfect life, and the dark grave have assigned forever as his melancholy portion.⁶³

The passage sets ‘the imagination of some sublimest and most holy poet’ against ‘narrow limits’, ‘imperfect life’ and ‘the dark grave’, explaining the former as shaped in compensating reaction against the latter. Shelley not only idealizes and delights in Plato’s idealizing; he is aware of what is at stake in the act of idealizing. That blend of delight and awareness helps to account for Shelley’s absorbed and absorbing response to Plato, a response that animates some of his finest prose.

63 *Prose I*: 256.

Chapter 13

‘These Catchers of Men’: Imposture and Its Unmasking in ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’

Alan M. Weinberg

Look to thyself, priest, conqueror or prince, Whether thy trade is falsehood
(Shelley, *Queen Mab*)

For the mind is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture.
(Bacon, ‘Idols of the Mind’)

All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.
(Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)

Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves
by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.
(Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*)

The ongoing re-radicalization of Shelley in literary studies has undoubtedly offset and so corrected the post-Victorian conception (following Arnold) that typed him as impractical and otherworldly, an angelic Icarus-figure ‘beating in the void his luminous wings in vain’.¹ This welcome corrective has not, however, been always even-handed in treating equally the two elements that, embedded in Shelley’s conception of misrule, are frequently coupled as a catchphrase or slogan in past and contemporary writing, namely, ‘force’ and ‘fraud’.² ‘Force’, as signifying oppression and tyranny in the Revolutionary era (alternatively synonymous with class

1 Arnold wrote: ‘And in poetry, no less than in life, he is “a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain”.’ *Essays in Criticism, second series* (‘Shelley’). London: Macmillan, 1895 (1st pub. 1888), p. 252. Arnold is quoting from his own earlier Preface to *Byron’s Poems* (1881).

2 Notable earlier uses of ‘force and fraud’ can be found in *Rape of the Lock* II, 31–3, *Paradise Lost* I, 645–9, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* Ch. 13, and Bacon’s essay ‘Of Judicature’ (No. 56). These instances may derive from Dante’s *Commedia*, when the division of Hell into the violent and the fraudulent is explained by Virgil (‘... ed ogne fin cotale / o con forza o con frode altrui contrista’ [... and every such end [injustice] afflicts someone either by force or fraud] (trans. John D Sinclair) *Inferno* XI, 23–4). In Pope (as in Milton) there are also echoes of Shakespeare (*Rape of Lucrece*, 1240–43; *Henry VI Part 3*, IV, iv), or Sidney (‘Astrophil and Stella’, XXXIII, 7).

hegemony), constitutes the condition which incites, even necessitates, resistance, rebellion and reform. In Shelley's writing 'force' (as imposition) manifests itself as the 'arm of the law' or authority (potentially cognate with government itself, as law maker and enforcer), is the characteristic emblem for licensed entitlement and divisive governance, and would appear to be the 'bottom line', the primary cause of enslavement or subjection, the first motive for change, but also the first line of resistance to change.³ A government is a delegated power-house which, unlike the populace, has the strongest means to defend its own interests.

One would not wish to argue with the central importance of 'force' in Shelley's writing, or with the emphasis given to it in interpretations of his political thought. But his repeated linking of 'force and fraud' (overtly and by implication) and his registering of this link as a *topos* of the age, obliges one to take more serious note of the second element in the catchphrase which while being linked to 'force', is not simply subsumed by it.⁴ That element appears, in 'A Philosophical View of Reform', as the single marker in a twin system of misrule, and as more broadly embraced in concepts such as 'falsehood' and 'imposture' (the latter being specifically referred to as much as five times in the course of the treatise). In focusing specifically on imposture and its unmasking by Shelley, I wish to draw attention to the paradigm of deceit in the essay on reform – to the falsity of entrenched ideologies, and the deliberate deception of the governed who, in blindness or good faith, are goaded into complicity with their 'masters'; and to the way fictional constructs are shown to prey on ethical principle in a manner that permanently disguises their true intent, featuring, therefore, as mass exploitation for private ends. Shelley's philosophical and practical concern in his draft prose treatise finds its imaginative counterpart in the representation of Jupiter as duplicitous tyrant in *Prometheus Unbound*, though it will not be my concern to treat the lyric drama here. One can see a network of resemblances with the poems of Shelley's 'annus mirabilis' (1819), particularly 'The Mask of Anarchy' which, like *Prometheus Unbound*, unites despotism and dissimulation in one overriding image of misrule.

It was in the 1980s – and mainly late in that decade – that Shelley's long neglected, and regrettably incomplete essay on Reform was at last given sustained critical attention.⁵ Following Cameron's and Dawson's overview of a seriously neglected

For a contemporary use, see *Paine: Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, Pt I, p. 92: 'When I contemplate the natural dignity of man ... I become irritated at the attempt to govern mankind by force and fraud, as if they were all knaves and fools, and can scarcely avoid disgust at those who are imposed on. (A further example from Paine is cited below' [p. 000]).

3 This idea of 'force' is mythically impersonated in the pseudo-omnipotent figure of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound*.

4 For verse references, see F.S. Ellis, *A Lexical Concordance to the Poetical Works of Shelley*. Tokyo: Senjo Publishing, [1892] reprint 1963, under the headings 'False', 'Falsehood', 'Force', 'Fraud', 'Impostor/s' and so on.

5 The essay was probably written between November 1819 and January 1820 (*SC* VI: 954). Though transcribed in 1822–23 by Mary Shelley (in Bodl. MS Shelley adds. d. 6, pp. 7–104: see Alan Weinberg, *BSM* XXII (1): 58–249), the incomplete draft essay was not edited and published until 1920 (T.W. Rolleston [limited edn]). The spur to renewed

essay, the posthumously edited text was closely read within the context of Shelley's output as a whole, yielding accounts that tied up with Shelley's revolutionary project – one that, according to the emphasis of each critic, was directed towards anarchical self-determination (Scrivener), decentralized radical transference of power (Hogle), a ceaselessly sceptical open society (Hoagwood), socially inclusive pragmatic reform (Behrendt) – and, more recently, the convergence of poetic and political ideals (Foss). The transparency of Shelley's general theme – repressive government and its practical dissolution (reform) – provides the backdrop for these various readings, and conditions their emphasis on the structure of power (force) and its successful dismantling and displacement, tending in appearance to give second place to the issue of fraudulence. Notwithstanding this approach, Terence Hoagwood, in his concern to establish the political workings of dogmatism (as force) and its resistance to sceptical enquiry, is particularly alive to the devious machinations of power. His account of ideological inversion, by means of which a system, belief or conception is selectively reified and then – in the interests of the ruling powers – made to regulate and determine the actions of all, touches closely on the question of imposture, especially with regard to Chapter 2 of Shelley's treatise; but in Hoagwood's discussion, the phenomenon of inversion (in, for example, 'economic fetishism', as Marx would go on to call it) is subordinated to a philosophical debate concerning Shelley's avoidance of prescription and contradiction (dogmatic closure) when envisioning a new social order.

An apparent decline of interest in Shelley's essay, following this flurry of publications in just a few years, might seem to imply that critics have largely exhausted its immediate appeal, founded on its urgent sense of both the justice and necessity of reform – as reflected in the work's epigraph⁶ – and its persuasive call

interest – following publication in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. VII, ed. Walter E. Peck. (1930), and the collated edition in David Lee Clark's *Shelley's Prose* (1954 rep. 1966) – was undoubtedly Donald Reiman's literal transcription of the notebook draft in 1973 (in *SC* VI: 945–1065, with introductory essay). Successive critical discussions of 'A Philosophical View of Reform' have appeared in Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 127–49; P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 190–98; Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 210–18; Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 222–62; Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1988, pp. 167–209; Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, pp. 212–25; and Chris Foss, 'Towards an Imaginative Politics: The Convergence of Theory and Practice in *A Philosophical View of Reform*', in *A Brighter Morn: The Shelley Circle's Utopian Project*, Darby Lewes (ed.). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003, pp. 39–60. Clark's flawed version was reprinted in paperback by Paul Foot in *Shelley's Revolutionary Year*. London: Redwoods, 1990. See fn. 23 for a recent abridged edition by Leader and O'Neill.

6 'Let us believe not only that it is necessary because it is just & ought to be, but necessary because it is inevitable & must be' (*SC* VI: 963, ll. 15–18). The term 'reform' – which might imply mild or radical change – was popularly embraced, and was the subject not

to the English nation to take heed. The relative sidelining of 'fraud' indicates an over-emphasis in Shelley studies on the polarity of oppressor and oppressed which has now run its course, but at the expense of a more embedded significance. The neglect of 'Peter Bell the Third', written contemporaneously with 'A Philosophical View of Reform' in Florence in the autumn of 1819, argues a similar skirting or underestimation of issues surrounding imposture, in this case Wordsworth's grand self-image, his supping with the ruling elite, the 'devil' as the poem puts it.⁷ And while 'The Mask of Anarchy' (among the most admired and discussed of Shelley's poems) may well have given rise to the prose essay in the first place, being the earlier verse response to the Peterloo Massacre (16 August 1819),⁸ its ironic exploration of mask/masque, that makes Law and Order a false projection of Anarchy, has not yet found a strong echo in treatments of the prose essay, in many respects its prose companion.⁹

Shelley's dual emphasis (on force and fraud) finds precedent in a line of dissident English writers going back at least to Bacon and the anti-clericalism of the Commonwealth period¹⁰ and more specifically, in his own time, to Paine, Godwin and the revolutionary left in general. To this list might be specifically added Leigh Hunt, alert defender of Shelley, his most admired friend, and percipient monitor of government excesses and abuses. But it is Paine's mockery and penetration with regard to 'force and fraud' that provides Shelley with a broad frame of reference for his own assault on imposture. In his *Rights of Man* (whose principal aim was to dispute Burke's defence of the realm) the institution of monarchy is, historically, the mask of military, ecclesiastical and commercial dominance:

After these [the Priesthood] a race of conquerors arose, whose government like that of William the Conqueror was founded in power, and the sword assumed the name of a sceptre. Governments thus established, last as long as the power to support them lasts; but

only of Shelley's 'An Address to the Irish' (1812) ('O Irishmen, REFORM YOURSELVES [*Prose* I: 25]), but also, more overtly, of his more recent published pamphlet, 'On Putting Reform to the Vote' (1817).

7 Stephen Behrendt's essay in the present collection addresses the 'neglect' of 'Peter Bell the Third'.

8 Composed in September 1819 and subtitled 'Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* [SPP], pp. 315–16.

9 Timothy Webb remarks that 'The Mask of the title ... also suggests the impostures and deceits of authority (in the first of his *Examiner* articles [on Peterloo, 22 August] Leigh Hunt had referred to 'the Men in the Brazen Masks of power', *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poems and Prose*. London: J.M. Dent 1995, p. 384). 'Masking' or its opposite was an embedded radical concept, as may also be seen, for example, in John Wade's *Black Book, or Corruption Unmasked*'.

10 See footnote 2. Anti-clericalism objected to the duplicitous political authority of priestcraft. This is reflected in Hobbes's view (in his *Ecclesiastical History*, 1689) that 'the priests turned religion into empire. False miracles, superstitions, ghosts and goblins, the kingdom of fairies and darkness established clerical power over the fearful and ignorant laity' (quoted in Justin Champion, 'Irreligion and the English Enlightenment 1649–1789', in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650–1830 From Revolution to Revolution*, Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith [eds]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 39).

that they might avail themselves of every engine in their favour, they united fraud to force, and set up an idol which they called Divine Right, and which, in imitation of the Pope affects to be spiritual and temporal, and in contradiction to the Founder of the Christian religion, twisted itself afterwards into an idol of another shape, called Church and State. The key of St Peter, and the key of the Treasury, became quartered on one another, and the wondering cheated multitude, worshipped the invention.¹¹

Power might entrench monarchy but fraudulence guarantees it, by ensuring that governing-class interests are advantaged at every point, spiritually and materially (the key to heaven and the treasury 'vouchsafed'). The pretence is one which involves the assumption of 'names' (sceptre) and the setting up of 'idols': 'Divine Right', 'Church and State'. The mystified populace are duped into believing that this system is divinely sanctioned and that they are inconvenienced by it. That both privileged and non-privileged (disadvantaged) subjects 'buy' into a fictitious system is one of the great stumbling blocks to reform, and (as we shall see later) is an issue that Shelley seeks to resolve in 'A Philosophical View of Reform', by making a clear distinction between those who will, and those who will not, immediately benefit from reform. If a system can be shown to be inimical to the many – if, moreover, it is shown to be fraudulent, then it might be possible for the people at large to claim what is truly theirs: their rights and 'selves'. But, as Paine strongly intimates, the observance of a fake hegemony amounts to a religion, and the persistence of monarchy (a closed system) is testimony to its popular idolatrous appeal, even when stripped of its ancient power. But any class-bound system is likely to be treated with superstitious awe, as those who establish their superiority (be it the priesthood, colonial powers or upper classes) inscribe a corresponding sense of inferiority and indebtedness into the minds of the dispossessed, who may take centuries to recognize the imposture. It might even seem that mankind is willingly imposed on.¹²

While Shelley focuses, like Paine, on monarchy, and is equally wont to make a mockery of its pretences – more particularly in the early cantos of *Queen Mab* – he is less obsessed with its deficiencies, having a somewhat broader canvas in mind. In fact, as those pointing to the anarchical strain in Shelley's writing have suggested, the philosophical resonance of his argument touches the problem of government in general.¹³ It is in this respect that Godwin's influence can be felt most. While, to Godwin, monarchy is 'founded in imposture',¹⁴ all governments are implicated – are

11 Collins, *Paine: Rights of Man* I: 92.

12 In his monograph, *Paine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), Mark Philp writes that 'The *Rights of Man* leaves no room for doubt as to why people have failed to perceive the imposture: the hereditary system overawes people with ritual and splendour, intimidates them with shows of force and threats of eternal damnation, and bewilders them with its sophistical claims about their eternal duties to the Crown, the nobility, the Church, and the State' (p. 63). For an account of Shelley's debt to Paine, see Alan Weinberg, 'P.B. Shelley and Paine's *The Rights of Man*', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies: The Rights of Man*, Mike Leighton (ed.). Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 1992, pp. 125–38.

13 See Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*. New York: Macmillan, 1950; Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*.

14 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 3rd edn corrected. 2 vols. London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1798, see V, vi Of

included in the attribution. Government, ‘which is nothing but regulated force’,¹⁵ demands that we give up our own personal sovereignty on the specious grounds that we will be better served if a body of individuals decide for us what shall be good or not good (it being impossible for any delegated body to represent the private judgments of all). This defeats the principle of independent choice and is really ‘force and fraud’ in disguise:

But, where I make the voluntary surrender of my understanding, and commit my conscience to another man’s keeping, the consequence is clear. I then become the most mischievous and pernicious of animals. I annihilate my individuality as a man, and dispose of my *force* as an animal to him among my neighbours who shall happen to excel in *imposture* and *artifice*, and to be least under restraint from the scruples of integrity and justice. I put an end, as to my own share, to that happy collision of understandings upon which the hopes of human improvement depend.¹⁶ [my italics]

Godwin’s extreme reliance on personal judgment, without which there is for him no reliable defence against fraud, is noticeably echoed by Shelley in a poem like ‘Political greatness’ (1820–21); but is quite opposed to Burke, who, in unembarrassed celebration of the *status quo*, argues for just that ‘voluntary surrender’ to government that Godwin finds so reprehensible and, by implication, unethical.¹⁷ One has the impression that Burke (state apologist *par excellence*) is, symbolically speaking, what Godwin, and later Shelley, are up against: ‘no man’, Burke argues ‘should be judge in his own cause’:

He abdicates all right to be his own governor. He inclusively, in a great measure, abandons the right of self-defence, the first law of nature. Men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil and of a civil state together. That he may obtain justice, he gives up his right of determining what it is in points the most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty, he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of it.¹⁸

Such trust carries with it no guarantee that it will be honoured (although tradition is meant to be a bank of wisdom and virtue); and entails a full, extraordinary endorsement of the entire edifice of church and state:

Subjects, vol. 2 (p. 48). Godwin writes that ‘the line of distinction that is drawn [between kings and subjects] is the offspring of pretence, an indirect means employed for effecting certain purposes, and not the language of truth’ (p. 48).

15 Godwin, *Political Justice*, III, vi Of Obedience I: 230.

16 Godwin, *Political Justice*, III, vi Of Obedience, pp. 232–3. For a discussion of the related concept of ‘voluntary servitude’ and its connection with Godwin, see Michael Rossington’s chapter on the sonnet ‘Political Greatness’ in the present volume.

17 Godwin’s use of ‘voluntary surrender’ echoes la Boétie’s concept of ‘voluntary submission’. See reference to la Boétie and Godwin in Michael Rossington’s chapter on ‘Political Greatness’ in the present volume.

18 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, intro. A.J. Grieve. London: Dent (Everyman’s Library), 1910 reprint 1971, p. 57.

We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility.¹⁹

It is just this adulation, this 'knee worship' of multi-layered patriarchy (barely concealed in the list of paternal authorities), that, in *Prometheus Unbound*, Jupiter commands and Prometheus resists, and that, in 'A Philosophical View of Reform', Shelley refutes, on the grounds that it is an imposture, a subtle design to disenfranchise the majority, and to entrench the authority of the state (and the class system) at all costs. Burke's ploy, in his *Reflections*, is to reverse the accusation against the aristocracy of 'force and fraud' – to claim that democracy (like an absolute monarchy which he likewise rejects), is a despotism of the masses: to suggest otherwise, as the revolutionaries and reformers in England have done, would (in his view) be fraudulent. This argument, no doubt momentarily compelling in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, is the counter-tactic of a shrewd rhetorician and politician, who likes to have it both ways.²⁰

While he naturalizes the rigid system of hierarchy, claiming that it is 'after the pattern of nature', Burke nevertheless concedes that institutions are 'artificial', the nobility a 'graceful ornament'²¹, and 'gentility' (that which makes 'power gentle' and 'obedience liberal') a 'pleasing illusion', constituting 'all the decent drapery of life'.²² He laments that this 'drapery' is to be rudely torn off by the 'new conquering empire of light and reason' but, given the choice, one wonders why one would prefer a mere 'show' (already founding a substantial 'conquering empire' of its own) to what is, by his own admission, 'enlightened' and therefore potentially self-critical. This is Shelley's choice, and while he is not immune to the charm of gentility (having by birth some predilection for the aristocracy), he is not deluded or overwhelmed by it, and so takes a stand outside the master–slave compact which Burke calls 'chivalry', and which subscribes to a fiction (the impressive superstructure of church and state), whose benefits are largely restricted to its architects (the rich and powerful).²³ The

19 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 83.

20 To Hazlitt, Burke was a sophist: 'For the habit of his mind would lead him to find out a reason for or against any thing.' ('Character of Mr Burke (II)', *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt* [Centenary edn], ed. P.P. Howe. 21 vols. London and Toronto: J.H. Dent and Sons, 1932, vol. 7, pp. 227–8 [essay 1st pub. 1819].

21 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 31, 32, 135.

22 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 74.

23 Despite regarding the aristocracy as an 'order of drones' (following Paine), Shelley concedes that connected with this order 'is a certain generosity & refinement of manners & opinion ... which at least makes those ven is a religion which makes the respected those venerable names' ['A Philosophical View Of Reform', SC VI: ll. 2471–80).

The extant MS (filling a good portion of a notebook, originally together with 'On Life') is a rough draft, one never revised by Shelley. In the interests of clarity and readability, in subsequent citations I have amended Shelley's draft, except where the unpolished text is itself illustrated and discussed. I base my readings on Reiman's literal transcript (SC VI: 945–1065), and have checked them against Mary Shelley's edited but unpublished transcript (MS Shelley adds. d. 6, pp. 9–104, Weinberg, *BSM* XXII (1): 50–249) and, where possible, against the newly edited abridged text in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works* (Oxford World Classics), eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill. Oxford and New York: Oxford

security and stability which these authorities provide in return for allegiance are simply masks for licensed repression.

If, practically speaking, one has no choice but to put up with government, then the Godwinian idea that imposture is inherent in any representative, authoritarian system requires that government be swiftly restored to the people, to be as it were reunited to the ground of its existence, such that it ceases (at least) to have a separate life of its own – that separation being refigured by Shelley in the representation of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound*, and Life in ‘The Triumph of Life’ (Shelley expresses the Foucaultian idea that our lives are pre-inscribed rather than authentically lived). The striking fact of monarchy in particular is its transcendental apartness from the governed. An inversion takes place that is analogous to the fate of words themselves, which, in the course of time, become increasingly divorced (abstracted) from the ‘beings/things’ which constitute them in the first place, so that a descriptive term like ‘king’ (standing for a male ruler by inheritance) is hypostatized, placed beyond the reach of the population, and, in this form, can be conveniently substituted (and entrenched) by the abstract metonymy ‘crown’, thereafter suitably inscribed into every social artefact and institution in the realm, as an irrefutable sign of divinely ordained ownership or trusteeship.

That Shelley was conscious of this analogy is shown in what, to my mind, is a key passage from the Introduction to ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’. Arguing from the very outset of this treatise that the Roman empire and all its successors up to the present (late 1819) are schemes to enslave ‘the most civilized portion of mankind’ (ll. 44–5) (and therefore indicating a context of unremitting cunning and oppression), Shelley identifies the Catholic Church as among the foremost of these ‘schemes’. In doing so, he indicates that what is at stake on the grand international stage is a battle for verbal supremacy:

[...] Sacred [...] names borrowed from the [...] life & opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of [...] domination & imposture; & a system of [...] liberty and equality for such was the system preached by that great Reformer was perverted to [...] support oppression — . Not his doctrines, for they [...] are too simple & direct to be susceptible of such perversion — but the mere names. (ll. 52–67)

What makes this passage so impressive is that it functions on at least two planes at once. There is a pernicious art of linguistic subterfuge in the historical process delineated here, and a counter movement (also verbal) which is simply its disclosure (that it is subterfuge, and deeply reprehensible at that). The Janus-face of language ‘codes’ (institutionally in this case) as well as ‘decodes’ (the personal function of the author, Shelley). Beginning with the fact that Jesus Christ was merely human and had no monopoly on the truth (‘life & opinions’ playing on the quotidian reality of

University Press, 2003, pp. 836–74. An ellipsis in square brackets [...] indicates omission of cancelled or unintelligible or digressionary draft. Citations preserve Shelley’s punctuation, spelling and use of ampersand. Line references following quotations refer to Reiman’s transcript.

Tristram Shandy), Shelley subverts the divinity encoded in the term 'Jesus Christ', so deliberately employed by him. This reverses the process by means of which that life and those opinions were reified, removed from the indeterminacies to which all ideas are subject, but reinscribes him as a 'great Reformer' who preached a 'system of liberty and equality' (a prefiguration of just Shelley's task in the treatise, and so serving as an admirable though inevitably imperfect model). The re-inscription completes the reversal because not only was there imposture in the nominal translation of a living person into a god and saviour of the world, but worse, the reformer's system of equality and freedom was, in the process, duplicitously perverted and erased. As the authorizing symbol of that system's opposite, namely, the hegemony of church and state, the religion of Jesus Christ became, paradoxically, the instrument of widespread oppression. The populations of Europe were subjected to mere names, both in this life and (as they were led to believe) in the 'life to come' (the names were sanctified).

That the subjection is verbally grounded emerges again when, at the end of the passage, Shelley makes an important distinction between doctrines and names. Although the doctrines are not specifically defined they are clearly reducible here to elementary precepts which, it is implied, underwrite the system of equality and liberty, and can (by definition) be 'taught'. Revolutionary sayings would be the injunctions to 'turn the other cheek' or to 'love one's neighbour as oneself'. Their most characteristic feature is transparency: they are 'simple and direct'. It would be perverse to assert that, in the teachings of Jesus, any person, race or class is innately privileged over another (beyond reproach, without sin or imperfection) or, alternatively, innately outcast (beneath contempt, beyond redemption).²⁴ To do so would be to turn the special, perhaps uniquely distinctive, claims of the gospel on their head. If, historically, that is what Christianity has actually done, then it must have been by some form of verbal sublimation or extrapolation, by means of which a family of borrowed names forms a selective, sacred iconography (son, father, holy spirit, messiah [Jesus Christ], virgin mother), giving Christianity a determining hold over the fate of its adherents, and a superior claim over any other state religion – as if one had to be a Christian, had to believe in the Son's saving grace, in order to practise or benefit from his doctrines. The separating out of names and their hypostatization (as being the properties of the Godhead) effectively disembodies the person, turning the Reformer's life into formulaic mantras, rituals and icons which have the magic character of a fetish. They, in turn, take on a life of their own (in the way of religion) and, as 'symbols of domination and imposture' (of force and fraud), acquire a superstitious hold over the imagination; they can even (paradoxically, given the pacific teachings of Jesus) be the signals for torture, referred to later in Chapter 1 as 'the [...] execrated & enormous [...] instruments of religious cruelty' (ll. 1158–60) in Shelley's account of the degradation in Spain as an instance of the state of nations in contemporary Europe, America and Asia.

24 A central tenet of Christianity is 'the equality of mankind' – so central that Shelley devotes an entire section to the topic in his fragmentary notes 'On Christianity'. Paraphrasing his gospel reading, Shelley writes, 'The only perfect and genuine republic is that which comprehends every living being' (*Prose I*: 264).

In describing an epoch originating several centuries earlier, Shelley, from the very outset of his essay, expertly distinguishes between genuine reform – which in the instance of Jesus Christ, is meant to be universally enabling – and its sham appropriation to serve the interests of a privileged ruling class or clique (referred to as the ‘cunning and selfish few’). The distinction underpins the whole of Shelley’s argument, since the hijacking of reform recurs repeatedly in history, and is, perhaps, the one great obstacle to progress (along the infinite path of perfectibility), since an imposture will be more markedly entrenched, and compel greater assent, than blatant tyranny. Wars and general discord resulting from the Reformation and the French Revolution (two momentous rebellions of recent occurrence cited by Shelley in the course of Chapter 1) eventually brought these movements into disrepute and might suggest their inefficacy, if it were not for the fact that the popular reforms (in religion and politics) themselves were necessary: they were the outcome of a process of liberalization begun in the city states of Italy and sustained, notably, by philosophers who exposed the mistakes upon which systems of faith are built. In a parenthetical note also employed in ‘On Life’, Shelley underlines the political role of philosophy, adding that it ‘went forth [...] into the enchanted forest of the daemons of worldly power, as the pioneer of the overgrowth of ages’ (ll. 423–7).²⁵ The problem lay in the fact that these very reforms were ruthlessly exploited by demagogues and tyrants. With regard to the Revolution, Napoleon, riding on the slogan of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, exploited the new freedoms for his own imperialistic advantage, and was instrumental in strengthening the backlash and reactionary tendencies that Shelley had encountered in post-Reformation (and therefore assumedly enlightened) England, tendencies which were, in his opinion, themselves stimulating a national revolt, thus prompting the very essay on reform here under discussion.

But it was the ‘bloodless’ Revolution of 1688 (explored in an historical overview of England in Chapter 2) that was the turning point in English politics and which represented, for Shelley, a failure of national will to take genuine reforms to the people, a failure that amounted to a gross national deception (though for Edmund Burke the event was the paradigm for securing British ‘liberties’ and safeguards).²⁶ As a protection against despotism, changes had been instituted in England, giving parliament greater autonomy (stronger executive powers), whilst limiting the power of the monarch. These correctives (embodied in the putative ‘Constitution’) were certainly enlightened, but by the time William III took the throne, the unrepresented multitude had grown significantly and therefore there was a disjunction between the rights of those who ruled and those who laboured for them. The shift in power, instead of embracing *vox populi* (as it was supposed to do) only brought into life a collusion of the separate parties that made up the ruling class:

For the nobility, [~~ceasing to fear the royal power, & being awakened to~~] having by the assistance of the people imposed close limitations upon the royal power, finding that power to be [its] natural ally, & the people ... its natural enemy; made the Crown the mask

25 If – in a comparable image – philosophy was ‘thus stripping Power of its darkest mask’ (ll. 489–90), its greatest debt was owed to an earlier generation of philosophers (Bacon, Spinoza, Hobbes, Bayle).

26 See Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 14–26.

& pretence of their own authority At this period, began that [despotism] despotism of the oligarchy of party, and [representin] under colour of administering the executive [for] power lodged in the King, represented in truth the interests of the rich, [&]. (ll. 1955–81)²⁷

Phrase for phrase, with thoughtful deletions and qualifications, Shelley unveils a gradual, and seemingly inevitable, process of political manoeuvring, simultaneously stripping away the guises that power assumes, and lays bare the schism at the heart of English society. The collaboration of the nobility and the people in the first instance signifies the common purpose – the commonality and inclusiveness – which is the ‘soul’ or ‘lifeblood’ of genuine reform and, more generally, the goal of political action, evaporating the great divide of classes and interests, and putting a brake on the potential abuses of the realm. The dramatic unfolding of each sentence, simulating the course of historical events, disrupts the momentary illusion of mutual co-operation, indicating that (perversely) in an artificial system of classes (nobility and the proletariat in opposite camps) it is ‘natural’ for the privileged to keep together, in hostility to their born enemies, whose strength in numbers and relative impoverishment (the ‘masses’) might always unsettle the power base (once it is reconstituted as the domain of the ‘rich’). As usual, like agrees with like, and the front of a united nation, entrenched in what is called the British Constitution, is swiftly and relentlessly exposed. One class profits at the other’s expense, that other being cynically exploited, and kept right out of the equation. The inference is clear, that as population expands, governing parties inevitably solicit mass support as an instrument for gain, and the motive of self-enrichment, that for Paine underpins the institution of monarchy, is perpetuated.

Having betrayed and deluded the people, the nobility create a further imposture (signalled ironically by the revelatory ‘under colour of’ and ‘in truth’, and syntactically, as the sequence of events is brought to a disquieting conclusion at the end of the passage). Instead of acting as a brake for all time on the royal prerogative (the celebrated aim of the Revolution) the nobility actually assume that prerogative for themselves, thus aggrandizing their own authority, whilst seeming merely to act on behalf of the crown. The crown becomes a shadow of itself (a ‘mask & pretence’), and the power net is spread wider, such that the danger of despotism (in a king) is exchanged for its reality, in the form of an oligarchy (the dictatorship of a small governing class). It is this dictatorship of ‘bishops lawyers peers or spies’ that constitutes the ‘ghastly masquerade’ of destructive authority in ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ (wherein the king is depicted, not as the ruling monarch, but as Anarchy himself – ‘GOD, AND KING, AND LAW’ (l. 37)).²⁸ Effectively, the nobility make a mockery of the Revolution which was supposed to have hedged the people against royal abuse in perpetuity (and is given out by Burke as actually having done so²⁹). At the same time, there is the illusion of greater public representation, and of the continuance, if not completion, of reform, bringing closure to a system that, contrary

27 I have retained MS deletions in square brackets to indicate how Shelley amplifies significant points in the process of composition.

28 *SPP*: 317.

29 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 19.

to appearance, is actually retrogressive in entrenching and exacerbating the class divide.

The defining point of the oligarchy is stated conclusively in the last phrase of the passage: namely, the ‘interests of the rich’. Shelley unlocks the key to the hidden source of power that, once revealed, betrays the crude capitalist base of pre-egalitarian society.³⁰ Yet even a system that pretends to be egalitarian – to represent the people in a virtual sense – practises a similar deception: thus, in a fragment ‘On the Game Laws’ (1817), closely linked in argument to ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’, Shelley shows that the House of Commons, in passing legislation that privileges the ‘barbarous and bloody sport’ of the landowner at the expense of the poor and of the helpless animal, ‘actually represent that which is a distortion and a shadow’, and ‘virtually represent none but the powerful and rich’.³¹ Shelley’s crucial insight – so simply and boldly stated – may well be the matrix of his entire argument in the treatise, since (as Godwin showed) the promise of reform (projected and embraced with particular emphasis in Chapter 3 of Shelley’s treatise) is at every turn bedevilled by self-interest,³² and it is never sure if the people can, or even wish to, withstand, let alone discern, their masters’ cunning³³ – that in effect, their function is to guarantee their masters’ interest at their own expense.

Once the veneer of reform is removed (and it is ostensible, institutionalized ‘reform’ that Shelley is addressing here, not reactionary government *per se*), the crass reality of power politics is unashamedly revealed. What drives inequity and produces chimeras of seemingly responsible governance is unacknowledged greed. Although Shelley had little of Paine’s confidence in the benefits of commerce, he shared Paine’s anger at the way commerce was distorted under monarchy. Shelley consequently takes advantage of Paine’s mockery of monarchical fraud (in *Rights of Man*) to deconstruct the perverse trappings of power. Paine observes that ‘monarchy is all a bubble, a mere court artifice to procure money’.³⁴ To this and similar disparaging comments in Paine’s pamphlet, Shelley adds that it is not really the

30 Oligarchy is itself defined by Socrates as ‘a society in which the political power is in the hands of the rich and the poor have no share of it’, *The Republic*, ed. H.D.P. Lee. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 321 [IX ‘Imperfect Society’]. Shelley translated passages from Bks II and III of *Republic* (a work he much admired) possibly at much the same time as he was writing his prose treatise. See James Notopoulos, ‘The Dating of Shelley’s Notes and Translations from Plato’. *The Modern Language Review* 34.2 (1939), pp. 245–8. See also Weinberg, *BSM* XXII (1): 23–5.

31 *Prose* I: 280. Shelley refers to this contemporary ruling class as a despotic ‘oligarchical minority’ (280).

32 In Godwin’s model, self-interest was conditioned by social inequality. Freed from class interest and allowed to be himself, the individual would naturally merge his own interest with that of the many. (See *Political Justice* VIII: On Property.)

33 Possibly it was the failure of his compatriots to recognize their true interest (urgent reform) that induced Shelley to abandon his essay early in 1820, if only provisionally. See also footnote 38. For a brief account of the essay’s incompletion, see Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 211.

34 Collins, *Paine: Rights of Man* II: 205.

royal power (that is, of the monarch himself) that has increased since 1688 (as was claimed), but 'the power of the rich':

The name & the office of King is merely the mask of this power, & is a kind of stalking horse used to conceal these 'catchers of men' whilst they lay their nets — Monarchy is only the string which ties the robbers bundle ... an oligarchy of this nature exacts more [...] of suffering from the people, because it reigns both by the opinion generated by imposture, & the force which that opinion places within its grasp. (ll. 2004–21)

Insubstantial though it be in itself, monarchy nevertheless lends its formidable discursive and institutional weight to the effective rulers, those entrusted with 'the administration of affairs', defined in a later passage as a 'new' – and comparatively more degraded – aristocracy (the civil service) (see ll. 2456–590). While this second governing class is without even a trace of nobility, and is therefore the subject of the writer's scorn,³⁵ Shelley has no illusions about its predecessor whose gentlemanliness, for all its magnificence ('chivalrous disdain of infamy'), is nevertheless 'at bottom all trick' (*SC* ll. 2500–2501, 2497). What this new aristocracy borrows, therefore, is the prestige and privilege traditionally invested in monarchy. Like the 'name' of Jesus Christ which, lifted from the person himself, becomes a displaced sign of superior authority (actually ruling-class interests, divinely ordained), so the 'name & the office of King' is appropriated as a means to secure wealth and its advantages, and to hide ('mask') that truth from public scrutiny, so long as monarchy, in name, is constitutionally inscribed into public consciousness. The investment yield on the name ('kingship') is too high to be squandered by those aspiring to power, so they adopt the brand as their trademark. Moreover, the predatory status of the proxy government is clear to the reader (though, of course, disguised to its contemporary audience). In what is effectively a trade off between two aristocracies, the old becomes 'a kind of stalking horse' which, as a decoy, conceals the hunters at their game (seeking profits and exploitation). Monarchy is entrenched at a price, that of inauthenticity (a mere 'pre-text', figuration, something not itself, a sham, a label). If this is a trick played on a revered institution (another instance of misappropriation), then it is a disturbingly devious one (we recall that, first, the people were exploited and betrayed). As if to underline the moral decline, Shelley not surprisingly insists that the 'new aristocracy has its basis in fraud', whereas 'the old one has its basis in force'.

Reduction of official governance to a trap ('stalking horse') is echoed in the allusion to 'catchers of men', who, in their concealment, 'lay their nets' with characteristic stealth. The dislocation of these 'catchers' from their original context in Luke 5:1,³⁶ is a prime example in the treatise of Shelley's daring transference of signs from the religious to the political spectrum, in such a way as to destabilize meaning, and suggest some sort of currency between them. In this instance, the 'catching of men' which, in Luke, is to emulate the miraculous catching of abundant fish in the presence of Jesus, by (one assumes) winning a sinful world over to the

35 'a set of pelting wretches [...] in whose employment there is nothing to exercise, even to [...] their distortion the more majestic faculties of the soul' (*SC*: ll. 2491–5).

36 Shelley was reading Luke in late 1819: see Dawson and Webb, *BSM* XIV: xvi–xvii.

'Kingdom of God', is transformed into what seems more like a soliciting or 'vote-catching' enterprise, that entraps men (the public at large) into a complicity with the reified machinery of the British kingdom. In the gospel account, it is a case of capturing men's minds and hearts for the spiritual guidance of Jesus, but in the more modern instance there is, clearly, mind control over the 'captives', and that, as usual, by deceit. The debasement of meaning that is the result of the transfer could, ostensibly, suggest the want in England of spiritual leadership. Be that as it may, the fact that, in Luke, men are to be caught like fish, that is, with some degree of cunning and disguise, and that this is analogous to stalking game (during which pastime, the catchers 'lay their nets') indicates that Shelley's text has deconstructed the repressed signification of 'catchers of men' in the gospel, or in later tradition when it may well have come to mean 'proselytizing or indoctrinating Christians, by force or fraud'. This equivocation of meaning, brought about by the deliberate 'misreading' of a biblical reference, has the effect of aligning the Christian past and the English present along a continuum that was set up right at the beginning of the treatise, when the political misappropriation of Jesus is announced as an historical fact. The bourgeois aristocrats (as we might call them), neutralizing the liberties that are the product of revolution and reform, and hiding behind 'the name and the office of King', are adepts at an old game. Their business is to outmanoeuvre the monarch on the one hand, and the people on the other. As author of the treatise, Shelley can type-cast them and decode their practices. He can warn against them. But they are time-servers, they infiltrate the bureaucracy, and will profit from any system. Presumably they are parasites of the 'spoilers spoiled' ironically identified among the captives in 'The Triumph of Life', expedient dignitaries, corrupted by their own success.³⁷

Shelley does not, in the above passage, specifically explain how the nation will be ensnared (taken in). Nets that are laid are many and various. But when capping his argument with the Paineite aphorism, 'Monarchy is only the string which ties the robber's bundle',³⁸ Shelley switches 'catcher' for 'robber', intensifying the degree of deceit and criminality, and intimating that those who have least to give (the dispossessed) are funding a 'make-believe' state. This fraud is ludicrously and shamelessly sanctioned by an effete monarchy ('tying the bundle' being analogous to 'rubber-stamping'): it masquerades as useful employment, requiring inordinately long working days (14 hours) from the poorer classes, including children, for little return; as paper credit, which, like market speculation, aggrandizes wealth without any work or tangible currency to show for it;³⁹ and as the national debt, ostensibly to safeguard the national interest, but in reality taxing the labourer, reducing men,

37 *SPP*: 490.

38 Possibly an allusion to Paine's remark that the line of English monarchy was founded by 'bands of robbers' who 'parcelled out the world'. 'The chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch' (Collins, *Paine: Rights of Man* II: 190).

39 For a valuable discussion of Shelley's argument concerning paper money and its fraudulent enrichment of the creditor at the expense of the poor labourer, see Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, especially pp. 236–9.

women, and children to further penury (as so strikingly highlighted in 'The Mask of Anarchy'), and lining the pockets of creditors with interest on the capital.

Essentially, the poor are deprived (robbed) by the rich of their 'property', to safeguard the latter against their creditors and to enrich them further. Property is defined by Shelley in terms which look back to Locke and forward to Marx:

Labour, industry, economy [...], skill, genius, [...] or any [...] similar powers honourably & innocently exerted are the [...] foundations of [...] one description of property, and ... all true political institution ought to defend every man in the exercise of his discretion with respect to [...] property so acquired. (ll. 3360–72)

That which is acquired is truly owned when it is the outcome of personal ability and endeavour. Hence the binary opposition between labour and property (upon which the capitalist system rests) falls away, and Shelley strongly affirms their intrinsic union:

[...] Labour & skill & the immediate wages of labour, & skill, [...] is a property of the most sacred & [...] indisputable right, & the foundation of all other property. (ll. 3546–52)

Direct remuneration ('immediate wages of labour') must also be counted property, since the return (wages) acknowledges and, in monetary terms, signifies the amount and value of labour expended. Shelley deliberately counters a second and, in England, more prevalent type of property, that has no labour or skill on the part of the owners to guarantee its possession:

[It] has its foundation in usurpation, [...] or imposture or violence, without which, by the nature of things, immense [...] aggregations of [...] possessions of gold or land could never have been accumulated[...] Of this nature is the principal part of the property enjoyed by the aristocracy & by the great fund holders, [...] the great majority of whose ancestors never either deserved it by their skill and [...] talents, or acquired & created it by thier personal labour. (ll. 3434–53)

Ironically, property illegitimately owned 'acquires force and sanction' over time, being bound up with the entrenched rights and privileges of the ruling class. But in exposing the true nature of property – in uncovering what has been repressed in ordinary common usage – Shelley brings to the surface its lost primary sense, that it is, by definition, self-possession, 'belonging or appertaining to the self' [lat. 'proprius' = own, self] and therefore one's own 'labour and skill'. This is the sense used by Locke when, in 1690, he claimed that

... every Man has a property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his.⁴⁰

This is the cornerstone of the argument that it would be theft to own what, by work and ingenuity, belongs by intrinsic right to another, without fairly rewarding the

40 'An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government' (Second Treatise of Civil Government) in *Of Civil Government*. London: J.M. Dent (Everyman), Pt II, Ch. V, section 27, 1955, p. 130.

person; and conversely, it would be dishonest, if not unjust, to own more than rightfully belongs to one's self. Malpractice arises when a breach is made between labour and property, worker and owner, such that the labourer possesses less, and the proprietor more than they have worked for. This disjunction – specifically related to property founded in 'usurpation, imposture or violence', the defining characteristics, as it happens, of colonial rule – leads, in Marxian terms, to the 'estrangement' or 'alienation' of the worker.⁴¹

In standard capitalist practice (where workers and managers are in opposition), the worker loses self-ownership by being reduced to a commodity which is owned by the capitalist, said to be a 'property owner' not essentially different from a landlord. The 'object' the worker produces is alien, it cannot be called the worker's 'own', and the money earned is for purposes of survival but can never compensate for the loss of 'property' or self, which has been transferred symbolically to the 'owner' in the form of production that will issue in profit. The labourer is effectively a slave. The more alien the work and the more advantageous to others, the more deprived the worker is. This loss of self-possession is analogous to the displacement of the self on to a god-figure who then takes charge of our being. Such is the account of the origin of religion given in Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* (1817):

... Some moon-struck sophist stood
Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown
Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood
The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown. (VIII, 3244–8)⁴²

This correlation of religion and labour (the workplace) in terms of displacement and alienation of personal activity (mental and physical), runs along a track already established in 'A Philosophical View of Reform', marking out the interdependence of religious, state and commercial hegemony and the consequent loss of sovereignty in the majority of citizens (not surprisingly denominated 'subjects' in Britain). With every pretence of acting in the public interest, all three appropriate to themselves or, in a manner of speaking, steal that which belongs to the Other: the church founds its monolithic authority on the name of the reformer Jesus, elevating him into a sacrificial god at the expense of his true qualities; the second aristocracy is an outgrowth of,

41 The terms are, in German, *Entfremdung* (estrangement) and *Entausserung* (alienation). Significantly for 'indisputable right' in the quotation above, Shelley first wrote 'inalienable right'.

42 *PS* II: 196. Cf. *Queen Mab* VI, 94–110 and Leigh Hunt's sonnet, *To Percy Shelley: On the Degrading Notions of Deity* (1818), cited in *PS* II: 196. Cf. also the following comment by Marx:

The external character of labour for the worker is demonstrated by the fact that it belongs not to him but to another Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, the human brain and the human heart, detaches itself from the individual and reappears as the alien activity of a god or of a devil, so the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It belongs to another, it is a loss of his self ('Estranged Labour' [First Manuscript] in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844. Available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/1st/htm>, pp. 40–41).

and parasite on, the first, setting up a reformed monarchy as a front (stalking horse) to serve its meretricious ends; and thirdly, the proprietor – whose privilege derives from the establishment of church and state – grows rich on the skill and sweat of the labourer. Collectively, and in collaboration, they virtually ‘own’ the land and its inhabitants by grand deceit. Each draws on private energies, the potential source of self-empowerment and self-governance, only to exacerbate the real schism between rulers and ruled, the haves and the have-nots.

In each instance above, authority defines the terms upon which its power base is to be legitimized. It determines the significance of the mission of Jesus, the role of monarchy, and nature of the workforce itself, such that these are absorbed and transmuted into the governing hierarchy. In consequence, potentially destabilizing reforms are neutralized, annexed and subsumed into myths of accomplished stable governance, wherein the church, the state and the labour market can continue to operate without hindrance and ostensibly for the good of all. In the long run, the majority is misled (perhaps even against their will) into believing that they lack authority to dispute the truth-claims of the elite: that is, that the rulers know best. Considering that one cannot wait for a population ‘to desire freedom’ even though ‘their real interest will consist in its establishment’, Shelley remarks in the final chapter of ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’:

It is in vain to hope to enlighten them [all men] whilst their tyrants [...] employ the utmost artifices of [...] all their complicated engine to perpetuate the infection of [...] every species of [...] fanaticism & error from generation to generation[.] (ll. 4562–70)

The ruling discourse infiltrates itself into every aspect of social life, in the process excluding or reappropriating the voiceless; has the appearance of being naturally, and not culturally, determined by custom and tradition; operates by closing off and, worse, stigmatizing resistance; and is intimidating and punitive (one could be deported for life).⁴³

Following its Hanoverian predecessors, the Regency government of England eschewed the need for large-scale reform since, in its view (as its spokesman, Burke, argued) it had already reformed, and any new ‘reforms’ would unsettle the ‘balance of power’.⁴⁴ It had had its bloodless ‘glorious’ revolution (in 1688), which ‘constitutionally’ reined in the king’s authority – thus providing a parliamentary check on monarchy. Reforms of the French variety were considered destructive of everything sacred, just and abiding in English society. In the meantime, though ostensibly protected by parliament and the sovereignty of England, the rights of

43 It is just this system that Burke justifies, and that Foucault considers to be ‘commensurate with, and determined by, non-localized and indiscriminate power’: ‘... it’s a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised’ (*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1997*, ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, p. 156).

44 For Burke, the English balance of conservation and improvement precludes the need for radical change (see *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 1–24).

the people were actually eroded, and their material conditions worsened. Shelley's intervention in 'A Philosophical View of Reform' occurs at this point, in the wake of Peterloo and, two years earlier, of the Pentridge Riots (the backdrop to his last published pamphlet, *An Address on the Death of the Princess Charlotte*, [1817]), where the discrepancy between outward stability and inward turmoil is at its most acute – when that turmoil is fast generating republican views capable of discounting England's mythic self-representation of calm moderation, mutuality and an equitable distribution of power.⁴⁵

The imposture of this civilized veneer – implied in a reference to 'that democratic element, upon the presence of which, it [...] has been supposed that the [...] waning superiority of England to/over the surrounding nations has depended' (ll. 3961–9) – is underplayed in Shelley's text, and therefore has largely gone unobserved in critical discussion (as if the false demeanour of Regency England and Burke's great defence of English sobriety, igniting Paine's counter-attack, were not in question).⁴⁶ What, on the other hand, is played up by Shelley in the last chapter of 'A Philosophical View of Reform' is the possibility of despotism or anarchy – either an extreme clampdown on resurgent radical and underground forces, or an over-reaction to repression, and a breakdown of social order (as had happened in Revolutionary France). (It has been argued that the effective silencing of opposition in 1819–20 led Shelley to abandon his essay.⁴⁷) Undoubtedly, the British government did fear a French-inspired revolt and was repressive, asserting in its defence the virtues of civil obedience and playing on primal fears of anarchy. But earlier governments were little better, as Shelley himself indicates throughout his essay, in reference to previous English governments from the time of Charles I and the civil war. His strategy is, in fact, consistent with his radical style throughout the text. His writing acts as the collective voice of the long-repressed 'other', bringing to the surface what government had been erasing from consciousness: its illegitimacy, based on the false principle of exclusivity, and the artifices which over time had given an air of sacred legitimacy, and of calm and reasonable restraint to English conduct. It consciously brings to a single reconcilable point the spectrum – even inner discordance at that time – of marginalized radical opinion, which had already felt the whip in the suppression of public opinion.⁴⁸ In this Shelley exemplifies his account of the true patriot who, in arousing the people from their subjection (like lions from slumber) 'will endeavour to rally round one standard the divided friends of liberty' (ll. 4390–92). This imaginary union of voices, from mild to extreme (drawing on Godwin, Paine, Byron, Leigh Hunt, Burdett, Spence, Carlile, Cobbett, Henry Hunt, Hazlitt, Hone, Owen, Cartwright and the

45 For his awareness of the growing political crisis in England, Shelley owed much to Leigh Hunt who, in the *Examiner*, consistently pleaded for urgent, if moderate, reform. See the *Examiner 1818–22* (Part III). 5 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998 (reprint).

46 In this case, understatement may simply be the result of incompleteness, of not bringing to the fore elements as yet submerged in the argument; or it may reflect the desire not to give any leeway to favourable Burkean stereotypes.

47 See footnote 29.

48 For an overview of the political and literary context in 1819, see Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, pp. 186–210 and Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology*, pp. 156–67. Hoagwood rightly indicates that, like Burdett, Shelley wished to effectuate a united front of reform (p. 160).

like, and fusing a philosophical and populist register) might seem to threaten revolt/insurrection (what the government so feared) when Shelley declares (as if stating a shared principle):

[...] government that is founded on any other basis [that is, than that of fair representation] is, a government of fraud or force, and ought on the first convenient occasion to be overthrown — . (ll. 3861–5)

But this is not where the common purpose lies. What is commonly and unequivocally desired (intimated by the 'soft' title of Shelley's essay) is 'Reform', 'the Watchword — / the talisman word', as Hone puts it in *The House that Jack Built*.⁴⁹ The key idea, the masterstroke of Shelley's argument, is not to promote violent revolution but to 'prevent it': this requires a full reclamation of the term 'reform' from the ruling class, who, in taking possession of it, had made a travesty of its meaning. In redefining and reclaiming 'reform' for its true beneficiaries (effectively the main task of the essay), and thus drawing on the collective voice of the radical and moderate left whose sympathies are with the oppressed and alienated majority (and not with the mythic realm), Shelley distinguishes between rights and possessions, so forestalling the government's fear of appropriation, and identifying universality of rights as the one safe measure of social justice. So he continues:

The [...] grand principle of political reform is the natural [...] equality of [...] men; [...] not with relation to their property, but to thier rights. (ll. 3867–73)

Equality of possessions which 'Jesus so passionately taught' – though the more desirable end and the 'goal, unattainable perhaps' to which all progress should tend – will only cause mischief if imposed or socially engineered.

The full Shelleyan counter-strategy, therefore, is to read the resistance to revolutionary change as an axiom, true for all governments, whose primary concern is, by whatever fraudulent means, to entrench existing powers and privileges. The tenacity of the authorities is such that radical reform (in the present case a campaign for universal suffrage) would inevitably be put down ruthlessly. The breadth of Shelley's claims is emphatic in draft revision: 'they would calumniate imprison, starve, ruin & expatriate all the chiefs of the patriotic party every person who wrote or acted, or thought, or might be suspected to think against them ...' (ll. 4285–90). It would be wise, therefore, not to tempt fate, unless government resistance proves to be wholly intractable (thus invoking the right to insurrection). The pragmatism expressed in the last chapter – sometimes labelled 'gradualism' in deference to Godwin, who spurned revolution and yet desired self-governance as the ultimate goal of civic society – is designed to win such rights as are immediately practicable, without disrupting the social order and thus inspiring a further wave of repression, and an unending cycle of violence ('the despot's rage, the slave's revenge').⁵⁰ As partial reforms are instituted, so greater reforms are demanded, within the capacity of the people to effect them. In

⁴⁹ *Regency Radical, The Selected Writings of William Hone*, eds David A. Kent and D.R. Ewen. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003, p. 207.

⁵⁰ 'Lines written among the Euganean Hills', l. 235 (*SPP*: 115).

Shelley's case, therefore, gradualism promotes a revolutionary end and – in contrast to Godwin – finds expression in openly contested, but non-violent, opposition that forces government to concede rights to a defenceless but awakening and determined citizenry: in short, to become legitimate.

Shelley's political acumen indicates a thorough scepticism towards government but a knowingness – what might be called a wise determinism – that unveils the mystique of authority for what it is: a spurious design to satisfy a monied class at the expense of the majority, those less fortunate, but cunningly manipulated into acceptance of their state. Increasingly, this governing class must be induced to 'disgorge some morsels of their undigested prey' (l. 47), as if that prey were not only gross excess of luxury, still awaiting consumption, but the masses themselves, as, in effect, food for the rich (an idea further developed in *Swellfoot the Tyrant*).⁵¹ Uncannily, Shelley instinctively discerns what is ineluctably abusive and exclusive in the social make-up. This insight makes it clear that the necessity of reform proclaimed in the essay's epigraph⁵² is premised on the inevitability of misgovernance, when power belonging collectively to citizens, by right of personal ownership and not privilege is, in yet another instance of ironic inversion, divorced from them and fraudulently given over to the rulers on the tragically, and persistently mistaken, assumption that those who rule will act in the interest of the ruled.

51 See Timothy Morton's chapter, 'Porcine Poetics: Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant*', in the present volume.

52 See footnote 6.

Drama

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Chapter 14

Porcine Poetics: Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant*

Timothy Morton

Pigs have frequently appeared in the British political imagination. Edmund Burke notoriously depicted working-class radicals as a 'swinish multitude'.¹ George Orwell used pigs to satirize Stalinist apparatchiks.² Pink Floyd's 'Pigs' refers to 'three different' kinds of pig: a 'fucked up old hag', the moralist Mary Whitehouse, and a fat bourgeois like George Harrison's 'Piggies', a 'pig man ... With your head down in the pig pen saying / Keep on digging'.³ The police are called pigs. In the 1790s Thomas Spence published a journal called *Pigs Meat* in defiant mimicry of Burke's own caricature, and Daniel Isaac Eaton published *Politics for the People*, which he subtitled *A Salmagundy for Swine*.⁴ Prosopopoeia, mimicry, caricature, mimicry of mimicry – the pig standing or wallowing on both sides of the class fence: there is a pattern here. In George Harrison's song, the pigs 'eat their bacon'. To pig-ify one's figurations is to fall into a trough where everything is mixed with everything else in a Bakhtinian and cannibalistic carnival. But perhaps no work of porcine poetics offers such an outrageous and elaborate falling-into and swilling-about in troughs as Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant*.

Shelley published *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant* (also dubbed '*A Tragedy*', in satirical and painful hilarity) anonymously in 1820. More a pantomimic satyr play than a tragedy, comedy or farce, *Swellfoot* boldly depicts the political sufferings of a class different from Shelley's own.⁵ The play's motivation was the salacious gossip associated with Queen Caroline of Brunswick, whose cipher in the play is Iona. The drama deals with famine and luxury, 'stifling turtle-soup, and brandy-devils' (I, i, 15). The Chorus of Swine are members of the working class, and incarnate on the stage the colonized Scots and Irish with their diet of 'red potatoes'

1 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to have been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*. London: J. Dodsley, 1790, p. 117.

2 George Orwell, *Animal Farm*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1949.

3 George Harrison, 'Piggies', *The Beatles*. EMI records, 1968. Pink Floyd, 'Pigs—Three Different Ones', *Animals*. EMI records, 1977. Lyrics by Roger Waters.

4 For an account of the play's connections with radical satire, see Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 76–7.

5 Shelley, *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant. A Tragedy. In Two Acts. Translated from the Original Doric*. London: published for the Author by J. Johnston, 1820.

and 'oats' (I, i, 24–5), but they are also actual swine, farmed for food. In a somewhat laborious twist, there are some among them of stout English patriotic stock, who 'think their strength consists in eating beef' (I, i, 145). Swine eating beef, humans killing and eating their lower orders: the inter- and intra-species consumption becomes incestuous, carnivalesque. It is as if we were witnessing a dramatic version of Swift's cannibalistic 'Modest Proposal'. Eating becomes a formal principle, providing ways of representing class relationships.

The play's Spencean and Burkean contexts have been explored.⁶ Scholarship has assessed its figurative use of swinish multitudes and its 'Swinish Monarch',⁷ and drawn attention to its sexually transgressive suggestions.⁸ Despite its intriguing topicality and its surprising grotesquerie, however, the play has never been given more than a humble place in the Shelley canon. It is time this unfamiliar text were given the close reading it deserves. This chapter attempts to flesh out some of the political and poetic resonances of *Swellfoot the Tyrant*. Shelley thought deeply about the play's burlesque, pantomimic form, as well as its explicitly political content. *Swellfoot the Tyrant* raises questions of language and mimesis, and we are now capable of addressing them adequately. It will also become clear that in this play Shelley continued to develop his thinking about food, consumption and consumerism swirling around and within the play.⁹

'Swellfoot the Tyrant' is a bald translation of 'Oedipus Tyrannos'. The cannibalistic mixing and mimicry of Shelley's satyr play metaphorically reproduces incestuous mixing that occurs in Sophocles' tragedy. At the City Dionysia in Athens, a ribald satyr play accompanied a tragic trilogy. Shelley was interested in this form, as his translation of Euripides' *The Cyclops* bears out. Both plays, asserts Timothy Webb, demonstrate 'his horrified delight in the macabre', an elegant phrase that conveys Shelley's phobia of obscenity – almost a phobia of phobia itself, a syndrome well exemplified in the vegetarian imagery of carnage in which, as I have argued elsewhere, Shelley departs from the 'ineffectual angel' diction with which readers

6 For a more contextual discussion, see Newman Ivey White, 'Shelley's Swell-Foot the Tyrant in Relation to Contemporary Political Satires'. *PMLA* 36 (1921), pp. 332–46.

7 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (rev. Geoffrey Matthews). London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 390. Hereinafter this edition will be referred to as *OSA*.

8 Samuel Gladden, 'Shelley's Agenda Writ Large: Reconsidering *Oedipus Tyrannus*; or, *Swellfoot the Tyrant*', in 'Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819–1820', Michael Scrivener (ed.), a special edition of *Romantic Praxis*. Available at <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/interventionist/gladden/gladden.html>. See also Samuel Lyndon Gladden, *Shelley's Textual Seductions: Plotting Utopia in the Erotic and Political Works*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 49–119.

9 Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 1998; paperback 2006, *passim*; *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 90–104; 'Shelley, Nature and Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. Timothy Morton. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 185–207.

often characterize him.¹⁰ This phobia is in part a symptom of his urgent desire to make obscenity carry a political charge. Webb convincingly argues that although *Swellfoot* 'might seem to belong to the category of the grotesque, it is essentially political burlesque with its origins in the traditions of English satire based on caricature and the political pamphlet'.¹¹ The world, then, was not intrinsically horrifying, as Shelley ultimately opts for satire rather than satyrs.

The spoof 'Advertisement' pretends that the play 'was evidently written by some *learned Theban*, and, from its characteristic dullness, apparently before the duties on the importation of *Attic salt* had been repealed by the Boeotarchs [rulers of Boeotia, in Greece; a pun on 'buttocks'?]'¹². This *occupatio* distances the actual author from the drama, while suggesting that the text itself is a piece of meat – it has not been salted enough, and is by implication unpalatable to the taste of the learned classes. The narrator continues: 'The tenderness with which he treats the PIGS proves him to have been a *sus Boeotiae* [Boeotian pig]; possibly *Epicuri de grege porcus* [a pig of the Epicurean flock].' Latin accentuates and distances, providing an illusion of salaciousness. Since in Shelley's time medical theses could still be written in Latin to disguise vulgarity, the implication is that something naughty underlies the veil of an official 'high' language. There follows a quotation from the notorious actor David Garrick, attributed to 'the poet': "'A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind"'.¹³ The language of sentiment and sensibility, often employed in contemporary poetry and prose on animal rights, here expresses a desire to cut across species boundaries. According to Mary Shelley's note on the play, while he was reading the 'Ode to Liberty' in a market square at the Baths of San Giuliano, Shelley 'was riotously accompanied by the grunting of a quantity of pigs brought for sale to the fair. He compared it to the "chorus of frogs" in the satiric drama of Aristophanes'.¹⁴ This is probably ironic, either on Mary's or Percy's part or both. But it does also indicate the social resonance of 'comedy'. 'Riotously' hangs nicely between comedy and rebellion. In the Shelleys' childhood, some protests against the government explicitly took the form of food riots.

The opening stage direction depicts a grisly temple of Famine: '*built of thigh-bones and death's heads, and tiled with scalps*' (I, I, opening stage direction); '*The statue of the Goddess [of famine], a skeleton clothed in parti-coloured rags, seated upon a heap of skulls and loaves intermingled [and attended by 'A number of exceedingly fat Priests in black garments arrayed on each side, with marrow-bones and cleavers in their hands']*' (II, ii, opening stage direction). This is not subtle. Indeed, Shelley's figurative subtlety elsewhere – his progressive poetics of interpenetrating and ethereal forms – is in inverse proportion to this figuration. How may we account for this? One explanation is that Shelley is overcompensating

10 Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 86. See Ch. 5 of Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste* for my discussion of Shelley's imagery of carnage.

11 Webb, *Violet in the Crucible*, p. 201.

12 *OSA*: 390.

13 *OSA*: 390.

14 *OSA*: 410.

for his class position. The rhetoric means to engage the taste not so much of the working class, but of the guilty upper classes. Crude figuration is accompanied by Aristophanic sophistication, making the play inaccessible to the masses. But the crudity and obscenity of the play – its proximity to the ‘low’ in one sense – is also in direct proportion to the distance required from which to enjoy it, like a political cartoon in an up-market newspaper.

We are dealing here with an upper-class refinement of taste, a form of ‘sophistication’ that delights in risking the consumption of disgusting things. Ironically, *pace* Bakhtin, radical working-class lyrics in the Romantic period can have more in common with Shelley’s high rather than his low style.¹⁵ *Swellfoot* is well within British Romantic traditions of pantomime, not only for its burlesque, but also for its politicization of the form, specifically its use of animals to explore class relations. The detailed stage directions demonstrate Shelley’s interest in having the play performed, if only in the imaginations of his readers. But such detailed and didactic dioramas were a feature of contemporary pantomime. The mentalist *Prometheus Unbound* has obstructed our understanding of Shelley’s interest in staging plays, despite *The Cenci*. Indeed mentalism has impeded our understanding of *Prometheus Unbound* itself: the fourth act is a revision of the patently physical forms of the masque and ballet.¹⁶

Mary Shelley’s comment that *Swellfoot* ‘is a mere plaything of the imagination’ is surely a decoy to distract hostile readers.¹⁷ This is an issue of more general importance in studies of Romantic-period drama. Philip Martin demonstrated how Byron was keen to reproduce historical tableaux and gestures in his dramas; even *Manfred* displays an interest in contemporary modes of “‘physical” acting’.¹⁸ *Swellfoot* plays with Shakespeare. Echoing *Hamlet*, Purganax the Wizard declares: ‘There’s something rotten in us’ (I, i, 99); later he shouts at the informer Rat, ‘Aroint ye!’, mimicking *Macbeth* (I, i, 269). Echoes of lower forms are also evident. The pantomime *Who Kill’d the Dog; or, Harlequin’s Triumph* (1822) ‘dramatizes some of the resentment at the squires and their hunting friends’.¹⁹ It concerns the intervention of the allegorical figure of Justice (shades of Liberty in *Swellfoot*’s conclusion) in the case of Rinaldo, who has been wrongly accused of killing the squire’s favourite dog. *Swellfoot* fits the pantomimic subgenre of ‘retributive comedy’, in which ‘Grave and stately persons are knocked into undignified positions’.²⁰ *Harlequin and Asmodeus* depicted the military in their red coats as lobsters.²¹

15 See Michael Scrivener, *Poetry and Reform: Periodical Verse from the English Democratic Press, 1792–1824*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992.

16 See Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley’s Italian Experience*. New York: St Martin’s Press, 1991, pp. 113–14.

17 Mary Shelley, note on *Swellfoot*, in *OSA*: 410.

18 Philip W. Martin, *Byron: A Poet before His Public*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, Chapter 6 (pp. 135–47), p. 111.

19 David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806–1836*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 204.

20 Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element, Harlequin*, p. 56.

21 Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element, Harlequin*, p. 279.

The subtlety of *Swellfoot* is that it maps humanity onto animality and yet distinguishes those categories. The presence of pigs *and* humans in the cast transcends simple prosopopoeia to achieve a necessarily political relationship between two *classes* of creature. This presence of farm animals bred for food along with humans opens up at least three levels of interpretation. First, animals are represented voicing the opinions of men: prosopopoeia adds an element of degradation to grotesque comedy. Greek satyr plays were supposed to have rowdy animal choruses, and Aristophanic comedy certainly does, for instance, in *The Frogs*; though we should recall Webb's salutary remark that 'It was against Shelley's nature to be funny as Aristophanes (or Byron) was funny', given his remarks in 'A Defence of Poetry' on obscenity and laughter as symptoms of political regression.²² Secondly, the notion of men actually *becoming* animals is itself significant. It establishes possibilities of expressing social relationships biologically, and conversely, of politicizing the natural world. Thirdly, men are represented mangling and butchering animals – and in the final comic reversal, animals hunt down men. This third interpretative level shows how Shelley's thinking about consumption continued since his earlier life as a practising vegetarian and writer of vegetarian prose and poetry, providing a trough of richly inconsistent imagery. Society is modelled as a farm; but the monopolizing tendencies of the rich owners extend to the power they wield over animals. A critique of private property is thus mapped onto an ethical argument about the domination of the natural world.

Swellfoot is a crude Shelleyan villain, swaggering, incontinent and corpulent. Through his worship of the goddess Famine, his 'nether promontories / Lie satisfied with layers of fat' (I, i, 5). Dramatic diction associated with him suggests the description of the Devil's suppers in 'Peter Bell the Third' (IV, 76–110) or the figure of obesity in *The Devil's Walk* (1812),²³ and the viscerality of *Similes for Two Political Characters* (1819). Swellfoot praises

Kings and laurelled Emperors,
Radical-butchers, Paper-money-millers,
Bishops and deacons, and the entire army
Of those fat martyrs to the persecution
Of stifling turtle-soup, and brandy-devils. (ll. 11–15)

The mention of 'Radical-butchers' brings to mind Charles Pigott (no pun intended), whose *Political Dictionary* defined 'Butchery': 'a regiment of English militia, at the command of their officers, firing on their countrymen, the unarmed inhabitants of Bristol, when a number of men, women, and children were killed.'²⁴ This is a familiar republican and radical dietary register of disgusting excess. To topple the tyrant, must radicals employ revolutionary revenge or a softer mode of reform, as the Oracle

²² Webb, *Violet in the Crucible*, p. 137.

²³ Printed as a broadside in Dublin, this poem coincides with Shelley's declared adoption of the natural diet.

²⁴ Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words. Illustrated and Exemplified in the Lives, Morals, Character and Conduct of the Following Most Illustrious Personages, among Many Others* London, 1795, p. 8.

(II, i, 153) asks them to do? To represent tyranny in the body of Swellfoot evokes the former option –let’s get physical. Given the context of a satyr-play, a physical overthrow would be funnier than Swellfoot going on a diet. Indeed, *Swellfoot* allows Shelley to play more dangerously than normal with the discourses of diet, which he often used instead to promote non-violent social change.

The Chorus of Swine is the protagonist of *Swellfoot*. If Shelley is on the one hand interpreting Dionysian and Apollonian art prior to Nietzsche, as one critic has suggested,²⁵ then the Swine and Swellfoot show him interested on the other hand in the necessary violence implicit in the imposition of Apollonian order on a disruptive Dionysian element. But the political nature of this ‘necessary violence’ means that this is not as easy as saying that Nature’s chaos overrides culture’s order. Shelley suggests that the body is constructed, produced and consumed in society. The Pigs are created for meat *within* the social structure. Shelley may well have presented the Swine as a grotesque multitude, following Burke (and more specifically as the labouring classes whose diet is potatoes and oatmeal, I, i, 27–8).²⁶ Nevertheless, although they suggest sheer corporeality, their triumph is not one of mere life, but is a political rout. Shelley does not oppose Burke by dignifying the working class; in fact he uses Burke’s own terms to defeat him in a kind of poetic judo.

The Pigs are disgusting, and themselves make Aristophanic animal noises that in turn mimic human disgust: ‘Ugh! ugh! ugh!’ (I, i, 23). This is a topsy-turvy carnival of mimicry – perhaps doubly topsy-turvy, since animals are imitating humans imitating animals. They talk frankly not only of their own hunger and thirst but also of being made into sausages. They are not simply talking animals; they are talking food. The disgusting protagonist begs the question, like some other staples of the Romantic interrogation of the poetics and politics of sympathy. The Ancient Mariner’s water snakes or Frankenstein’s creature implicitly present the same conundrum: can we have sympathy or ‘fellow feeling’ for such abject beings, ‘bare life’ indeed (in Giorgio Agamben’s phrase), beings whom it would seem a crime to experience aesthetically? This question is urgent: it is precisely these creatures for whom fellow feeling is imperative. It was in Italy, where Shelley wrote *Swellfoot*, that his feelings about beings ‘under’ him and Mary were tested, in the shape of his distaste for the Italians. In particular, on his first arrival, his feelings of disgust were bound up with his judgment of their ‘servility’ – a reaction to the very underclass that Shelley thought held the key to revolution.

To raise this question is to contemplate the viability of pantomime itself. *Swellfoot* provokes the bourgeois reaction that it is not in good taste, and lack of interest in the play might reflect on the bourgeois dominance over literary criticism since Victorian times. *Swellfoot* appears to violate the twin injunctions against both coming *too close* to one’s object (disgust), and remaining *too far* from it (excessive artifice), and this may explain the play’s unfair neglect. I say ‘twin’ because in the bourgeois view, disgust and distrust are intimately related. Avant-garde art (is *Swellfoot* an instance

25 See Ross Woodman, ‘Nietzsche, Blake, Keats and Shelley: The Making of a Metaphorical Body’. *Studies in Romanticism* 29.1 (spring 1990), pp. 115–49.

26 See R. Bartel, ‘Shelley and Burke’s Swinish Multitude’. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 18 (1969), pp. 4–9.

of it?) has constantly tried to outpace the norms of appropriate aesthetic distance towards the object, which is also the appropriate distance towards different classes. The bourgeoisie distrusts the aristocracy (are they just faking it?) and is disgusted by the workers (the 'great unwashed'). This outpacing happens in two directions at once, either over- or under-reaching the aesthetic bulls-eye.

Post-modern culture, with its questioning of what counts as appropriate distance from the object of enjoyment, may be more kind to Shelley's play than previous aesthetic norms. Pastiche, the aesthetic form of postmodernism, can surprisingly evoke sympathetic identification, precisely *because* we in the audience are wondering whether there is anything 'behind' the pastiche or not; precisely because of this uncertainty, a sort of fetishistic or melancholy version of sympathy reaches out to the disgusting/artificial object. This is the logic behind recent popular films, not only musical/pastiche works such as *Moulin Rouge*, but also those works in which pastiche is as it were incarnated in a person, such as *Blade Runner* or *AI*.²⁷ Since the latter are both in different ways versions of *Frankenstein*, we should explore further the possibility that this strange new form of ethical identification is internal to the Shelleys' thinking about art forms.

In Shelley's hands, prosopopoeia becomes nothing less than a critique of normative ways of discriminating between appropriate objects of sympathy and enjoyment, and between those very categories of sympathy and enjoyment. William Blake observed that sympathy ironically involves a form of distancing: 'Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor' ('The Human Abstract', ll. 1–2).²⁸ This distancing is part of the British imperial ideological view, emerging in the Romantic period to become fully fledged during the nineteenth century, for example in the laconic cool of William Henry Paget, the general in Wellington's army who remarked casually 'Good God, Sir, I have lost my left leg.' 'Good God, Sir, so you have', Wellington replied, anticipating Monty Python.²⁹ Blake would rather identify with a fly in *Songs of Experience* than assume this (always political) distance, and Shelley concurs. Like the Ancient Mariner blessing the water snakes, the audience of *Swellfoot* is compelled towards a more radical act of appreciating the pigs than a charitable or philanthropic one; something more along the lines of jumping into the trough with them. Shelley's porcine poetics leaps beyond the caricatures of Orwell and Pink Floyd. Shelley demonstrates a more fundamental and in a sense philosophical engagement with the pigs themselves as suffering sentient beings.

Food cannot help reminding Shelley, with his keen interest in diet and especially vegetarianism, of the physical properties of language, that other stuff that the mouth processes. The intense food imagery in *Swellfoot* evokes the density and affective power of language. In Act 1, scene 1, for example, Dakry the Wizard talks about haranguing the Swine with abstracts: 'delicacy, mercy, judgement, law, / Morals,

27 I am very grateful to Alan Weinberg for a discussion of this.

28 William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. D.V. Erdman. New York: Doubleday, 1965; rev. 1988.

29 Timothy Morton, 'Let Them Eat Romanticism: Materialism, Ideology and Diet Studies', in *Eating Romanticism: Cultures of Taste / Theories of Appetite*, Timothy Morton (ed.). New York: Palgrave, 2004, pp. 257–76.

and precedents, and purity ...' (I, i, 328–9). He describes the effects of rhetorical pathos using the visceral imagery of 'blood and brains'. The gross literalization of his eloquence forces even himself to cry:

and then I wept,
 With the pathos of my own eloquence,
 And every tear turned to a mill-stone, which
 Brained many a gaping Pig, and there was made
 A slough of blood and brains upon the place,
 Greased with the pounded bacon; round and round
 The millstones rolled, ploughing the pavement up,
 And hurling sucking-pigs into the air,
 With dust and stones. (ll. 336–44)

The figural and referential connections with the more familiar 'The Mask of Anarchy' are striking.

What an appropriate depiction of a society in which meaning has been reduced to mere brutal physicality! In the Romantic period, an aesthetics of bodily affect could be used to drum up support for the political order: Burke's *Reflections* and many of Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* provide suitable examples. In Shelley's image of the millstones 'ploughing the pavement up', the visceral body is pinned under the Juggernaut of industrial tyranny. Dakry's class has indeed generated something revolutionary: 'liberation' (from feudalism) is figured as the release of body fluids, a flood of offal and gristle and blood. Dakry's pathos, shorthand for official ideological explanations of social misery, is read brutally as *itself* immiserating even as it soothes. But the image is literally one of food production, of turning live pigs into dead bacon. In a far more sophisticated way than *Queen Mab*'s use of Juggernaut and machine imagery (derived from Southey, whom he once admired greatly), Shelley articulates the worker's body as the *function*, the subject *and* the object, of the capitalist machine (the Wizard is literally living off its products). Here Shelley strikingly anticipates his image of the Juggernaut in 'The Triumph of Life', and Marx's Juggernaut in *Capital*.³⁰ Shelley's upside-down image turns the daily grind of this reality into the direct illocutionary effect of the Wizard's words, surely a cartoon image of the power of ideology.

Eating is appropriating material reality, but that is not the limit of *Swellfoot*'s representation of food. As well as being voracious eaters, the powerful are shown as more perversely dealing in toxic substances. Mammon's 'GREEN BAG' is full of the poison and vomit of the tyrant's functionaries, the gadfly and the rat (I, i, 346–60). The Green Bag is an allusion to the collection of incriminating evidence by the secret services in contemporary England and to political scandals surrounding Queen Caroline's landing in England. Lord Castlereagh, satirized in 'The Mask of Anarchy', had demanded 'in the King's name that an inquiry should be instituted into [Caroline's] conduct'.³¹ The Green Bag, which in actual life is used by lawyers

³⁰ Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan. London and New York: Longman, 1977, pp. 482–3.

³¹ Mary Shelley's note to *Swellfoot*, in Shelley, *Poetical Works*, p. 410.

for documents, becomes a stomach-like sac, filled with nauseating contents. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Demogorgon speaks of the nonconceptual quality of reality glimpsed in the revolutionary moment of change: 'If the abyss / Could vomit forth its secrets' (II, iv, 114–15). In *Swellfoot* we glimpse an obscene burlesque literalization of this potent image of liberation emerging from a place beyond concept, from a bag that is a kind of externalized stomach (it is literally made from the poison sac of a 'Green spider huge' [I, i, 347]).

We are reminded of the director Syberberg's presentation of Amfortas' wound in his film version of *Parsifal*, a pulsating, bleeding vagina-like object resting on a cushion. The externalized stomach of *Swellfoot* functions similarly as an obscene, palpable and (most significantly) inconsistent kernel of ideology ('truth'). It is no accident that this stomach is the means to liberation at the close of the play. Shelley is allegorizing the action of ideological critique. Instead of demonstrating the falsity and artificiality of the language of power, revolutionary critique could simply grasp its meaningless inconsistent, 'idiotic' incarnation. Consider for instance the appropriation of the word 'queer', which effectively undermines homophobic ideology by removing its fantasy support, pulling the rug out from under its feet rather than engaging it in a rational argument. The play takes the pigginess out of 'pigs' by radically acting out this piggy quality.

There is something in the symbol of the Green Bag that 'goes beyond' symbolization: it is a grotesque Coleridgean Romantic symbol, a blob of reality that is 'more real' than its symbolic contents. The pantomimic burlesque of *Swellfoot* thereby conveys a truth about effective political action (including effective political art). The pantomime suggests that we must engage with the material embodiments of ideology, its fantasy objects, and that by grasping them with enjoyment in all their meaningless excess (as does Iona – literally, when she seizes the Green Bag), rather than rejecting them squeamishly, we can undermine the fixating power of the tyrannical language that frames them and makes them significant. This is a further level of the artistic logic Shelley pursues in compelling us to identify with the pigs, with the disgusting object of reactionary ideology. Shelley's politics, gauged by his response to disgust in this play, are not just a matter of opposing the powers that be, but of subverting them altogether. By compelling us to identify with the pigs *qua* potential meat, as abject swine who make grunting noises, he neutralizes the ideology that depends upon a (disgusted) distance for it to remain effective.

The corporealization of truth via the Green Bag suggests comparisons with earlier non-democratic representations. Compare *The Cenci*, where torture is named as a tyrannical means towards truth.³² In *The Cenci* Beatrice rails against her torturers in the language of animal rights:

Tortures! Turn
The rack henceforth into a spinning-wheel!
Torture your dog, that he may tell when last
He lapped the blood his master shed ... (V, iii, 61–4)³³

³² See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977, pp. 60–61.

³³ *SPP*: 196.

The aristocrats fabricate the idea that the Green Bag is like a medieval ordeal: its contents are 'the true test of guilt or innocence' (I, i, 393) and will 'transform' the person to deformity (l. 394) or cause him or her to be 'transfigured / into an angel' (l. 396). That the England imagined in *Swellfoot* is still somewhat medieval is, for Shelley, a sign of its corruption and oppression. For the Chorus of Priests who open the final scene, Famine is the 'Goddess of fasts and feasts, starving and cramming!' (II, ii, 6), the dietary cycle of a medieval peasant. The division of labour, however, is also starkly modern: 'Those who consume these fruits through thee grow fat, / Those who produce these fruits through thee grow lean' (II, 11–12). The painful symmetry of Shelley's parallelism limns the growing discrepancies between rich and poor associated with contemporary life. Animal – or is it human? – 'flesh' is cynically tucked away amongst the list of these 'fruits': 'Corn, wool, linen, flesh, and roots' (l. 10).

Mimesis itself becomes a rhetorical threat through the language about food. When one of the Swine questions the greenness of the Green Bag (II, i, 74–6), suspecting its contents to be poisonous, Purganax replies with a macabre version of the 'syllogism in grass', derived from Isaiah, Shelley's favourite prophet:³⁴

Honourable swine,
In piggish souls can prepossessions reign?
Allow me to remind you, grass is green —
All flesh is grass; — no bacon is but flesh —
Ye are but bacon. (II, 76–80)

The passage in Isaiah 40 refers to human impermanence relative to the word of God. But here words themselves are at stake. Purganax has twisted Isaiah one step further, in a violent *crasis* that mixes the opposites of grass and flesh in ways the maxim did not expect. The verbs 'to be' in the sentence perform ever-more extravagantly metaphorical, *and* ever-more violent, identifications. There are implications for ecological understanding in the original syllogism.³⁵ Flesh and grass intermingle in a suppressed metonymy that reduces the Pigs to farm animals foraging on grass, and further, reducing animals to the grass they eat; objects whose consciousness, if any, matters nothing to their owners and consumers. The comic clumsiness of the *crasis* thumps reason over the head as literality and metaphor exchange places. These dubious metaphorical substitutions are repeated later when, after praising Famine, Laotonos declares that 'Claret, somehow, / Puts me in mind of blood, and blood of claret!' (II, ii, 35–6). The suggestiveness of figurative language is articulated as an intoxicated ecstasy of violence; compare the comic 'Order! order! be not rash!' (II, i, 117). The figurativeness of language itself, in other words, has become an aspect of the oppressive social conditions.

Mammon, the Arch-Priest of Famine, sees political control as all very easy: just 'decimate some regiments' (I, i, 106), forge some 'coin paper' (l. 107); his daughter

34 Gregory Bateson, 'Men are Grass: Metaphor and the World of Mental Process', in *Gaia: A Way of Knowing; Political Implications of the New Biology*, W.I. Thompson (ed.). Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1987, pp. 44–5.

35 Bateson, 'Men are Grass', pp. 45–6.

is called 'Banknotina' (I, i, 203). Another heavy-handed joke resounds: money is the arch-priest. As in many places in Shelley's oeuvre, there appears a concurrence of blood and gold, which strenuously invokes the idea of a drastic reduction in living potential. It is an image of human subjects reduced to trickles of objectified stuff, as a result of greed and rage. It is all a question of figures in the numerical sense as well as in the rhetorical, and of treating bodies as figures.

Just as the human bodies are reduced to abstraction, so gold will 'purge himself, / In emulation of [paper money's] vestal whiteness' (ll. 109–10). The aristocrats are by implication sucking the blood and excrement out of John Bull like the animals they use to spy on Iona, the Gadfly, the Leech and the Rat. *Swellfoot* details the celibate, 'purged' body of paper coin, and the excessive body of capital (a cynical use of 'vestal whiteness'), in contrast with the 'bilious face' of gold. Drunkards (I, i, 113) are depicted in control of an oppressively puritanical order. Again, this anticipates *Capital*, in which a social structure reduced to horrifically crass utility is dominated by a class of ascetics who abstain from cashing in their chips.³⁶ A capitalist system simply substitutes one form of control for another: the meaningless and hypocritical purity of 'virgin' capital for the lewd (and now devalued, purged) 'face' of gold (the face of the sovereign or despot). Aristocratic power is decoded as capital's full body: the 'new aristocracy' of which the brief essay on the Game Laws, *A Vindication of Natural Diet* and 'A Philosophical View of Reform' speak.³⁷

The Swine demand better conditions from Swellfoot:

Now if your Majesty would have our bristles
 To bind your mortar with, or fill our colons
 With rich blood, or make brawn out of our gristles,
 In policy – ask else your royal Solons –
 You ought to give us hog-wash and clean straw,
 And sties well thatched; besides, it is the law! (ll. 64–9)

This is indeed an image of factory farming, both literally and metaphorically. In response Swellfoot calls Moses the sow-gelder and Zephaniah the pig-butcher. The 'brute' to be killed by Zephaniah is 'overfed' (l. 84). Zephaniah complains that the pig is sick (ll. 86–9): 'We shall find five pints of hydatids [cysts] in's liver' (l. 87). Swellfoot insists that the pig can be used 'instead of riot money' (l. 90) when the troops will 'relish carrion' (l. 93) 'after a day / Of butchering' (ll. 92–3): they will eat pigs as payment for slaughtering them. This excessive circulation of meat even finds a place for excrements: the pigs are worth 'skin and bones, and some few hairs for mortar' (l. 39).

The bodily plenitude evoked by the farmyard/slaughterhouse figure raises some political problems at the end of the play. The overthrow of Swellfoot must be farcically embodied by Iona's throwing of the Bag over his head. Iona has just been praying for reform rather than civil war:

36 Karl Marx, *Capital*, tr. Ben Fowkes. 3 vols. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, 1990, vol. 1, pp 298–9.

37 See *Prose I*: 280–81, 86 and *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, eds Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford World Classics), 2005, pp. 652–3.

The earth did never mean her foizon
 For those who crown life's cup with poison
 Of fanatic rage and meaningless revenge. (II, ii, 93–5)

But civil war is practically what happens, in a gleefully-enacted carnival: the 'holiday' atmosphere is explicit (l. 125). Language breaks the bounds of Shelley's own form of abstemious politics: his vegetarian-reformist quietism. It is as if the play's figurative language were linked to a certain triumphalism at odds with a reformist, 'bloodless' message. The contents of the bag turn Swellfoot and the court into '*a number of filthy and ugly animals*' (II, ii, stage direction). These animals are then hunted down by a Pig whose body has transmogrified back into John Bull, on whose back rides the spurred Iona:

Hoa! hoa! tallyho! tallyho! ho! ho!
 Come, let us hunt these ugly badgers down,
 These stinking foxes, these devouring otters,
 These hares, these wolves, these anything but men.
 Hey, for a whipper-in! my loyal pigs,
 Now let your noses be as keen as beagles',
 Your steps as swift as greyhounds', and your cries
 More dulcet and symphonious than the bells
 Of village-towers, on sunshine holiday;
 Wake all the dewy woods with jangling music.
 Give them no law (are they not beasts of blood?)
 But such as they gave you. (II. 117–28)

The scheme derives from the medieval *topos* of the *monde renversé*, in which animals are depicted hunting men.³⁸ It is ideology *renversé* for Shelley himself, the vegetarian who elsewhere had written against game sports, 'a barbarous and bloody sport, from which every enlightened and amiable mind shrinks in abhorrence and disgust'.³⁹ Indeed, Shelley's essay on the Game Laws was an attack both on animal cruelty and perverse social hierarchy, under the sign of *nature*: both cruelty and the hierarchy with which it is intertwined are seen as unnatural. In *Swellfoot* the Chorus of Swine chide the tyrant with the discourse of *nature*:

I have heard your Laureate sing,
 That pity was a royal thing;
 Under your mighty ancestors, we Pigs
 Were bless'd as nightingales on myrtle sprigs,
 Or grasshoppers that live on noonday dew,
 And sung, old annals tell, as sweetly too;
 But now our sties are fallen in, we catch
 The murrain and the mange, the scab and itch;
 Sometimes your royal dogs tear down our thatch. (I, i, 36–45)

38 See Jehan de Grise, *The Romance of Alexander*, Bodleian MS 264, 81v.

39 *Prose I*: 280.

This Shelleyan language pits 'natural' health against 'unnatural' disease and degradation, 'natural' innocence against 'unnatural' power. Like a good social ecologist, Shelley sees disease and famine as 'unnatural' in the sense that they have been created or induced by what for him is a perverse form of society. Elsewhere, the tyrant Swellfoot is associated with Orientalist images of despotic excess, when Mammon offers him 'A simple kickshaw by your Persian cook' – contemptuous English slang for the French *quelque-chose*, a French delicacy, and also of the household of the Regent (soon George IV), with its notorious Orientalist tastes. Kickshaws, we should note, are never simple in Shelley's sense, and Mammon's language is designed to turn the stomach against injustice:

A simple kickshaw by your Persian cook,
Such as is served at the great King's second table.
The price and pains which its ingredients cost
Might have maintained some dozen families
A winter or two – not more – so plain a dish
Could scarcely disagree. (II, ii, 23–8)

In Shelley's age, the Regent was often portrayed as suffering from gout, which was associated with high rank, luxurious consumption, and masculinity. George Cheyne, the early eighteenth-century doctor whose work Shelley consulted, suggested that less meat, more milk, less food in general, and abstinence from liquor could assuage the gout. Metaphorically gout was a disease of disjuncting, excess and swelling – hence 'Swellfoot'.⁴⁰

The Swine resort to a feudal form of misrule and carnival in order to defeat aristocracy. The final chorus of *Iona* and the Swine is a muddier version of the psychedelics of *Prometheus Unbound* IV, with its exhilarating dance of reforming desire. Here desire becomes a hunting cry: 'Tallyho! tallyho!' (II, ii, 129). In a different register, the same formal components yield strangely similar messages: we are not riding through villages and towns but through bogs and fens, just as the characters in *Prometheus Unbound* ride into an uncharted, non-cultured nature (II. 131–40). The tyrants are chased off England's farm like vermin, and disfiguration is undone. Meaningful life is possible again, though what form this might take remains unclear. In Shelley's reappropriation, the people are the future aristocrats who protect all humans and sentient creatures from (capitalist) predators. Shelley is taking a political risk by using figurative language about nature and the body. His millennial, carnivalesque poetry attempts to revise the conservatism implicit in the figure of the world turned upside down, the *adynaton* (Greek, 'impossible').⁴¹ Instead of being a

40 Roy Porter and G.S. Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 5, 16, 82, 211–47, 238.

41 See Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 72, 79, for a discussion of the socially sustaining role of medieval license. For a discussion of the inherent conservatism of *adynaton*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard R. Trask. New York: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 94–8.

comment on the immaturity of contemporary times, the *adynaton* becomes Utopian. The revision of Isaiah's ecotopian language in *Queen Mab* VIII is an early example of Shelley's experiments with the world turned upside down. But the image of a lion lying down with a lamb, imagined in that early work, is less provocative than *Swellfoot*'s one of a hunted creature becoming the hunter.

How are we to account for this? The pacifist elegist evidently has another side. We should not be surprised. Quietism and riot are two sides of the same coin, both possibilities for the Shelleyan 'beautiful soul', to use Hegel's terminology.⁴² The beautiful soul's options for political action are drastically attenuated by the distance towards the social object that 'beautiful soul syndrome' implies. Forever tapping on the window of this distance, the only two choices are to sit quietly or to smash it. Shelley's vegetarianism sometimes yields unexpectedly violent images of cannibalism and slaughter, not simply on the sharp end of Shelley's attacks, but from his own standpoint.⁴³ Arrival in the ecotopian future in *Queen Mab* is figured as the ripping of a shroud of flesh, the vomiting of 'half-devoured babes' (VIII, 5), or as the slashing of roots by an axe, recycling Thomas Paine's use of St Matthew's gospel.⁴⁴ In 'A Philosophical View of Reform', Shelley exhorts 'the oppressors' to 'disgorge some morsels of their undigested prey'.⁴⁵

Beautiful soul syndrome is unexpectedly a feature of a thoroughly developing consumer society. Scholarship has now more fully accounted for the emergence of consumer society in the eighteenth century. By the Romantic period, this society had become self-reflexive. 'The consumer' was born, both as an abstract economic category and a concrete social role. Consider the Shelleyan figure of Mr Forester in Peacock's novel, *Melincourt*. Indeed the asymmetry between the abstract and concrete manifestations is worth remarking upon, for the general disconnection between social subjectivity and objective structure is what gives consumerism both its feeling of power and its impotence. Once it has become self-aware, consumerism produces possibilities for violent or rigorous rejection, for boycotting, starving – even anorexia as a political act. In many ways this is what Romantic vegetarianism is. So we may indeed consider this perhaps surprising play as a symptom of consumerism. Political action is figured as vomiting, the revenge of food against its eater. At the end of *Swellfoot*, the food rises up against its consumer: the abysm of England literally vomits forth its secrets (continuing the parallel with *Prometheus*). The licentious moment of overthrow must at some point be regulated, however, and set to work. The no-spaces of pollution, the bogs through which the pigs travel, the decoded flow of poison which literally decodes the tyrants, issuing from the Green Bag, are brought into play. The secret evidence contained in the Green Bag is an occult knowledge of society which could shake it to its foundations, but only when released upon the right people. The happy monastic asceticism of Shelley's millennium (imagined for

42 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, analysis and foreword by J.N. Findlay. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 383–409.

43 Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste*, pp. 85, 113.

44 *SPP*: 60. See Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 5.

45 Leader and O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, p. 672.

instance in his various uses of Isaiah's ecotopian imagery, described above) is not yet in place. Revolution is coded as a consumerist act of refusal.

Shelley's grotesquely comic treatment of the body and food in 'On the Devil, and Devils' (written sometime between late 1819 and mid 1820, almost exactly contemporary with our drama) bears resemblances to *Swellfoot*, as the following little known passage demonstrates:

What became of the Devils after the death of the pigs [in the Gadarene Swine episode of the gospels], whether they past into the fish [on hurling themselves over the cliff], and then thence by digestion through the stomach, into the brain of the Gadarean Ichthyophagists [fish-eaters]; ... I should be curious to know whether any half starved Jew picked up these pigs, and sold them at the market of Gadara, and what effect the bacon of a demoniac pig, who had killed himself, produced upon the consumers ... If I were a pigherd I would make any excuse rather than that [to jump off a cliff], to a master renowned for subtlety of penetration, and extent and variety of experience.—

Among the numerous theories concerning the condition of Devils, some have resorted to the Pythagorean hypothesis, but in such a manner as to pervert that hypothesis, from [a] motive of humanity, into an excuse for cruel tyranny. They suppose that the bodies of animals, and especially domestic animals, are animated by devils, and that the tyranny exercised over these unfortunate beings by man is an unconscious piece of retaliation over the beings who betrayed them into a state of reprobation — on this theory Lord Erskine's Act might have been entitled, 'An Act for the better protection of Devils'

— How devils inhabit the bodies of men is not explained.⁴⁶

In 1809 Thomas Lord Erskine (1750–1823) had proposed the first Parliamentary Bill against cruelty to animals. George Nicholson (1760–1825), publisher of the vegetarian recipe book, *On Food*, produced an edition of the speech. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals formed in 1824. Shelley was familiar with Erskine's work. Erskine, who had a dog whom he introduced at consultations (complete with wig), a goose and two leeches whom he named Cline and Home after celebrated surgeons, published the eccentric *An Appeal in Favour of the Agricultural Services of Rooks* (1807). In *The Farmer's Vision* (1818) he wrote 'Instant this solemn oath I took / No hand shall rise against a rook.'⁴⁷ The evidence in the quotation suggests that Shelley had formed a nuanced critical opinion of Erskine. The 'Pythagorean hypothesis' is the theory of metempsychosis, and those who have 'applied' it would include, in a grotesque irony, anyone who exercises cruelty to animals.

Shelley conveys a sophisticated notion of the projection of hatred onto animals, the practice we still call scapegoating. He understands Lord Erskine's speech to be about power-relationships between them and humans. The comic discussion about eating 'possessed' bacon shows Shelley's medical interest in meat as poison. But

46 Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 9, pp. 75–7 (*BSM XIV*: 83–5). I have used 'and' for ampersands, and made minor grammatical and typological corrections, and have omitted Shelley's deletions.

47 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800*. London: Allen Lane, 1983; repr. Penguin, 1984, p. 279.

there is also a haunting ethical dimension to the passage. How literally should we take the notion that meat contains the souls of humans? Shelley often proclaimed himself to be the devil. In metaphorically sliding from animals to devils, is he not subtly suggesting that animals have consciousness, subjectivity, a soul or mind that is not entirely determined by their body? His love of Milton's Satan, the earliest prototype of Romantic interiority who himself is hell, suggests that he would have been keenly aware of the possibility that animality and having a soul (an *anima*) were not incompatible.

The passage from 'On the Devil' is from a comically sceptical series of improbable questions about relationships between spirit and matter. God and the Devil have already been lambasted in a grandiose image of cruelty to animals, including producing veal calves, 'whipping pigs to death' (a practice mentioned by Shelley's main vegetarian source, Joseph Ritson),⁴⁸ vivisection and 'cooking'. God and the devil are like 'a troop of idle dirty boys baiting a cat', with 'that very disinterested love of tormenting and annoying which is seldom observed on earth except among old maids, eunuchs & priests'.⁴⁹ Shelley is suggesting (here comically, elsewhere in earnest), that there is a straight line from lobster boiling to Christian state despotism. The passage about the pigs simply pushes the thinking to a grotesque conclusion. The outrageous representation of the 'half starved Jew' parallels *Swellfoot's* representations of the inextricable linkage of greed, hunger and (political) violence such as 'Solomon the court porkman' (I, i, 69). It is difficult to know whether Shelley is being straightforwardly anti-Semitic or rubbing our nose in taboos to take out their sting. Such representations are as problematic as the discourses of the carnivalesque which helped to construct medieval anti-semitism.⁵⁰ Issues of ethnicity are involved in the discourses of diet in the Romantic period. Ludwig Feuerbach's and Brillat-Savarin's idea that 'you are what you eat' became an easy slang for describing the French, or Africans, or Pacific islanders – just as, nowadays, *eating* Chinese and *being* Chinese are too often associated together.

In the final scene of *Swellfoot*, the ghostly allegorical figure of Liberty bisects the grisly action like a knife going through a ham. This is a literalized version of the way in which liberty often appears in Shelley's work, from *The Revolt of Islam* to 'The Mask of Anarchy'. Liberty appears in a virtual image, or in an anamorphic shape that is hard to perceive directly, like the skull in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*. It is a present absence. In Shelley, Liberty's form is neuter, then female. 'It' is 'a graceful figure in a transparent veil', its forehead engraved as if 'in fire' with 'the word LIBERTY'; 'She kneels on the steps of the Altar.' Its/her voice is distorted: 'Its words are almost drowned in the furious grunting of the PIGS, and the business of the trial.'⁵¹

48 See Joseph Ritson, *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food, as a Moral Duty*. London: Richard Phillips, 1802, p. 98.

49 Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 9, p. 61 (BSM XIV: 69).

50 See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986, Ch. 1, 'The Fair, the Pig, Authorship'.

51 *OSA*: 408.

Liberty is a *dialectical image*, in the manner later described by Walter Benjamin. It has a Janus-faced quality: it emerges to address the Goddess of Famine herself, in a strange-seeming alliance; yet this alliance, a 'hollow truce' (II, ii, 102), will nevertheless bring liberation. For it is famine itself that will 'wake the multitude' to political action, as Shelley knew (l. 90). I am thus not inclined to concur with Gladden's pessimistic reading of Iona's triumph. *Swellfoot the Tyrant* could hardly be more vigorous and sophisticated at once. In conclusion, *Swellfoot the Tyrant* effectively dramatizes the action of ideological critique. Critique need not be thought of as belonging exclusively to action or to thought. Even a cursory glimpse at Shelley's dramatic work here and in *Prometheus Unbound*, which also concerns revolutionary action, shows that he was unable to make a distinction between theory and practice so wide that reflection and hesitation were seen as inane cloud-castle building, and 'pure' action as solidly material and absolutely, guilt-inducingly vital. Nor did Shelley come to the same conclusion in reverse, making distinctions between reflection as ethereal transcendence, and action as a rather grimy thing that other less enlightened people do. If *Prometheus Unbound* is about how one progresses from historical moment to historical moment, then so is *Swellfoot*; though they seem quite different, they are both in fact about praxis, that strange blend of thinking and doing, thinking-as-doing, and doing-as-thinking. By presenting the audience with pigs and the Green Bag, Shelley makes clear the psychological dimension of revolutionary acts, the intertwining of thinking and doing, the ways in which things we see 'over there' (on a stage, for instance) give body to compelling ideas in our heads. In a way nothing could have been more *thoughtful* than this obscene incarnation of the enjoyment-objects of reactionary thinking. In a series of Utopian reversals, Shelley shows us how to use the instruments of power, its fantasy objects, against power itself. The porcine poetics of an Orwell or a Roger Waters turns humans into animals while leaving things just as they are. Shelley suggests far more metamorphic relationships between audience and actors, humans and animals, spirit and matter, oppressors and oppressed.

Chapter 15

Shelley's Late Fragmentary Plays: 'Charles the First' and the 'Unfinished Drama'

Nora Crook*

Between January and April 1822 Shelley began a never-completed tragedy, 'Charles the First' (after hesitating between it and a play about Troilus and Cressida),¹ advised his friend Edward Williams on writing two (abandoned) history plays,² jotted down ideas for a Modern Timon, translated scenes from Goethe's *Faust* and Calderón's *El Mágico Prodigioso*, and started an untitled 'Unfinished Drama'. The heterogeneity of these drama-related activities might suggest no very deep investment in the projects themselves, or a diversion to drama from Shelley's supposed true bent, lyric poetry, due to rivalry with Byron, from whom came an outpouring of dramas during this period. And it is true that Shelley's late dramatic ventures begin with his visit to Byron in Ravenna during August 1821 and peter out after Byron's departure from Pisa in March 1822.³

But the proliferation of projects can be construed in another way: that Shelley was over-stimulated to an excess of creativity, and, like the ass that starved amidst plenty, was temporarily unable to prioritize. Pisa's winter season was lively; the *improvvisatore* Tommaso Sgricci was back in town; Shelley and his enlarged circle were busy with theatre-going, writing, getting up plays and mentoring each other's work.⁴ Although he confessed to his cousin Thomas Medwin that 'the magnetism of "the Byronic energy" was hostile to his powers',⁵ rivalry with Byron was not

* Quotations from Shelley's poetry are mostly taken from Shelley MSS in Oxford, the Bodleian Library, and San Marino, the Huntington Library, as reproduced in *BSM* XII, *BSM* XIX and *MYR* VII. I have corrected my 1991 and 1997 transcriptions of the first two, omitted false starts and uncanceled alternatives and silently added minimal punctuation. Canceled words within a line are shown. The Oxford Standard Authors edition (hereafter designated as *OSA*) is referenced for convenience where its text is not misleading (Shelley, *Poetical Works*, ed. T. Hutchinson [1905], 2nd edn, corr. G.M. Matthews. London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

1 Shelley to Ollier, 11 October 1821, *Letters* II: 356.

2 *Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams ... Their Journals and Letters*, ed. Frederick L. Jones. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951, especially pp. 124–7, 130, 132–5.

3 *Hellas* (completed autumn 1821) may retain traces of a planned drama on the Book of Job. See Mary Shelley, 'Note on Prometheus Unbound', *OSA*: 271.

4 *Gisborne & Williams*, pp. 122–31.

5 Medwin, *The Life of Shelley* (1847), rev. and ed. H. Buxton Forman. London: Oxford University Press, 1913, p. 340. Charles E. Robinson's *Byron and Shelley*. Baltimore, MD:

altogether disabling, as I shall suggest below. Lyric and dramatic aspects of Shelley cannot be divorced, as many critics (among them Matthews, Webb, Cameron, Curran, Behrendt and Cox) have argued. These collectively emphasize the versatile theatricality of Shelley's imagination and remind us that in *The Cenci* he wrote a highly effective stage-play.⁶ The Covent Garden manager had expressed 'great admiration ... of the author's powers, and great hopes of his success with a less repulsive subject' – a back-handed tribute.⁷ Shelley told Trelawny that 'Charles the First' was intended for the stage, adding, 'It is affectation to say we write a play for any other purpose.'⁸

This last was a hit at Byron, who had declared to Murray the previous 23 August, shortly after Shelley's visit: 'I want to make a *regular* English drama – no matter whether for the Stage or not – which is not my object, – but a *mental theatre*.'⁹ Shelley, by contrast, wished to write a stage-play and to be the cause of stage-plays in others. Williams's journal contains many entries between January and March 1822 testifying to Shelley's frank yet encouraging advice, some of it directed towards stage-representation, on his historical tragedies, 'Boniface' and 'Gonzaga, Duke of

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, still offers the most complete account of the poets' rivalry in Pisa; see particularly pp. 144–60, 211–16.

6 See G.M. Matthews, 'Shelley's Lyrics' (1969), rpt. in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977, p. 691; K.N. Cameron, *Shelley, the Golden Years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 394–421; Timothy Webb, 'The Romantic Poet and the Stage' and Stuart Curran, 'Shelleyan Drama', both in *The Romantic Theatre*, Richard Allen Cave (ed.). Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1987, pp. 9–46, 61–77; Stephen C. Behrendt, 'Audiences and the Later Works', in *Shelley and His Audiences* (1989), rpt. in *SPP*: 636–44. Jeffrey N. Cox, 'The Dramatist' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. Timothy Morton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 65–84.

7 T.L. Peacock, *Memoirs of Shelley in The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. H. Wolfe, 2 vols. London: Dent, 1933, vol. 2, p. 352; see also Mary Shelley, 'Note on the Cenci', *OSA*: 337. It is worth noting that among the drama projects that Shelley briefly contemplated was the following: 'on Bonaparte – / A Drama – / That a bad & weak man / is he who rules over bad & we[a] / First scene the field of Battle / [?]in] – one of the first in which / Bonapa[r]te was conqueror / perhaps in Ægypt / two wounded men hear his / voice – they first mistake it / for each others but it is Jacobinism.' This jotting, in HM 2176 fols. *9r–*8v (*MYR* VI: 346–9), is found amidst brief excerpts from Calderón and evidently belongs to late 1819. It suggests that Shelley, anticipating the vacancy that completion of the last act of *Prometheus Unbound* would shortly leave, was already filling it in idea with a political drama, one that, unlike *Prometheus*, would take recent history rather than myth for its groundwork.

8 E.J. Trelawny, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*. London: Moxon, 1858, p. 79 (Chapter ix). Chances of a tragedy on Charles I being staged in 1822 were poor, but probably slightly better than after George Colman the Younger became Examiner of Plays (1824). In 1826 he refused a licence to Mary Russell Mitford's relatively tame *Charles the First*.

9 *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols. London: John Murray, 1973–94, vol. 8, pp. 186–7.

Mantua'.¹⁰ Nor should 'representation' be limited to the public theatre. Shelley's 'Unfinished Drama', according to Mary Shelley, was intended for 'the amusement of ... our intimate society' – that is, for private performance (or dramatized reading with a cast), not the closet.¹¹

Of Shelley's two unfinished late Pisan plays the more considerable fragment is 'Charles the First', which he worked on during January 1822. Reading notes, a plot-sketch for the first two acts, and a very rough first draft for Act I (in four scenes, Scenes 3 and 4 being unfinished) survive.¹² Scene 1 opens in 1634 with the London lawyers' elaborate masque, ostensibly mounted to support the monarchy, but revealing that something is rotten in the state of England. In Scene 2 the King, Queen, Archbishop Laud, the future Earl of Strafford, and other ministers debate whether and how to wage war against the rebellious Scots. In Scene 3 (*OSA*, Scene 4) Hampden, Cromwell and other Parliamentarians prepare to depart for America and freedom, while Henry Vane the Younger attempts to dissuade them. In Scene 4 (*OSA*, Scene 3) Laud sentences puritan dissidents to mutilation, imprisonment and swingeing fines. This takes us up to 1638. Act 2 was to end with Parliament in the ascendant and the execution of Strafford for treason (1641).¹³ Critics such as Cameron and Michael Scrivener have been convinced that Shelley would have completed 'Charles the First' had he lived. This of course cannot be known, but cases where Shelley returned to an interrupted work are not rare.¹⁴ Moreover, though he admitted that he had stalled, he never said that he had finally abandoned the play.¹⁵

Shelley certainly met with external set-backs, such as the refusal of his bookseller, Ollier, to buy the copyright.¹⁶ But 'Charles the First' has additionally acquired the reputation, among certain critics, of being unfinishable.¹⁷ The view persists that Shelley was at war with his own convictions, obliged reluctantly to turn that hateful

10 For instance, 'S[helley] is much pleased with it, but does not think it would perform.' Williams also wrote part of an independent scene involving Jane Queen of Naples (*Gisborne & Williams*, pp. 124, 126, 127).

11 'Closet' drama is here used in the restricted sense of drama intended for reading, not performance, private or public.

12 Reading notes are in Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 7, pp. 255 rev.–237 rev. (*BSM* XVI: 220–39); sketch of Acts I and II in HM 2111, fols *1r–*5r (*MYR* VII: 322–39); draft in Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, pp. 33–51, 52 rev., 55 + stray leaf adds c. 4, fol. 136r–v, 93b rev.–185 rev. (*BSM* XII: 70–109, 114–15, 120–23, 144–327).

13 HM 2111 fol. *4r (*MYR* VII: 326–7).

14 Examples include *Queen Mab*, *Rosalind and Helen*, *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* and *Prometheus Unbound*. See Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 421 and Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 297.

15 Shelley to Hunt, 2 March and to Gisborne, 18 June, *Letters* II: 394, 436.

16 *Letters* II: 377 n.

17 A view promoted or accepted by, notably, R.B. Woodings, 'Shelley's Sources for "Charles the First"'. *Modern Language Review* 64 (1969), pp. 267–75, "'A Devil of a Nut to Crack': Shelley's "Charles the First"'. *Studia Neophilologica* 40 (1968), pp. 216–37, and William Jewett, *Fatal Autonomy: Romantic Drama and the Rhetoric of Agency*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997. Behrendt considers that the historical characters offered Shelley no obvious figure that would elicit audience sympathy.

figure, a king, into a suffering, tragic hero, and unable to find any opposition figure who might draw the theatre-audience's sympathy and admiration away from the monarch. This *idée reçue* stems ultimately from Thomas Medwin's testimony that Shelley detested the Puritans and Cromwell (though acknowledging his energy) and sympathized with Charles, whose execution he could not stomach.¹⁸ This has created a pseudo-choice: either Medwin's evidence is to be discounted as unreliable, or he is to be believed, and the explanation adopted that Shelley came to a standstill through self-conflictedness. This is to overlook Shelley's characteristic rhetorical procedure of setting up two opposing positions, both of which he proceeds to discredit in order to define his unstated, real position, which in this case is republicanism, not simply pro-Parliamentarianism. 'Charles the First' originated in William Godwin's urging Mary Shelley in 1818 to write a history of *republican* Commonwealth heroes, a plan that Shelley heartily approved of.¹⁹

Eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century republican historians such as Catharine Macaulay and Godwin combine pity for Charles, condemnation of him, hatred of bigotry (Puritan and Laudian) and disapproval of Cromwell, without any sense of their incompatibility.²⁰ Cromwell was almost universally regarded by radicals as a hypocritical tyrant who had lost the Commonwealth, while Charles was a traitor deserving to be brought to justice (with the death penalty agreed to be lawful, though whether it should have been imposed was open to debate). Just as the genuine spirit of the French Revolution was represented not by Jacobins (the Marats and the Robespierres) but by the Rolands and the Condorcets,²¹ so true Commonwealthmen were not to be found with Cromwell and Praise-God Barebone, but among republican intellectuals – in particular, Milton, Algernon Sidney (a distant relative of Shelley himself) and Henry Vane the Younger. All turned critical of Cromwell, having at first supported him. None were regicides. Milton defended the right of Parliament to execute the King, but was not one of his judges. Vane and Sidney actually opposed the execution. Vane was, like Charles, beheaded (1662) chiefly because he refused to abjure republicanism after the Restoration.²² Of the three, only

18 Medwin, *Life of Shelley*, p. 342.

19 Shelley to Godwin, 25 July 1818, *Letters* II: 21 and n.

20 See Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I [etc.]*, 8 vols. London: Dilly, 1763–83, vol. 4, p. 417; vol. 6, p. 129. William Godwin, *History of the Commonwealth*, 4 vols. London: Colburn, 1824–28, vol. 3, p. 533; vol. 4, pp. 159–60, 276, 562. Scrivener's apt suggestion (1982) that Shelley would have 'probably ... criticized Cromwell as a Napoleon' (*Radical Shelley*, p. 299) does not appear to have been followed up.

21 For Romantic-period displacement of the French Revolution onto the English Civil War see Kenneth R. Johnston and Joseph Nicholes, 'Transitory Actions, Men Betrayed', in *British Romantic Drama*, Terence Hoagwood and Daniel P. Watkins (eds). London: Associated University Presses, 1998, pp. 114–58. William Frend and Mary Hays represent republican perspectives on Louis XVI, combining pity and condemnation; see *The Idea of Being Free: A Mary Hays Reader*, ed. Gina Luria Walker. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2006, pp. 155, 168.

22 Sidney was later (1683) beheaded (on inadequate evidence of attempting to assassinate Charles II).

Vane, 'young in years, but in sage counsel old', as Milton's sonnet puts it, appears in Shelley's draft or notes, but the appearances are recurrent and significant.

The historical Vane had the potential for stage representation as the true tragic hero and counterpoise to both Charles and Cromwell. He would have made a good antitype of a Brutus, realizing a tyrant-quelling mission but without recourse to assassination. To memorialize and to vindicate Vane, gentleman, activist and martyr, was a riposte to the charge of 'jacobinism' that tarred British republicans from the 1790s onwards. Such vindication challenged both the cult of the martyred monarch and David Hume's Tory-slanted, influential *History of England* (1754–62).²³ This had educated three generations to weep for King Charles, and to regard Vane as a duplicitous extremist.²⁴ Even Hampden and Pym, heroic Parliamentarians, who had died in 1643 during the early part of the war, but who were not republicans, did not serve these purposes so well.²⁵ In the draft Shelley gives Vane a sympathetic individualization and patriotic role based on his apologetic writings and Macaulay's portrait. But he went further: his first thought (as his notes show) was to *begin* the play with the present Scene 3, an invented debate between Hampden and Vane.²⁶ That there is such a debate in 'Charles the First' was long obscured by the virtual erasure of Vane's part from standard texts, a crucial speech having been given to Hampden.²⁷ It is also Shelley's continuation of a long-standing dialogue with Byron.

'Charles the First' is, among other things, an attempt to rebut the message of Byron's *Ode on Venice* (1818), which cries 'The name of Commonwealth is past and gone', and hails America as the last refuge for the free, 'unconquered and sublime / Above the far Atlantic!' (ll. 125, 143–4). The patriot of Europe is urged, 'O'er the deep fly', leaving Venice to sink into the Adriatic and oblivion. Shelley echoes these lines when, in Scene 3, Hampden calls on the 'Fair star whose beam lies on the wide Atlantic' to light the path to America, leaving England to its corruption.²⁸ Byron

23 I argue the case in more detail in 'Calumniated Republicans and the Hero of Shelley's "Charles the First"'. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 56 (2007), pp. 141–58.

24 See Mark Salber Phillips, "'If Mrs. Mure be not sorry for poor King Charles": History, the Novel, and the Sentimental Reader'. *History Workshop Journal* 43 (1997), pp. 111–32; Hume, *History*, Ch. liv (many editions); Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars* (1702–04, 1719–20), new edn, 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1807, vol. 1, pp. 569–71 (Bk II, Pt i). Hume, however, acknowledges Vane's bravery on the scaffold.

25 Godwin feared that, had they not died prematurely, they might have later joined the faction that was to restore the monarchy in 1660; see Godwin to Shelley, June 8 1818 in *Shelley Memorials, from Authentic Sources*, ed. Jane, Lady Shelley. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1859, p. 97. Shelley does not mention Vane (but does refer admiringly to Hampden) in 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (1819–20; SC VI: 1035), written before he read Macaulay's lengthy, impassioned foregrounding of Vane as the true hero of the Commonwealth (Macaulay, *History* VI: 128–33).

26 For Shelley's making this scene the third instead of the first, see Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 7, p. 249 rev. and HM 2111 fol. *1v (*BSM* XVI: 232–3; *MYR* VII: 336–7).

27 Woodings saw this, but concluded (owing to the chaotic draft) that Shelley had not decided finally which speeches belonged to Hampden and which to Vane.

28 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 43 (*BSM* XII: 90–91).

may not have had English Commonwealth men in mind in *Ode on Venice*, but his preface to *Marino Faliero* (1821) shows that he had been struck by the tradition, recounted by Hume and Macaulay and dated 1637, that the King had unwisely prevented Hampden, Cromwell et al. from leaving for America, which would have rid him of his chief enemies, and deprived Parliament of its most able leaders. For Byron this episode is one of a string of examples illustrating how mighty national events may hinge on small circumstances: ‘... an order to make Cromwell disembark from the ship in which he would have sailed to America destroyed both king and commonwealth.’ Shelley’s response was to make the episode central.²⁹

In Scene 3, Hampden declares that England has become ‘a den for slaves to gender in’. To be buried alive would ‘stifle less the inmost spirit of life / Than England’s air ...’. Vane replies that to the enslaved soul the universe is a prison, but to the free spirit even darkest England is the birthplace of freedom:

The boundless universe
 Becomes a cell too narrow for the soul
 That owns a master – while the loathliest ward
 Of this wide prison, England, ... is a nest
 Of cradling peace built on the mountain’s top ...³⁰

Evoking the vision of England in Milton’s *Areopagitica* (‘an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam’), Vane develops the image: free spirits ‘range through heaven and earth’ as eaglets that ‘gaze upon the light of truth’ before falling like destiny on their prey:

They soar above their quarry and shall stoop
 Through palaces & temples thunderproof
 As fiery birds through a forest or a storm
 On the triumphant powers of Fraud and Wrong ...³¹

Taunted with adopting a supine attitude towards present oppression, Vane replies:

Even this
 Most bitter cup would I not put away –
 If from the head whence the redeemer drank –
 Blind is the eye that sees not in this world
 All things maturing to a mighty end

29 The historical Vane was not (and could not have been) among the intending self-exiles, though Shelley makes Laud (Scene 2) list him among them. This may have been Shelley’s contrivance to ensure that the audience registered Vane’s name before he actually appeared. Shelley had read Byron’s preface by 14 September 1821 (*Letters* II: 349).

30 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, pp. 47, 48 (*BSM* XII: 98–101). As Vane later speaks of ‘my master’, his speech alternatively, but, I think, less probably, begins at ‘while the loathliest ward’. His master is Christ, whose service is perfect freedom.

31 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, pp. 48–9 (*BSM* XII: 100–103). Johnston and Nicholes, misled by the *OSA* text, wonder how ‘this apocalyptic image of execution’ correlates to the ‘political force of the republicans’, and conjecture that such correlation ‘may have been beyond Shelley’s interest’ (‘Transitory Actions’, p. 139).

And dead the soul that bears no feeling heart
In the great *action* of the growing work.³²

Shortly after this speech the draft ends. The interchange, unfinished as it is, establishes Vane as one whose conviction and eloquence are capable of motivating his companions to stay in England and participate in the 'great action', even if the King's order were not unwittingly about to secure that end. Great men have been among us who have chosen to remain, rather than fly; the name of Commonwealth will rise again.

Such is the sub-text of the scene as we have it. Nothing of this, of course, did Medwin hint at, and he may not have seen this portion. However, though he has misled readers of 'Charles the First', many of his remarks are valuable. One of these is his suspicion that Shelley's compositional difficulties stemmed from the 'ever-growing fastidiousness of his taste'. To Medwin's remonstrating at his 'self-hypercriticism', Shelley replied: 'The source of poetry is native and involuntary, but requires severe labour in its development.'³³ Here he was producing poetry shaped for the theatre, almost entirely free of the knotted syntax and inversions found in some lines of *Prometheus Unbound* or *Mont Blanc*. That he was working hard to make the texture of the play immediate, yet succinct and charged with implication, is suggested by a closer study of the draft.

Let us take his use of 'o'ergrown', 'overgrown' and 'overgrows' during Scene 2. In a wonderful throwaway line, Charles proposes to fine landowners for 'violations' of royal forests, which, he says, 'from neglect have been o'ergrown / With cottages & cornfields'.³⁴ Reversing the French Revolutionary slogan, 'Guerre aux châteaux, paix aux chaumières', he makes war on cottages: to use land for growing food instead of hunting is criminal, while his actions are good husbandry. Here Shelley is supporting, by means other than pamphleteering, Godwin's *Answer to Malthus* (1820), which arrived along with his materials for 'Charles the First'.³⁵ Godwin argues that society creates paupers, who then become, in Malthus's words, persons with no 'claim of right to the smallest portion of food', since 'At nature's mighty feast there is no cover' spread for them.³⁶ Later, the King's jester, Archy, part-Calderonian learned-*gracioso*, part-Lear's fool, observes, mocks and darkly foretells disaster. Archy refers contemptuously to a King's minister as that 'overgrown Scho[o]lboy Cottington'.³⁷ It is now the minister, not the cottager, who is the excrescence. Finally, Archy, sent to order lute-music via a 'Lady Jane', departs with a retort addressed to their majesties and the audience:

32 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 55 (*BSM* XII: 114–15). My italics.

33 Medwin, *Life of Shelley*, p. 347; see also Trelawny in *The Diary of William Michael Rossetti*, ed. Odette Bornand. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 262.

34 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 147 rev. (*BSM* XII: 250–51).

35 Mary Shelley read Malthus and Godwin's *Answer* on 18–24 June 1821; see *MS Journals* I: 370–71. Shelley ignores Hume's statement that Charles also fined landowners for turning cornfields into pasture.

36 In a notorious passage added to the 1803 edition of *On Population*, later withdrawn by Malthus, and with which Shelley locks horns in 'A Philosophical View of Reform'.

37 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 109 rev. (*BSM* XII: 174–5).

I'll go hide under the ivy that overgrows the ter[r]ace, and count the tears I shed on its old roots as the [] plays the song of – A widowed bird, sate mourning Upon a wintry bough.—³⁸

Here the more complex use of 'overgrows' recalls the submerged old Roman 'palaces and towers' of the *Ode to the West Wind*, changed by time and nature from tyrants' pleasure-houses into a submarine wilderness, 'overgrown with azure moss and flowers' (l. 34). Archy's old ivy-bower is one of Shelley's marvellously polyvalent images. It suggests both a natural force which slowly transforms the decaying royal garden, and a green recess in the lap of ruin, where the fool's heart breaks for the condition of England, his master's folly, and his own powerlessness to affect future events.

Even the less inspired Scene 4 exhibits what Poe called Shelley's characteristic 'conglomerate concision' of many ideas.³⁹ The Puritan Bastwick threatens his interrogators with eternal torture: their 'purple state and gilt prosperity' will at Judgement Day turn to 'crowns and robes of everlasting fire'.⁴⁰ 'Purple' and 'gilt/guilt' here correspond (with chiasmus) to 'robes' and 'crowns' respectively, and these, again respectively, to blood and gold, a recurring image in the play and, indeed, throughout Shelley's work. In Prometheus's curse, Jupiter's Infinity becomes Nessus's blood-dipped robe of 'envenomed agony' and his Omnipotence a crown of 'burning gold' (*Prometheus Unbound* I, 286–91). In Bastwick's hope that Laud will burn in Hell he reprises the Promethean curse that confounds justice (which would arraign and get rid of tyrants) with revenge (which demands that the oppressors be eternally tortured). In such vindictiveness and that of his fellow-Puritans lie the seeds of the eventual divisions within and loss of the Commonwealth. The audience in its indignation against Laud may be tempted to condone Bastwick, but, as Shelley said of Milton's Satan, this would be morally dangerous; we would be led by a 'pernicious casuistry' to 'weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure'.⁴¹

The perspective of theatre-craft, when combined with notebook evidence, sheds, I believe, more light on what Shelley meant by calling 'Charles the First' 'a devil of a nut ... to crack',⁴² than the proposition that he was paralysed by an unresolved conflict between sympathy and ideology. Without acceding to Medwin's view that the puzzle of 'how to connect the links of the complicated yarn of events' was insoluble, we can accept his testimony that Shelley was having difficulty with the

38 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 101 rev. (*BSM* XII: 159–8 and n.). Shelley left no blank nor illegible word before 'plays', but the sense requires an insertion. Rossetti (who suggested 'wind') thought this speech a soliloquy forming a fifth scene. Woodings corrected Rossetti's text, but overlooked Shelley's cue for inserting Archy's speech within Scene 2 (*BSM* XII: xlvii–xlviii, 164–5 and n.).

39 Edgar Allen Poe, 'Marginalia' [Installment XIV]. *Southern Literary Messenger* 15.5 (May 1849), p. 293.

40 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 99 rev. (*BSM* XII: 154–5). Rossetti misread 'purple' as 'fearful' and adopted the cancelled Dantesque 'cows' for Shelley's reinstated 'crowns'.

41 'Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*', *SP* II: 472; Scrivener calls Bastwick an 'unregenerate Prometheus' (*Radical Shelley*, p. 305).

42 Shelley to Peacock, 11 January 1822, *Letters* II: 373.

connection. Shelley admitted that he could not 'seize the conception of the subject as a whole yet'⁴³ and the draft supplies evidence for this. Some of his problems stem from a tussle between the possible narratives provided by the historical record and stageability. Defying Byron's recent espousal of 'a *regular*', that is, neo-classical drama, Shelley's play was heading for an unusually large time-scale, the first two acts covering seven years. It must have been conceived as continuing to the King's execution eight years later, possibly even beyond. Shelley's *dramatis personae* threatened to be proportionately large, though hardly rivalling that of Victor Hugo's unstageable *Cromwell* (1827), which contains over sixty named parts, including four jesters. Yet margin jottings and notes show him trying to introduce yet another character, the Queen's aged mother, Marie de Medicis.⁴⁴ He may have been trying to ensure that, since male parts would have dominated, his female parts were at least varied. 'Lady Jane' might have sung, like 'Juana Semyra' (Jane Seymour) in *La Cisma*. An intriguing stage direction lists Cromwell's daughter among the departing rebels of Scene 3.⁴⁵ Two daughters might have furnished hints for this character. The republican Bridget Fleetwood 'abhorred the treachery of her father'; Elizabeth Claypole died deploring his 'crimes and cruelties' (1658), which allegedly filled him with 'gloomy horrors'.⁴⁶

A regard for stage-effect appears to be a motive for several of Shelley's hesitations and tinkering. This may be seen in his working on one of the high points of Scene 1, the heart-stopping recognition of Leighton, mutilated and stigmatized by Laud's decree. A speaker (probably an unnamed citizen) reels off a list of England's disgraces, which in Shelley's penultimate version runs as follows:

The remnant of the martyred saints in Rochefort
Have been abandoned by our faithless allies
To that idolatrous & adulterous torturer
Lewis of France – the palatinate is lost,
Our flag which was the terror of the ocean
Is now the scorn of every pirate keel
That wounds its honour –⁴⁷

Another speaker, probably Bastwick, was then to ask 'Who What thing is here / What image of the tyrant's mien?' At which point, onlookers were to turn towards Leighton, who is to be imagined as present on-stage in the shadows. This is an effective *coup de théâtre*, but Shelley decided to heighten the shock by having the second speaker break into the first speaker's harangue. He cancelled the lines about the flag, substituting 'Our embassy to the Pope——', ending with a longer dash to

43 Medwin, *Life of Shelley*, p. 341; Shelley to Gisborne, 26 January 1822, *Letters II*: 388.

44 Blank verse lines beginning 'When wilt thou come' (HM 2111, fols 10v–11v [*MYR VII*: 42–7]) may have been written for her; see also margin jottings, adds e. 17, pp. 171 rev., 136 rev. (*BSM XII*: 228–9, 298–9).

45 Bodleian MS. Shelley adds e. 17, p. 33 (*BSM XII*: 70–71).

46 Macaulay, *History*, V: 196 n.

47 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, p. 169 rev. (*BSM XII*: 294–5, which reads 'honour' as '?form').

indicate an interruption, and altered the second speaker's interposition to read 'What thing comes here / What image of our lacerated country?' Leighton now emphatically steps forward; Shelley has jettisoned the ironic contrast between metaphorical and literal wounds in favour of an icon of 'bleeding' England. In an afterthought Shelley inserted after 'lacerated country' another fine line, 'Filling the gap of speech with speechless horror'. There is no 'gap of speech' in his continuous draft, but the new line is an implied stage direction. The entrance of Leighton, an 'image of ugliness and horror amidst aestheticised pomp',⁴⁸ is to be announced by a most fitting herald: momentary stage-silence.

While 'Charles the First' tries to affirm the centrality of theatre to national life,⁴⁹ the 'Unfinished Drama' is a testament to Romantic sociability, and to its tensions. Mary Shelley's 1824 dating of it to 'February 1822' seems plausible, though April is another possibility.⁵⁰ In late February Pisa was holding carnival; Byron made an aborted attempt to get up *Othello* at Palazzo Lanfranchi with his circle cast as the principals and for which 'all Pisa' would be the audience; on one occasion Mary Shelley and Jane Williams donned Oriental costume.⁵¹ One might guess that Shelley, his romantic feeling for Jane Williams growing, took the opportunity created by the collapse of Byron's plan and his own writing block to explore his *égarements du coeur* obliquely through an 'Oriental' drama – one, incidentally, containing echoes of *Othello*.

Mary Shelley's 1839 headnote, drawing on notes she had made in 1823,⁵² gave a 'sketch of the story as far as it had been shadowed in the poet's mind', viz.: 'An Enchantress, living in one of the islands of the Indian Archipelago, saves the life of a Pirate, a man of savage but noble nature. She becomes enamoured of him; and he, inconstant to his mortal love, for a while returns her passion.' He laments his lost love (named, the draft reveals, Zella or Zelica, and living in North India), escapes and returns to her but 'His mode of life makes him again go to sea'. The Enchantress fetches him back 'by a spirit-brewed tempest'. However, the Pirate's guardian Spirit mysteriously brings his lady to the isle, accompanied by an Indian Youth, in love

48 'Introduction', in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture*, Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 7.

49 '... as Machiavelli says of political institutions, [the soul of social life] may be preserved and renewed, if men should arise capable of bringing back the drama to its principles' ('A Defence of Poetry', *SPP*: 518–19). By contrast, Mitford, whose *Charles the First* finally premiered and was published in 1834, affirmed defensively that the performance was innocuous because 'the Stage has lost much of its ancient influence over the feelings and passions of the multitude' and in any case could never harm a constitutional monarch like William IV (*The Dramatic Works of Mary Russell Mitford*, 2 vols. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1854, vol. 1, pp. 245–6).

50 The February date subjoined in the *Posthumous Poems* text (1824) was dropped, intentionally or not, from Mary Shelley's collective editions of 1839 onwards. Possibly composition began in February, stopped and then resumed. Rossetti in 1870 expanded Mary Shelley's 1839 text with extracts supplied from Shelley's MS by Richard Garnett.

51 *MWS Letters* I: 470 n. 7; *Gisborne & Williams*, p. 131.

52 Bodleian MS Shelley adds d. 7, pp. 5–7 (Massey, *BSM* II: 12–17).

with her 'but whose passion she returns only with a sisterly affection'.⁵³ All that has survived of the play is the forsaken Enchantress's invocation, the Spirit's reply, and an unfinished dialogue between the Lady and the Youth.⁵⁴

The overwhelming mood of these surviving scenes is elegiac. The speakers, apart from the Spirit, are haunted by echoes of departed joy. This mood is enhanced by some of the dialogue, omitted by Mary Shelley and Rossetti. The Youth, with formal courtesy, fearing to reveal that he and the Lady have met before, asks

But fairest stranger, when didst thou depart
From – I would say, the springs of the Indus –
Your home amid the meeting of the fountains
And how thence didst o'erpass this fierce ocean ...⁵⁵

– 'this' indicating that Shelley visualized a sea-shore setting. The Lady replies that she had left in spring, when the 'widowed bird' in the ivy bower renewed her sad song; the Pirate had left the previous autumn. All winter she had wandered through bare woods 'near the slow streams dark in silent snow / And through the copses of cold evergreens' ('cold' is one of those seeming-obvious, precisely-chosen words so characteristic of Shelley's late manner). With her was a 'gentle youth' who 'Wept with me; and our frozen tears together / Fell on my bosom & upon our hands ...'.

The Youth, recognizing himself (though the Lady does not), cries

O prithee cease – just such a winter I
Have lived, – & live to say thus much has been
And is not.⁵⁶

He calms himself and begs her to proceed; she embarks on a long description, broken by a few interpellations from him.⁵⁷ A star visited her chamber in a dream; waking, she found a tiny plant. It grew into a gourd-like vine, bore a 'purple velvet flower' and an 'embryon fruit'. Despite the frost, the plant ramped through her window and spread; the fruit dilated and came to rest half-floating in a pool. Above it hovered and wheeled 'grave little shapes with perfect lineaments' 'like clouds of gnats ...

53 The sketch provides parts for two women, two men and two spirits, corresponding to Shelley's intimate Pisan circle in late February (the Williamses, the Shelleys, Trelawny and Medwin). For Matthews ('Shelley's Lyrics', pp. 691–2), who suggested a hypothetical casting with Trelawny as the Pirate, the sketch implied 'a kind of lovers' chain', as in Shelley's translation 'Retribution, from Moschus'. But the parallel is not exact, since two women love the same man.

54 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 18, pp. 156 rev., 154 rev., 148 rev.–130 rev., 125 rev.–124 rev. (BSM XIX: 236–82, 290–91, 294–5).

55 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 18, p. 142 rev. (BSM XIX: 270–71). The MS text here is very rough.

56 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 18, p. 140 rev.–141 rev. (BSM XIX: 266–9).

57 The Lady's narration may seem overlong for a staged performance, but no unbroken portion of it exceeds 45 lines, well short of Berowne's 75-line speech in *Love's Labour's Lost* or Carlos's 111-line speech in *Jornada Primera* of *La Cisma de Inglaterra*.

old, young / Ugly or pretty, tall & short'.⁵⁸ Here the draft tails away. Shelley seems literally to have lost the plot, mesmerized by his botanical fantasy. But the description advances the action: the Youth's question is on the point of being answered. Had Shelley continued, the floating fruit would have surely become Love's boat, as another magic gourd did in 'The Witch of Atlas' (stanzas 32–3), and would then have departed downstream to the Indus, eventually arriving at the ocean.⁵⁹

Imagery of regeneration seems to presage a happy ending, but discords in the Lady's speech hint at darker possibilities. As she watered the plant the flower sheathes rose 'like the crest of cobra di capel'. A deadly serpent is implicated in this love magic.⁶⁰ Her plangent memories of the Pirate have already sounded a disquieting note, that of a Woman who Loves Too Much. Enthralled by his mystery and sexual prowess she deifies him:

He was so awful, yet
So beautiful in mystery & terror,
A god-shadowing & absorbing me –
Calming me as the azure of Heaven
Soothes the unquiet sea and yet not so,
For he seemed tumultuous ...

In his bad moods he is to her a 'quenchless sun masked in tempestuous clouds'. Echoing *Othello*:

Some said, he was a man of blood & peril,
And steeped in bitter infamy to the lips.

All the more reason that she (and only she) should be 'true & kind':

more need there should be one
To share remorse & scorn and solitude
And all the ills that wait on those who do
The tasks of Ruin in this world of life –
And that, that one should be his Zelica –⁶¹

⁵⁸ Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 18, pp. 138 rev.–130 rev., 125 rev.–124 rev. (*BSM XIX*: 236–9, 246–63).

⁵⁹ Here the draft (Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 18, pp. 129 rev.–126 rev.) is broken by doodles of boat shapes. For Cameron the plant represents a 'benignant power' that 'somehow got the Lady from India to the island' (Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 291). Matthews noted that Shelley first called the Spirit 'Love' ('Shelley's Lyrics', p. 693); the gourd image also appears in 'The Zucca' (1822).

⁶⁰ 'Amid the roses fierce *Repentance* rears / Her snaky crest' (James Thomson, *The Seasons: Spring*, ll. 996–7; Thomson is loosely paraphrasing Lucretius's famous lines about the tormenting bitterness at the heart of love (*De Rerum Natura* IV, 1126–7). J.M. Good's line note in his 1805 edition of Lucretius, owned by Shelley, cites Thomson as a parallel. I take it that Shelley intended the image to be disturbing, but without baldly equating it to 'Repentance'. The cobra-in-the-flowers image appears in cancelled 'Charles the First' draft, where it emblems a fierce puritan creed that 'transforms innocence to ill'; see Bodleian Shelley MS adds e. 17, pp. 178 rev.–179 rev. (*BSM XII*: 312–15).

⁶¹ Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 18, pp. 143 rev.–142 rev. (*BSM XIX*: 270–73).

The Pirate, for all his lamentation, evidently bored by or unable to endure such devotion, has fled back to his tasks of Ruin, while she has found solace with the 'gentle youth', self-assured that the boy had been 'content' simply to be a 'thing . . . a short content', when his anguished speech makes it clear that he was not.⁶² Such is the ruthlessness of sentimental love. Shelley never surpassed this delicate yet keen exposition of its nature, whereby one person's delight is another's misery.

The pastoral love-tangle of 'Unfinished Drama' seems worlds away from the political tragedy of 'Charles the First'. Yet both contain the image of the widowed bird and the ivy bower, together forming one of Shelley's most powerful emblems of desolation. Hearts break for a lover's loss as well as a nation's fate. Is there not a viewpoint from which the fragment plays might relate to each other in terms of certain concerns that Shelley tried to combine and shape into dramatic form during the last year of his life? One such ruling idea is that of faithlessness, the breaking of promises following the evanescence of feelings that seemed immutable; another is the corruption of the state. Each story that Shelley contemplated for his late dramatic experiments lent itself to conveying at least one of these. The most obviously suitable vehicle for both, for relating the fickle heart to the state of a nation, was the option that he passed over, the play of Troilus and Cressida.⁶³ In Shakespeare's *Troilus* (and to a degree in Chaucer's poem) the betrayal of love and the corruption of Troy are inseparable. Cressida is bartered to the Greeks to save the city and her love for Troilus evaporates. But the city will fall anyway and is not worth saving. In an episode in 'Charles the First' where Strafford offers to strip himself of his wealth so that the King will not need to recall Parliament,⁶⁴ there is a foreshadowing of the theme of betrayal,⁶⁵ we know from history that the faithless Charles will later sacrifice his friend to protect the Queen and his hollow crown.

Another project with the potential to unite the themes of faithlessness and state corruption was the 'Modern Timon', also based on a Shakespearean tragedy. Shelley broached the idea to Edward Williams on 30 December 1821 shortly before sitting down to 'Charles the First'.⁶⁶ The following February, with 'Charles the First' in limbo, he reportedly spoke of it to Trelawny, as 'an excellent mode of discussing our present social and political evils dramatically, and of descanting on them'.⁶⁷ 'Charles the First' contains no Timon figure (definitely not Strafford), but reminiscences of Shakespeare's *Timon* emerge in the Old Man's railing at the aristocracy of wealth,

62 The two-period ellipsis is Shelley's. The faulty *OSA* text led the puzzled Cameron to suppose that the gentle youth was also the Pirate (Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 291).

63 The theme of passion as demonic spell links the 'Unfinished Drama' to *El Mágico Prodigioso* and *Faust I*, but is absent from 'Charles the First'.

64 *OSA*: 499.

65 Johnston and Nicholes identify apostasy and betrayal as dominant themes in Romantic Civil War drama ('Transitory Actions', *passim*).

66 *Gisborne & Williams*, p. 121.

67 Trelawny locates this remark on a journey to Leghorn before Medwin's departure for Rome. The only Leghorn visit recorded by Mary Shelley during this period is 20 February 1822. Trelawny, however, tends to conflate events (Trelawny, *Recollections*, p. 53; *MS Journals I*: 398).

while Archy's ridicule of the presumptuousness of bishops, ministers and kings recalls some of the repartee of Apemantus's fool.⁶⁸ Could this 'Modern Timon' be an insubstantial bridge thrown across the chasm between 'Charles the First' and the 'Unfinished Drama'?

That the 'Modern Timon' would have included the theme of faithlessness could be inferred from the source story alone, even without the undatable brief jotting that is Shelley's only written record of the project: 'Modern Timon / 1st Act. / deserted by his mistress / his sensations – his friend / his plans of happiness'.⁶⁹ Timon is a type of noble-mindedness turned to a savage misanthropy provoked by friends' ingratitude. In the 'Unfinished Drama', we find noble rage and misanthropy softened down into a Byronic outcast, the savage but noble Pirate, but no mention of 'social and political evils'. Yet perhaps not quite so: the Pirate is supposed to have committed bloody crimes in a world of dirty deeds where fine natures are disfigured. Moreover, faithlessness is a major theme in Mary Shelley's sketch of the story. The situation lent itself, as 'Charles the First' did not, to treating of 'the mistakes cherished by society concerning the connection of the sexes'.⁷⁰ The Pirate offers paradise on earth to his loves. To the Enchantress 'He came like a dream in the dawn of life', while to the Lady he was 'The embodied Vision of the brightest dream / Which like a dawn heralds the day of life'.⁷¹ Such dreams, in Shelley, have their ugly side, like the masque in 'Charles the First', which also at first appears like a dream of paradise.⁷² The Pirate is an inconstant rover; the situation set up by Shelley is one where love spurned might quickly erupt into selfish jealousy. We wonder (and this might have constituted the suspense of the play) whether the four principals would have ended up killing each other, or pining away, or in a sad muddle (the Pirate enjoying two mistresses and the poor Youth left with nobody), or living happily as a little commonwealth of mutual love.⁷³

While a political theme seems mainly absent from the 'Unfinished Drama', the gnat-like shapes above the pool, some of which are *ugly*, suggest an emblem of this strange 'world of life', in which good and ill co-mingle. Moreover, an 'Enchanted Island' is a traditional device for presenting a microcosm of society

68 Kean's Timon was vividly reviewed by Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner* of 4 November 1816 (*The Romantics on Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Bate. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992, pp. 539–41). Mary Shelley may have read this review in January 1817 (*MS Journals* I: 158 and n.).

69 HM 2111 fols *8r, *9v–*10r, *11r (*MYR* VII: 311–12, 302–5, 298–9). Ink jottings reminiscent of lines in the 'Unfinished Drama' are in proximity, but see p. 257 for Quinn's suggestion that the 'Timon' jotting dates from late December 1821. Shakespeare's Timon has no disloyal mistress.

70 *Queen Mab*, Note 17 (*CPPBS* II: 299).

71 Bodleian MS Shelley adds e. 17, pp. 156 rev., 146 rev. (*BSM* XIX: 294–5, 278–9). Alan Weinberg drew this parallel to my attention.

72 *OSA*: 489.

73 Cameron's suggestion that 'the Enchantress would have ultimately been defeated and the Pirate and the Lady have escaped together' overlooks the Youth (Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 290).

and critiquing 'things as they are', as in *The Tempest*,⁷⁴ which is actually alluded to in 'Charles the First'. Archy remembers Gonzalo's island 'commonwealth' (*The Tempest* was put on at Whitehall in 1611) where there is to be no landownership, labour or marriage; he mockingly calls this commonwealth 'Gynocœnic and pantisocratic',⁷⁵ anachronistically linking it both to Southey and Coleridge's ill-fated plan of a utopian egalitarian community and to Shelley's attempt to set up in 1815 an arrangement involving a free-love sharing or 'community' of partners.⁷⁶ In short, we see a concern common to these two late dramatic fragments: what may be called, in Miltonic phrase, the establishment of a 'Free Commonwealth' – though Shelley had long recognized that in no sense of the term could a 'Free Commonwealth' be made in a 'Ready and Easy' way.

For many readers Shelley's last two fragment plays are interesting chiefly as preparations for 'The Triumph of Life', with the masque in 'Charles the First' anticipating the Chariot of Life and the 'grave little shapes' in the 'Unfinished Drama' refigured as the miscreated shapes that 'like small gnats and flies ... thronged about the brow / Of lawyer, statesman, priest and theorist'. And, indeed, there cannot be for these fragments 'some point of view, if we could find it, some proper distance and happy light, in which the whole would appear a beautiful whole'.⁷⁷ But we may nevertheless find some 'proper distance and happy light' where they may be read not simply as staging posts leading to Shelley's last great fragment, but as beautiful broken arcs – each characteristic of his mature art, each containing features unique to itself. They are works of late winter and early spring, effects of vernal sunshine and the 'keen air ... that sharpens the wits of men and makes them imagine vividly even in the midst of despondence'.⁷⁸

74 Shelley was haunted by *The Tempest* during January–February 1822; see for example 'With a Guitar, to Jane', which Trelawny remembered him writing during this period, with its reference to Ferdinand and Miranda and to Ariel.

75 *OSA*: 501

76 See Claire Clairmont's testimony, *The Clairmont Correspondence*, ed. Marion K. Stocking, 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, vol. 1, pp. 11–12. Her conception of 'the subterranean community of women' (*MS Journals* I: 32) is more likely to have meant something like 'a covert gynocœnic society' than, as usually interpreted, a feminist network.

77 Attributed to a fictionalized Shelley in Medwin's 'Byron and Shelley on the Character of Hamlet'. *New Monthly Magazine* n.s. 29 (1830), pp. 327–36. This contains an unquantifiable amount of Shelley's authentic table-talk of 1821–22. Medwin's authorship is still officially classed as uncertain, but circumstantial and stylistic evidence, especially from 'Hazlitt in Switzerland: A Conversation' (*Fraser's Magazine*, 19 [March 1839], pp. 278–83) and his novel *Lady Singleton* (1843), build a compelling case for it.

78 Shelley to Medwin, 17 January 1820, *Letters* II: 169.

Afterword

Tracking Shelley

Donald H. Reiman

I

Given the good company that it keeps within these covers and the readers that it will likely encounter, this paper may be characterized as one knight's tale about his quest for our Holy Grail – the true meaning of the life, thought and art of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Because it telescopes into 7,500 words almost fifty years of 'adventures' (the kind experienced only in research libraries and scholarly home libraries), it will be relatively abstract. But it may prove helpful to others engaged in similar searches, if only to caution them against the sin of hubris that causes those of us in humanistic studies to think, each time we learn something new, that we have found the single answer, the total explanation, the magic formula revealing all that anyone wants to know about the noble dead.

In 1958, when I began my doctoral dissertation on Shelley, the common public perception of him, as well as the majority view of those teaching his poetry in American and British universities, was that Shelley had been a rather unstable and immature, if precocious, young man with a facile gift for tinkling lyric poetry that was intellectually confused and without real merit. My decision to study 'The Triumph of Life', his last major poetic effort, grew out of a challenge presented by Royal A. Gettmann, my mentor at the University of Illinois, who assigned 'The Triumph of Life' as the major literary work for me to discuss in the oral phase of my Ph.D. qualifying exam. Royal did not much like Shelley or his writings, but he hoped that someone who worked against the grain, as he knew I did, would follow up T.S. Eliot's statement that 'in his last ... though unfinished poem, *The Triumph of Life*, there is evidence not only of better writing than in any previous poem, but of greater wisdom'.¹ The problem interested me so much that I decided to focus my dissertation exclusively on 'The Triumph', examining its fragmentary text and trying to explicate it in the light of Shelley's earlier writings and the major literary works by his predecessors that had contributed to it.

While I was working on my dissertation, Earl R. Wasserman published *The Subtler Language*, in which he traced coherent intellectual and imagistic patterns through three quite different poems by Shelley. Encouraged by his example, I

¹ Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1933, p. 90.

attempted to provide in my study (completed in the spring of 1960²) a coherent reading of 'The Triumph' based, in part, on my first attempts to grapple with the textual cruxes in the Bodleian manuscript (then known to me only in microfilm). During the following year at Duke University, while preparing a session on Shelley for a colleague's class in comparative literature, I discovered that even such an apparently informal poem as *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* had both thematic coherence and a symmetrical structure as intricate as – and perhaps subtler than – those found in classically-based masterpieces by Milton and Pope. In the wake of Wasserman's demonstration that Shelley chose his words and figures of speech carefully to articulate a subtle thematic coherence in *Mont Blanc*, *The Sensitive Plant* and *Adonais*, I felt convinced that my studies of 'The Triumph' and *Euganean Hills* also revealed Shelley to be a subtle artist, rather than a romantic youth who poured out 'wood-notes wild' in response to every throb of his sensitive soul. Shelley was not only a sophisticated master of progressive revelation through patterned imagery that re-energized the traditional *topoi* of the Western tradition, but also a master craftsman who honed every line of his finished poems to convey his ideas and emotions through the music of the verse and the connotative effects of words chosen for their sounds as well as their denotative relevance. Because he wrote out of a deep understanding of the genres, symbols, versification and wisdom of many Classical, Medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment and contemporary writers and thinkers, and recreated similar effects in a voice that spoke both to his time and to our own, he has proved himself to be their peer.

In Shelley's *'The Triumph of Life': A Critical Study* (1965),³ I attempted to provide an example and a method for explicating not only Shelley's mature writings, but difficult works by other poets as well, hoping that by focusing on a single poet's final major effort, the book would provide a comprehensive case-study of his genius at work. The book began by outlining Shelley's diction and symbolism and stressing the accumulated understanding of his major themes and the keys to particular aspects of their symbolic expression. It also presented a thesis about the motives that drove Shelley to write poetry in the first place, which (I then believed) derived chiefly from his judgment on the moral failure of the British social order of his age. After I had explicated 'The Triumph' in the second chapter, the third chapter – entitled simply 'Style' – examined Shelley's prosody as another facet of poetic meaning, attempting to demonstrate that by the end of his life even such an unpolished fragment as 'The Triumph of Life' revealed the ear of a master artist who employed poetic form and subtle patterning of sounds to reinforce and add subliminal meaning to the denotations of his words. Leading into and following the chapter of explication and the chapter on style were concise discussions of Shelley's philosophical perspective: the latter half of the first chapter outlined and the fourth chapter discussed in greater detail Shelley's commitment to the tradition of Academic Scepticism, as first analysed by C.E. Pulos in *The Deep Truth* (1954). Finally, I examined Shelley's rationale for

2 'Shelley's *The Triumph of Life: A Variorum Edition and Critical Study*.' University of Illinois, 1960.

3 Reiman, *Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life': A Critical Study, Based on a Text Newly Edited from the Bodleian Manuscript*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965.

adopting that epistemology and suggested that the poet would likely have ended 'The Triumph of Life' in a more positive vein than was recognized by the nihilisms then coming into critical fashion.

While compiling for the dissertation a variorum account of earlier comments on 'The Triumph', I had also focused on the consistency of the symbolic patterns that persisted throughout Shelley's writings. This approach to Shelley's thought had been first adumbrated by W.B. Yeats in his essay 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' and followed up by several twentieth-century critics (epitomized by Peter H. Butter's *Shelley's Idols of the Cave*) that identified recurrent symbolic patterns or archetypes in Shelley's writings along the lines suggested by Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* and paralleled in studies on Blake culminating in Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*. Perhaps if, like so many scholar-critics who had preceded me in writing on Shelley at the outset of their careers, I had then abandoned the poet to write on other authors or periods, I might still feel that *Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life'* provides keys with which to unlock the motives and meanings of all of Shelley's writings.

II

After my first year of teaching at Duke University, Mary Warner Reiman and I spent the summer of 1961 studying Shelley's manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Its collection of Shelley's manuscripts seemed like a great feast newly laid out for serious scholars. Even though Neville Rogers had been at work on the manuscripts for years, he, we and several other Shelley scholars who visited Oxford that summer merely nibbled around their edges like field mice at harvest time, leaving the core collection of draft notebooks virtually untouched. That summer I purchased six Shelley first editions, and on my return to America, I persuaded Duke to order microfilms of the Bodleian's collection of Shelley's literary manuscripts, to join its microfilms of Lord Abinger's collection. As I began to dig deeper into the surviving evidence on Shelley's life, thought and art, my intellectual curiosity was aroused, and just as Br'er Rabbit's curiosity got him stuck to the Tar Baby, I was soon attached so firmly to Shelley that I have not been able to free myself from his spell. After spending 1963–64 on a fellowship – the first semester at Wesleyan University's Center for Advanced Studies and the spring semester in Italy, exploring Shelley's Italian background – Mary and I returned to Oxford for a second summer immersed in the Bodleian's riches.

At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where I taught the following year, *Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life'* went though the press while I began to write *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, a succinct account of the poet's life, thought and art. Though limited by the space available in the format of Twayne's English Authors, I analysed his major poems and several of his prose works, outlining the thematic structure and primary symbolic patterns of each as I then understood them. Shelley, I knew, was far from being carelessly spontaneous in his writing, but in fact loaded every rift of his poems with ore (as Keats belatedly advised him to do), a skill that he perfected in *Prometheus Unbound*, though Keats was by then too young, too ill and too deep

in despair to recognize Shelley's mastery. It remained for Wordsworth alone among Shelley's peers to acknowledge (in 1827) the technical virtuosity of his verse: 'Shelley is one of the best *artists* of us all: I mean in workmanship of style.'⁴

The Twayne *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, though well fitted to its mission as a brief, general overview of Shelley's life and writings, was written in a detached, impersonal style that was then my goal in scholarly writing. Expository prose should, I thought, be a clear pane of glass through which a reader could view the subject without being aware that there was anything between them. In 1974, soon after Hélène Dworzan (Reiman) and I first met, she – a passionate poet and novelist – read the Twayne *Shelley* and remonstrated with me for writing a book in which, she said, there was nothing of myself. In retrospect I realize that the then-fashionable mode for academics to pose as cool, neutral observers – distinct from the madding crowd of engaged creative writers – was partly attributable to the pervasive influence of the New Critics, who considered understatement and irony to be major literary values and who, like a few of their Deconstructive heirs, often masked extremely conservative political biases with an aura of pseudo-scientific objectivity. My use of their fashion was, however, also partly rhetorical, because those academics who disliked Shelley or his poetry were obviously repelled by the enthusiasm and emotional commitment of both the poet and his admirers, and the most effective advocacy on his behalf was, therefore, to be cool and factual, rather than excited and evangelistic.

In 1965 I moved to New York to edit the later volumes of *Shelley and his Circle* at the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, lured not by the city but by the Pforzheimer Library's vast collection of manuscripts and books by and about the Shelleys, Lord Byron, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Love Peacock and their friends and relations, as well as its microfilms of both the Bodleian Shelley manuscripts and Lord Abinger's collection centring on the Godwin–Shelley circle. My position there gave me access to all of the major research collections of Shelleyan manuscripts, a select spectrum of background materials on Shelley and his period and superb collateral resources nearby at the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library and Columbia University. As I undertook detailed study of Shelley's life and letters for volumes 5 and 6 of *Shelley and his Circle*, my writing on literature in general and Shelley's work in particular slowly began to turn back into the personalist vein to which I was naturally inclined. After Kenneth Neill Cameron, my predecessor, had begun his biographical research for *Shelley and his Circle*, he found that the theoretical Marxist view of Shelley's thought that he had presented in *The Young Shelley* was necessarily modified by his deeper knowledge of the poet's personal qualities and experiences, and my view of Shelley was similarly altered by my work at the Pforzheimer Library.

Having argued in *Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life'* that 'central to all of his writings ... was the moral law that Shelley found within himself' and that 'The moral law that governed Shelley's mature thought and action insisted upon both the right and the duty of each individual to rule his own destiny',⁵ I had concluded that he was

4 Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*. 2 vols. London: Secker & Warburg, 1947, vol. 2, p. 637 n. 5.

5 Reiman, *Triumph*, p. 1.

primarily a moral reformer who, when the doors to a political career closed on him after his expulsion from Oxford, merely changed his tactics and cleverly conveyed his categorical imperatives to the public in the Trojan horse of poetry. But in New York, analysing for *Shelley and his Circle* various aspects of his life – especially his relationships with Mary Shelley, Claire Clairmont, Godwin, Hogg, Peacock and Byron – I began to realize that Shelley's motives (like ours) were often mixed, inasmuch as he frequently helped others primarily to satisfy his own psychic needs. Even when he sincerely tried to respond to the needs of his family and friends, his lack of empathy and tact often caused them unnecessary pain. As the entailed heir to a great fortune in a community where his home, Field Place – though not a massive building – dominates the surrounding landscape (as no private house did in London and no man-made object could then do in the Lake Country), Shelley was from his birth a centre of attention. Consequently, he never learned to fade into the background and seldom felt the need to compromise his ideals or his individuality to please others. In both his artistry and his friendships, he maintained the integrity of his own opinions, and when challenged by those who attempted to repress his independence of thought, he invariably resisted, sometimes carrying his reactions to egregious extremes. Shelley virtually demanded that the people he met should take a stand either for or against his beliefs and practices. While accepting the foibles of Shelley's mortality, I gradually realized that to write about him without responding to his challenging ideas or without making judgments about the rights and wrongs of his interactions with those whom he befriended or opposed, would betray both who Shelley was and who I am.

As I focused upon Shelley as a unique individual – an idealist who was nevertheless subject to the quirks and tribulations of a very unusual and often unhappy life – I could not represent him as some kind of ideology-fuelled machine for manufacturing morals, politics or art. Large parts of Shelley's writings were clearly provoked, not by an intellectual appraisal of the injustice of English society, but by his anger at the rejection that he had experienced personally from his father, his teachers, his schoolmates and his cousin Harriet Grove, the first serious object of his romantic love. As those wounds festered, he redirected his anger toward the injustice implicit in the social institutions that he believed embodied the values represented by those individuals whom he judged to be either unjust or uncaring. Like Dante and Milton, Shelley escaped from petty carping at life and from constant quarrels with living individuals by transforming his sense of isolation and his anger into a passionate crusade for cosmic justice and by learning his poetic craft well enough to inspire readers to join his quest for the renovation of both self and society. Later years strengthened my belief that Shelley's ideal of liberty for all human beings was rooted in his demand for freedom to express and act out his own desires. But, as I also learned, once Shelley had committed himself to the cause of human freedom and self-determination, he tried to practice what he preached at many levels, from acting as a good Samaritan to a man who had been robbed and beaten on Hampstead Heath, to buying and distributing blankets and medicine to the poor weavers of Marlow amid a post-war depression in the bitter winter of 1817. Again, though Shelley sometimes loved less than wisely and none too well, his romantic desires were usually directed toward those who were unhappy in their home environments, as he had been, and

whom he tried to rescue as well as love. I know of no other literary figure who devoted so large a portion of his time, energy and money (both his own and sums borrowed from well-to-do others) to help those around him who were in need. While sometimes desperately short of money to shelter and feed his own household, he not only kept Godwin and Hunt afloat financially because he believed that their contributions to human society warranted the sacrifice, but he also gave a stipend to Thomas Love Peacock from almost the time they met until Peacock attained his post at the East India Company, a benevolence that may have saved that talented man from suicide.⁶

Not only did Percy Bysshe Shelley foster Mary Shelley's desire to become a learned and successful author in her own right, but he similarly encouraged such lesser lights as Elizabeth Hitchener, Charles Clairmont and Henry Reveley, attempting to free them from situations that stifled their hopes for autonomous creativity.⁷ In the first case his attempt failed disastrously, but Charles Clairmont ultimately became (after Shelley's death) a worthy, useful, and – more important to Shelley's intention – autonomous and happy person. Reveley suffered later reverses, but he always blessed Shelley for helping him gain enough self-confidence to break away from his stifling home environment and to make an independent life for himself. So, although Shelley's motives may not have been as high-minded or altruistic as I once viewed them, my later perspective had strong affinities with that earlier view, as I learned that he attempted, with more success than most of us enjoy, to make the Golden Rule work by being as willing to help others fulfil their dreams as he was eager to enlist their help in fulfilling his own. And if Shelley was not the disembodied angel of Victorian myth, neither was he immature and feckless by the time he reached Italy, where he wrote most of his best works. He changed and developed as experience chastened him, and by the time that he encountered a 16-year-old girl in an Italian convent who longed for freedom from parental bonds, he repressed the inclination that had led to his elopements with Harriet Westbrook and Mary Godwin, instead writing two fine poems, *Epipsychidion* and 'The Fugitives' (properly, 'The waters are flashing')⁸ through which he imagined the thrill of an escape to Eden without inflicting serious pain upon himself or those he loved.

III

Late in the year 1971, *Shelley and his Circle* broadened its focus. After lecturing at the Wordsworth Summer Conference at Rydal Mount that August, I returned

6 See Nicholas A. Joukovsky, 'Peacock before *Headlong Hall*: A New Look at His Early Years'. *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 36 (1985), pp. 1–40, and *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, vol. 1, pp. lv–lvi.

7 For Shelley's sponsorship of Hitchener, see the texts of the letters they exchange and other references to her in *Letters I*: 81–336 *passim*; on their parting, see White, *Shelley I*: 262–5. For his nurturing of Charles Clairmont, see *The Clairmont Correspondence*, ed. Marion K. Stocking. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, and *SC IX*: 232–41. For the course of Reveley's life and Shelley's influence on it, see *SC X*: 1115–33.

8 Reiman, *MYR VIII*: 109–20.

to London by way of Cambridge, where a librarian at the Fitzwilliam Museum put me on the trail of a cache of manuscripts related to the Shelley–Byron circle owned by heirs of Countess Teresa Guiccioli (née Gamba). Tracking those papers to Sotheby’s, I phoned John Carter, Sotheby’s specialist in literary materials, and learned that preliminary cataloguing of the manuscripts having been completed, they were available for purchase *en bloc*. After I inspected the collection and discussed it with Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr, the Pforzheimer Foundation purchased it for the Pforzheimer Library, later buying additional items still held by the owners in Italy.⁹ Doucet Devin Fischer and I later persuaded the Pforzheimer Foundation to allow us to publish in *Shelley and his Circle* most of the manuscripts in the Guiccioli papers that fell within its chronological limits. This decision meant that we had to hire research assistants capable of transcribing and translating manuscripts in Italian dialects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and we spent extra years integrating the story of Byron’s years in Italy with the chronological study of the Shelleys’ circle of primarily English friends. The vast difference between the Italian experience of Shelley, who remained a tourist or a man in exile, and that of Byron, whose psyche was reintegrated in part by his acceptance into the Gamba family in Ravenna and the respect that he enjoyed in a society where ‘liberal landed aristocrat’ was not an oxymoron, showed me why Shelley’s poetry became more introspective the longer he lived abroad, while Byron abandoned the brooding introspection of *Childe Harold* to write the finest – and funniest – political and social commentary of the age.¹⁰

In the 1970s and 1980s, my perspective on Romanticism also broadened as I edited *The Romantics Reviewed*, compiled and wrote introductions for the 128 volumes of *The Romantic Context: Poetry* and wrote reviews and essays on Wordsworth, Lamb, Coleridge and Byron – some of which were published, along with essays on editorial methods, in *Romantic Texts and Contexts* (1987). Finally, I attempted to treat English Romanticism as a whole in *Intervals of Inspiration: The Skeptical Tradition and the Psychology of Romanticism* (1988), a book that analysed the formative lives and writings of Lamb and Hazlitt, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Byron and the relationship of each writer to the Sceptical tradition that began with Pyrrho of Elis and the Academy (founded by Plato) and was revived at intervals by (among others) Cicero, William of Ockham, Montaigne, Voltaire and Hume. While studying the ideas of these and other Sceptics within their historical contexts, I came to see that Scepticism reappeared whenever a dominant religious or ideological dogmatism backed by coercive force inhibited intellectual inquiry. While

9 These papers, including the later additions, are described in *SC VII* – especially in the Foreword, Introduction, and Doucet Devin Fischer’s two essays, “‘Countesses and Cobblers’ Wives”: Byron’s Venetian Mistresses’ (pp. 163–214) and ‘Countess Guiccioli’s Byron’ (pp. 373–487).

10 As I observe in ‘Byron in Italy: The Return of Augustus’, Horatian or Augustan satire requires that writers feel confident ‘that they speak for important communal values – that they are not prophets crying in the wilderness . . . , but rather that they and their writings possess a moral authority that ought to be recognized by all right-thinking people’ (*Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, ed. Andrew Rutherford. New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990, pp. 181–98 (p. 182).

examining the lives and thought of those seven Romantic writers, I concluded that not only did they share ideas that went against the grain of the British establishment following the French Revolution, but that all of them had been either orphaned or distanced from their parents at a relatively early age. As British society as a whole turned against the French Revolution and left little room for independent expression, these 'inner-directed' people, who earlier in their lives had been cut off from, or had rebelled against, the values of their familial communities, were able to accept the libertarian ideals emerging from the early years of the French Revolution and to maintain their early idealism by melding it with the more traditional values of the Classical-Christian synthesis exemplified in the writings of Dante and Milton. By holding a Sceptical view of the search for ultimate truth, the Romantics were able to defend their personal beliefs in the face of the reactionary pressures and to defend the best elements of Western humanism against the self-serving dogmatism of the rotting feudal establishment and the callousness of both unbridled capitalism and post-Enlightenment factual scientism (like Bounderby and Gradgrind, whom Dickens was later to portray in *Hard Times*).

Most of my conclusions about Shelley in *Intervals of Inspiration* were not new, but the discussion did pin-point why he and his contemporaries required Scepticism to defend their beliefs against the dominant ideologies of their time and the different ways in which various Romantics used Scepticism to navigate in a world from which old certainties had disappeared. Shelley's doubts protected his aspiration toward a positive view of the nature and destiny of humanity, because he could reject the unpropitious appearances of rationalistic science and could still hope for a more beneficent reality beyond the ken of fallible human sensation and reason. His scepticism about the ultimate power of the evils that are visibly present in the world provided him with the freedom to imagine positive possibilities and to depict them in myths that sustained his hopes for human significance at three levels: the personal, the political-historical and the cosmic.¹¹ Byron, equally sceptical and less inclined to build systems than the other writers discussed (except Charles Lamb), managed to think with his emotions in clear and memorable verse, becoming the embodiment of the Sceptic who could speak to his contemporaries about the loss of his and their certainties and yet give his life for a cause about which he had doubts, but which he considered a step toward the self-determination that he (like Shelley) felt ought to be the birthright of every human being. At the end of his life, Byron provided the public example of the Sceptic's ability to engage in meaningful social and political action.

While writing *Intervals of Inspiration* and revising some of my earlier essays for *Romantic Texts and Contexts*, I explored other areas of the literary tradition by studying and lecturing on contemporary American poetry, grounding myself anew in textual theory and editorial practice, and skirmishing with some post-structuralist critics. But I returned to Shelley's trail when Garland Publishing suggested that I edit a series of manuscript facsimiles that became *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics* (MYR: 1985–98), which involved manuscripts of Byron, Shelley and Keats owned by several libraries in Europe and America, as well as *The Bodleian Shelley*

¹¹ See my *Intervals of Inspiration: The Skeptical Tradition and the Psychology of Romanticism*. Greenwood, FL: Penkevill Publishing Company, 1988, pp. 245–61.

Manuscripts (BSM: 1986–2002). This dual project, undertaken with a group of the best Romanticists from around the world, deepened my understanding of Shelley's thought and art and renewed my admiration for his aesthetic sensibility and technical poetic skills. Since I have discussed these two series in my Forewords to their 52 volumes, as well as in two essays,¹² I shall mention here just a few examples of Shelley's mastery that surprised me in the volumes of *BSM* that I personally edited or co-edited. The major works featured in *BSM* volumes I, VII and XVI were 'The Triumph of Life'; 'Peter Bell the Third' (both its holograph rough draft and the press copy transcribed by Mary W. Shelley and amended by Shelley); large parts of the rough drafts for *Adonais*; the intermediate holograph fair copy of 'A Defence of Poetry'; and the drafts for *Hellas*. Shelley demonstrated an uncanny capacity to draft individual stanzas and groups of stanzas for 'Peter Bell the Third' and *Adonais* seemingly before he had established the complete shape of the poems for which they were intended – almost as if he were preparing quilting squares. Later, when Shelley copied these passages into intermediate holographs (now missing), he stitched them together so skilfully that the seams were invisible even to the microscopic analysis of even so keen a critic as Earl Wasserman. After reading one or more reviews of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* and the parody of the same name by John Hamilton Reynolds, Shelley produced 'Peter Bell the Third' in a few months while also going through severe family crises resulting from the illness and death of his son William and while he was working intensively on *Prometheus Unbound*, 'Julian and Maddalo', 'The Mask of Anarchy' and *The Cenci*.¹³ 'Peter Bell the Third' is four times the length of Reynolds's squib and about three-quarters of the length of the poem that Wordsworth prided himself on perfecting during 19 years, and yet Shelley's stanzas have more complicated rhyme patterns than Wordsworth's similar but freer stanzas.¹⁴ Finally, in the *Hellas* notebook Shelley experimented with at least three different generic forms – the Faustian drama implicit in the surviving 'Prologue in Heaven' and two earlier false starts – before he settled on *The Persians* of Aeschylus as his model for *Hellas*, rejecting his earlier trials when he hit upon the perfect form to utilize the 'newspaper erudition' available to him during the early stages of the War for Greek Independence. By invoking the grandeur that was Greece through this purely Classical form, he helped to rally British and American philhellènes to come to the support of the contemporary Greeks in their struggle, and by using Athenian stagecraft, including the unities of time, place and action, he presented the main historical events through journalistic reportage hastily carried by necessarily unreliable messengers from the far-flung battlefields. Whereas, had he persisted in using the Faustian dramatic form, in which the action was observed by

12 'Shelley's Manuscripts and the Web of Circumstance', in *Romantic Revisions*, Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 227–42; and 'Romantic Collected Editions: Varieties of Editorial Experience', in *The Culture of Collected Editions*, Andrew Nash (ed.). London: Palgrave, 2003, pp. 201–17.

13 For an extended list of Shelley's output at this time, see the Stephen Behrendt's chapter on 'Peter Bell the Third' in the present volume.

14 See the comparison of their forms in Reiman, *BSM* VII: 9–10.

God, Satan, Mohammed and Christ, he would have been responsible for the accuracy of his depiction of their supernatural foreknowledge of history.

IV

In a talk entitled 'Shelley and the Human Condition' that keynoted the Keats-Shelley Association's bicentennial celebration at New York in 1992,¹⁵ I examined Shelley's mature views on human nature and its limitations, or – to use the Christian idiom – the fallen condition of humanity. Though the poet studiously avoided theological language and attacked the cruder representations of the doctrine of original sin, he treated the issue of moral weakness in such realistic poems as 'Julian and Maddalo' that show how difficult it is for human beings with the best will in the world to live up to the high ideals of the 'best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds'. As a young man, Shelley had tried to attribute the moral errors of good people to a lack of knowledge, but as he points out in paragraph 44 of 'A Defence of Poetry', between their moments of inspiration even those 'best minds' experience 'intervals' when 'a poet becomes a man, and is abandoned to the sudden reflux of the influences under which others habitually live.'¹⁶ That is, being hyper-attuned to this change of mental state (like an addict coming down after a 'high'), the sensitive person in seeking to renew that feeling often mistakes the suitable object of his search because pain and pleasure 'have disguised themselves in one another's garments'. In this formulation, Shelley recognizes the inability of most people to avoid errors that cause pain to themselves and others – the cause being, ultimately, a flaw in their capacity or willingness to do the right thing because they, too, are limited by an egocentric perspective of the mortal condition itself (one way that modern Christians define original sin). Shelley then moves beyond this confession of the problem by describing ways in which people can continue the endless struggle to improve themselves, the social order, and the physical world around them. Even an individual disillusioned by his own fallibility and that of others – even one who seeks the aid of a higher, universal Power and discovers that, like the top of Mont Blanc, it is 'Remote, serene, and inaccessible' – can maintain his will not only to live, but to prevail over the forces of corruption and entropy.

Much has been written about the poet's 'conversion experience', when he dedicated himself to truth and justice, as recounted in *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and the Dedication to *Laon and Cythna*. Strangely enough, what made me a life-long Shelleyan was not the young man's dedication of his talents to unceasing war with the injustices that he witnessed in his home, class and country, but rather his perspective on the nature of the Power that rules the physical universe. While I was working on my dissertation, Wasserman's reading of *Mont Blanc* in *The Subtler Language* guided me to an understanding of that poem. One day (as I now remember it), while studying the text of *Mont Blanc* in my carrel on the sixth floor of the stacks

15 This essay was published in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (eds). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 3–13.

16 *SPP*: 534.

in the library of the University of Illinois, I experienced an epiphany perhaps not unlike that which struck Shelley as he looked up at the Mer de Glace from the Vale of Chamouni at the mountain's base. After some fifteen or twenty minutes of thinking about the poem's implications, I realized that my orientation was badly skewed and that Shelley's poem taught me a moral lesson of great importance. In that quarter hour, I changed from having been a teacher-scholar trying to demonstrate that Shelley was an underrated poet, deserving of more scholarly attention, to a disciple of a profound thinker and teacher, long dead. *Mont Blanc*, which records Shelley's intellectual and existential struggles in 1816, undercut my previous value system and provided me, instead, with one moral stance that remains to human beings after they confront a possibility that Shelley presented sceptically in a question worthy of the Sphinx: What 'were' – that is, what would be – the source of the natural order, including Mont Blanc 'and earth, and stars, and sea / If to the human mind's imaginings | Silence and solitude were vacancy?'¹⁷ Before that afternoon I had been a neo-orthodox Christian, active all my life in the Presbyterian Church. When entering the tenth grade, I had even been 'born again' in a fit of fervour ignited by evangelical students from Princeton Theological Seminary. As early as seventh grade (ages 12 to 13), my reflections on the death of a schoolmate had focused my attention on the problem of evil, and at least by then (though, I believe, much earlier) I had been burdened by thoughts of human mortality, concluding that if there were no personal immortality, then humane values could not survive and every individual life was thus rendered meaningless. Throughout my youth the promise of the Resurrection had been the cornerstone of my Christian faith and my hope for moral order in the Universe. But by understanding *Mont Blanc* and accepting its message I came to recognize my own *immorality* in demanding, or even hoping, that such a petty being as I am should live eternally merely because I tried to live a decent life and believed in one parochial set of explanations for the mysteries of existence. In one of the two great metaphysical poems that Shelley wrote in the summer of 1816, he had peered up at the blank, white silence at the top of Mont Blanc and said, in effect: Nothing that I can see in processes of Nature suggests that there is any benevolent Being who will pick us up out of this cold, dark place and provide us with ultimate knowledge or eternal bliss. The visible universe is cyclical: its glaciers destroy human dwellings, while rivers flowing from those same glaciers become 'the breath and blood of distant lands' (*Mont Blanc*, l. 124). But this very neutrality of Nature has 'a voice ... to repeal / Large codes of woe', although only 'the wise' can 'Interpret' that message, only the 'great' can 'make [it] felt' and only the 'good' can 'deeply feel' it (ll. 80–83). That message, Shelley implies, is that there are no unimpeachable leaders and no infallible doctrines, even though (as Ivan has his Grand Inquisitor suggest to Jesus in *The Brothers Karamazov*) human beings desire simple lists of beliefs and duties assigned to them so that they can feel that they hold the keys to their own salvation.

17 *SPP*: 101.

V

Combining the lesson of *Mont Blanc* with that in *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, in which Shelley decides to worship the spirit of the Good, True and Beautiful and serve the world's sufferers at whatever cost to himself, I found that his existential moral imperative to serve virtue for its own sake, without promise of reward, parallels ideas and values developed three decades later by Shelley's younger contemporary Kierkegaard (born 1813), who employed the idiom of the Bible, rather than that of Classical and Enlightenment philosophy, as Shelley did. For Kierkegaard, human beings had to be willing to make a leap of faith and, with 'fear and trembling', cast aside rational calculations of possible rewards and punishments. They must court personal loss in the service of whatever part of the truth each limited human can apprehend – in Shelley's case, dedication to the service of other people less fortunate than himself. The first record of Shelley's conversion experience is his early poem 'I will kneel at thine altar', which he probably wrote during his last year at Eton (1809–10).¹⁸ Addressing an unknown Power, he writes in lines 14–18:

Thine, thine is the bond alone binds the free.
 Can the free worship bondage? nay, more, 15
 What they feel not, believe not, adore
 What if felt, if believed, if existing must give
 To thee to create, to eternize, to live. –

After sceptically questioning the oxymoron of a 'bond' that 'binds the free', Shelley affirms that not only *can* this happen, but that the free person who encounters such an inexplicit being, idea, or value that embodies his own least self-centred aspirations ('Whether God, Love, or Virtue thou art', l. 2) is *obligated* to bind himself to that idealization. For if a shadowy spirit that brings such inspiration does exist, it inevitably 'must' give its adherents the capacity 'to create, to eternize, to live'. In a closely related poem beginning, 'Dares the Lama, most fleet of the Sons of the Wind'¹⁹ Shelley declares that, despite the dangers to those who drink at the springs of true knowledge, he will not be dissuaded: 'Yet, yet will I draw from the purest of fountains' even while expecting to be attacked by something 'fiercer than tygers' – the minions of orthodox religion (ll. 21–2). The final stanza, however, begins: 'They came to the fountain to draw from its stream / Waves too *poisonously lovely* for mortals to see' (ll. 28–9; italics added). In other words, the poem portrays a lose–lose situation: Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, / If the tygers don't get you, then the deep truth must. This thought appears clearly in Shelley's later poetry, perhaps most starkly in his 'Sonnet: "Lift not the painted veil"²⁰ Gazing at the deep truth was dangerous for the quester because 'one who had lifted' the veil of *maya*, or illusion, thereafter found nothing that the 'world contains, the which he could approve' (l. 10). In the same manner, the Youth in *Alastor* arises from his passionate embrace with the visionary 'veiled maid' only to be totally disillusioned with the actual world

18 *Esdaile* no. 42 in *CPPBS* II: 105–6.

19 *Esdaile* no. 41 in *CPPBS* II: 101–4.

20 *SPP*: 327–8.

of his daily existence: 'His wan eyes / Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly / As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven' (ll. 200–201). Similarly, the 'pardlike Spirit' who mourns Adonais 'Had gazed on Nature's naked Loveliness, / Actaeon-like' and, thereafter, 'his own thoughts ... / Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey' (*Adonais*, ll. 275–9).

The vision of Intellectual Beauty behind the veil of *maya* can not only disillusion the quester himself, but is also harmful to those around him, such as the Arab maiden in *Alastor* who loved the wandering youthful poet but is bereft of his love because of his thirst for occult knowledge and visionary love. Perhaps this danger is expressed most succinctly by Panthea at the start of *Prometheus Unbound* II, iii as she and Asia approach the volcanic 'portal' leading to the 'realm of Demogorgon':

Whence the oracular vapour is hurled up
Which lonely men drink wandering in their youth
And call truth, virtue, love, genius or joy —
That maddening wine of life, whose dregs they drain
To deep intoxication, and uplift
Like Maenads who cry loud, Evoe! Evoe!
The voice which is contagion to the world.

This passage alludes to *The Bacchae*, a powerful drama written by Euripides at the age of 77, that Shelley also invokes later in *Prometheus* (IV, 471–5). F.L. Lucas says of that play:

For many years Euripides the realist had warred with the [Dionysian] romantic: here the two meet in a kind of final reconciliation It is not hard to be critical, to undermine beliefs, to start men asking questions. But to make them find some answers — that is less easy. Men think they think; but their thought is largely the shuttlecock of passion, desire, or fear. Who can master Dionysus? ... *The Bacchae* is the tragedy of fanaticism. Euripides is not converted to it; he is horrified by it; but he recognizes at last its terrible power.²¹

By 1813 when Shelley finished collecting and revising the poems now found in *The Esdaile Notebook* — before his twenty-first birthday and probably years before he read *The Bacchae* — he had somehow acquired, at least in a nascent form, the wisdom of this Greek sage. While realizing that to be successful he and those who followed his precepts and example might well be martyred, Shelley also offered at least three positive values to those whom he tried to free from the prejudices and bigotry of the received religious, political and social systems of Europe: first, as an Academic Sceptic, he sought to change minds through rational discussion of human feelings and experience, rather than through coercion. Second, he believed (as several British philosophers of the preceding century had proposed) that human beings base their conduct on a fundamental inclination to merit the approval of others and to foster social cohesion by cultivating imaginative sympathy. Finally, he was aware early in life that, given the entrenchment of vested interests in the dominant social order, a fundamental change in social values might be achieved only if the early believers in

21 Lucas, *Greek Drama for Everyman*. New York: Macmillan, 1954, pp. 306–7.

amelioration were willing to sacrifice their personal comfort and contentment to that cause and perhaps, like Jesus and Socrates, to follow their visions even unto death. By clearly warning of this risk, he articulated the implications of the existential choice for those who might wish to follow his example, as have Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr and Nelson Mandela in more recent times. Shelley's moral focus impressed itself on me anew while I was editing the poems in the Esdaile Notebook for Volume 2 of *CPPBS*. After I reviewed my earlier work, it was obvious that I had analysed Shelley's message out of my own experience. Partly because I am now admitting that this is so, my current perspective may be more comprehensive – possibly even closer to the truth – than the earlier generalizations that I had proposed from behind the mask of objectivity, even though there will always be more for us to learn and other perspectives to incorporate.

In sum, my experience with Shelley has been not unlike that of Robert Bridges and his friend Henry Bradley. While compiling an anthology entitled *The Spirit of Man*, Bridges discovered that he was giving 'a predominant place to Shelley' and consulted his friend Bradley to see whether his selection of Shelley's writings was disproportionate to its value. Bradley, who did not know Shelley's works as well as Bridges did, was 'surprised by the accumulated force of the chosen passages, and by the true insight that underlay the rich poetry'.²² This is the kind of unfamiliarity with which Shelley can surprise any of us during almost any working day.

²² *The Spirit of Man* (1916), containing both poetry and prose, was designed to lift British morale during the horrific years of the First World War. Bridges (1844–1930; *Oxford DNB*), a medical doctor turned poet, was Poet Laureate from 1913 till his death. The quotations come from Bridges's memoir of his friend Henry Bradley (1845–1923; *Oxford DNB*), an autodidact, philologist and lexicographer. Though this memoir was first published in 1928, I quote it here from its reprinting in Bridges's *Three Friends: Memoirs of Digby Mackworth Dolben, Richard Watson Dixon, and Henry Bradley*. London: Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 182.

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