Shelley's Apocalypticism: A Study of the Human Mind's Imaginings, 1818-1822

LUCIA SCIGLIANO-SUAREZ

Shelley's Apocalypticism

A Study of the Human Mind's Imaginings, 1818-1822

Lucia Scigliano

A thesis submitted as required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Studies

Durham University

2021

Abstract

Apocalypse and millennium are often discussed in relation to Percy Bysshe Shelley's works, but there remains little sustained, in-depth analysis that singularises and magnifies their significance for his thought. This thesis offers a substantial reassessment of Shelley's thought by correlating the understanding of apocalypse and millennium to the study of the poet's apocalypticism, the symbolic universe through which to understand and discuss one's existence and ideas of futurity. This thesis demonstrates the importance of understanding Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological perspective for a comprehensive, nuanced study of his conceptions of morality, violence, history, and religion.

Chapter one analyses the expression of Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological perspective in *The Mask of Anarchy* (composed 1819), reconsidering the controversy that underlies the (perceived) dichotomy between the poem's violent tones and its pacifist message, to emphasise that Shelley's vision, rather than being ambiguous, understands pacifism as different from passivity. Chapter two reads 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820) and fragments often neglected in criticism – 'Orpheus' (composed 1821), 'The Coliseum' (composed 1818), and *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama* (composed 1822) – to focus on Shelley's Temples of Nature, spaces whose millennial promise is problematised by his inexorable, yet optimistic, scepticism. Chapter three studies *Adonais*'s (1821) subversion of the traditional association of death and darkness, considering death as the millennial state of the human soul, and proposing, in this context, the kaleidoscope as a framework, hitherto unconsidered, through which to understand Shelley's famous image of life as 'a dome of many-coloured glass'. Chapter four explores *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) to appreciate Shelley's questioning and rejection of institutionalised forms of authority that subjugate the human intellect and will, and illustrate his composite vision of apocalypse and millennium. The coda examines *Hellas* (1822) for the ways in which it extends discussions raised in previous chapters, especially Shelley's understanding of pacifism and violence, and his considerations on the cycles of history.

Statement of Copyright

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university. The work is solely that of the author, Lucia Scigliano, under the supervision of Professor Michael O'Neill and Professor Sarah Wootton.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the late Professor Michael O'Neill, who supervised this thesis from the outset. Michael's unparalleled knowledge of Shelley was a very helpful guide that shaped my own understanding of Shelley as well as the Romantic period more generally. I am also indebted to Professor Sarah Wootton for her generosity in having taken on the supervision of this thesis. Sarah's constructive criticisms and insights were invaluable, especially during the latter stages of the thesis. I am also grateful to Professor Mark Sandy, who read and offered useful advice about chapter two and the coda in their early stages.

I am extremely thankful to Aalia Ahmed, for her friendship, long discussions which informed my knowledge, and, not least, reading this thesis in its various stages and many incarnations. Additionally, I am grateful to my family for their financial help and support throughout the writing of this thesis.

I am thankful to the following bodies for having awarded me research and conference grants, which were indispensable to present sections of this thesis at national and international conferences: St Chad's College, Durham University; Department of English Studies, Durham University; Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Durham University; Keats-Shelley Memorial Association for the Sheila Birkenhead Bursary.

List of Abbreviations and Note on the Text

BSM Donald H. Reiman, gen. ed., *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, 23 vols (New York: Garland, 1986-2002). Relevant volumes: vol. V: '*The Witch of Atlas' Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 6*, ed. by Carlene A. Adamson (1997); vol. XII: *The 'Charles the First' Draft Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 17*, ed. by Nora Crook (1991); vol. XVI: *The 'Hellas' Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 7*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Michael J. Neth (1994); vol. XVIII: *The Homeric Hymns and 'Prometheus' Drafts Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 12*, ed. by Nancy Moore Goslee (1996); vol. XIX: *The Faust Draft Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 18*, ed. by Nora Crook and Timothy Webb (1997)

ELTF Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed., *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments by Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1840 [1839])

Hopkins Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, eds, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 3 vols (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-): vol. I, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (2000); vol. II, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook (2004); vol. III, ed. by Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, associate eds. Stuart Curran, Michael J. Neth, and Michael O'Neill, assistant ed. David Brookshire (2012)

JMWS Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, eds, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987)

Letters Frederic L. Jones, ed., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964)

LMWS Betty T. Bennett, ed., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980-1988)

Longman Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, gen. ed., *The Poems of Shelley*, 4 vols (Harlow: Routledge, 1989-): vol. I: 1804-1817, ed. by Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (1989); vol. II: 1817-1819, ed. by Geoffrey Matthews

	and Kelvin Everest, contributing eds. Jack Donovan, Ralph Pite, and Michael Rossington (2000); vol. III: 1819-1820, ed. by Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest, and Michael Rossington (2011); vol. IV: 1820-1821, ed. by Michael Rossington, Jack Donovan, and Kelvin Everest (2014)
Notopoulos	James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1949)
PBS Handbook	Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe, eds, with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan, *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
Penguin	Jack Donovan and Cian Duffy, eds, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose* (London: Penguin Classics, 2016)
PL	*Paradise Lost* (consulted from *The Major Works* (Oxford, 2008); see below)
Prose	E. B. Murray, ed., *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)
PW	Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed., *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 1 vol (London: Edward Moxon, 1840 [1839])
SMW	Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, eds, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; reissued with corrections 2009)

All of Shelley's poetry and prose, unless otherwise stated, is cited from *SMW*. *Hopkins*, *Longman*, *Penguin*, and *Prose* are consulted to supplement *SMW* and are referenced parenthetically in the text. As versions of *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama* vary significantly in hitherto published editions, and new editions in *Longman* and *Hopkins* have not yet appeared, I have reconstructed a text based upon *BSM* XIX. Likewise, references to 'Prologue to *Hellas*' are based on my reconstruction from *BSM* XVI. Dates given to Shelley's works refer to the date of publication, unless stated otherwise.

William Blake is quoted from David V. Erdman, ed., *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-Plate Commentary* (New York: Anchor Press, 1974; New York: Dover Publications, 1992); Lord Byron from Jerome McGann, gen. ed., *The*

Complete Poetical Works, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-1993); John Keats from Elizabeth Cook, ed., *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; reissued 2008); Samuel Taylor Coleridge from Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano, eds, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); William Wordsworth from Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, eds, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 2nd edn, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-1959).

Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* is cited from Allen Mandelbaum's translation compiled in the Everyman's Library edition (1995); John Milton from Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, eds, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; reissued 2008); William Shakespeare from Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1997; reissued 2008). The works of Victorian poets are quoted from Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle, eds, *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory: Concise Edition* (Ontario, Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000; reprinted with corrections 2005). All Greek and Latin references, unless otherwise specified, are from the relevant Loeb Classical Library (LCL) volume which is given parenthetically (page numbers are combined with line numbers only to differentiate between entries, e.g. to distinguish between Homeric Hymns). The Bible is cited from the Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; reissued 2008). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is consulted as an electronic resource (www.oed.com).

This thesis follows the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) style guide for all references in footnotes and the bibliography. It differs from the style guide in two aspects: (a) references to quotations from the Bible have the chapter and verse separated, without spacing, by a colon (e.g. Revelation 1:1); and (b) the issue number has been added to nineteenth-century periodicals, though not an MHRA requirement, for comprehensiveness. All emphases in quotations, including biblical, are original, unless otherwise stated. All parentheses and emphases in quotations from Shelley's 'The Coliseum' (*Penguin* 623-30) and Shelley's letters (*Letters*) belong to the works' respective editors, unless otherwise stated.

List of Plates

Introduction

This thesis examines the workings of Percy Bysshe Shelley's apocalyptic and millennial imagination, how he discusses and represents the convolutions of history through a dramatisation of his apocalyptic expectations and millennial desires in his poetry. The thesis, more generally, is concerned with understanding Shelley's place in the Romantic tradition, one whose 'major tropos', as Morton D. Paley states, is the eager anticipation of the imminent and immanent movement between apocalypse and millennium, a belief in a sequence that history did not realise and with whose frustration intellectuals of the age grappled in very personal, creative manners.[1] The discussion of Shelley's conceptions of apocalypse and millennium conducted in this thesis will be correlated to an understanding of his apocalypticism, a concept which proves useful to comprehend the workings of his imaginarium as well as his overall intentions for his oeuvre.

Apocalypticism and related terms derive from the Greek *apokalyptein* (ἀποκαλύπτειν), to reveal or uncover, and *apocalypsis* (ἀποκάλυψις), revelation, concepts introduced into biblical exegesis from the Book of Revelation, but which are neither circumscribed to this book of the New Testament nor to Christianity. Indeed, apocalypse – in its eschatological variant, essentially a conflict between light and darkness, or its correlatives, good and evil, morality and sin – has its roots in Judaism and Zoroastrianism. The application by early scholars of terms such as apocalypticism, apocalypse, and apocalyptic, to other sections of the Bible led to confusion of their meaning and usage, but the accepted practice in most recent scholarship has discontinued the use of *apocalyptic* as a noun and redefined the application of the notion of *apocalypse*, creating a differentiation based on the eschatological content of the text, especially important in the context of apocalypticism.[2] The understanding of apocalypticism as a 'system of thought produced by visionary movements' rests on a distinction between three key concepts: apocalyptic eschatology as a perspective; apocalyptic movement as ideology; and apocalypticism as a socio-religious phenomenon.[3] P. D. Hanson's definition of apocalypticism, his distinction between these three concepts and explanation of their specific

[1] Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), p. 1.
[2] See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd edn (New York: Crossroad, 1984; Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), pp. 2-3.
[3] P. D. Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. by Keith Crim et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 28-34 (p. 28).

use, is particularly important here, and the thesis will actively engage with it in order to show the ways in which it elucidates the workings and patterns of Shelley's thought.

Apocalypticism is a system of thought that arises in moments of tyranny, when communities (regardless of their size or social composition) are oppressed, marginalised, and feel that their existence is at odds with the status quo, with the aim of 'reconstruct[ing] a universe of meaning', of finding hope and vitality in what appears as a desolate, desperate world.[4] Apocalypticism is the life-sustaining cultural and ideological milieu created by an alienated community for itself in order to cope with its alienation, a group experience brought about by the 'actual physical destruction of institutional structures' and/or being 'excluded from the dominant society and its symbolic universe' by personal choice or ostracism.[5] It is in facing the experience of alienation that the group develops an apocalyptic-eschatological perspective, a way of understanding history as ending (by the action of divine providence) to be renewed in a transformed social order. The community envisions a resolution to its alienation by embracing an understanding of itself as being transported out of its present predicament into future salvation (whether in this life or in the afterlife), by understanding the current socio-political situation from which it is excluded or which it rejects as having an imminent (and immanent) end, to be followed by the instalment of a new, improved reality through which the community finds vindication. Put in other terms, that a group, in any historical age and which finds itself without ideological referents, has an apocalyptic-eschatological perspective means that this apocalyptic community subscribes to a conception of history that delineates a transition from apocalypse to millennium. The importance of apocalyptic eschatology for alienated groups lies in the fact that a sense of identity can emerge from adopting such a perspective, that it can offer solace, purpose, and a *telos* at a time of historical and social uncertainty and chaos. When this takes place, when the perspective is internalised as identity, the apocalyptic-eschatological perspective has been elevated to the status of ideology, to the degree of apocalyptic movement, one that 'resolves contradictions between hopes and historical realities and provides the group with an identity in relation to other social and political groups and to the deity'.[6] The adoption of an apocalyptic-eschatological perspective, therefore, allows the apocalyptic community to construct a new symbolic universe that substitutes the system from which the community was excluded, the system lost or rejected: 'The creation of a new symbolic universe thus begins by denial of the

[4] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 31.
[5] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 30.
[6] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 30.

ultimate significance of this world's structures and by a retreat into a vision of the "higher" reality and of what that reality implies for the future.'[7]

Apocalypticism is, in this context, understood as the symbolic universe or universe of meaning created by alienated communities to make sense of their experience and reality, 'crystallize[d] around the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology that the [apocalyptic] movement adopts.'[8] Put in other terms, apocalypticism is a manner, devised by the alienated individual or community, of apprehending reality, a system of thought that offers, in the form of a universe of symbols, a language with which to discuss and through which to understand one's existence and ideas of futurity. However, not every alienated community that faces tyranny and/or is excluded from or rejects the socio-political and cultural practices of mainstream society will have an apocalyptic response to its circumstance and apocalypticism be its referential universe. That is, alienation alone is not a characteristic of apocalyptic eschatology. For a symbolic universe to be deemed apocalyptic, it must emerge from the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology that an alienated community adopts or, as Hanson puts it, 'What makes the response of a particular group apocalyptic is its recourse to apocalyptic eschatology as the perspective from within which it constructs an alternative universe.'[9] Such was Shelley's response to historical upheavals, his conception of the past, his perception of his contemporary time, and his vision of the future. His understanding of history entailed a belief in the inexorability of cyclical movements, but also considered, and most importantly desired, the possibility of a triumphant *telos* for history, delivered by forces that he could not condense into one identity, addressed, at times, as Necessity (*Queen Mab*, 1813; VI. 198) and even represented by Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). Shelley's desire for a triumphant *telos* for history, in which deified Love always intervenes, for transformation and renewal in the political and human spheres, is presented in his writings as a brilliant apex to socio-political and human degradation, past and contemporary, and, in its yearning for a transition between apocalypse and millennium, intimates Shelley's personal apocalyptic-eschatological perspective.

A moral purpose drove Shelley's '"passion for reforming the world"' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 232), his fervent and life-long opposition to all forms of tyranny, to the oppression of individuals which created segregation and marginalisation within society. Shelley's millenniums are socio-political projects which, in their emphasis on harmony and

[7] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 30.
[8] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 30.
[9] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 30.

fraternity, aim to resolve alienation, a concept which takes various forms in his works. On a social level, some of Shelley's works are concerned with the oppressed that have been disenfranchised from institutional structures and perceive themselves to be powerless in the face of tyranny. Shelley, through the plethora of poetical voices that emphasise the moral need for reform, speaks of (and in some cases for) marginalised communities, from the 'captives in every attitude of humiliation & slavery' – the enslaved peoples of the past that were abused and abjectly paraded as objects by those deemed to be great conquerors, as Shelley reveals through his description of the Arch of Constantine in a letter to Thomas Love Peacock (23 March 1819; *Letters* II, 86) – to the oppressed and deprived, the 'many' of his historical present with whom he is concerned, for instance, in *The Mask of Anarchy* (ll. 155, 372). That Shelley speaks to and on behalf of alienated communities – prompted, in *The Mask of Anarchy* (composed in 1819), by his indignation on the occasion of the Peterloo massacre – has met with critical rebuke, not least because of his social standing;[10] but the intention, behind the writing of the poem and the speech uttered by the Earth (ll. 147-372), is suggestive of Shelley imaginatively and emotionally standing with the oppressed populace, supporting their ideology and struggle for socio-political reform.[11] On a personal level, Shelley's rejection of institutionalised forms of authority, his opposition against the oppressive judicial, religious, and governmental institutions that denied equality as well as intellectual and physical freedom to individuals, entailed exclusion from mainstream society. Shelley's rejection of the life-sustaining structures of the dominant society of his historical present saw him construct, from his personal perspective of apocalyptic eschatology, a new symbolic universe through which to discuss his own experience of self-imposed ideological exclusion from society, his refusal to abide by social convention, as well as the alienation of individuals who found themselves oppressed and disenfranchised. If perceiving Shelley as an alienated individual might be

[10] Susan Wolfson chastises Shelley for not going 'home to England to stand on the people's side' (*Romantic Shades and Shadows* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), p. 99). Richard Cronin, in a more sympathetic tone, sees Shelley as 'separated from the balladeer by the culture he was heir to, an élitist culture' and considers the poet's self-conscious exclusion from the 'ye' of the poem as 'honesty' (*Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 54-55). Michael O'Neill, however, reminds the reader that to fully comprehend the various voices present in poem, including Shelley's own, 'it is necessary to understand his deracinated social status. Exiling himself from the political arena of power which was his birthright, Shelley embarks on a series of impassioned, subtle and imaginative critiques of the uses to which power was being put.' See *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 7.

[11] Although this long speech in *The Mask of Anarchy* is usually ascribed to the Earth, the 'As if' (ll. 139, 146) clause that introduces the speech prevents full identification of the owner of the voice that addresses the reader, as will be discussed in chapter one of this thesis. The importance of this moment, however, as Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill point out, rests in Shelley's emphasis on 'the problem of speaking', which is 'foreground[ed] to bring out the fact that he is cut off, by physical exile and social class, from the group to whose defence he would leap, and to assert that poetry's voice must frequently associate itself with hope and imagination' ('Introduction', *SMW* xvi-xvii).

difficult to conciliate with the aristocratic background of his birth, it is important to remember that Shelley understood alienation as a necessary condition, self-imposed by the enlightened, when love is not universally fostered, when humanity exists in such an inharmonious state that its created institutionalised forms of authority further social inequality, as he explained in *On Christianity* (composed in 1817):

> If there be no love among men, whatever institutions they may frame, must be subservient to the same purpose: to the continuance of inequality. If there be no love among men, it is best that he who sees thro' the hollowness of their professions, should fly from their society and suffice to his own soul. In wisdom he will thus lose nothing, in peace he will gain every thing. (*Prose* 264)

It is not merely through his rejection of socio-political institutions and their life-sustaining myths that Shelley's sense of alienation can be understood. His brief, yet very prolific life was punctuated by various moments of self-imposed isolation, as his letters reveal, and Shelley also understood his social isolation as a result of the response to his literary output. He acknowledged his natural alternation between moments of social interaction – 'Social enjoyment in some form or other is the alpha & the omega of existence' (To Peacock, 24 August 1819; *Letters* II, 114) – and modes of solitude. On 22 October 1821, he admits to his university friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg that, 'I addict myself but little to walks of any length,— but wander about the edges of the hills sometimes with my book, and live in a total intellectual solitude' (*Letters* II, 360), a confession that echoes an earlier one to Claire Clairmont, 'The Baths, I think do me good, but especially solitude, & not seeing polite human faces, & hearing voices' (14 May 1821; *Letters* II, 292). Writing to Leigh Hunt whilst still in England, before the self-imposed exile that took him through various European cities, Shelley considers his social alienation to be rooted in societal attitudes towards his literary attempts:

> But thus much I do not seek to conceal from myself, that I am an outcast from human society; my name is execrated by all who understand its entire import,—by those very beings whose happiness I ardently desire. (8 December 1816; *Letters* I, 517)

In this letter to Hunt, sent in the early stages of their friendship, Shelley reflects on what would become a characteristic of his literary career, the frustration and disappointment he felt at the neglect, dismissal, and rejection of his varied literary outputs and their millennial message,

feelings especially significant considering that he believed himself 'undec[e]ived in the belief that I have powers deeply to interest, or substantially to improve, mankind' (*Letters* I, 517). Shelley was confident in his role of poet-prophet, in his analysis of history combined with the powers of his imagination to improve humanity and create the millenniums in which it would find regeneration, equality, and freedom. He believed in the potential contained in those imaginings to transform humanity and in humanity's ability to become what Shelley believed it could be, in line with his descriptions of humankind in, for example, *Prometheus Unbound* III. iv and *A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love* (composed in 1818).

Shelley, however, had to contend with the prospect and reality of his imaginings failing to spark the much needed, and much desired change, even accepting the possibility that his 'conduct' and 'opinions [could] have rendered the zeal & ardour with which' he discussed his apocalyptic expectations and millennial desires 'ineffectual' (*Letters* I, 517). The frustration he felt comes to the fore in many of his poetical self-portraits, with whom Shelley is suggestively, rather than prescriptively, identified, as it will be discussed in chapters two and three. The 'frail Form' (l. 271), Shelley's self-portrait in *Adonais* (1821), responds to Urania's inquiry of his identity by making 'bare his branded and ensanguined brow, | Which was like Cain's or Christ's—Oh! that it should be so!' (ll. 305-06), a self-depiction that addresses a dual aspect of Shelley's work, the intention with which he composed poetry contrasted with his reputation, how society received his literary attempts.[12] It is for Urania, and the reader, to decide if the 'frail Form' (and Shelley) is a Christ-like figure – a champion of humanity interested in the

[12] Cf. Christ's words in the fragmentary 'Prologue to *Hellas*' (composed in 1821): 'by this brow | Whose pores wept tears of blood' (*BSM* XVI, 28-29 (adds. e. 7, p. 25)). Shelley's juxtaposition of Cain and Christ has become a famous and controversial passage from *Adonais*. John Taaffe was the first (known) commentator of this line, whose suggestions for alterations Shelley did not heed:

> I am afraid that I must allow the obnoxious expressions if such they are, to which you so kindly advert, in the Poem itself, to stand as they are.—The introduction of the name of *Christ* as antithesis to *Cain* is surely any thing but irreverence or sarcasm. (4 July 1821; *Letters* II, 306)

Taaffe seems to have heeded Shelley's own suggestions – 'I think when you read the passage again, you will acquit it of any such tendency' (*Letters* II, 306) – for his commentary on *Adonais*, found on the side margins of his copy of the poem gifted by Shelley, includes the following statement next to line 306 of the elegy: 'The antithesis from the murderer to the Redeemer of man was certainly intended by the poet as an expression of awful reverence. All the context proves this' (Richard Harter Fogle, 'John Taaffe's Annotated Copy of "Adonais"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 17 (1968), 31-52 (p. 45)). William Michael Rossetti points to 'the extreme repugnance with which he [Shelley] was generally regarded, and in especial perhaps the decree of the Court of Chancery which deprived him of his children by his first marriage—and generally the troubles and sufferings which he had undergone' as the essential meaning of the contrast between Cain and Christ in this line of *Adonais* (Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, revised with the assistance of A. O. Prickard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), p. 134).

moral improvement of society, acting with a 'seraphical purpose', as Hunt saw Shelley – or someone like Cain – 'a fugitive and a vagabond' (Genesis 4:12), a corruptor of men, as some contemporary reviewers understood the poet and his works.[13] Shelley's frustration at seeing his works fail to achieve their purpose – that of kindling the process that would transform his apocalyptic expectations into the realisation of his millennial desires – is revealed in the despondent tone that reverberates through this confession to Hunt, that 'Perhaps I should have shrunk from persisting in the task which I had undertaken in early life, of opposing myself, in these evil times & among these evil tongues, to what I esteem misery & vice' (*Letters* I, 517), an opinion he voiced throughout his life.[14] Despondency pervades his last major unfinished composition, *The Triumph of Life* (composed in 1822), which sees Shelley deepen previous sceptical attitudes in a contemplation on the inability of hope's imaginings being actualised:

their lore

'Taught them not this—to know themselves; their might
Could not repress the mutiny within,

[13] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy*, preface by Leigh Hunt (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), p. xxx. For a comprehensive and well-balanced selection of contemporary articles reviewing Shelley's works, see *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by James E. Barcus (London: Routledge, 1975). The following examples are quoted as representatives of the caustic tone of the negative reviews which Shelley and his works received. An unsigned review in *The Lonsdale Magazine or Provincial Repository* (November 1820) considered that Shelley was

> a man of such poetic powers, as, if he had employed them in the cause of virtue, honour, and truth, would have entitled him to a distinguished niche in the temple of fame. And painful it must be for every admirer of genius and talent, to see one, whose fingers can so sweetly touch the poetic lyre, prostituting his abilities in a manner which must at some future period, embitter the important moment, and throw an awful shade over the gloomy retrospect. (quoted in Barcus, *Critical Heritage*, p. 249)

Similarly, another anonymous review, from *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* (19 May 1821), perceived Shelley as a good poet whose genius was employed against humanity's best interest:

> We have spoken of Shelley's genius, and it is doubtless of a high order; but when we look at the purposes to which it is directed, and contemplate the infernal character of all its efforts, our souls revolt with tenfold horror at the energy it exhibits, and we feel as if one of the darkest fiends had been clothed with a human body, to enable him to gratify his enmity against the human race, and as if the supernatural atrocity of his hate were only heightened by his power to do injury. (quoted in Barcus, *Critical Heritage*, pp. 74-75)

[14] 'Heaven knows what makes me persevere (after the severe reproof of public neglect) in writing verses' (To Lord Byron, 16 July 1821; *Letters* II, 309). 'I write nothing, and probably shall write no more. It offends me to see my name classed among those who have no name. If I cannot be something better, I had rather be nothing, and the accursed cause to the downfall of which I dedicated what powers I may have had—flourishes like a cedar and covers England with its boughs' (To Peacock, 10 August 1821; *Letters* II, 331). 'What motives have I to write.—I *had* motives—and I thank the god of my own heart they were totally different from those of the other apes of humanity who make mouths in the glass of time—but what are *those* motives now?' (To Leigh Hunt, 2 March 1822; *Letters* II, 394).

And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night

'Caught them ere evening.' (ll. 211-15)

Despite despondent moods, Shelley never shrunk from composing both poetry and prose with an ardent belief in the transformative power of love and hope, in the need to imaginatively engage every member of society, in the potential for socio-political and moral improvement that can arise from an active feeling of compassion and understanding among individuals.

Adopting an apocalyptic-eschatological perspective gives focus to an understanding of history like Shelley's; it allows the possibility of renewal by breaking the cyclical pattern that history is understood to describe. Apocalyptic eschatology gives sense and orientation to an identity that has rejected orthodox systems and their myths, to envision change and reform of the present, the instalment of new modes of being in a future state, even if Shelley's particular apocalyptic-eschatological perspective is one that, whilst welcoming the occurrence of an apocalyptic event, questions the durability and longevity of the millennium that ensues. Although embraced as a way to escape the cycle of history, apocalyptic eschatology is, paradoxically, a cyclical perspective in itself: as a perspective continuously adopted and adapted across centuries by different individuals trying to cope with and understand worldly pressures, repetition is one of its functional characteristics. That the sequence apocalypse to millennium, when envisioned by a community, does not occur, in fact, does not prevent a subsequent apocalyptic alienated group from constructing a new universe of meaning through which to find a sense of identity, from conceiving their place in the world, their relation to their socio-cultural context and their deity, in terms of the future vindication of their present dire situation. The cyclical nature of apocalyptic eschatology as a perspective thus reaffirms the ideological importance of apocalypticism and gives renewed potency to the possibilities of an apocalyptic and millennial imagination.

The paradox that underpins apocalyptic eschatology – intended as a way to break the cycle, and yet it is a perspective continuously embraced across history – was recognised by Shelley. A sceptical apprehension haunts his millenniums, which are invariably constructed on the balance of a pragmatic idealism that destroys as much as it creates and imagines. Shelley's millenniums are designed, although against the wishes of their creator, with the prospect of their destruction: the poet is aware that change and progress can be revoked, and, consequently, that the process of envisioning an apocalypse transformed into millennium will resume, either during his historical present or in a future existence, as the end of *Prometheus Unbound*,

discussed in chapter four of this thesis, demonstrates. The rhetorical question with which 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820) closes is another instance of the cyclical pattern that the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology describes. Michael O'Neill astutely points to the way in which the concluding couplet of the Ode lends itself to 'deconstructive rewriting', that 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?' (l. 70) poses a dual possibility; the question equally encapsulates the potential for the cycle ending in winter (without progressing to spring) as well as spring being a part of the cycle, to be continued in autumn.[15] If the cyclical analogy is assumed, then, spring, through autumn, can give way to the arrival of another winter of discontent, to another cycle of apocalyptic and millennial imagining, that will not necessarily be made into glorious summer.

Morton D. Paley highlights that an important distinction must be made in the context of Romantic apocalyptic writings, which this thesis will follow as it proves useful to the understanding of Shelley's apocalypticism:

> More useful for our discussion is the difference between *millenarianism*—the idea that the millennium will be dramatically inaugurated by the Second Coming of Christ—and *millennialism*—the belief 'that history, under divine guidance, will bring about the triumph of Christian principles, and that a holy Utopia will come into being'.[16]

Paley also explains that Romantic writers did not adhere to literal details from the Book of Revelation and other apocalyptic writings.[17] 'Wordsworth, Shelley and Godwin', Tim Fulford states, 'all set out secularized versions of the thousand-year reign of peace and plenty.'[18] It is important, however, to recognise the complexities of the concept of secularity, especially in the particular case of Shelley: Shelley's millenniums are often concerned with temporal and worldly affairs (perhaps with the exclusion of *Adonais*, for example), but the millenniums he projects are socio-religious, just as much as political projects, imbued with a sense of spiritualism and belief, understood in non-orthodox terms, as the thesis will demonstrate, particularly in the coda.[19] Additionally, millenniums, for instance, were not prescriptively

---

[15] Michael O'Neill, '"The Mind Which Feeds This Verse": Self- and Other-Awareness in Shelley's Poetry', *Durham University Journal*, 85.2 (July 1993), 273-92 (pp. 280-81).
[16] Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, p. 3 (emphasis added).
[17] Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, pp. 3-4.
[18] Tim Fulford, 'Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism', in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. by Tim Fulford (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 1-22 (p. 13).
[19] See 'secular, *adj*. and *n*. A. *adj*. I. 2. a) Belonging to the world and its affairs as distinguished from the church and religion; civil, lay, temporal. Chiefly used as a negative term, with the meaning non-ecclesiastical, non-

structured to last one thousand years in the writings of the Romantic period, as in William Blake's *America* (composed in 1793) or John Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* (begun in July 1819). More generally, rather, they signify a time of renewal and prosperity (not necessarily understood in a strictly Christian sense) without being restricted to a specific timeframe, which is particularly important for a poet like Shelley whose millennial projects are created with a sense of impermanence. Indeed, Shelley's practice of constructing revocable millenniums directly contrasts with biblical paradigms. The oblivion implied in Isaiah 65:17 – 'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind' – and the sense that the past cannot return of Revelation 21:4 – 'for the former things have passed away' – are not features of Shelley's millennial projects. Based on what is, for the poet, a harrowing acceptance that history develops cyclically, Shelley's millenniums stress that past moments of devastation, doubt, despair, and tyranny can return, despite the hopeful belief of the morally-inclined, as *Hellas* (1822) exemplifies. The millennial return of Ancient Greece, modified into 'A brighter Hellas' (l. 1066), signals that 'The world's great age begins anew, | The golden years return' (ll. 1060-61), but this auspicious rebirth is predicted to end with the beginning of a new apocalyptic cycle of destruction:

> O cease! must hate and death return?
> Cease! must men kill and die?
> Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy.
> The world is weary of the past,
> O might it die or rest at last! (*Hellas*, ll. 1096-101)

It is awareness and remembrance of the past that perdures in the millennium after prompting the transformation of socio-political and personal attitudes, the instalment of new modes of being emerging from the combination of love, truth, freedom, and hope, Shelley's reworking of the French Revolution's guiding apophthegm. However, it is noteworthy that so many of Shelley's poems, not merely his familiar works but also his unfamiliar compositions, like the fragmentary 'Orpheus' (composed in 1821) discussed in chapter two, conclude with a suggestion of the potential end of the millenniums they imagine, a consequence of the poet's

---

religious, or non-sacred'. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/174620> [accessed 17 February 2021]

scepticism regarding the permanence of what, in fact, is a speculative exercise based on an understanding of a revolving history.

The strength of apocalyptic eschatology as a perspective derives, as Frank Kermode rightly indicates, from the fact that 'apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited'.[20] Both apocalypse and millennium are events that can be postponed without losing credibility, validity, or importance. As the occurrence of an apocalypse is continuously imagined by different communities, the adaptability and malleability of its symbols and significations is shown in the ways in which symbols, derived from various apocalyptic texts, were projected onto current events by individuals, as Richard Price exemplifies through the rhetoric he employed to discuss the significance of the French Revolution.[21] Shelley was able to gather, from the disillusionment caused by these postponements of successful apocalypses into millenniums, especially that of the French Revolution, the favourable momentum needed to re-enact, at least imaginatively and poetically, a positive actualisation of this elusive sequence. Shelley's personal apocalyptic-eschatological perspective was characterised by his ability to distil hope and optimism from disillusionment – even if they vary in degree across his oeuvre, which is especially true as he matured poetically – and was disappointed to learn that his Romantic predecessors, who, unlike the younger poet, did experience the French Revolution first-hand, had redirected, after the violence staged across France in the 1790s, their millennial projects elsewhere.[22] That apocalypse, as a concept or event, 'can be disconfirmed

---

[20] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 8.

[21] See Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, 3rd edn (London: George Stafford, 1789).

[22] Shelley met Robert Southey early in his literary career, when he lived in Keswick between November 1811 and January 1812, before departing for Dublin. He longed to meet his literary predecessors, but he soon realised that his expectations regarding their socio-political affiliations would not be met. From William Calvert, a neighbour of Southey's whom Shelley met whilst being a guest of the Duke of Norfolk at Greystoke in early December 1811, he learned that

> Southey has changed. I shall see him soon, and I shall reproach him of [for] his tergiversation—He to whom Bigotry Tyranny and Law was hateful has become the votary of these Idols, in a form the most disgusting.—The Church of England it's [*sic*] Hell and all has become the subject of his panygeric [*sic*].—the war in Spain that prodigal waste of human blood to aggrandise the fame of Statesmen is his delight, the constitution of England with its Wellesley its Paget & its Prince are inflates with the prostituted exertions of his Pen. I feel a sickening distrust when I see all that I had considered good great & imitable fall around me into the gulph of error. (To Elizabeth Hitchener, 15 December 1811; *Letters* I, 208)

But Shelley would attenuate this estimate after meeting Southey himself:

> In fact Southey is an advocate of liberty and equality; he looks forward to a state when all shall be perfected, and matter become subjected to the omnipotence of mind; but he is now an advocate for existing establishments; he says he designs his three statues in Kehama to be contemplated with republican feelings—but not in this age.—Southey hates the Irish, he speaks against Catholic Emancipation, & Parliamentary reform. In all these things we differ, & our differences were the subject of a long conversation. (To Elizabeth Hitchener, 26 December 1811; *Letters* I, 211-12)

without being discredited' is acknowledged by Shelley in his understanding of history as a continuous repetition of 'cancelled cycles' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 289). 'Mak[ing] bare the secrets of the earth's deep heart' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 279), Shelley conducts a survey of geological strata, scanning various, though unidentified, historical periods, and they reveal, to the poet, the symbolic coincidences that induce him to conceive history as a continuum of 'cancelled cycles':

> anchors, beaks of ships,
> Planks turned to marble, quivers, helms, and spears,
> And gorgon-headed targes, and the wheels
> Of scythèd chariots, and the emblazonry
> Of trophies, standards, and armorial beasts,
> Round which death laughed, sepulchred emblems
> Of dead destruction, ruin within ruin!
> The wrecks beside of many a city vast,
> Whose population which the earth grew over
> Was mortal, but not human; see, they lie,
> Their monstrous works and uncouth skeletons,
> Their statues, homes, and fanes; prodigious shapes
> Huddled in grey annihilation, split,
> Jammed in the hard, black deep; and over these
> The anatomies of unknown wingèd things,
> And fishes which were isles of living scale,
> And serpents, bony chains, twisted around
> The iron crags, or within heaps of dust
> To which the tortuous strength of their last pangs
> Had crushed the iron crags; and over these
> The jagged alligator, and the might
> Of earth-convulsing behemoth, which once
> Were monarch beasts, and on the slimy shores

The disappointment Shelley felt after seeing Southey's revolutionary and reformist views abated transpires in Southey's own account of their meeting: 'Here is a man at Keswick, who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794. […] I tell him that all the difference between us is, that he is nineteen, and I am thirty-seven' (*Letters* I, 219fn10).

> And weed-overgrown continents of earth
> Increased and multiplied like summer worms
> On an abandoned corpse, till the blue globe
> Wrapped deluge round it like a cloak, and they
> Yelled, gasped, and were abolished; or some God
> Whose throne was in a comet, passed, and cried,
> 'Be not!' And like my words they were no more. (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 290-318)

The dual influence of poetry and science on Shelley can be inferred from this passage spoken by Panthea in the lyrical drama. Echoes of Keats's *Endymion* III. 119-41 are heard through this extract from *Prometheus Unbound*, and even Shelley's own sonnet 'Ozymandias' (1819) finds its place here as an example of one of these 'cancelled cycles', another ruinous colossus symbolic of past tyrannies that has been consumed by the apocalyptic and millennial flux of an ever-developing history. The passage also evinces the poet's awareness of contemporary scientific theories and their implications for the comprehension of past history, especially James Parkinson's *Organic Remains of a Former World* (3 volumes, 1804-11), which Shelley read (*Letters* II, 481), as well as the geological expositions of George Cuvier, Jean-François d'Abuisson de Voisins – both of whose works Shelley also read (*Letters* II, 472) – and James Hutton. Shelley's survey of history implies an understanding that 'history may repeat itself symbolically but not literally', as Paul Hamilton puts it, and sees the poet rise as an 'alert interpreter', or prophet, who 'realize[s] when such figurative coincidences occur'.[23]

To study Shelley's apocalypticism is to study the symbolic universe, constructed from his perspective of apocalyptic eschatology, through which he expressed his conception of history as well as the circumstance of his personal experience. Apocalypticism is the symbolic scaffold of Shelley's apocalyptic and millennial imagination. It is the universe of symbols of the poet's system of thought that emerged from the struggle to conciliate his expectations and visions of the future with the socio-political and religious reality of his historical present. Shelley's apocalypticism is articulated through an engagement with tradition that, as Michael O'Neill puts it, 'is not straightforwardly syncretic.'[24] Although apocalypticism has its roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is a system of thought that absorbs into its symbolic universe diverse and wide ranging concepts and images from 'biblical traditions, ancient Canaanite

[23] Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 12.
[24] Michael O'Neill, 'Shelley Prometheus Unbound', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp. 407-18 (p. 414).

myth, Zoroastrianism, neo-Babylonian astronomy, Greek myth, Hellenistic historiography, Jewish and foreign wisdom, and perhaps […] "whatever the author happened to have heard yesterday"', as Hanson explains, resulting in apocalyptic works 'characterized by the esoteric, the bizarre, and the arcane'.[25] Shelley's works and his engagement with tradition were thusly evaluated, both by his contemporaries, as shown by Peacock's remarks on *Adonais*, and in modern criticism.[26] Although his symbolic universe draws from various repositories of knowledge, Shelley's interest lies in the linguistic and symbolic possibilities offered by tradition as a means of expression, rather than in the creation of a unified theory of history or human understanding: 'Though he [Shelley] is fascinated by affinities between different traditions, he does not seek to weave them into a unified version, an all-encompassing myth of human development.'[27] Using the language of symbols from, although not exclusively, the Judeo-Christian tradition and classical mythology, in addition to his knowledge of European literatures and affairs, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Dante Alighieri, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Shelley communicates his vision of apocalypse and millennium, one which is underpinned by his overall intention of conveying 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence', codified within 'a systematic history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human nature' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 232).

As much as Shelley reflects on the past and present with a vision of the future, his compositions are not presented as focused discussions of the development of history, but the

---

[25] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 30.

[26] 'The poetry of your "Adonais" is very beautiful; but when you write you never think of your audience. The number who understand you, and sympathise with you, is very small. If you would consider who and what the readers of poetry are, and adapt your compositions to the depths of your understandings and the current of their sympathies, you would attain the highest degree of poetical fame' (Peacock to Shelley, 28 February 1822; *Letters* II, 374fn6). Echoing Peacock's remarks, albeit with a more sympathetic tone, Mary Shelley explains that obscure material in Shelley's poetry, whilst requiring an attentive, knowledgeable reader, is not meant to mystify the audience:

> It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem [*Prometheus Unbound*]. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague. It was his design to write prose metaphysical essays on the nature of Man, which would have served to explain much of what is obscure in his poetry. (*PW* 127)

F. R. Leavis, however, disagreed, for 'the elusive imagery' of *Prometheus Unbound* made it 'impossible to go on reading him at any length with pleasure' ('Shelley', in *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936; repr. 1959), p. 211). For modern criticism that reflects on Shelley's engagement with wide-ranging (including what are considered to be obscure and unintelligible) sources of knowledge, see especially James Rieger, *The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: George Braziller, 1967), pp. 15-17: 'Obscurantism enters the main tradition of English verse with Shelley' (p. 15). Rieger characterises Shelley as 'a pedant' who 'has set out to puzzle' the critic (p. 16) because of his choice of arcane and obscure sources: 'What are we to make of poetry which cannot be enjoyed in an intelligent way without detailed knowledge of its sources?' (p. 17).

[27] O'Neill, 'Shelley Prometheus Unbound', p. 414.

interest to understand its development is revealed in his sweep across historical periods to find, in specific moments of upheaval, 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence', what he identifies as the millennial germs that can point towards regeneration. Though apocalypticism may imply an emphasis on futurity, on the potential vindication against oppression that the future offers, the focus is on history as a whole:

> The past (whether captured in the résumés [of history], in various schemata, or in the pseudonymous use of ancient heroes), the present (whether conceptualised in terms of cosmic woes, deadly dualistic struggles, or universal disintegration), and the future (whether perceived as reversion to the events of *Urzeit* [primeval beginnings], as the death of the old and birth of a new order, or as the intervention of Israel's God 'on that day') are all caught up in a cosmic context which opens up new dimensions of meaning.[28]

Shelley's focus on 'the genuine elements of human society' as the overall driving force behind his oeuvre is not a display of blind idealism, something which he has often been perceived of manifesting, for his philanthropic discourse, as this thesis will demonstrate, is one that includes an awareness of humanity's less aspirational moments, a recognition that humankind has not achieved the state of millennial existence that Shelley envisions.[29] He is aware that the representations of what for him constitute the ideal state of society are, after all, mere 'domes of many-coloured glass' which might obfuscate reality, or the 'white radiance of Eternity' (*Adonais*, ll. 462-63). That these millenniums might not be actualised (or might be revoked after their instalment) prevents him from 'the danger', as Ross Woodman warns, 'of the poet's mistaking the visionary world constructed by his imagination for the reality which it can only adumbrate.'[30] Shelley's focus on 'the genuine elements of human society', in fact, betrays a conscious choice to centre his discussion on possibility, hope, morality, and love, rather than emphasise despair, loss, hatred, and tyranny, even if the poet concedes that these forces cannot be fully exterminated. He thus rises forth as a champion of human possibility, a man attuned to the struggles, sensibilities, deficiencies, and potentiality of his species.

---

[28] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 31.

[29] Shelley's millennial enterprises are often considered blindly idealistic by some critics; Shelley is perceived as having understood reform as sudden or easily achieved. Susan Wolfson, for instance, explains that the refrain of *The Mask of Anarchy* 'is a rousing call, but even for a figurative politics, the simile for chains is a tad fantastic: mere dew, just shake it off. It's as if Shelley, the schoolboy who liked to concoct chemical explosions, thought political change could work this way too, by sudden transformation' (*Romantic Shades and Shadows*, pp. 100-01).

[30] Ross Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. xiii.

Shelley's engagement with tradition is explorative and wide-ranging, rather than one-sided or partisan as Kate Rigby suggests: 'In his own prophetic writing, Shelley nonetheless eschews biblical paradigms in favour of English folklore, in *Queen Mab* (1813/1822), and classical mythology, in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).'[31] That *Prometheus Unbound* is heavily influenced by the lost and extant Promethean tragedies attributed to Aeschylus and that *Hellas* is modelled on *Persians* (472 BC), for instance, should not be taken as an indication of Shelley's partiality for classical mythology over other cultural expressions. Shelley's characteristic expressions of admiration for the human development witnessed 'during the century that preceded the death of Socrates' (*A Defence of Poetry*, composed in 1821; *SMW* 682-83) – a time above all other historical periods, for the poet, in which artistic 'records and fragments' were 'stamped so visibly with the image of the divinity in man' (*SMW* 683) – are usually accompanied by admonitions concerning the 'many imperfections' which 'deformed' 'the scheme of Athenian society' (*SMW* 682). Shelley's desire to 'employ a similar licence' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 229), in *Prometheus Unbound*, to that of Greek tragedians, who continuously reworked their received mythical material, shows his high regard for their literary craft, and this is, indeed, a practice which he extends to many other of his compositions. Shelley frequently employs myth to codify myth itself – as displayed in *Prometheus Unbound* I. 454-56, and 'Orpheus', ll. 46-51 – in the vein of Greek tragedians, especially Aeschylus, who describes the activity of the Furies in *Eumenides* (458 BC) through an indirect reference to the *sparagmos* of Acteon (ll. 246-47, LCL 146). Shelley's relation to the classical world, however, was complex. His deep affinity to the classical tradition – Thomas Medwin called him 'perhaps, the first classic in Europe' – was laced with an awareness of its moral deficiencies, both religious (divine moral perfection was not a characteristic of Greek mythology, as discussed in chapter four and the coda) and socio-political (especially in the treatment of women and slaves, as Shelley delineates in *A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love*).[32]

It is also important to recognise the significance of the Bible as a linguistic, conceptual, and symbolic repository from which Shelley and other Romantic writers drew inspiration without the bonds of doctrinal uses and dogmatic belief. Shelley's use of biblical paradigms, despite his often vitriolic criticism of Christianity as an organised system, is not hypocritical

[31] Kate Rigby, *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 118.
[32] Thomas Medwin, *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted during a Residence with his Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London: Henry Colburn, 1824), p. 254.

or blasphemous. Rather, it arises from his recognition of the power that biblical images have commanded, throughout history, over the human imagination, of their ability to shape and give expression to Shelley's perspective, one that attempts to understand the convolutions of the present historical moment. That Shelley rejected for himself the dogmatic theology of the Bible did not hinder his inclination to use biblical paradigms. His deep knowledge of the Bible had manifold manifestations, not least a desire to separate the moral from the superstitious aspects of the text in his *Biblical Extracts*, which is no longer extant, as well as a plan to compose a lyrical drama based on the Book of Job, as Mary Shelley reveals:[33]

> He meditated three subjects as the groundwork for lyrical Dramas. One was the story of Tasso; of this a slight fragment of a song of Tasso remains. The other was one founded on the book of Job, which he never abandoned in idea, but of which no trace remains among his papers. The third was the 'Prometheus Unbound'. (*PW* 125-26)

A Shelleyan reconfiguration of the Book of Job would most likely have entailed a similar methodological approach to his poetic craft in *Prometheus Unbound*, and see the poet rework the dogmatism of the biblical story to suit not only his socio-political and historical circumstance but most importantly Shelley's personal sense of morality. Adopting and adapting the story of Job as the biblical paradigm for a lyrical drama in the early nineteenth century would have entailed 'a similar licence' (*SMW* 229) to the one Shelley assumes in the composition of *Prometheus Unbound*, making him, as he put it of Milton, 'a bold inquirer into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 231). Despite Shelley never having executed this adaptation, Richard Garnett found, in the poet's fragmentary 'Prologue to *Hellas*' (composed in 1821), an indication of what Shelley's Jobian lyrical drama could have been:

> Nevertheless, I am confident that the unpolished and mutilated remnant ['Prologue to *Hellas*'] will be accepted as a worthy emanation of one of Shelley's sublimest moods,

[33] Shelley confided to Elizabeth Hitchener that he 'often thought that the moral sayings of Jesus Christ might be useful if selected from the mystery and immorality which surrounds them—it is a little work I have in contemplation' (27 February 1812; *Letters* I, 265). He prepared the volume and, although unsuccessful, intended it to be published: 'At all events I would wish them [*Biblical Extracts*] to be sent to the press. […] Small Christmas or *Easter offerings* of a neat little book have frequently a surprising effect' (To Thomas Hookham, 2 January 1813; *Letters* I, 348; parenthesis added).

> and a noble earnest of what he might have accomplished could he have executed his original design of founding a drama on the Book of Job.[34]

Edward Dowden, following Garnett's suggestion, similarly understood the Prologue as manifesting the influence of the Book of Job on Shelley, with a structure in which 'the speakers are the angelic herald of Eternity, the Christ, and Satan standing, as does the Adversary in the Book of Job, among the sons of God'.[35] The Prologue sees Shelley fuse and engage with various traditions in 'a bold design' that allies 'the genius of Hebraism with that of Hellenism' and 'present[s] Christ as pleading "by Plato's sacred light" on behalf of revolutionary Greece'.[36] The Prologue, as with other of the poet's writings, makes overt the wisdom of the Platonic influence on Jesus, an influence deduced by Shelley but not explicit in orthodox writings. It is in this affinity between traditions that Shelley believed the relevance of Christianity was found: in Jesus's democratisation of 'the poetry and wisdom of antiquity' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 690), Shelley saw the true reforming force of Christianity, as will be discussed in chapters three and four.

Shelley's interest in the Book of Job was mostly pertained to the moral influence it exercised on Jesus.[37] Shelley envisions Jesus as another 'bold inquirer into morals and religion' (*SMW* 231): he finds in Jesus the qualities of great poets (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 251) who question and examine with the aim of inciting discussion and debate, of fomenting and enlarging knowledge. Jesus thusly questioned and examined the received religious precepts of his time, and 'probably studied the historians of his country with the ardour of a spirit seeking after truth' (*Prose* 249), analysing scriptures and received moralist material, including the 'sublime dramatic poem entitled *Job*' (*Prose* 249). It is, therefore, inquiry, study, and questioning, empowered by an imagination familiarised with 'the poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 688), some of which contains 'the boldest imagery afforded by the human mind and the material world' (*Prose* 249), that, for Shelley, characterise Christianity 'in its abstract purity' (*SMW* 690), what the poet understands to be Jesus's philosophical and moral system of religion and manners. Shelley's admiration of Jesus is

---

[34] *Relics of Shelley*, ed. by Richard Garnett (London: Edward Moxon, 1862), p. 3.
[35] Edward Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1886), II, p. 238.
[36] Dowden, *Life*, II, pp. 238-39.
[37] The thesis will, throughout, differentiate between Jesus and Christ, a distinction that Shelley did not make, but which clarifies his understanding of the moral and historical character of the figure of Jesus Christ. Associating Jesus with the title *Christos* imbues the humanity of the man with a divine supernatural agency which Shelley rejected and which the poet found to be at fault with the organised religion that became Christianity. See David Fuller, 'Shelley and Jesus', *Durham University Journal*, 85.2 (July 1993), 211-23 (p. 211).

juxtaposed with his abhorrence of the organised institution into which Christianity was transformed, the orthodox religion that, as Shelley perceived it, misattributed a supernatural agency to the character of Jesus and eroded the pantheistic dimension of Jesus's concept of God. Jesus was, for Shelley, an extraordinary individual who encapsulated the possibility of millennial transformation through the reform of socio-political attitudes that his doctrines espoused, 'unparalleled in the annals of mankind' for his 'profound wisdom and the comprehensive morality of his doctrines' (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 247). Shelley is further invested in Jesus because of what he considers to be the simplicity of the account of the life and works of the prophet:

> A man of ardent genius, and impatient virtue perished in stern and resolute opposition to tyranny, injustice and superstition. He refuses, he despises pardon. He exults in the torturing flames and the insolent mockery of the oppressor. It is a triumph to him beyond all triumphs that the multitude accumulate scorn and execration on his head solely because his heart has shown no measure in the love it bore them, and because the zeal which dragged him to his torments is so pure and ardent that it can make their very hatred sweet. (*Prose* 247)

That such description is equally applicable to Shelley's Prometheus shows the extent to which classical and biblical paradigms were fused in the moral and ideological construction of the eponymous character of *Prometheus Unbound*. Shelley's moulding of Prometheus is another 'bold design' that allies 'the genius of Hebraism with that of Hellenism', to borrow Dowden's expression, combined into an emblem that remains intrinsically Shelleyan, despite the power of the symbolism of his influences. Whilst working within the classical tradition that directs the subject-matter of the lyrical drama, Shelley strays from the Greek Prometheus – who, in Aeschylus's *Prometheia* (produced sometime before 430 BC), recants his position to reconcile with Zeus without the latter's moral reform – to reconfigure the myth and present a Christ-like Prometheus, who, in the likeness of the Jesus that the poet depicts in *On Christianity*, 'refuses, he despises pardon' (*Prose* 247) as it implies resignation of one's ideology and submission without the tyrant's moral reform. Christian and Greek ideas and imagery inform Shelley's Prometheus, as will be explored further in chapter four, to transform him into 'an emblem' of moral excellence, of

> those who do endure
> Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap

Thousandfold torment on themselves and him. (*Prometheus Unbound*, I. 594-96)

Shelley's personal perspective of apocalyptic eschatology, and its corresponding symbolic universe, evolved as the poet's vision matured. 'He rushed forth in Utopia and collided with the world' is aptly put by Edmund Blunden, perhaps reflecting Maddalo's 'You talk Utopia' (*Julian and Maddalo*, finished in 1819; l. 179), to characterise the impetuousness of Shelley's youth that was gradually sobered to include the realisation that 'if way to the Better there be, it | exacts a full look at the Worst' (*In Tenebris*, II. 13-14), to borrow Thomas Hardy's expression.[38] Looking at the worst in Shelley's works entails facing the inharmonious aspects of human nature: more than an exposure of tyranny, it necessitates an acceptance and understanding of the complaisance of the oppressed as well as what Shelley considers to be the ill-workings of human justice. Tyranny, Shelley explains, is, indeed, produced by the tyrant, but more worryingly so perpetuated by the oppressed, the 'cold-blooded slaves, who did the work | Of tyrannous omnipotence' (*Queen Mab*, VII. 92-93). It is their passivity that Shelley condemns as inadvertent compliance with the system that enslaves them, their inability to envision (or heed the warnings of those that do) a millennial path irrespective of the trappings of orthodoxy. Shelley's condemnation of the oppressed extends beyond their unintentional participation in tyranny. He equally reproaches their tendency to behave like their oppressors by retaliating against injury, what in *Hellas* he deplores as the 'deeds which make the Christian cause look pale | In its own light' (ll. 554-55) and which he recognises as part of 'the difficult and unbending realities of actual life' (*SMW* 664) in *A Philosophical View of Reform* (composed in 1819-1820). It is the iniquity of revenge, masked as human justice, that rekindles apocalyptic cycles and obstructs millennial progress, what, for Shelley, moves 'the vast machine' (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 256) of history between 'cancelled cycles' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 289). For cycles not to be cancelled and not to be repeated (even if Shelley acknowledges the possibility of their re-occurrence), the instinct that moves 'the vast machine' needs to be suffused by love, compassion and understanding, rather than being driven by 'revenge | Fiercely thirsting to exchange | Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong—' (*The Mask of Anarchy*, ll. 193-95):

> If all the thought which had been expended on the construction of engines of agony and death, the modes of aggression and defence, the raising of armies, and the acquirement

[38] Edmund Blunden, *Shelley: A Life Story* (Glasgow: Collins for Readers Union, 1948), p. 25.

> of those arts of tyranny and falsehood without which mixed multitudes deluded and goaded to mutual ruin could neither be led or governed, had been employed to promote the true welfare, and extend the real empire of human society, how different would have been the present situation of human society. How different the state of knowledge on physical and moral science from which the happiness and the power of mankind essentially depend! (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 257-58)

Tyranny is perpetuated not merely by the passivity of the oppressed, but also by their indulgence of hatred which breeds feelings of revenge and are, therefore, trapped by what Michael O'Neill, describing the 'strangely twinned alliance' of Shelley's Prometheus and Jupiter in the events that precede the lyrical drama, calls 'the psychodynamics of his [Prometheus's] dependence on hatred'.[39] The millennium, for Shelley, can only be achieved when humanity redirects its gaze from its focus on retaliation and its ensuing cycle of violence to concentrate on compassion and pity, especially for the tyrant, what characterises the moral and judicial system of Shelley's Prometheus, as will be discussed in chapter four.

Shelley's system of justice incorporates what he understands as the benevolence of Jesus. 'It is not to be believed that Hell or punishment was the conception of this daring mind' (*Prose* 256), not even for the tyrant, and, although 'Kindness to such is keen reproach', which Shelley recognises can '[break] | With bitter stings the light sleep of Revenge' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I. 393-94) in the oppressed, the poet would urge the latter to embrace a pacifist ideology grounded on 'Pity, not punishment' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I. 404). More than a focus on the exercise of violence, Shelley's pacifism emphasises the importance of determining the intention that motivates the desire for justice, that drives the apocalyptic event, as it directly impacts the success of the resulting millennium and reveals the character of those who seek it. Shelley's concept of pacifism is nuanced and complex, and founded on an understanding that nonviolence and pacifism are not concepts synonymous with the absence or lack of violence, and that lack of action extends beyond passivity to include active defiance and resistance. Shelley condemns the passivity of the 'many' who, in *The Mask of Anarchy*, have become enslaved whilst in a complaisant 'sleep' (ll. 153-55, 370-72), fearing retaliation from the tyrant. Instead, he urges the 'many' to recognise the collective power that lies in their 'unvanquishable number' (ll. 152, 369), by remaining

[39] Michael O'Neill, 'Shelley's Defences of Poetry', *Wordsworth Circle*, 43.1 (Winter 2012), 20-25 (p. 21).

calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war. (ll. 319-22)

He proposes lack of action, not passivity, of the type of his Prometheus, as the most useful approach to actively defy the vengeful attacks of the oppressor, to stand 'undismayed' (l. 326) whilst

the tyrants pour around
With a quick and startling sound,
Like the loosening of a sea
Troops of armed emblazonry. (ll. 303-06)

Critical discussions of Shelley's pacifism and his reformist tendencies often focus on what the poet does not achieve or clearly specify: that Shelley's works, prose and poetical, are often vague and do not delineate a path to achieve the reform he envisions, to show how the millennium will actually be achieved.[40] To outline or impose a clear path for reform, however, would negate his declaration that 'Didactic poetry is my abhorrence' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 232). The spirit with which his works are composed is one of suggestion through questioning and inquiry, to propose rather than assert, to familiarise without authoritative instruction, to show alertness to the patterns of history, to encourage independent judgement and stimulate the human imagination about the question of the millennium.[41] There is a danger, if poetry (or prose) authoritatively presses or charts a path of reform, of the poet assuming the tone of the tyrant he repudiates, of poetry becoming dogma masked by glorified language. Shelley's works are more appropriately considered if taken for what they actually do, rather than what they do not, as George Henry Lewes suggests: 'Must then, all the actions of a man's life weigh but as feathers in the scale, simply because he was unable to solve the mystery of mysteries?'[42]

[40] See Leavis, 'Shelley', pp. 206, 228, 231; P. M. S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), p. 5; and Jens Martin Gurr, 'Views on Violence in Shelley's Post-Peterloo Prose and Poetry: Contradiction, Ambivalence, Ambiguity?', *Studien zur Englischen Romantik*, 'Romantic Ambiguities – Abodes of the Modern', 20 (2017), 83-93.
[41] See also O'Neill, 'Shelley's Defences of Poetry', p. 20.
[42] George Henry Lewes, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Westminster Review*, 35 (1841), 303-44 (p. 305).

The civil and political reform that Shelley envisioned was grounded on his belief in the necessity of first transforming human nature: a millennium would only be possible, for the poet, if human tendencies towards violence, including revenge, were purged to be replaced by a universal fostering of love, extended to all species, which is the basis for his vegetarianism. Shelley's understanding of violence, here, is crucial. Art Young, in his discussion of Shelley's pacifism, differentiates between violence and nonviolence by reflecting on Mahatma Gandhi's preference of the Sanskrit term *satyagraha* (or 'truth-force') for his philosophical system, as it lacks the passivity and negative connotations usually associated with nonviolence and passive resistance. Young stresses that nonviolence, like *satyagraha*, 'is distinguished from *violence* in that it is in itself a forceful power, while violence is an agent of power.'[43] Gandhi's preference of *satyagraha* to nonviolence is important, as it betrays an interest in the motive that drives the search for social and political change: '*Pacifism* can be considered as similar to nonviolence if pacifism is defined as an active, aggressive force seeking in the pursuit of truth the elimination of social injustices, and not simply defined as a moral position whereby the pacifist refuses to participate in violence.'[44] Understanding violence in the context of pacifism defined as an aggressive force confers nuance to the moral issue of violence, as the violence of pacifism stresses the search for truth as it is expressed through love and compassion. What underlies both Gandhi's and Shelley's pacifism as a philosophical system is their emphasis on determining what defines and distinguishes the violence of the pacifist from that of the oppressors.

> The nonviolent militant in both Shelley's and Gandhi's philosophy, although he himself recognizes the inherent evil of violence, also recognizes the relativity involved in each man's approach to this moral issue, and therefore he may support the violent efforts of those who would eliminate injustice.[45]

Shelley's pacifism, whilst deploring the use of violence, comprehends its use with a philanthropic intent, to instil goodness whilst respecting human liberties, rather than inflicting revenge: 'Popular insurrections and revolutions I look upon with discountenance; if *such things must be* I will take the side of the People, but my reasonings shall endeavor [*sic*] to ward it

[43] Art Young, *Shelley and Nonviolence* (Paris: Mouton, 1975), p. 14.
[44] Young, *Shelley and Nonviolence*, p. 15.
[45] Young, *Shelley and Nonviolence*, p. 15.

from the hearts of the Rulers of the Earth, deeply as I detest them' (To Elizabeth Hitchener, 7 January 1812; *Letters* I, 221). Recognising 'the relativity involved in each man's approach to' the 'moral issue' of violence necessitates, in turn, the acknowledgement that the nonviolent combatant is not alone in conceiving his actions as philanthropic, but that the oppressor also considers his actions as driven by morality and virtue, even if his morality is restricted to ensuring the benefit of his class. It is this relativity of the morality of violence and good intent that William Godwin explained to a young Shelley:

> Every man, in every deliberate action of his life, imagines he sees a preponderance of good likely to result. This is the law of our nature, from which none of us can escape. You do not on the point [of writing with the intent to 'conduce to virtue' and 'influence to good'] generically differ from the human beings about you. Mr. Burke and Tom Paine, when they wrote on the French Revolution, perhaps equally believed that the sentiments they supported were essentially conducive to the welfare of man. (4 March 1812; *Letters* I, 261; parenthesis added)

The relativity of the morality of violence – both the tyrant and the nonviolent combatant consider their use of violence to have philanthropic aims – is mitigated if philanthropy is predicated on the respect of humankind's liberties, both physical and psychological, as Shelley discusses in *Prometheus Unbound*. The aggressive force of the philanthropy of the nonviolent combatant, unlike that of the tyrant, is neither vengeful nor seeks to subjugate for personal gain those considered inferior, but fights every form of injustice from a standpoint of goodness, understood in the context of Baconian philanthropy, since Shelley 'had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 232).[46]

[46] See *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; reissued with corrections 2002), p. 363: 'I take Goodness in this sense, the affecting of the weal of men, which is that the Grecians call *Philanthropia*; and the word "humanity" (as it is used) is a little too light to express it. This of all the virtues and dignities of the mind is the greatest.' On Shelley's line from the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, cf. 'I would rather think wrongly with Plato, than rightly with any one else', Thomas Moore's translation of Cicero's 'Errare mehercule male cum Platone, quem tu quanti fascias scio et quem ex tuo ore admirer, quam cum istis vera sentire' (*Tusculan Disputations*, I. xvii. 39-40; LCL 141). Moore used a rephrased version of Cicero's line in Latin (and his translated version) as epigraph for 'Fanny, my love, we ne'er were sages', included in *Epistles, Odes, and other Poems* (London: James Carpenter, 1806), p. 125, which the Shelleys read in 1817 (*Letters* II, 480; *JMWS* I, 101). Cf. also Shelley's confession to Peacock, which rephrases both Moore's translation and his own declaration in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: 'I had rather err with Plato than be right with Horace' (23-24 January 1819; *Letters* II, 75).

Shelley's works offer a distinction between the violence of the oppressor – which, by enslaving and corrupting, punishing and retaliating, invades other people's liberties – and the aggressive force of the pacifist, which fights against injustice and enslavement to respect other people's liberties. Shelley clarifies this distinction in *On Christianity* through a discussion of the circumstance of Julius Caesar's murder. The poet considers the event from the perspective of the murderers, creating a stark juxtaposition between Caesar and 'the conspirators' (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 254) to emphasise that they deterred the tyrant not from a desire to cause him personal injury, but from a higher understanding of the necessity to help the oppressed who were, to borrow William Wordsworth's expression, 'made desperate by "too quick a sense | Of constant infelicity"' (*The Excursion* VI. 332-33). The juxtaposition is extended to their use of violence: Caesar was 'the usurper of the liberties of their countrymen', but 'the conspirators' were propelled by a philanthropic purpose, as 'It was in affection, in inextinguishable love for all that is *venerable and dear* to the human heart in the names of country, liberty and virtue, it was in serious and solemn and reluctant mood that these holy patriots murdered their *father and their friend*' (*Prose* 254). For Shelley, Caesar's violence – like that of Anarchy in *The Mask of Anarchy*, of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound*, and of Mahmud in *Hellas* – interrupted the liberties of others, but 'His assassins understood justice better' for their violence against Caesar, though committed at a personal cost as they were his 'familiar friend[s]', warranted the protection of the liberties that ensured the progress of 'the most virtuous and civilized community of mankind' (*Prose* 254). The aggressive force of the philanthropy of the pacifist, then, is not concerned with futile, unbound violence, and neither is it driven by anger, retaliation, or punishment. In asserting 'Pity, not punishment' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I. 404), the moral purpose that determines the violence of the pacifist ensures respect for others that comes from sharing the experiences of and understanding an other by getting outside of the self, for which the imagination (and therefore poetry) is crucial: 'A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 682).

The fine nuance with which Shelley approaches the moral issue of violence has been diagnosed in criticism as ambiguity in his thought and works; the case of *The Mask of Anarchy* is the most often invoked to explain the (perceived) contrast between the violent tones of the rallying cry to 'Rise like Lions after slumber | In unvanquishable number' (ll. 151-52, 368-69)

and the pacifist tone of the poem.[47] That this fine nuance has been perceived as ambiguity is unsurprising: this controversial issue is one of the many examples, like the poet's atheism, that, in the words of Leader and O'Neill, poses 'challenges to received ideas' ('Introduction', *SMW* xix-xx). What appears as ambiguity in Shelley's thought and works is actually a recognition that pacifism is not passivity; that violence should not be synonymous with punishment, anger, and revenge; that morality and goodness, true philanthropy, require and imply respect of humanity's freedom, not invasion of their independence, physical and psychological. Shelley's work is grounded on a complex and nuanced understanding of violence and nonviolence that adheres to his belief that 'Language is a perpetual Orphic song' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 415), redefined for a millennial purpose.

This thesis is aware that apocalypticism could be perceived as a paradoxical approach to the study of Shelley's thought, especially in light of what he considered to be his atheism. Although apocalypticism is a theological programme, it is not one that is circumscribed to the Judeo-Christian tradition, as previously explained, but, more importantly, it is a significant concept through which to reconsider Shelley's perception of belief. Shelley's sense of belief, despite rejecting orthodox religions and the dogmas of Christianity, was rooted on a firm subscription to the regenerative power of deified ideal Love in the private and cosmic spheres, its catalysing energies necessary to enact the movement from apocalypse to millennium. Shelley's perception of belief is included in his act of millennial redefinition, part of the Orphic nature of language that organically flows to adapt to the mental atmosphere of each time. Shelley's plastic conception of God as dependent on the human imagination – 'The thoughts which the word, God, suggests to the human mind are susceptible of as many variations as human minds themselves' (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 249) – suggests that, although his repudiation of Christianity as an organised religion induced him to consider himself an atheist, he did not reject spirituality. As an avid student of the Bible and religions, the millennial worlds envisioned in his poetry are, correspondingly, not secular or devoid of mysticism, worship, or belief; rather, they are based on the necessary reconfiguration of these notions that a new world, suffused by the pantheistic spirit of Love, demands. Love is the philosophy, to adapt the title of his lyric of 1819 (as it appears in *Posthumous Poems* (1824)), or 'law divine' ('Love's Philosophy', l. 6) that can deliver the millennium through human reformation. It is through the

[47] See, for example, Paul Foot, *Shelley's Revolutionary Year* (London: Redwords, 1990), p. 16; Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 203; and Jens Martin Gurr, 'Views on Violence in Shelley's Post-Peterloo Prose and Poetry: Contradiction, Ambivalence, Ambiguity?', especially p. 86.

action of Love, as a beneficent power that offers direction,[48] that the millennial *telos* of history, for Shelley, can be achieved, despite Kate Rigby's assertion that 'For Shelley, too, history evidently has a *telos*, albeit one that is no longer dependent upon divine providence'.[49] In his deification of Love, Shelley moves away from the 'faithless faith' (*Prometheus Unbound*, III. iii. 130) of institutionalised religious powers to linguistically and conceptually re-edify the concepts of God and divine providence in non-Paleyan terms – 'as something', in pantheistic terms, 'mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things' (*On Christianity*, *Prose* 250) – and to understand belief and religion beyond the parameters determined by Christianity and orthodox religions.

***

Examining what the thesis terms as Shelley's apocalypticism, this study offers a substantial reassessment of Shelley's thought and work, but also a significant re-appraisal of the importance of apocalypse and millennium in the cultural history of Britain during the Romantic period. Apocalypticism is an operational framework that confers a sense of identity and ideology to individuals across ages, from the ancient tribes among which apocalyptic-eschatological perspectives were first retrospectively identified by exegetes, and libertarians opposed to tyrannical uses of institutional power that rejected social equality and freedom, to the present-day that constantly sees socio-political and cultural mores questioned and redefined. The adoption of an apocalyptic-eschatological perspective is not a self-conscious attitude, but it is a perspective that can be inferred from the pattern of behaviour and thought of individuals. It is also important to note that apocalyptic eschatology is not 'an absolute posture which an individual or group either adopts exclusively or rejects completely, but […] which individuals or groups can embrace in varying degrees at different times, even as the modern person or community can vacillate between religious, superstitious, and scientific perspectives'.[50] Apocalypticism is, therefore, adopted by this thesis as a useful and instructive approach to the study of Shelley's thought and works, but it is not proposed as the ultimate, or sole, method that can elucidate the workings of Shelley's imaginings. In analysing Shelley's apocalypticism, the thesis, as already explained, considers apocalypse in its eschatological variant, an approach that differs from Ross Woodman's in his *The Apocalyptic Vision in the*

[48] Cf. 'providence, *n*. 6. a. Usually in form **Providence**. God or nature as exercising prescient and beneficent power and direction.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/153450> [accessed 17 February 2021]
[49] Rigby, *Reclaiming Romanticism*, p. 119.
[50] Hanson, 'Apocalypticism', p. 29.

Poetry of Shelley (1964), which examines apocalypse in its etymological sense and in the context of Shelley's Platonism, studying the poet's apocalyptic vision for what it reveals or discloses about the condition of Man. From Woodman's work, Shelley emerges as a poet whose vision is concerned with the way in which humanity can imaginatively realise 'The ideal self within man', his Platonic understanding of the potentiality of humankind.[51] This thesis considers Shelley's investigation of the condition of Man, the patterns of human intellectual development, including his Platonism, but extends the discussion to embrace diverse modes of thought such as his engagement with the classical and biblical tradition, and the experimental and natural sciences of his time.

The thesis maintains a dialogue with its footnotes, across all chapters, to extend the discussion of Shelley's apocalypticism to other compositions, from his prose and poetry, that are not discussed *in extenso*, to show the ways in which his apocalyptic and millennial vision is manifested and evolves across his oeuvre. The footnotes also serve, in many instances, to establish a contextual background for many of Shelley's compositions, especially the fragments. A degree of selectivity has been exercised for the suitability of material that is discussed in the thesis, with a main focus on what are considered to be Shelley's Italian compositions, the works composed whilst in Italy, from 1818 to 1822. However, attention is paid throughout to peritext, not just to the prefaces and footnotes that accompany the published texts, but also to manuscript jottings and discarded material, necessary to contextualise the compositions as well as to understand the workings of Shelley's imagination. The first chapter analyses the expression of Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological perspective in *The Mask of Anarchy*, engaging with contemporary material, especially newspaper reports about Peterloo published in 1819 and thereafter. The chapter re-evaluates *The Mask of Anarchy*, reconsidering the controversy that underlies the (perceived) dichotomy between the poem's violent tones and its pacifist message, to emphasise that Shelley's vision, rather than ambiguous, understands pacifism as different from passivity. The second chapter reads 'Ode to the West Wind' alongside 'Orpheus', 'The Coliseum' (started in November 1818), and *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama* (composed in 1822), fragmentary Shelleyan compositions which have received little critical attention. The chapter focuses on the importance of the forest in order to examine Shelley's Temples of Nature, spaces whose millennial promise is problematised by the poet's inexorable, albeit optimistic, scepticism, one which haunts the stability of these temples. The third chapter studies Shelley's reconfiguration of John Keats as the quasi-

[51] Woodman, *Apocalyptic Vision*, p. 61.

mythical Adonais in the elegy of the same name, considering Shelley's transformation of Adonais into a symbol that is in harmony with his apocalypticism. *Adonais* is a poem that subverts the traditional association of death and darkness. The chapter presents Shelley's conception of death as the millennial state of the human soul, proposing, in this context, the kaleidoscope as a framework, hitherto unconsidered, through which to understand Shelley's famous image of life as 'a dome of many-coloured glass' (l. 462). The fourth chapter explores Shelley's Prometheus to appreciate the importance of psychological and moral freedom for his apocalyptic-eschatological expectations and millennial desires. The chapter's focus on sections of Acts I, III, and IV of *Prometheus Unbound* will bring into relief what can be understood as Shelley's 'inquiry into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 231), his questioning and rejection of institutionalised forms of authority that subjugate the human intellect and will, and, ultimately, illustrate his unique, composite vision of apocalypse and millennium. Finally, the thesis will consider *Hellas*, in the coda, for the ways in which it continues, extends, and reaffirms issues and discussions raised in previous chapters, especially Shelley's understanding of pacifism and violence, and his considerations on the cyclical movement of history.

I

Song of Angry Men: Rethinking Pacifism and Violence in *The Mask of Anarchy*

This chapter's title, 'Song of Angry Men', refers to a double aspect behind Shelley's intention for *The Mask of Anarchy* (composed in September 1819; published posthumously by Leigh Hunt in 1832). Along with other short lyrics composed in 1819-1820, such as 'Men of England: A Song', 'A New National Anthem', and 'England in 1819', *The Mask of Anarchy*, a fusion of the ballad and courtly masque forms, was planned for inclusion in 'a little volume of *popular songs* wholly political, & destined to awaken & direct the imagination of the reformers' (To Leigh Hunt, 1 May 1820; *Letters* II, 191). This proved, however, an unsuccessful endeavour: neither did Shelley publish such a volume nor did any of these '*popular songs*', most likely by virtue of their contentious nature, see publication during his lifetime. That the composition of *The Mask of Anarchy* started almost immediately after 'the news of the Manchester work' reached Shelley in Leghorn attests to what the poet would later confess to his publisher Charles Ollier, that 'the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously [to] hear how the Country will express its sense of this bloody murderous oppression of its destroyers' (6 September 1819; *Letters* II, 117). The poem is a meditation on how to 'express' that 'indignation', that 'sense' of what almost immediately became known as the Peterloo massacre: Shelley's focus is on the philanthropic channelling of indignation and anger, rather than anger becoming the type of destructive hatred that is eventually manifested in vengeful, oppressive violence. Thus *The Mask of Anarchy* is a record of Shelley's enduring hope in the power of human agency to give rise to transformative, tectonic movements in history, for the chaotic and desperate situation of early-nineteenth-century England to give way to the millennial future of Shelley's vision. This chapter analyses the way in which Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological perspective is reflected in the visionary composition that is *The Mask of Anarchy*. It also offers a re-evaluation of what is largely considered in criticism as an ambiguous poem, reconsidering the controversy that underlies the (perceived) dichotomy between the poem's violent tones and its pacifist message. The chapter will show that Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological and millennial vision encompasses violence as not, in fact,

incongruous with his pacifism, but rather part of a vision that understands pacifism as different from passivity.

That Leigh Hunt did not publish *The Mask of Anarchy* during Shelley's lifetime is unsurprising. In emphasising the potential of civil empowerment and bluntly exposing the abuses perpetrated by the ruling classes, *The Mask of Anarchy* dramatises the potential for the movement between apocalypse and millennium to take place when the oppressed parts of society embrace their political power and, in so doing, assume the physical and psychological freedom which, as 'sons of England' (l. 140), is their right. The assertiveness with which Shelley promotes this social incitement to reform in England has been critically understood as being undermined by the poet's self-exile in Italy:[1]

> As I lay asleep in Italy
> There came a voice from over the Sea,
> And with great power it forth led me
> To walk in the visions of Poesy. (ll. 1-4)

Following the traditional literary form of apocalypse, *The Mask of Anarchy* is a visionary, dream composition in which the poet, in the capacity of seer or prophet, receives a message, through a vision in a dream, revealing a hidden truth from an otherworldly entity. Unlike the models from the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, Shelley does not give prominence, here, to specificity or identification, but to the imaginative power of his visionary exile. It is a mystical force not clearly defined by the speaker that inspires the undertaking of this imaginative (and imaginary) journey, the 'great power' of 'a voice from over the Sea'. Shelley's emphasis, as the poem progresses, is on the nature of the worldly transformation as well as on the suggestion of a path of action to adopt for the movement from devastated present to regenerate future to take place. John Collins's definition of apocalypse is illuminating in this context as it shows the extent to which 'apocalypse' is a useful concept through which to understand *The Mask*:

> 'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a

[1] See, for instance, Susan Wolfson, *Romantic Shades and Shadows* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), p. 100.

> transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[2]

The Mask describes a 'crisis and transformation without a general review of history': the poem focuses on the decayed state of England in 1819 and envisions its millennial transformation effected through a social, yet peaceful, revolution, excluding the retrospective analyses of world history that, for instance, the choral songs in *Hellas* (though not exhaustively) include.[3] The sense that this crisis is already underway at the time of revelation and the transformation imminent, and, perhaps more importantly, immanent, is transparent in the poem and a characteristic of apocalyptic eschatology.

Shelley's access to the 22 and 29 August 1819 issues of *The Examiner*, which reported the events that took place on 16 August 1819 in St Peter's Field, proved significant for his awareness of the Manchester affair, and influenced the diction and contents of *The Mask of Anarchy*. The first of those issues paints a distinctively apocalyptic-eschatological scene which recalls the Triumph of Anarchy in Shelley's poem, especially lines 38-57.[4] The denunciation of the abuse of the oppressed and the hypocrisy of the perpetrators are framed through a series of rhetorical questions tinged with an ironic tone that makes apparent the indignation that drives this journalistic piece:

> Who said that human beings were not to be cut down, shot, and trampled upon?—that towns and districts were not to be thrown into the most horrible consternation? […] Who ever said that cities were not to be fired?—that thousands of living human bodies were not to be blown up in the air?—that arms and legs were not to be split off, bones shattered, bodies cut in two, faces carried away, bowels blown out, and dying men left to rave, and shriek out 'water!' and beg for God's sake to be put out of their misery? What canting hireling, even while pretending to shake something in his head at the 'lamentable

---

[2] John J. Collins, 'Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre', in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. by John J. Collins, Semeia 14 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), pp. 1-20 (p. 9).
[3] Bernard McGinn, 'Early Apocalypticism: The Ongoing Debate', in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions*, ed. by C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 2-39 (p. 4).
[4] The chapter will follow Morton D. Paley's useful division of the poem into five sections: 'Introductory Vision' (ll. 1-4), 'Triumph of Anarchy' (ll. 5-85), 'Agon' (ll. 86-134), 'Bridge' (ll. 135-46), and 'Hortatory Address' (ll. 147-372), the latter further divided into three parts. See Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 237-38.

> necessity' of war, ever thought of actually doing any thing but inflaming and carrying it on?[5]

This passage from the report is echoed in two moments in *The Mask*. The poem meditates on the report's 'trampled upon' and, indeed, amplifies its use, repeating 'trampling' three times in the twenty lines that comprise the Triumph of Anarchy, as well as twice elsewhere in the poem (ll. 40, 43, 52; also in ll. 222, 310). The use and repetition of 'trampling' in *The Mask* evokes the horrors reported through the first five rhetorical questions – Anarchy and his followers are the 'Men in the Brazen Masks of power' that trample 'to a mire of blood | The adoring multitude' (ll. 40-41).[6] Shelley also reflects on the moral disposition of the 'base company' (l. 359), the 'canting hireling[s]' of the report. Their actions will be self-revelatory – 'the blood thus shed will speak | In hot flushes on their cheek' (ll. 349-50) – but, more importantly, their appalling actions will expose their degraded sense of morality, condemning them to being social pariahs:

> 'Every woman in the land
> Will point at them as they stand—
> They will hardly dare to greet
> Their acquaintance in the street. (ll. 351-54)

Shelley's use of 'triumph' (ll. 46, 57), 'Pageant' (l. 51), and 'pomp' (l. 58) to describe Anarchy's riotous march across England points to his conception of this scene in terms that fuse the descriptions of the reports of Peterloo, as the one quoted above, with a *pompa triumphalis*, or Roman triumph, the unarmed procession of victorious conquerors through the streets of their city to demonstrate their military prowess and display spoils of war, which usually included slaves and other captives.[7] The Triumph of Anarchy, therefore, gains a double signification: Anarchy's is a 'glorious triumph' (l. 46) because his parade across England, in the manner of the *pompa triumphalis*, is successful in defiling the land.[8] Shelley's reprobation

---

[5] 'Disturbances at Manchester', *The Examiner*, 22 August 1819, Issue 608, p. 530.
[6] 'Disturbances at Manchester', p. 530.
[7] See H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry Into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).
[8] See Benjamin West's drawing entitled *The Triumph of Death* (1784), his study and first version of the composition he later entitled *Death on the Pale Horse* (oil sketch in 1796 and oil on canvas in 1817). West's Death, like Anarchy in Shelley's poem, is a skeletal figure who wears a kingly crown and tramples the multitudes that gather around him.

of the concept of Triumph – not least because, for the poet, it signifies moral degradation and oppression – is also explicit in his commentary on the Arch of Constantine: 'Never were monuments so completely fitted to the purpose for which they were designed of expressing that mixture of energy & error which is called a Triumph' (To Thomas Love Peacock, 23 March 1819; *Letters* II, 86). A 'mixture of energy & error' pervades Shelley's description of this monument to Peacock, in which he characteristically juxtaposes his admiration for the artistic and aesthetic value of the piece with his repudiation of the bellicose scenes it commemorates (see plate 1):

> It is an admirable work of art. […] Four Corinthian fluted columns support on each side a bold entablature, whose bases are loaded with reliefs of captives in every attitude of humiliation & slavery. The compartments above express in bolder relief the enjoyment of success, the conqueror on his throne or in his chariot, or riding over the crushed multitudes who writhe under his horses [*sic*] hoofs, as those below expressed the torture & abjectness of defeat. (*Letters* II, 86)

The scenes depicted on the Arch as described by the poet are not at odds with the images that Shelley includes in the Triumph of Anarchy; what transpires in both of Shelley's descriptions is his sympathy for the debased conquered and indignation at the brutality and remorselessness of the tyrants.[9] Although these ancient monuments and ruins are the remnants of a civilisation and a time to which Shelley looks for inspiration and with admiration, he is also aware that they are symbols of a tumultuous and oppressive past, which he would not wish to see repeated in the potential millenniums he projects for the future. He is perceptive of the fact that these are emblems of the simultaneous magnanimity and ignobility of civilisations; they are, for Shelley, the physical representations of the cyclical movement of history that he acknowledges yet rejects. It is characteristic of Shelley, and a sign of his sensibility, to consider an emblem

[9] There is a sense that, when Shelley describes the 'captives' and 'crushed multitudes' depicted in the Arch of Constantine, he is alluding to both human slaves and captured animals, as the generalised 'species' he uses in a related passage to his prose fragment 'The Coliseum' suggests: 'a human being returning in the midst of festival and solemn joy with thousands and thousands of his inslaved [*sic*] and desolated species chained behind his chariot' (*Penguin* 629). Cian Duffy identifies the scene of this footnote as 'an account of Titus's triumphant return to Rome after his destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70' because (a) the Coliseum is alternatively known as the Flavian amphitheatre (after Titus Flavius), and (b) the poet wrote this footnote 'in terms which parallel' his description of the Arch of Titus in *Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence* (composed in 1819) (*Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 169, 235fn49). The scene of the related passage could be referring to the Arch of Titus, as Duffy proposes (which he reiterates in *Penguin* 865), but the generalised terms of the description of the *pompa triumphalis* that it depicts suggests a universal applicability that is equally relevant to the Arch of Constantine.

Plate 1. *Arch of Constantine, detail of 'Liberatori Urbis' panel*. Rome, Italy.

intended to convey the greatness and power of a civilisation for what it reveals about the oppressed on whose pain and torture it bases its victory and construction. The poet's reading of monuments, as the one that he conducts in his prose fragment 'The Coliseum' (composed in 1818), is finely nuanced. That he recognises and praises the aesthetic and architectural value of a building – an appreciation of the genius that envisioned and designed it, and an admiration of the intrinsic beauty of its form – does not mean that he is ignorant of its function – the circumstances in which it was built, the uses to which it was put, or the events and people that it commemorates. Shelley's understanding of the concept of Triumph points to the importance of recognising the potential ambiguity and ambivalence of over-connoted concepts, of re-evaluating how they are perceived and the perspective from which they are employed.[10]

Leigh Hunt characterises the courtly masque, in his discussion of the form that introduces *The Descent of Liberty: A Mask* (1816), as 'more essentially given up to the fancy, and abounding in machinery [i.e. supernatural characters and incidents] and personification, generally with a particular allusion' which very fittingly applies to *The Mask of Anarchy*.[11] Shelley's knowledge of Hunt's mask, Stuart Curran points out, 'must be assumed', and likewise must be the poet's acquaintance with an alto-relievo, part of a memorial to Thomas Dundas in St Paul's Cathedral, depicting the confrontation of Liberty and Anarchy in a manner reminiscent of Shelley's poem (see plates 2 and 3).[12] Writing to the editor of *The Morning Chronicle* in January 1806, John Bacon Jr, offers an explanation of the iconography of his monument to General Dundas to make the memorial intelligible to its observers. Among the statues, one of which is '*Sensibility* […] represented by a youthful female figure, holding in her hand a sensitive plant', is the 'tomb', he describes,

> enriched by an alto-relievo representation of Britannia in the act of protecting *Liberty*, who has fled to her for succour from *Anarchy*, emblematized by a maniac figure with a lighted fire-brand in his hand; and from *Hypocrisy* here pointed out by a female figure who is holding in her right hand a mask descriptive of a smiling and amiable countenance, with which she is concealing her real features, expressive of the most ferocious and horrid barbarity.[13]

---

[10] See chapter two for a discussion of 'The Coliseum' which reflects on Shelley's views on the appreciation of the form and function of monuments.
[11] Leigh Hunt, *The Descent of Liberty: A Mask* (London: Gale, Curtis, and Fenner, 1815), p. xxiv.
[12] Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1975), p. 189.
[13] John Bacon, Jr, 'General Dundas's Monument', *The Morning Chronicle*, 7 January 1806, Issue 11432, p. 3.

Plate 2. John Bacon Jr, *Monument to Major General Thomas Dundas*, 1805. St Paul's Cathedral.
© Courtauld Institute of Art (B95/884)

Plate 3. John Bacon Jr, *Monument to Major General Thomas Dundas, detail*, 1805. St Paul's Cathedral.
© Courtauld Institute of Art (B95/886)

It is, on the extant evidence, impossible to ascertain the extent to which Shelley would have been familiar with this memorial or this description in *The Morning Chronicle*, if at all,[14] yet the scene Bacon describes points to noteworthy parallels with the Agon in *The Mask*. The singularisation of Anarchy as the 'ultimate evil' (*SMW* 760fn401) is evident in both the memorial and Shelley's poem, as is the subversive use of the mask, even if their use differs, Shelley's to denounce and Bacon's to commemorate government officials.

The similarities between *The Mask of Anarchy* and its biblical sources have been widely recognised by scholars. Morton D. Paley is alert to the overall scheme of the poem, explaining that 'The programme of *The Mask of Anarchy* could be described as a rewriting of the Book of Revelation for England in 1819'.[15] Shelley's 'rewriting of the Book of Revelation for England in 1819' is most evident in his reconfiguration of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The biblical War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death become Murder, Fraud, Hypocrisy, and Anarchy, four oppressive forces which suit the socio-political turbulence of England in 1819. The Book of Revelation directly speaks to the brutality and chaos of Shelley's time, offering the linear pattern of crisis-judgement-transformation that many intellectuals of Shelley's present hoped their turbulent time would describe. The journey that the speaker of *The Mask of Anarchy* is prompted to initiate, his 'walk in the visions of Poesy' (l. 4), is not a literal walk but rather a spiritual transportation in the manner of John of Patmos in Revelation 4:1-2:

> After this I looked, and, behold, a door *was* opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. 2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne.

---

[14] Shelley's visits and references to St Paul's Cathedral date from after the erection (in 1805) of the monument to General Dundas, and although the available evidence does not confirm his acquaintance with the piece, the same evidence does not allow this possibility to be excluded. St Paul's is visited by Beelzebub in Shelley's *The Devil's Walk: A Ballad* (composed in December 1811 or January 1812, in Keswick whilst visiting Southey) and was a meeting-place for Shelley and Mary before their elopement in 1814. James Bieri explains that 'In addition to Peacock's lodgings, Shelley and Mary met sporadically at St. Paul's Cathedral and at a variety of hotels and coffeehouses, favouring those outside the bailiffs' jurisdiction' (*Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Biography: Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792-1816* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 339). On 25 October 1814, Mary writes to Shelley, 'will you be at the door of the coffee house at five oclock [*sic*], as it is disagreeable to go into such places and I shall be there exactly at that time & we will go into St. Pauls [*sic*] where we can sit down' (*Letters* I, 409fn5). Two days later, on 27 October 1814, Shelley arranges another meeting at the same location, 'Meet me tomorrow at 3 o clock in St. Pauls [*sic*] if you do not hear before' (*Letters* I, 413). Writing to Peacock on 23 March 1819, Shelley comments on what he considers to be the superiority of St Paul's Cathedral in relation to St Peter's Basilica: 'St. Peter's is, as you have heard, the loftiest building in Europe. Externally it is inferior in architectural beauty to St. Paul's, though not wholly devoid of it; internally it exhibits littleness on a large scale, and is in every respect opposed to antique taste' (*Letters* II, 87).

[15] Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, p. 235.

Like John of Patmos, the speaker presents himself as especially chosen to be spiritually transported with the aim to communicate his vision of present and future to those who would listen and are meant to be regenerate after the disclosure of this truth. Both texts are thus acutely aware of their readership and their composition, preoccupied with and conscious of the fact that they have been produced to be transmitted. Apocalypses are characterised by what Bernard McGinn calls 'the "bookish" nature of the revealed message' and, in effect, the Book of Revelation is concerned with the longevity and communication of its message through the written word.[16] The prophet John is commanded to write his vision in a book in Revelation 1:11, 1:19, and 21:5, and the revelation itself is described as being physically contained in a book in 1:3, 10:4, 10:8-11, 22:7-19. The interest of Revelation in the act of writing is pertained to preserving the accuracy of the message of John's vision; communicating the vision exclusively through the spoken word could jeopardise the precision of the specific details of the revelation, not only of the particulars of the moment of destruction but also of the highly symbolic image of the New Jerusalem in 21–22. Indeed, Revelation warns against tampering with the written message by 'add[ing] unto these things' (22:18) or 'tak[ing] away from the words of the book of this prophecy' (22:19). References to the act of writing and the written word likewise pervade *The Mask of Anarchy*, a poem composed to be disseminated in writing in spite of the declamatory quality of some of its sections.[17] The first two lines of the penultimate stanza of *The Mask* – 'And these words shall then become | Like oppression's thundered doom' (ll. 364-65) – are contingent on the importance of 'become': the pacifist message conveyed in the written words of the poem has the potential to be materialised, if Shelley's suggestions are accepted, and thus bring the end of tyranny. Both the written and spoken words are prioritised in the poem: 'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW' is the 'mark' written on Anarchy's 'brow' (ll. 36-37); the poet writes the 'words of joy and fear' spoken, most likely, by the 'indignant Earth' (ll. 138, 139);[18] the primary audience of the speech is

[16] McGinn, 'Early Apocalypticism', p. 5.

[17] Reflecting on the declamatory nature of the Hortatory Address, Ronald Tetreault remarks that 'It cannot be denied that these lines are conveyed as spoken, and therefore they create a context which is at once historical and dramatic' (*The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), pp. 204-05).

[18] The identification of the speaker of the Hortatory Address is a much discussed and controversial matter in criticism of *The Mask of Anarchy*. Although the most likely candidate has been accepted as the Earth (see, e.g., Lisa Vargo, 'Unmasking Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*', *ESC*, 13.1 (1987), 49-64, especially p. 57), the following have also been proposed: 'the "power" as inherent in nature' (see Kenneth Neil Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 348); Hope (see Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 43, 47, 49); 'a maternal spirit, probably Britannia' (see Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 205); and even the spectral Shape (see Tetreault, *Poetry of Life*, p. 204; and Stephen Behrendt, *Shelley and his Audiences* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 198-99). However, as Paley comments, 'delimitations' imposed by attempts to identify the voice of the speech 'seem unsatisfactory, for the omission appears both deliberate and effectual'

addressed as 'Men of England, heirs of Glory, | Heroes of unwritten story' (ll. 147-48) and identified as 'Ye who suffer woes untold' (l. 291), for their suffering both exceeds human comprehension and is yet to be recorded;[19] it is with 'measured words', 'strong and simple' yet 'Keen to wound as sharpened swords' (ll. 297-300), that the oppressed should face their assailants. *The Mask* is, borrowing Michael O'Neill's expression, a self-conscious poem, perceptive, on the one hand, of the fact that it has been written down and, on the other hand, aware of the longevity and universality of its statements and message, of its potentiality to resonate with individuals across geographical and temporal boundaries, 'Ringing through each heart and brain, | Heard again—again—again—' (ll. 366-67).[20]

***

The Mask of Anarchy is codified according to two crucial conceptual inversions, namely the use of the mask and the meaning of anarchy. The opening lines of the Triumph of Anarchy introduce the characters of Shelley's masque and, by extension, they offer a vivid, often gruesome depiction of the decay and corruption of the pillars on which the country stands. In subverting the traditional presentation of the courtly masque, Shelley subverts the reader's expectations: the poetical characters of *The Mask* are abstract concepts that assail the country

(*Apocalypse and Millennium*, p. 246). The vagueness that surrounds the identity of the voice is in line with the apocalyptic form of the poem and with the practice of Romantic apocalypses. As in the first stanza of the poem, the emphasis in the Hortatory Address is not on who reveals the message, but rather on the millennial content of the vision.

[19] 'Heroes of unwritten story' is another passage on which critical consensus has not been reached. It could allude to the fact that these individuals, 'who suffer woes untold', do not yet have a representative from their social standing to voice their concerns, and Shelley is therefore temporarily speaking for, even if not with, them. Not only do they lack a representative for their collective voice, but also a record in the annals of history; they are 'heirs of Glory', of previous English men who have fought for their rights. That the 'story' of these heroes remains 'unwritten' could also allude to the fact that their legacy has not yet materialised: the millennial future of freedom envisioned in the speech, and towards which they are incited to strive, has not been realised. See also Susan Wolfson, 'Popular Songs and Ballads: Writing the "Unwritten Story" in 1819', in *PBS Handbook*, pp. 341-59 (p. 343).

In 'An Ode, Written, October 1819, before the Spaniards had recovered their Liberty' (published in *Prometheus Unbound, with Other Poems* in 1820; *Longman* III, 162-67), a composition which echoes, in tone, phrasing, and ideology, sentiments expressed in *The Mask*, Shelley reflects on the unsurmountable fame that those who fight for freedom, those 'who suffer woes untold' like the 'Men of England' of *The Mask*, will achieve when their story and feats are finally recorded:

> Glory, glory, glory,
> To those who have greatly suffered and done!
> Never name in story
> Was greater than that which ye shall have won. (ll. 22-25)

[20] O'Neill employs the expression '"the self-conscious poem" […] less to point to "consciousness of self" as a theme extractable from a poem than to the recognition made by a poem that it is a poem' (*Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. xiii-xiv). For his brief discussion of the self-consciousness of *The Mask of Anarchy*, see pp. 141-42.

through the actions of real government officials, whose collective enterprise follows the path of anarchy, rather than stately order.[21] Shelley's suggestion, in ascribing, for instance, Viscount Castlereagh as the mask that Murder wears, is that Castlereagh's actions are, in fact, the way in which Murder finds expression in England in 1819, a period perceived in 1831 as 'the reign of terror in England—the days of Castlereagh, and Sidmouth, the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Bill, and the Manchester Massacre'.[22] Despite this phraseology, which equates this moment in English history with Maximilien de Robespierre's 'La Terreur' (1793-1794), Shelley's mask is *of Anarchy* – not terror, murder, hypocrisy, or fraud – which reveals that, for the poet, chaos is the spirit that rules this particular historical period. Thus personified Anarchy occupies a position of ultimate authority, adorned with the symbolic apparatus of command ('a kingly crown' and 'a sceptre', ll. 34-35) and concentrating in itself the powers (and, by extension, atrocities) perpetrated by the religious, monarchical, and judicial systems ('I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW', l. 37). That Shelley would equate Anarchy with God is unsurprising, but it reflects, beyond his usual attack on orthodox Christianity, his criticism of the desecrating uses to which the Bible and religion are put – it is as 'Bishops' that many 'Destructions' are disguised in the 'ghastly masquerade' (ll. 26-29), and Hypocrisy (or Sidmouth) is 'Clothed with the Bible, as with light' (l. 22), deturpating the holy text in the service of oppression.

In considering anarchy as having origin, not in the actions of the populace, but in the misrule of governors, Shelley shows his alertness to etymologies: there is irony in the country's figures of authority being anarchic, for Shelley's perception of their unsuitability to govern is expressed through a concept derived from the Greek *anarchos*, without ruler. England in 1819 is in an anarchic state because it is without a rightful, compassionate, and honourable leader, and the attack in St Peter's Field, for Shelley, proved it – the crowd attending the peaceful reformist meeting was dispersed by a disorderly group of government officials. Shelley's inversion of the use of anarchy is not without precedent: the meaning of anarchy, as Raymond Williams explains, 'begun to shift in the specific context of the French Revolution, when the Girondins attacked their radical opponents as anarchists' which 'had the effect of identifying anarchism with a range of radical political tendencies'.[23] The concept of anarchy morphed in

[21] For a discussion of Shelley's use of the courtly masque and its relation to the poem's original published title, *The Masque of Anarchy*, as well as an analysis of the 'triumph of Anarchy' as a 'ghastly masquerade' (ll. 57, 27), see Tetreault, *Poetry of Life*, pp. 200-04, and Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, pp. 236-37.
[22] 'Reform Meeting at Worcester', *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 6 October 1831, Issue 6717, p. 4.
[23] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; rev. 1985), p. 37.

its signification, from being applied (by supporters of the monarchical status quo) to the activities of revolutionaries, in the early stages of the French Revolution, to denoting revolutionaries-turned-politicians whose sanguinary and violent measures, as the tenor of the Revolution started to change, resembled those of the deposed tyrants of the *Ancien Régime*.[24] One of the ways in which the apocalyptic-eschatological tone of *The Mask of Anarchy* is revealed, therefore, is through the inversion of the meaning of anarchy in this particular historical and political context, showing the disordered state of England in 1819.

The Triumph of Anarchy is interrupted by Hope, an early sign of what later in *Hellas* Shelley would put as 'Hope may vanish, but can die not' (l. 35), his belief in the ability of hope to endure and subsist even amidst the most dire circumstances. Shelley's anthropomorphised Hope is 'a maniac maid' who 'looked more like Despair' (ll. 86, 88), again anticipating sentiments from *Hellas*, 'Yet were life a charnel where | Hope lay coffined with Despair' (ll. 38-39), and 'To——' ('One word is too often profaned', dated 1821 by Mary Shelley), 'One hope is too like despair | For prudence to smother' (ll. 5-6). Shelley analyses the complexities of hope: hope is resilient, but it is often sustained, amid chaos and distress, by the need for its existence. There is a subtle threshold that separates hope and despair, Shelley suggests, which can be jeopardised by a lack of mental fortitude to resist both oppression as well as constant disappointment caused by frustrated millennial ideals.[25] This association sees Shelley, yet again, exploring etymologies: that hope and despair are conceptually bound, or twin antithetical concepts, is evident from the Latin derivation of 'despair', from *desperare*, to deprive of or reverse hope.

---

[24] Jacobin politician Jean-Paul Marat, renowned for the brutality of his views in his newspaper *L'Ami du Peuple* (1789-1793), is described as an 'anarchic monster' in a eulogising print praising the nobility and selflessness of his assassin, Girondin sympathiser Charlotte Corday. (See Michel Hennin and Carl de Vinck, *Charlotte Corday vertilgte das anarchische Ungeheuer Marat*, *c*. [1793-1799?], [Germany?], Bibliothèque Nationale de France.) Maximilien de Robespierre was likewise perceived: the Terror, in an article that examines the actions of Robespierre and Napoléon Bonaparte, is presented as 'the revolutionary anarchy of Robespierre' whose ultimate aim was, through the use of the guillotine, 'to establish an universal anarchy' ('Robespierre and Bonaparte Compared', *Chester Chronicle*, 1 July 1803, Issue 1463, p. 4).

[25] Cf. George Frederic Watts and assistants, *Hope*, 1886, oil paint on canvas, 1422 x 1118 mm, Tate Britain. Watts's Hope – a melancholic, blindfolded figure clutching a single-stringed lyre – defies joyful depictions and traditional understandings of hope, leading Gilbert Keith Chesterton to state that such a picture may be entitled '*Despair*' (G. K. Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (London: Duckworth, 1904), p. 98). Watts's vision tests the limits of hope, akin to Shelley's conceptions, addressing the resilience of hope by moving away from conventional ideas of expectancy to include a discussion of how to cope with despair. Watts's *Hope*, Chesterton explains, is best understood if appreciated as 'another symbol describing another part or aspect of the same complex reality', for it speaks to 'something in man which is always apparently on the eve of disappearing, but never disappears, an assurance which is always apparently saying farewell and yet illimitably lingers, a string which is always stretched to snapping and yet never snaps' (*Watts*, pp. 102, 98). Understanding Watts's hope requires the audience not to perceive the lyre as broken, but rather to appreciate the beauty that can be produced by the instrument's last chord. Like Shelley's hope, which 'may vanish, but can die not' (*Hellas*, l. 35), Watts emphasises how hope can be 'something damaged but undestroyed' (*Watts*, p. 107).

Paley identifies Hope as 'a Cassandra figure', perhaps understanding the desperate state of Shelley's 'maniac maid' through the mad scenes of the Trojan prophetess in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (458 BC).[26] However, the conception of Hope as the sole surviving offspring of Time in stanza XXIII of *The Mask*, presenting her as an indestructible force that resists the turbulent convolutions of history, has echoes of Pandora. The myth, in Hesiod's retelling in *Works and Days* (*c*. 700 BC), raises questions regarding the nature of hope – if hope remains confined in a jar from which evils are released, should it be feared or even indulged?[27] It is important that the story of Pandora is codified within the myth of Prometheus, and thus it is an antecedent to the events of *Prometheus Unbound*: it is to balance the gift of fire to humans, Hesiod suggests, that Pandora and the jar are offered by Zeus to Epimetheus, and, in this context, hope is not necessarily intended as a favour to humans. Hesiod's retelling, however, is ambiguous regarding the nature of hope: if Zeus offered hope to humans, along with other evils, because it 'is too like despair' and dreams can lead to disillusionment, its confinement in the jar can equally point to hope alleviating the effects of other evils, the reassurance it can offer to humans.[28] The myth thus represents an aspect of the ability to hope that, for Shelley, is crucial – confined to the jar without the possibility of escaping or disappearing, hope can endure, recover, and regenerate. It is this ambiguity of hope, articulated through the language of myth, that Shelley addresses in his invariable equations and associations of hope and despair. The ability to dream and envision millenniums stems from an attempt to reconcile the disparity that exists between the reality and expectations of the present, but the phantoms that hope creates, Shelley concedes, can be equally revoked. Shelley's emphasis, especially in *The Mask of Anarchy*, is on the convergence of indignation and hope. Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological perspective rests on the indignation of what his modern world is and the hope

---

[26] Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, p. 242. Clytaemnestra alludes to Cassandra's madness in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (LCL 146), saying of the prophetess that 'She's mad, that's all, obeying the promptings of an unsound mind' (l. 1064). The Chorus of town elders, in conversation with the Trojan princess, later say, 'You are out of your mind, divinely possessed.' (l. 1140)

[27] The myth of Pandora varies significantly in ancient sources. Its earliest account is included in Homer's *Iliad* (*c*. 8th century BC), in which Achilles explains that Zeus possesses two urns (one containing evils, *kakon*, and another blessings, *doron*) and is the great distributor of human lots (XXIV. 527-28, LCL 171). However, the discussion, both in antiquity and modern times, is centred around the uncertainty as to which jar was given, along with Pandora, to Epimetheus, perhaps due to the ambiguity that surrounds confined hope. The Greek *elpis*, often translated as hope, can also be interpreted as anticipation or expectation, both of good and bad things. Hesiod, who also briefly alludes to this myth in his *Theogony* (*c*. 700 BC), explains it was the jar containing evils (*Works and Days*, ll. 59-105; LCL 57), whereas Theognis (*Elegiac Poetry*, ll. 1135-50; LCL 258) and Aesop (from Babrius's *Fables* 58, LCL 436) claim the opened jar contained blessings (perhaps influenced by Pandora's name meaning 'all gifts' or 'all blessings').

[28] See Norman Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 65-85, for a study (with a psychoanalytical dimension) of the figure of Pandora that addresses the myth's inherent misogyny and the structural importance of hope.

of what it can become, on how, if change and reform are embraced, society could achieve the progress that not even the Ancient Greeks – whom Shelley considered the most overall advanced of civilisations – attained.[29]

The Shape in *The Mask of Anarchy* is one of Shelley's phantoms that hope creates, initially vaporous – 'A mist, a light', 'small at first, and weak, and frail' (ll. 103, 104) – but progressively imposing and inspiring awe in 'the prostrate multitude' (l. 126).[30] Although the Shape, like Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound*, triumphs over Anarchy and initiates the potential prosperous time, Paley's warning is relevant that 'Attempts to assign an allegorical meaning to this manifestation […] do not fully describe what is happening, because the apocalyptic moment cannot be contained in a single denotative meaning'.[31] The Shape is the symbol that represents the transformative process between the apocalyptic-eschatological present and the ensuing millennium desired by the visionary poet, thus simultaneously encompassing and figuring the path for the yet-to-materialise, to happen or exist. The Shape is correspondingly described as present among the people, but invisible to their eyes, who are unaccustomed to imaginative exercises:

> With step as soft as wind it passed
> O'er the heads of men—so fast
> That they knew the presence there,
> And looked—but all was empty air. (ll. 118-21)

That the Shape cannot be discerned by the people, unlike the other anthropomorphised entities of the poem, is a reflection of Shelley's perception that humanity does not have the ability to

---

[29] See this thesis's coda for a discussion of Shelley's engagement with Ancient Greece, both as a nation and a concept. The fourth and fifth centuries BC (in Greece) are singularised by Shelley, in *A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love*, as 'the most memorable period in the history of the world' (Notopoulos, 404), yet the poet recognises the improvements that 'the modern world' has achieved with respect to their Greek predecessors, explaining that 'justice and the true meaning of human society is, if not more accurately, more generally understood; though perhaps men know more, and therefore are more, as a mass, yet this principle [of 'arrest[ing] and perpetuat[ing]' Greek excellence] has never been called into action, and requires indeed a universal and almost appalling change in the system of existing things' (Notopoulos, 406).

[30] Cf. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834 edition):

> At first it seemed a little speck,
> And then it seemed a mist;
> It moved and moved, and took at last
> A certain shape, I wist.
>
> A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist! (III. 149-53)

[31] Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, p. 245.

strive for what it cannot imagine; people have felt hope, even if momentarily, and endured the effects of what Shelley considers to be governmental anarchy, but never experienced an altogether better future. Humanity cannot be motivated to embrace socio-political and personal reform merely by the promise of a potential millennium, Shelley concludes, for 'We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 695). Therefore the Shape remains incorporeal and unseen by the people because its signification is found beyond what society has experienced, and humanity, Shelley proposes, cannot imagine beyond its experience. The poet-prophet describes the Shape in detail, proving that he can imagine beyond what he has experienced, and is receptive to a sensitivity and understanding that escapes society, in line with the ability of the poet to 'lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 681). It is through his ability to exercise his imagination, to both see the Shape and envision the future it signals, that Shelley distinguishes himself from the audience he addresses. There is an implied unity in the 'you' which is addressed in the poem – the audience is incited to stand together and resist tyranny; nevertheless, this is a unity in which the poet, even if he emotionally and imaginatively joins the cause of the oppressed, does not include himself – it is never a 'we'. Shelley's interest is in encouraging his audience to exercise their imagination, unrestricted and passionately, to realise that their present dire situation can change as long as they hope and dream, even if for something which they have never experienced and cannot accurately define. The Shape's arrival, in fact, seems to have had that effect: 'the prostrate multitude' is inspired, and 'Thought's sprung where'er that step did fall' (ll. 126, 125). It is this inclination of 'the prostrate multitude' that Shelley wants to inspire and animate, for the transformative potential encapsulated in collective hope is rooted in the imaginative power of society. In its dramatisation of the movement from apocalypse to millennium, *The Mask of Anarchy* discusses the potential of poetry and the mind to create new realities, and instil hope in a desperate society.

Shelley's discussion of Freedom also entails immateriality and transience. He offers the perspective of the tyrant, for whom the freedom of the oppressed is

> A shadow soon to pass away,
> A superstition, and a name
> Echoing from the cave of Fame. (ll. 214-16)

Shelley offers this perspective as an interlude to separate his approach to the ways of defining freedom for the oppressed: after delineating their present enslaved situation which illustrates

what Freedom is not (ll. 156-208), Shelley provides very concrete images and examples through which Freedom can be understood (ll. 217-61), counterbalancing attempts, by 'imposters' (l. 213), that deny the possibility of its actualisation. Shelley's definition of freedom for the oppressed is not a patronising attitude. Like with the example of the Shape, it arises from Shelley's understanding that people are purblind to the necessity to envision the freedom for which they should strive, and thus the poet offers parameters to help them conceive what would otherwise remain strictly abstract and unintelligible. Shelley's shadows and phantoms are symbols of hope, of transformation and regeneration, unlike their use by oppressors, who rely on the incorporeality of shadows to perpetuate their status quo. Shelley's use of shadows also points, however, to the invariable scepticism that underlines the poet's millennialism: these phantoms and shadows that Shelley desires can be dissipated, just as the millennium can be reversed.

Perhaps because *The Mask of Anarchy* was conceived as a poem of the 'exoteric' kind, it lacks the sceptical uncertainty that characterises the millenniums envisioned in Shelley's 'esoteric' poems.[32] This is not to say that Shelley believed in the ultimate permanence of the millennium conceived in *The Mask*, and indeed his other compositions show this. Rather, the assertiveness of the language and images in *The Mask* is pertained to the audience to whom the poem is directed: it would undermine the message of the poem to engage the readers' imaginations and promote their fight against oppression, whilst simultaneously doubting the stability of the freedom and millennium towards which Shelley is inciting his audience. The certainty that *The Mask* offers, by excluding references to revoked millenniums, is not replicated by other lyrics that may have been intended for Shelley's volume of popular songs. The 'glorious Phantom' (l. 13) of 'England in 1819' (composed in late 1819), with whom the Shape is usually compared, '*may* | Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day' (ll. 13-14, emphasis added) for, despite hoping, Shelley is aware that imagining millenniums is a speculative exercise. The purpose of these 'exoteric' poems is shown in the way in which the language employed echoes the revolutionary discourse of the early 1790s, in particular Richard Price's *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1790). Both Shelley's poems and Price's *Discourse* share the perception of governments as 'contrivances for enabling the *few* to oppress the *many*', reworked into a memorable phrase in *The Mask* and *Laon and Cythna* IX. xiv. 3590 (*Longman*

[32] Shelley distinguished, from among his poetical compositions, those categorised as 'of the exoteric species' (To Leigh Hunt, 14-18 November 1819; *Letters* II, 152), intended for the masses, from those he destined for the 'esoteric few' (To Charles Ollier, 16 February 1821; *Letters* II, 263).

II, 210).[33] They are also posed as advice to oppressors, not merely to the oppressed, to prevent civil insurrection; Price's suggestion to tyrants to 'Restore to mankind their rights; and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together' rings true in Shelley's popular poems as well.[34]

The Phantom of 'England in 1819', being 'glorious', is presented as an inheritor of the American and French 'Revolutions, both glorious', but the glory of Shelley's Phantom, unlike Price's, is uncertain.[35] It is complicated by the auxiliary 'may' which casts ambiguity over the possibility of Shelley's millennial Phantom becoming concrete, and further distances this entity from the Shape in *The Mask of Anarchy*, and its signification from the enthusiastic fervour that transpires in Price's *Discourse*. The figure of the Phantom is a malleable symbol, not just because of the immateriality it connotes, but also in its implication. Shelley also considered 'Phoenix' and 'Gorgon' as potential millennial figures for 'England in 1819', but, although metrical equivalents, 'Phantom', devoid of specific and determining positive or negative associations, is a more appropriate symbol in the context of Shelley's apocalypticism.[36] That the Phantom 'may | Burst' also addresses the potential violence traditionally associated with revolutions which Price seems to welcome:

> Behold kingdoms, admonished by you, starting from sleep, breaking their fetters, and claiming justice from their oppressors! Behold the light you have struck out, after setting AMERICA free, reflected to FRANCE, and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes, and warms and illuminates EUROPE![37]

The American Revolution was likewise for Shelley 'A second sun arrayed in flame, | To burn, to kindle, to illume' (*Hellas*, ll. 68-69) which could inspire the oppressed to 'shake your chains to earth like dew | Which in sleep had fallen on you' (*The Mask*, ll. 153-54, 370-71), as Price envisioned. Yet Price's certainty, in 1789, that the destructive energy which 'lays despotism in ashes' will have positive repercussions is not shared by Shelley. Writing from a vantage-point afforded by time, after the French Revolution, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and the Manchester Massacre, the poet is not convinced that violence safeguards the arrival of the

[33] Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, 3rd edn (London: George Stafford, 1789), p. 12.
[34] Price, *Discourse*, p. 51.
[35] Price, *Discourse*, p. 49.
[36] See *BSM* XVIII, 214-15 (adds. e. 12, p. 178).
[37] Price, *Discourse*, p. 50.

millennium, but he is equally aware that, if violence must subsist, its guiding intention needs to be redefined to secure universal philanthropy.

It is this desire to ensure universal philanthropy that distinguishes the aggressive force included in Shelley's pacifism. Peace and violence are indeed fused in Shelley's works, but not because of conscious ambiguity or an inability to decide the best method of action to defeat tyranny.[38] Shelley's philosophy comprehends pacifism as lack of action but different from passivity, and understands violence and its purpose from a different perspective to that of the oppressor. Shelley's pacifism condemns the use of violence, especially against the tyrant, but understands that its deployment is dependent on how the moral issue of violence is approached, and only with the intent of seeking universal love, truth and compassion, is this aggressive, though philanthropic force, ever considered by the pacifist. This moral philosophy underlies the confluence of antithetical forces in the apocalyptic-eschatological moment – the confrontation of tyrant and agent of Liberty – as depicted in Shelley's works. The specific moment of overthrow of the oppressor does not show injury to the tyrant, which is in line with the Greek tragic convention of violent deaths taking place offstage, but more importantly reflects Shelley's rejection of revenge against the tyrant.[39] The tyrant should be deposed, Shelley's works propose, not as a result of punishment for crimes committed or as an act of revenge from the oppressed, but because it ensures universal social justice and protects individual liberties which the tyrant, by enslaving and retaliating, invades. Therefore, *Prometheus Unbound* III. i-ii and the Agon in *The Mask of Anarchy* depict the confrontation between tyrant and the deliverer of the millennium, but not the fatal blow. It is uncertain in whose 'blood' Hope lies 'ankle-deep' (l. 127): it could belong to 'the prostrate multitude' after their trampling by Anarchy, but the line could also indicate a violent *agon* between the Shape and Anarchy. The only certain references to this event, however, occur in stanza XXXIII, referring to the destruction of Anarchy and his followers, and in the Shape's description, which presents the apparition as if ready for battle:

---

[38] See, for instance, Jens Martin Gurr, 'Views on Violence in Shelley's Post-Peterloo Prose and Poetry: Contradiction, Ambivalence, Ambiguity?', *Studien zur Englischen Romantik*, 'Romantic Ambiguities – Abodes of the Modern', 20 (2017), 83-93.

[39] Violent deaths were not presented visually on the Greek stage, but were represented verbally through reported speeches, often very detailed in the intense horrors described. Although certain kinds of violence were allowed, as was the stage presentation of a character in the process of dying or the corpse of a character killed by a violent act, what was barred from stage was the depiction of the fatal act that leads to death. Horace, for instance, explains that murders should not be depicted on stage (*Ars Poetica*, ll. 179-88; LCL 194). For an in-depth examination of the Greek convention of tragic violence, see Alan H. Sommerstein, *The Tangled Ways of Zeus: And Other Studies In and Around Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), in particular the second chapter, 'Violence in Greek Drama'.

Till as clouds grow on the blast,
Like tower-crowned giants striding fast,
And glare with lightnings as they fly,
And speak in thunder to the sky,

It grew—a Shape arrayed in mail
Brighter than the viper's scale,
And upborne on wings whose grain
Was as the light of sunny rain.

On its helm, seen far away,
A planet, like the Morning's, lay;
And those plumes its light rained through
Like a shower of crimson dew. (ll. 106-17)

The Shape's entrance amongst lightning and thunder bears biblical models, of which, because of the messianic purpose of the Shape, the most relevant is Matthew 24:27: 'For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.' The defensive armour that the Shape wears reveals an evident allusion to Milton's Lucifer, the light-bearing figure of rebellion against God's institutionalised form of authority. Images of apocalyptic destruction are suggested by the light of the Morning Star filtering through 'those plumes', a multivalent symbol. The 'shower of crimson dew' evokes pyroclastic debris, but equally meteorite showers, a simile which Shelley also employs later in the poem for the destruction caused by tyrannical 'horsemen's scimitars' which 'Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars | Thirsting to eclipse their burning | In a sea of death and mourning' (ll. 315-18).[40] The 'shower of crimson dew' further reimagines bellicose scenes, as in Zophiel's

[40] Cf. Revelation 6:13 – 'And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind' – and Revelation 8:10-11 – 'And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of water; 11 And the name of the star is called Wormwood.' The latter is reconfigured by Lord Byron in an image of apocalyptic expectation of his own, on the aftermath of Waterloo:

> Like the Wormwood Star foretold
> By the sainted Seer of old,
> Show'ring down a fiery flood,
> Turning rivers into blood. ('Ode, from the French', 1816; ll. 18-21)

rallying cry to the angels, 'For this day will pour down, | If I conjecture ought, no drizzling shower, | But rattling storm of arrows barbed with fire' (*PL*, VI. 544-46). Finally, the 'shower of crimson dew' also carries associations of blood, especially that which is unjustly spilt, and its defilement of nature and the nation, an idea that pervades *The Mask of Anarchy* (see ll. 39-41, 44, 127, 141, 143-44, 192, 242-43).[41]

It is with images evoking cosmic destruction, as the ones suggested by the Shape's armour, that the poem closes:

> 'And that slaughter to the Nation
> Shall steam up like inspiration,
> Eloquent, oracular;
> A volcano heard afar.
>
> 'And these words shall then become
> Like oppression's thundered doom
> Ringing through each heart and brain,
> Heard again—again—again— (ll. 360-67)

The different levels of address of the poem multiply its interpretation, especially important in the case of the Hortatory Address.[42] The poem's exhortation to freedom can be perceived as

---

Cf. also William Blake's 'The Tyger' (1794): 'When the stars threw down their spears | And water'd heaven with their tears' (ll. 17-18).

[41] Cf. Revelation 8:7: 'The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth.' Cf. also Byron's 'Ode, from the French': 'We do not curse thee, Waterloo! | Though Freedom's blood thy plain bedew' (ll. 1-2). Cf. also *PL*, I. 45-49. Similar images open Shelley's 'An Ode, Written, October 1819, before the Spaniards had recovered their Liberty'. The defilement of nature is evident in the land's infertility, 'There is blood on the earth that denies ye bread' (l. 2), but blood is also transformed into tears, with which to mourn for the fallen in the struggle for freedom, 'Be your wounds like eyes | To weep for the dead, the dead, the dead' (ll. 3-4; *Longman* III, 165). Rain is also represented as tears, in the third choral ode of *Hellas*, which mingle with the blood of the fallen Greek in the Greek War of Independence, mourning the passing of those fighting for liberty: 'My golden rain | For the Grecian slain | Should mingle in tears with the bloody main' (ll. 665-67). Shelley's interchanging of blood and tears also features in 'Mine eyes [ ] like two ever-bleeding wounds | Watering my footsteps with their briny rain' (*Longman* III, 20; composed in late summer or early autumn 1819), Shelley's loose translation of Sophocles' rendition of the messenger's account of Oedipus's self-blinding, 'the bleeding eyeballs soaked his cheeks, and did not cease to drip [sending forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail]' (*Oedipus Tyrannos*, ll. 1276-79; LCL 20). Wounds that send forth tears and blood also feature in Christ's words in the fragmentary 'Prologue to *Hellas*': 'by this brow | Whose pores wept tears of blood' (*BSM* XVI, 28-29 (adds. e. 7, p. 25)).

[42] Stephen Behrendt explains that *The Mask of Anarchy* simultaneously constitutes a 'program' for the oppressed and a 'warning' for the 'aristocracy (liberal or otherwise)' who should be aware of 'the clear and present danger of continued failure to enact real social, political, and economic reform' (*Shelley and his Audiences*, p. 200).

both inspirational for the people and threatening for tyrants who fear a British revolution of the magnitude of the French, a duality to which the poet alludes by describing the Hortatory Address as 'words of joy and fear' (l. 138).[43] The importance of the effect of 'words' is, at the end of the poem, emphasised: the words of the poem will memorialise Peterloo, and its peaceful protest reverberate to inspire defence through rhetoric, 'Be your strong and simple words | Keen to wound as sharpened swords' (ll. 299-300).[44] Shelley immortalises the Manchester Massacre as a 'volcano heard afar' that annunciates 'oppression's thundered doom', prefigured in *The Devil's Walk: A Ballad* (composed in December 1811 or January 1812):

> Hark, the earthquake's crash I hear,
> Kings turn pale, and Conquerors start,
> Ruffians tremble in their fear,
> For their Satan doth depart. (ll. 128-31; *Hopkins* I, 127)

[43] Cf. Byron's 'Ode, from the French':

> But the heart and the mind,
> And the voice of mankind,
> Shall arise in communion—
> And who shall resist that proud union?
> […]
> When once more her hosts assemble,
> Tyrants shall believe and tremble—
> Smile they at this idle threat?
> Crimson tears will follow yet. (ll. 91-94, 101-04)

The French Revolution was still invoked in 1831 to reject the introduction of what would become the Great Reform Act of 1832. Revolution, and reform, was considered, in an account of parliamentary proceedings, as promoting national instability, more disadvantageous than the insubstantial benefits which it could offer, as Horace Twiss is reported to have declared:

> When the most ardent admirers of revolution looked at its consequences, and saw Belgium and France devastated—trade suspended—property unsafe—security lost—they would find that moderation was better than revolution; and that those countries held out no encouragement to us to imitate them. It was impossible therefore to suppose that Englishmen could be so senseless as to run the hazard of a Revolution, to obtain some theoretical improvements. ('Parliamentary Proceedings', *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 9 March 1831, Issue 2541, p. 1)

Reform, however, was proposed, in a counterargument, as a measure to avoid the potential threat of a revolution: 'the dangers which had resulted from the French Revolution' were undeniable, conceded John Spencer (then Lord Althorp), but 'was it not then the duty of those who looked to the welfare of the nation to take measures to prevent such a Revolution here?' ('Parliamentary Proceedings', p. 1).

[44] The use of rhetoric as incisive defence that has the potency of weapons bears biblical models – see Isaiah 49:2; Psalms 64:3; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16, 2:12, 2:16, 19:15, 19:21. Cf. also *Hamlet*, III. ii. 366, 'I will speak daggers to her, but use none', and III. iv. 84-85, 'O, speak to me no more; | These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears.' Shelley employs the image in Urania's lament in *Adonais*: 'Defenceless as thou wert, oh where was then | Wisdom the mirrored shield, or scorn the spear?' (ll. 239-40).

Both earthquakes and volcanoes are usually associated with cosmic violence, especially with the destruction of the Conflagration in Revelation 8:8 and 11:13, but volcanoes are more appropriate millennial symbols for Shelley's apocalypticism. The activity of volcanoes, that violently erupt and discharge magma, unlike earthquakes, is creative. Volcanoes simultaneously signal endings and beginnings, and are emblems of transitional states, of the new worlds that can emerge from eruptive socio-political turmoil.[45]

Ronald Tetreault interprets *The Mask of Anarchy* as a poem centred on the tension between the 'misrule' of the government and the spiritual and physical 'self-rule' of the people:

> *The Masque of Anarchy* unfolds a dramatic process that depicts two kinds of order, the first cruel and repressive, a social order that uses violence and intimidation to constrain the turbulent passions of the people, succeeded by a second kind of civil order that is benevolent and springs from those internal sources of harmony and self-discipline that the Greeks called *sophrosyne*.[46]

That the 'second kind of civil order' is benevolent and ruled by *sophrosyne* does not impede its philanthropic use of violence. Shelley's emphasis is on how violence is used by these two civil orders: the first one, because it represses and intimidates to maintain a status quo which only benefits those who want to preserve it, has to be replaced by a second order to ensure harmony and benevolence, a universal respect of people's liberties. Shelley is aware that humanity is violent, not just the tyrant but also the oppressed, and, indeed, the fact that Shelley promotes a pacifist approach of nonviolent resistance demonstrates his understanding of the violent and destructive tendencies of society. His interest lies in breaking the cycle in which the oppressed intervene by engaging in retaliative violence like the tyrant, in breaking the parallel behaviour of slave and tyrant, as he laments in *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills* (1819):

> but 'tis a bitter woe
> That love and reason cannot change
> The despot's rage, the slave's revenge. (ll. 233-35)

[45] See G. M. Matthews, 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley', in *Shelley: Modern Judgements*, ed. by R. B. Woodings (Glasgow: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 162-95.
[46] Tetreault, *Poetry of Life*, p. 201.

In guiding the potential use of violence towards promoting social justice, not revenge, Shelley's works question the intent with which violence is put into action and, in turn, who benefits from that violence being used. This is the nuance that emerges in the third stanza of 'An Ode, Written, October, 1819, before the Spaniards had recovered their Liberty' (1820). The ode is addressed to an audience similar to that of *The Mask of Anarchy* which the poet urges to re-evaluate its approach to the fight for freedom:

> And ye who attend her [Freedom's] imperial car,
> Lift not your hands in the banded war,
> But in her defence whose children ye are. (ll. 19-21; *Longman* III, 165)

Shelley's emphasis is placed on the intention that drives the aggressive force of those whom the poet would urge to embrace a pacifist ideology and methodology. Pacifism, again, is not coterminous with passivity, and Shelley encourages those who fight against oppression to apply a philanthropic aggressive force, if it indeed has to be used, in Freedom's 'defence', rather than seeking a 'banded war', indulging anger and retaliation in the manner of Satan in his war against God in *Paradise Lost*.[47] Shelley especially stresses that the philanthropic aggressive force of pacifism is a *reluctant* measure to be adopted with nonviolent, active resistance, of the type he proposes in *The Mask of Anarchy*, for, above all, he does not condone the demonstration of violence. In fact, Shelley explained to Leigh Hunt, at the close of his long letter of 3 November 1819, that he considered those who promulgate offensive, instead of defensive, violence, even if dignitaries of the cause of Freedom, as enemies of the cause:

> And {as the} struggle seems approaching I recommend no {less to} your attention the open bigoted & pensioned enemies of freedom, than those who profess to advocate our own cause, yet who pollute it with the principles of legitimate murder, under the specious yet execrable names of revenge & retribution. (*Letters* II, 148)

Retributive violence, war and effusive brutality, engender their like and undermine the pillars on which the prospective millennium is to be founded. Thus the fight of active defiance – that Shelley concedes will culminate with the use of violence, but he hopes to inspire its focus to

[47] Cf. *PL*, VI. 85-86: 'The banded powers of Satan hasting on | With furious expedition.'

be philanthropic so as to curb its cyclical nature – should primarily be of nonviolent resistance in the form of rhetoric and lack of action, not passivity, hatred, and revenge:

> Then it is to feel revenge
> Fiercely thirsting to exchange
> Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong—
> Do not thus when ye are strong. (ll. 193-96)

This message is likewise advanced in *Hellas*:

> For
> Revenge and wrong bring forth their kind,
> The foul cubs like their parents are,
> Their den is in the guilty mind,
> And Conscience feeds them with despair. (ll. 728-32)

Mazenghi (composed in 1818) also makes retributive violence its theme, as the powerful admonition with which it opens reveals:

> Let those who pine in pride or in revenge,
> Or think that ill for ill should be repaid,
> Who barter wrong for wrong, until the exchange
> Ruins the merchants of such thriftless trade –
> Visit the tower of Vada, and unlearn
> Such bitter faith beside Mazenghi's urn. (ll. 1-6; *Longman* II, 354)

Shelley expertly uses, in the unfinished *Mazenghi*, the rhyme revenge-exchange which he would later employ in *The Mask of Anarchy*: retributive violence is an unproductive enterprise, a fruitless exchange which supresses progress, an approach which Shelley urges the poem's audience, as well as that of all of his compositions, to 'unlearn'.

Shelley's repudiation of retributive violence extends beyond these poems to other poetical compositions, but is also addressed in his prose. *Laon and Cythna* (1817), its preface explains, gives 'no quarter' to 'Revenge, or Envy, or Prejudice' (*SMW* 137), and the preface to *The Cenci* (1819) alerts us to the need to find alternatives to revenge, 'no person can be truly

dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes' (*SMW* 316). *A Philosophical View of Reform* denies that retribution is 'an universal law of human nature' (*SMW* 674) and, in *A Defence of Poetry*, 'Revenge is the naked Idol of the worship of a semi-barbarous age' (*SMW* 681) which should have no place in a progressive, millennial state.

Shelley's reproach would, then, have extended to the ways in which Peterloo was discussed and understood. The 22 August 1819 issue of *The Examiner* praises the reformers who met at St Peter's Field for adopting a peaceful attitude, for 'doing nothing' whilst attacked, but its partiality for retributive violence underlines the article, for there is a sense that, had the reformers counter-attacked, they would have been exonerated from chastisement:

> If they [reformers] made some counter-signs, who is to wonder? But they did nothing. They assembled peaceably. […] For they [oppressors] talk of the revolutionary tendencies of the conduct of the Reformers; but how can revolutionary tendencies be more excited than by government's [*sic*] lawlessly drawing the sword, and being the first to shed blood systematically? We say lawlessly, and first; for every account we have seen subsequent to that of the *Courier* affirms that an hour had certainly not elapsed (one says not more than twenty minutes) between the reading of the Riot Act and the charge of the soldiery.[48]

Another editorial in the same issue of *The Examiner*, giving an account of a meeting that discussed Peterloo, praises the 'exemplary behaviour' and 'humane' conduct of the reformers at Peterloo, but equally sanctions the application of the *lex talionis*:

> Some voice in the course of the Meeting exclaimed, 'We'll have blood for blood!' upon which Mr. Wooler said, 'No: we have laws, and the laws will give us redress. Let no blood be shed but that which the law shall require as a sacrifice for the offence.' (*Much Applause*.)[49]

[48] 'Disturbances at Manchester', p. 529.
[49] 'Crown and Anchor Meeting; And Proposed Smithfield Meeting', *The Examiner*, 22 August 1819, Issue 608, p. 536.

It is precisely the fact that reformers were gathering in a peaceful meeting that, for Shelley, makes Peterloo 'Eloquent, oracular; | A volcano heard afar' (ll. 362-63), inspirational and exemplary in a way that the unruly, undisciplined revolt of the French Revolution is not.

The Mask of Anarchy's purpose, more than inspiring society to adopt a pacifist approach to reform, is to rouse the people from what Shelley figuratively characterises as their sleep. Shelley's multivalent use of sleep drives the message of the poem: it is simultaneously a metaphor for the inertia of the people and the mode, in line with the apocalyptic form of the poem, through which Shelley's vision occurs and how his action is enabled. The poem's initial line is tinged with self-criticism: Shelley is crucially aware, as he lays 'asleep in Italy' (l. 1), that he is physically removed from and unable to participate in the revolutionary activity in England. Insisting on the publishing of a poem with the revolutionary undertones of *The Mask*, '[l]obbing popular poetry from a redoubt beyond the grasp of English law in 1819', as Susan Wolfson puts it, 'can look like self-indulgent venting, something less than "wholly political"'; but Shelley shows the potential of art to generate socio-political movements, and *The Mask* is an example of Shelley being undeterred by his physical circumstance, moving away from passivity.[50] The poem reveals, despite its self-critical vein, that this sleep encapsulates visionary possibility: it is what can be achieved through a symbolic sleep that *The Mask* emphasises. *The Mask*, as Tetreault puts it, is 'by no means art for art's sake' as it was 'artfully designed to make things happen'.[51] The poem was thusly perceived by those closest to the poet. Leigh Hunt, in the preface to his edition and the first publication of *The Mask*, attributes to Shelley's works an active socio-political power that the ruling classes of his time tried to subdue:

> Mr. Shelley's writings have since aided the general progress of knowledge in bringing about a wiser period; and an effusion, which would have got him cruelly misrepresented a few years back [in 1819], will now do unequivocal honour to his memory, and shew every body what a most considerate and kind, as well as fervent heart, the cause of the world has lost.[52]

Mary Shelley, alluding to lines 217-61 of *The Mask*, reflects on the social effect and potential of Shelley's lyrics: 'But the most touching passage is that which describes the blessed effects

[50] Wolfson, *Romantic Shades and Shadows*, p. 100.
[51] Tetreault, *Poetry of Life*, p. 197.
[52] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy*, ed. by Leigh Hunt (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), p. vi.

of liberty; it might make a patriot of any man, whose heart was not wholly closed against his humbler fellow-creatures' (*PW* 251). Shelley might 'lay asleep in Italy' (l. 1), be physically removed from revolutionary activity in England, but, aided by his poetic faculties, he is imaginatively immersed in 'visions of Poesy' (l. 4), the apocalyptic movements there taking place.

If Shelley's self-aware sleep is creative, the people's state, the poem posits, is one of unconscious dormancy. Shelley's incitement to action in the poem's memorable line 'Ye are many—they are few' (ll. 155, 372) is preceded by an implicit critique of the people's unaware participation in the tyranny that supresses them, 'Shake your chains to Earth like dew | Which in sleep had fallen on you—' (ll. 153-54, 370-71). Sleep is thus another mechanism through which Shelley distinguishes himself from the audience which *The Mask* addresses. The use of 'ye', as Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill point out, suggests 'a gap, at once social and geographical, between himself and the audience he is addressing' (note to line 155, *SMW* 761); but it also implies Shelley's moral self-exclusion from the group whose inactivity has allowed tyranny to thrive. Not only, Shelley suggests, do the people adopt the behaviour of tyrants by indulging in retaliation, but their dormancy, their inertia has also complied with the flourishing of tyranny. Physical, psychological, and ideological 'chains' have 'fallen on' society as a result of their 'sleep', difficult to revoke if unable to recognise those fetters when debasement has become custom. Yet this dormancy is tinged with complaisance.[53] The 'sleep' of the oppressed is the condition of those who paradoxically, though inadvertently, venerate the oppressor, what in *The Mask* Shelley depicts as the multitudes 'adoring' and 'prostrate' (ll. 41, 126) to the rule of Anarchy whilst he 'Trampl[es]' them 'to a mire of blood' (l. 40).[54] This form of 'sleep' in *The Mask of Anarchy* anticipates the tone of 'Sonnet: Political Greatness' (composed in 1820). The 'herds whom Tyranny makes tame' (l. 3) in the sonnet, like 'the astonished herds of men' (III. 45) of *Ode to Liberty* (1820), are curiously bound in a reciprocal relation with the tyrant that enslaves them, and thus 'History is but the shadow of their shame' ('Sonnet: Political Greatness', l. 5). 'Adoring' and 'prostrate', echoed in 'tame' and 'astonished', are descriptors that allude to the people's complex involvement with tyranny: the few control and oppress the many, but the people, unstirred and complaisant to challenge the yoke of slavery, perpetuates a system that hinders their becoming full citizens of the world, their achievement of millennial

[53] For 'sleep' as a trope of complaisance or passivity, see also *Laon and Cythna* V. xlv. 2120 and XI. xv. 4354 (*Longman* II, 10-260).
[54] Cf. Prometheus's characterisation of Jupiter, in the opening speech of *Prometheus Unbound*, as 'a prostrate slave' (I. 52), a reference to Shelley's consideration of tyrants as 'prostrate' in veneration of and enslaved to their absolutist power.

self-rule.[55] *The Mask of Anarchy* presents both the poet and the oppressed in a sleep-like state, but their 'sleep' has different connotations: the poet's acts of resistance, arising from the imagination and channelled into poetry, distance him from the passivity that characterises the oppressed.

What transpires, in *The Mask of Anarchy* and elsewhere, is Shelley's hope that humanity wakes from its slumber and his belief in the human capacity to defeat tyranny. What should be of importance, the poet stresses, is what humanity does to 'shake' its physical and psychological 'chains to Earth like dew', by no means a simple task, but one which, through moral reformation, can be achieved, as his Prometheus demonstrates. Reform for Shelley is a dual process that requires social unity (compared with Anarchy's followers who are his 'slaves', l. 82) in tandem with individual, personal improvement – before reform can become a mass-scale phenomenon, there has to be a change within the self. Shelley's philosophical system of reform is best condensed by George Henry Lewes, '*man* must first be reformed, and then the reform of states will follow,' but the succinctness of Lewes' statement should not be taken as supporting the notion that Shelley considered change and reform to happen instantaneously.[56] Underlying *The Mask*'s exhortation to freedom and denunciation of governmental tyranny is Shelley's belief in the necessity of human moral reform, which includes relinquishing retaliation and embracing compassion, even for the tyrant. The larger historical movements that Shelley envisions are thus crucially reliant on each individual changing their social attitudes, realising the power they hold in society, and understanding that this power needs to be used philanthropically.

The Mask of Anarchy's meaning rests on the definition of specific concepts which are crucial to understand the workings of Shelley's pacifism and moral approach to violence: (a) pacifism is not antithetical to violence; (b) pacifism is lack of action, not passivity; (c) lack of action and passivity are not synonymous; (d) passivity is dormant sleep, complaisance, and not included in Shelley's sense of reform. The lack of action proposed by the poem as the preferred method of peaceful protest is different from the unconscious, acquiescent 'sleep' of society which inadvertently lets tyranny thrive. Lack of action, conversely, is active defiance and is suggested in lines 299-326: it is to stand 'calm and resolute, | Like a forest close and mute' and to use 'strong and simple words | Keen to wound as sharpened swords' whilst 'tyrants pour around'. Hope, in the poem, performs another nonviolent, pacifist act: expecting Anarchy's

[55] Shelley's use of 'astonished' and 'prostrate' has Miltonic echoes: 'astonished' (*PL*, I. 266), 'prostrate' (*PL*, I. 280), and 'entranced' (*PL*, I. 301) are descriptors employed to describe Satan's followers.
[56] George Henry Lewes, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Westminster Review*, 35 (1841), 303-44 (p. 335).

pageant, she 'lay[s] down in the street, | Right before the horses' feet' (ll. 98-99), anticipating the actions of suffragette Emily Wilding Davison at the 1913 Derby.[57] Hope, Matthew Borushko describes, 'prostrates herself in front of the procession', but 'prostrate' – which, by echoing the actions of 'the prostrate multitude', connotes their complaisant passivity – is not an apt description for the lack of action of nonviolent pacifism that Hope conducts.[58] Hope's nonviolent act has the potential, however, to lead to violence as a consequence of, for example, her being trampled, the horse falling and stalling the pageant, and chaos ensuing. Shelley is aware that violence and the lack of action of pacifism are difficult to disentangle: Hope's actions are not inherently violent, and yet the outcome can potentially be so. Shelley understands this complexity, which is manifested most prominently in *The Mask*, and therefore his philosophical approach to pacifist action is one that reconfigures what it understands violence to be and the motives that propel its use. It acknowledges that to expect all forms of violence to disappear is true blind idealism, whilst recognising that, if it indeed has to be used, not all violence is universally destructive nor are retaliation and subjugation its only possible aims.

The Mask of Anarchy is concerned, more than with an 'ethical imperative to choose the least violence within an economy of violence' as Borushko puts it, with an analysis of the uses and the intention of violence.[59] Shelley's pacifism is underlined by a belief that all violence is abhorrent and should not be entertained, counterpoised by a recognition that the philanthropic application of the aggressive force of the nonviolent militant is, at times, and regrettably, the only alternative to effect the movement between apocalypse and millennium. Seth Reno states that, by featuring violence, *The Mask* 'presents an alternative to Shelley's poetics and politics of love, an alternative path to utopia';[60] but the poem does not pose a dialectic between violence and pacifism (or love), because violence is a reluctant part of Shelley's pacifism, part of a thought that had absorbed, yet gradually came to reject parts of, Godwinism. Reno further qualifies the poem as, 'in effect, forc[ing] Shelley to advocate a kind of violence he rejects elsewhere in his writings.'[61] Shelley does not advocate or call for violence, in *The Mask* or elsewhere; his pragmatic idealism forces him to reluctantly concede that, despite nonviolent

[57] For a discussion of Shelley's influence on the British suffragette movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see Hilda Kean, 'Public History and Popular Memory: Issues in the Commemoration of the British Militant Suffrage Campaign', *Women's History Review*, 14.3-4 (2005), 581-602.
[58] Matthew C. Borushko, 'Violence and Nonviolence in Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 59 (2010), 96-113 (p. 105). This idea is also repeated on page 106.
[59] Borushko, 'Violence and Nonviolence', p. 113.
[60] Seth T. Reno, 'The Violence of Form in Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 62 (2013), 80-98 (p. 83).
[61] Reno, 'Violence of Form', p. 82.

resistance, violence, which he hopes is philanthropic, will be involved in the final apocalyptic moment. This is not a contradiction, ambiguity, or inability to comprehend the workings of violence and peace, but rather Shelley's conciliation of his millennial hopes and the 'difficult and unbending realities of actual life' (*A Philosophical View of Reform*, *SMW* 664).

The novel approach with which this chapter appreciates Shelley's notions of violence and pacifism shows that *The Mask of Anarchy* is the opposite of what Reno considers it to be, 'an anomaly in Shelley's body of work.'[62] Far from 'an anomaly', *The Mask* is a facet of an ever-evolving imagination; and its differences respecting the issue of violence with an early work such as *Queen Mab* (what, for Reno, makes *The Mask* a Shelleyan anomaly) point to the evolution of Shelley's thought as he constantly grappled with the moral underpinnings of reform. Not only is *The Mask* essential to comprehend the workings of Shelley's imagination, but its placement in the Shelleyan canon has been demonstrated by having been considered in a discussion that includes, with various degrees of engagement, *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, *Mazenghi*, 'England in 1819', 'An Ode, Written, October 1819, before the Spaniards had recovered their Liberty', *Prometheus Unbound*, *Ode to Liberty*, 'Sonnet: Political Greatness', and *Hellas*. Reno is correct, however, in his estimation that the attention which *The Mask* receives in criticism points to 'a general dissatisfaction with received understandings'.[63] Whilst reading the poem (and 'Shelleyan aesthetics') through the philosophical theories of, for example, Adorno and Derrida, as Reno and Borushko do in their respective essays, provides an elucidating framework through which to read Shelley's works, it can detract from understanding the complexity of Shelley's own thought as well as his engagement with received knowledge and his contemporary influences. Oliver Taplin explains, regarding the contextualisation of the Homeric epics, that '*Homēron ex Homērou saphēnizein*, "you should elucidate Homer by the light of Homer"', and the same applies to Shelleyan studies.[64] Although Shelley was still in the process of fully articulating his ideas at the time of his early death, and his philosophical system is not fully arranged in one single document, his body of work bears ample evidence to comprehend the complexities of his nuanced thought, especially the intricacies of his philosophical engagement with the moral issue of violence.

[62] Reno, 'Violence of Form', p. 83.
[63] Reno, 'Violence of Form', p. 83.
[64] Oliver Taplin, 'Homer', in *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, ed. by John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; repr. 1988), pp. 50-77 (p. 51).

II

‘A nursling of Man’s art’: Temples of Nature in ‘The Coliseum’, ‘Ode to the West Wind’, ‘Orpheus’, and *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama*

Shelley began ‘Ode to the West Wind’ in Florence around mid-October 1819, in the month after writing *The Mask of Anarchy*, and published it as one of the Miscellaneous Poems of *Prometheus Unbound, with other Poems* (1820), a poetic volume of apocalyptic-eschatological and millennial concerns which, correspondingly, includes compositions that discuss the effects of worldly and historical transformation and mutability. ‘Ode to the West Wind’ allowed Shelley to reflect on the role of the poet-prophet in the context of the revelation of the imminence of the transformative moment and of the apocalypse itself. Indeed, it emphasises the relation of the poet to his apocalyptic vision – the juxtaposition of what the poet imaginatively sees with the powers of the mind and what he can empirically see, with the way in which those instances are interpreted. In addition to ‘Ode to the West Wind’, this chapter will focus on ‘Orpheus’ (composed in early 1821), ‘The Coliseum’ (started in November 1818), and *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama* (composed in 1822), fragmentary Shelleyan compositions which are often critically neglected. Taking the note which is appended to the title of the ode in the 1820 volume as its point of departure, the chapter will analyse the apocalyptic-eschatological and millennial importance of the forest in the Shelleyan imaginarium, a symbol that Shelley articulates through a fusion of the language and concepts of nature and architecture. It will focus on Shelley’s Temples of Nature, spaces in which the poet-prophet reads and imagines potential millenniums that offer solace and refuge from the degradation of humanity, but which, as much as they offer promise, are problematised by Shelley’s inexorable, albeit optimistic, scepticism, one that haunts the stability of these temples.

For the 1820 publication of ‘Ode to the West Wind’, Shelley included a note which functions as a fitting introduction to the ode, as it succinctly encapsulates and foreshadows its central themes:

> This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild

> and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions. The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it.[1] (*SMW* 762fn412)

The note offers an insight into the nature of the West Wind, the wind of change of the poet's apocalypticism. The poet perceives the wind as revelatory and prophetic, the central natural element in the annunciation of impending change, as he connects the fluctuations of the wind with the apocalyptic movements of his historical present and which he envisions for the future. The wind's description as simultaneously 'tempestuous' and 'mild and animating', although seemingly contradictory, exposes the turbulent relationship of the poet with the wind which characterises the ode. Shelley welcomes the coming natural tempest that figures political change: this is an invigorating wind, not debilitating or castrating, which infuses individuals with power, desire, and expectation – it is auspicious, pregnant with the possibility of the actualisation of the poet's millennial hopes. Portentous clouds are poetic 'vapours' in the note, revealing, through their analogous association with the prophetic vapours inhaled by the Pythia at the time of revelation at the Temple of Delphi, the imminence of the apocalyptic rain.

The note also highlights the relevance of the symbiotic connection of every natural realm and natural phenomenon in the development of the apocalypse, foregrounding the pantheistic relationship between poet and nature, which enables him to read the signs presented in the natural world that foretell the apocalypse. The prophetic tone of the note suggested by

---

[1] See Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound, A Lyrical Drama, In Four Acts, with Other Poems* (London: C. & J. Ollier, 1820), p. 188. Shelley wrote this note in the notebook that contains the manuscript of *A Philosophical View of Reform* as well as numerous sketches and draft stanzas for *Prometheus Unbound*, Act IV. This notebook also originally contained the manuscript for *On Life* and four paragraphs entitled 'Malthus principle' regarding contraception, but were removed in 1916 by Stopford A. Brooke (to whom Jane, Lady Shelley, gave the notebook in 1894) for a Red Cross fundraiser for the First World War organised by Edmund Gosse. The notebook was then bequeathed to Brooke's daughter, whose husband, Thomas W. Rolleston, published the first edited version of Shelley's unfinished *A Philosophical View of Reform* in 1920. This notebook is now held in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, New York Public Library; the manuscript of *On Life* and the passage on contraception are now housed in the Morgan Library & Museum (previously known as the Pierpont Morgan Library). For more information on the history of transmission of the notebook, see *Shelley and his Circle, 1773-1822*, 10 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961-2002), II: ed. by Kenneth Neill Cameron (1961), p. 897; and *Shelley and his Circle*, VI: ed. by Donald H. Reiman (1973), p. 961. For a transcription of and information on the note to the ode, see *Shelley and his Circle*, VI, pp. 1066-69, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Philosophical View of Reform*, intro. and appendix by T. W. Rolleston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 94.

'vapours' is reinforced by the poet's declaration of his vision – 'as I foresaw' – which places him at the centre of this apocalyptic moment, one that takes place in a traditionally-conceived mystical place, 'a wood that skirts the Arno', and time, 'at sunset.'[2] From its incipient stage, Shelley recognises the sublimity of the apocalyptic event, describing it in terms that bear biblical parallels.[3] It is a 'violent' yet 'magnificent' scene, an awe-inducing, wondrous display of the power of nature which the poet correlates to the transformative power that propels revolutions and creates apocalypses in the socio-political sphere, akin to the sublime appearance of the Phantom in 'England in 1819', in a revolutionary act that 'may | Burst to illumine our tempestuous day' (ll. 13-14). The potential arrival of the millennial world, in the sonnet, is suggested by the hope of the speaker, revealed in the annunciation of the potential advent of this figure, but that new world is neither shown nor described. 'Ode to the West Wind' does little more to certify that a millennial spring will be installed. The ode's note, despite its auspicious tone, shies away from substantiating the poet's hope with a concrete image of this new world, and the poem itself dedicates a few lines in its first stanza to the vision of vernal renewal,

> O, thou,
> Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
> The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
> Each like a corpse within its grave, until
> Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
>
> Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
> (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
> With living hues and odours plain and hill. (ll. 5-12)

The potentiality encapsulated in 'shall' is not actualised by the progress of the poem, whose concluding couplet ('O, wind, | If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?', ll. 69-70) replicates, after being modified by Shelley from a statement to a question, the uncertainty of

[2] Cf. W. B. Yeats's 'Into the Twilight' (*The Wind Among the Reeds*, 1899); and William Blake's 'Introduction (Experience)' to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 'Hear the voice of the Bard! | Who Present, Past, & Future sees | Whose ears have heard, | The Holy Word, | That walk'd among the ancient trees' (ll. 1-5).
[3] Cf. Revelation 11:19: 'And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.'

the arrival of the millennium suggested by the auxiliary 'may' in 'England in 1819'.[4] Although this millennial 'clarion' of change is not heard in the ode, its tones of hope resonate across it, carried in the expectation of the poet whose desire to welcome millennial renewal transpires through the optimistic scepticism of the ode's final question. Far from blindly idealistic, Shelley's imaginings are laced with a characteristic honesty which invariably forces him to disentangle his energetic welcoming of an apocalypse from his hopes for the instalment of a millennium, as well as to accept that, in spite of his optimism, this sequence might not be realised.

'Ode to the West Wind' is almost unique among Shelley's works in its revelation (in the note) of the specific location of its composition.[5] In the assertion that the poem was 'conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence',[6] Shelley concentrates a process of creation that spanned over several notebooks but probably took only a few weeks to write.[7] What is of importance in Shelley's identification of the Cascine as the place of composition of the ode is the fact that the poet associates 'Ode to the West Wind' with forests, noteworthy insofar as it accentuates the apocalyptic and millennial dimension of the poem. The significance of Shelley's reference becomes apparent when considering the late-1818 and early-1819 letters he wrote to Thomas Love Peacock from Naples, which recount the various excursions taken by him, Mary, and Claire Clairmont to the archaeological sites in the region. Their visit to Pompeii inspired Shelley to reflect on the importance of the lifestyle of the Greeks, and its expression in their architecture, for the excellence of their artistic

---

[4] In a draft of the poem, the final question that appears in the published version of the ode is posed as an affirmative statement, 'o Wind | When Winter comes Spring lags not far behind' (*BSM* V, 286-87).

[5] Shelley does something similar in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, by revealing the location of its composition: 'This Poem was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades, and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees, which are extended in ever widening labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air' (*SMW* 230).

[6] The 'wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence' is, in fact, the Cascine Park, the sixteenth-century hunting reserve and cattle farm of the Medici family. Its transformation into a park begun around the mid-eighteenth century, but its status as a space rearranged for the public only took form in the early-nineteenth century. This wooded park had a re-energising influence over Shelley in late 1819 and early 1820, as a secluded space which offered solace and the possibility of reflection during an intensely turbulent period, both personally and politically. He writes to John and Maria Gisborne from Florence: 'I like the Cascini very much where I often walk alone watching the leaves & the rising & falling of the Arno. I am full of all kinds of literary plans' (6 November 1819; *Letters* II, 150). Mary records a 'Walk in the Cascini' on 2 January 1820 (*JMWS* I, 304) and describes the Cascine as 'the Hyde Park of Florence' in her last published work, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), II, p. 134.

[7] There are drafts of various stanzas of the ode in *BSM* V, *BSM* XVIII, and *Shelley's 1819-1821 Huntington Notebook: A Facsimile of Huntington MS. HM 2176*, ed. by Mary A. Quinn, Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics VI (New York: Garland, 1994). *Longman* establishes the writing of the ode to have begun in or around 15 October and to have been concluded by the end of the month (*Longman* III, 200).

endeavours. What is most salient for Shelley is the predisposition of the Greeks to live in accord with nature, and the way in which they incorporated that relationship into their quotidian:

> They lived in harmony with nature, & the interstices of their incomparable columns, were portals as it were to admit the spirit of beauty which animates this glorious universe to visit those whom it inspired. (23-24 January 1819; *Letters* II, 73)

The forest – considered in the context of the extended metaphor, comparing trees and columns, that Shelley maintains throughout this letter to Peacock – thus emerges as the space which allows for the communion between man and Nature to be materialised. Forests are understood by Shelley as transcendental spaces where 'the spirit of beauty which animates this glorious universe' dwells; they are conglomerations of trees through whose intercolumniation is effected the sacred transference of knowledge that, as poet-prophet, Shelley expects.

Shelley's portrait of Pompeii creates a city of organic forms, characterised by a confluence of natural architecture and architectural nature in which dissociating the human settlement from its surrounding woods proves challenging. He visits the 'public buildings, whose ruins are now, forests as it were of white fluted columns' as well as the 'forests of lofty columns' of the dilapidated buildings that 'surround the forum' (*Letters* II, 72-73). It is the cemetery, however, that has the most striking impact on Shelley, as it proves to be the epicentre for his understanding of the character of the relationship between man and nature:

> These tombs were the most impressive things of all. The wild woods surround them on either side and along the broad stones of the paved road which divides them, you hear the late leaves of autumn shiver & rustle in the stream of the inconstant wind as it were like the steps of ghosts. […] I now understand why the Greeks were such great Poets, & above all I can account, it seems to me, for the harmony the unity the perfection the uniform excellence of all their works of art. They lived in a perpetual commerce with external nature and nourished themselves upon the spirits of its forms. Their theatres were all open to the mountains & the sky. Their columns that ideal type of a sacred forest with its roof of interwoven tracery admitted the light & wind, the odour & the freshness of the country penetrated the cities. Their temples were mostly upaithric; & the flying clouds the stars or the deep sky were seen above. (*Letters* II, 74-75)

Surrounded by the stillness of the graveyard, the poet finds himself at the centre of a synaesthetic experience, through which, inspired by the visually- and aurally-stimulating landscape, he recognises the importance of a harmonious existence with nature for artistic creation and the development of poetic power. The lexicon employed by Shelley to describe this harmony – 'nourished', 'open', 'admitted', 'penetrated', 'upaithric' – shows the extent to which receptivity to nature is key to poetic practice. He perceives this poetical relationship with nature as 'a perpetual commerce', a constant exchange of intelligence between man and the natural world, one in which the Greeks participated insofar as they fostered more than a superficial interest in nature – they conceived themselves (alongside other worldly entities) as being an integral part of the expression of the mind and soul of divine nature.[8] They understood not only the relevance of maintaining a strong bond with the external world but also that this bond was fundamental to human essence. It is their understanding of the symbiotic relation between humans and nature as a mark of humanity, of what entails to be part of and constitutes humanity, that prompts Shelley to consider the Greeks as 'great Poets'.[9]

Shelley's analogy between columns and trees is an expression of the centrality of the harmonious existence between man and nature. It illustrates not only the importance of nature for Greek thought and poetic practice, but also the impossibility of dissociating nature from human activity, with the added suggestion that, to do so, would be an unnatural contradiction of humanity. Combining botanical language and architectural terminology, Shelley foregrounds the relevance of the forest as a sacred construction that nurtures and gives spiritual stability to the individual. In his fusion of columns with trees, creating 'that ideal type of a sacred forest with its roof of interwoven tracery', the poet envisions the decorative tracery of the entablature of a colonnade or of the roof of a temple as the pattern formed by the interwoven boughs of the canopy of trees in a forest, through which 'light & wind' penetrate. With trees that provide structural support, like a column to an edifice, and a canopy of boughs and leaves that offers shelter, like a ceiling in a building, Shelley perceives, in the great natural construction of the forest, a Temple of Nature of which the poet-prophet is the presiding priest,

---

[8] See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), pp. 3-4.

[9] The understanding of the relationship between man and nature is intrinsic to the psyche of Ancient Greece, to study Greek religion, beliefs, and creative impulses:

> Among rocks golden with broom-flowers, murmurous with bees, burning with anemones in spring and oleanders in summer, and odorous through all the year with thyme, we first assimilate the spirit of the Greeks. It is here that we divine the meaning of the myths, and feel those poems that expressed themselves in marble mid the temples of the gods to have been the one right outgrowth from the sympathy of man, as he was then, with nature. (John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), II, p. 367)

interpreting and translating the signs of nature for his fellow men, a place that affords refuge from the degradation of humanity.

***

Echoes of this Greek inheritance of the divinity of forests, understood as consecrated ground and construction, reverberate to one of Shelley's English influences. The Pensive or Melancholy Man of John Milton's *Il Penseroso* (*c*. 1631) is a poet-prophet who conducts his reflection and inquiry in a Temple of Nature to 'attain | To something like prophetic strain' (ll. 173-74). As in Shelley's description of the settlement of Pompeii and as it will be seen in Shelley's own poetry, Milton's sylvan environment is an architectural space that, as a Greek *temenos*, or precinct of the gods, reflects the sacredness of the natural cathedral in which the poetical voice envisions itself excursioning. The Pensive Man invokes the goddess Melancholy to direct him 'To archèd walks of twilight groves, | And shadows brown that Sylvan loves | Of pine, or monumental oak' (ll. 133-35), to a 'close covert by some brook, | Where no profaner eye may look' (ll. 139-40). The sacredness of the forest is suggestive, to the poetical voice, of the holiness of orthodox religious spaces, and, accordingly, the intercolumniation and canopies of the trees of the forest become undistinguishably fused with the arches, vaulted roofs, and stained-glass windows of cathedrals. Traversing through the forest, communing with 'th' unseen genius of the wood' (l. 154), is equated with a dutiful endurance

> To walk the studious cloister's pale,
> And love the high embowèd roof,
> With antic pillars' massy proof,
> And storied windows richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light. (ll. 156-60)

Milton's and Shelley's Temples of Nature are spaces to expatiate, where the pensive poet-prophet's ability to roam freely in a natural space is paired with the exercise of the imagination without restraint.

Another pensive, melancholic poet-prophet, in this case of mythological origin, is enthroned in a Temple of Nature in 'Orpheus' (composed in 1821), a poem in dialogue-form

of doubtful attribution to Shelley.[10] Orpheus's mournful song pervades the scene of the 124-line fragment: it 'glides' through 'the columns of a temple' (l. 37), or the barren scene punctuated by trees described in the opening section of the poem.[11] The condition of the title-character is recounted in a series of answers to questions posed by a Chorus:

> He does no longer sit upon his throne
> Of rock upon a desert of herbless plain:—
> For the evergreen and knotted ilexes,
> And cypresses who seldom wave their boughs,
> And sea-green olives with their grateful fruit,
> And elms dragging along the twisted vines
> Which drop their berries as they follow fast,
> And blackthorn bushes with their infant race
> Of blushing rose-blooms—beeches to lovers dear,
> And weeping willow trees, all, swift or slow
> As their huge boughs or lighter dress permit
> Have circled his throne; and Earth herself
> Has sent from her maternal breast a growth
> Of star-like flowers, and herbs of odours sweet
> To pave the temple that his poesy
> Has framed. (ll. 103-18)

The symbiotic relationship between nature and the poet for the creation of poetry is here demonstrated in nature's provision of a physical architecture, in the form of pleached boughs from different varieties of trees and a carpet of Asteraceae flowering plants and herbs which stimulate the senses, to the metaphysical temple that Orpheus's poetry created. Nature's

---

[10] 'The rough draft and fair copy of this poem are almost entirely in Mary's hand' in a notebook employed by both, 'raising the question of whether it belongs in S.'s canon at all' (*Longman* IV, 379). A very comprehensive account to trace the history of composition of 'Orpheus' leads the editors to conclude that 'while on the available evidence the poem cannot be confidently attributed either in whole or in part to S., the same evidence does not allow his authorship of all or part of it to be ruled out' (*Longman* IV, 380). Manuscript material for this fragment exists in *BSM* XII, 4-27, 50-52. 'Orpheus' has remained largely neglected in Shelleyan studies, with the exception of Glenn O'Malley, *Shelley and Synesthesia* ([Evanston, Ill.]: Northwestern University Press, 1964; second printing 1968), pp. 145-51, 152, 155, 157. O'Malley offers a sustained analysis of the fragment as a valuable precursor of *Prometheus Unbound*, examining the synaesthetic encounters in the poem as an example of what he terms as the 'stream-of-sound'. Edwin B. Silverman traces interesting links between 'Orpheus' and *Adonais* in *Poetic Synthesis in Shelley's 'Adonais'* (Paris: Mouton, 1972), pp. 95, 99-101.

[11] References to 'Orpheus' are from *Longman* IV, 379-87.

elements are presented as the physical counterparts to the abstract, intangible art of the poet, constructing a philosophical and spiritual temple presided by this poet-prophet.

The truth and beauty of Orpheus's artistic powers, like in the myth that frames the poem, attract animals to his temple:

> while near his feet grim lions crouch
> And kids, fearless from love, creep near his lair;—
> Even the blind worms seem to feel the sound;—
> The birds are silent, hanging down their heads
> Perched on the lowest branches of the trees;
> Not even the nightingale intrudes a note
> In rivalry, but all entranced she listens. (ll. 118-24)

The oracular quality of Orpheus's poetry has infused this natural *locus* with millennial undertones, in which rivalrous attitudes are relinquished and animals with opposing temperaments mingle peacefully. Kids, 'fearless from love', associate with lions in an image which illustrates the redeeming force of millennial love and which bears echoes of the well-known passage of millennial renewal in Isaiah 11:6: 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.' Orpheus's dwelling among trees and his union with the dryad Eurydice provide mythical evidence for the poetical dimension of trees, or the affinity between poets and nature, as Shelley cogitates in the letter to Peacock discussed above. The poet-prophet's love for the oak nymph is an allegorical representation of the poet in communion with nature and, by extension, reveals the intrinsic role of inspiring muse that trees (and nature) serve in the act of poetical creation, which contextualises the importance of this fragment. 'Orpheus', in its dramatisation of the transformative power of poetry, further underlines the fundamental role of the latter for the conception of millennial realities, presenting nature as another materialisation of poetry through its depiction of a temple of apocalyptic-eschatological and millennial significance.

Despite its dubious attribution to the poet, the fragment employs, in a mode characteristic of Shelley's,[12] its response to the ancient myth to emphasise the transformative potentiality of

[12] Although Nora Crook states that 'The semi-quotation in *The Last Man* is the only trace of or reference to "Orpheus" yet found in the Shelleys' work' (*BSM* XII, xli), the fragment echoes, in language, themes, and images, other Shelleyan lyrics. 'But blasted and all wearily they stand' (l. 31), the state of a group of cypresses in

both poetry and love (Orpheus's lament for his departed Eurydice is effectively a love song).[13] This final section of the fragment does not merely describe the positive response of flora and fauna to Orpheus's art; rather, its focus is placed on the creation of a millennial ecosystem through the fertile influence and embryonic power of poetry (and of love, as the subject of that poetry) which the latter crystallises in the image of a Temple of Nature. The positive atmosphere of the millennial ecosystem that love and poesy have created, however, is indirectly tainted by Orpheus's despair at the loss of his beloved: although poetry covers 'in sweetest sounds and varying words' the amorous lament of Orpheus, his 'angry song' is the expression of the 'tempestuous torrent of his grief', 'a sound | Of deep and fearful melody' (ll. 82, 72, 81, 54-55). Despite the millennial perfection with which the fragment ends, the poem depicts an

---

'Orpheus', Crook compares to an almost identical line found in *The Last Man*, but this description could also apply to a group of pines in *Alastor* (1816) that would pass unremarked in the apocalyptic sylvan scene with which 'Orpheus' opens –'And nought but gnarlèd roots of ancient pines | Branchless and blasted, clenched with grasping roots | The unwilling soil' (ll. 530-32). The fragment uses mythological images to codify myth itself, a characteristic approach of Shelley to myth: the intensity of Orpheus's grief is depicted through the *sparagmos* of Acteon (ll. 46-51), a myth that also proves useful in *Adonais*'s portrayal of the frail Form's burdening thoughts (ll. 274-77, 297). This parallel is also noticed, among many others between 'Orpheus' and *Adonais*, by Silverman, *Poetic Synthesis in Shelley's 'Adonais'*, p. 100. The interchangeability of stars and flowers, in a poetical acknowledgement of the etymology of the Asteraceae family of plants, also links 'Orpheus' to other Shelleyan compositions. '[…] and the high dome | Of serene heaven, starred with its fiery flowers' as well as 'and Earth herself | Has sent from her maternal breast a growth | Of star-like flowers' (ll. 93-94, 114-16) are images from 'Orpheus' that have equivalents in, for instance, *The Witch of Atlas* (1820), 'Lit by the gems of many a starry flower' (l. 600); *Prometheus Unbound*, 'And budding, blown, or odour-faded blooms | Which star the winds with points of coloured light' (III. iii. 137-38); 'The Question' (1820; *Longman* III, 265-68), 'Daisies, those pearled Arcturi of the earth, | The constellated flower that never sets' (ll. 10-11); and *Adonais*, 'Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour | Is changed to fragrance, they [flowers] illumine death' (ll. 174-75). '[…] the stars, | Twinkling and dim, peep from between the plumes' (ll. 91-92), another stellar image in the fragment, is similar to 'A planet, like the Morning's, lay; | And those plumes its light rained through' (ll. 115-16), a section from the description of the Shape in *The Mask of Anarchy*. The image of refracted light through water revealing a rainbow is present in both 'Orpheus', 'And as it falls casts up a vaporous spray | Which the sun clothes in hues of Iris light' (ll. 79-80), and *Prometheus Unbound*, 'rainbow-skirted showers' (III. iii. 116). The image of a silent, listening nightingale informs both 'Orpheus' and *Prometheus Unbound*: the nightingale does not intrude 'a note | In rivalry, but all entranced she listens' to Orpheus's song and, likewise in the lyrical drama, songs of love, freedom, and brotherhood are 'delightful strains which cheer | Our solitary twilights, and which charm | To silence the unenvying nightingales' (II. ii. 95-97).

[13] Cf. William Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, III. i. 3-14, which also emphasises the millennial possibilities encapsulated in the entrancing power of art:

> Orpheus with his lute made trees,
> And the mountain tops that freeze,
> Bow themselves when he did sing:
> To his music plants and flowers
> Ever sprung; as sun and showers
> There had made a lasting spring.
> Every thing that heard him play,
> Even the billows of the sea,
> Hung their heads, and then lay by.
> In sweet music is such art,
> Killing care and grief of heart
> Fall asleep, or hearing, die.

unsettling scene. Beauty and love co-exist with anger, sadness, and violence – 'Orpheus, seized and torn | By the sharp fangs of an insatiate grief | Maenad-like waved his lyre in the bright air' (ll. 50-52) – showing that there is creative potential within despondency, 'With loud and fierce but most harmonious roar' (l. 78). As is the case with Shelley's millennial projects, there is a sceptical apprehension underlining the scene that questions the extent to which this Temple of Nature will endure.

Shelley's engagement with the myth of Orpheus in this fragment is in dialogue with Francis Bacon's interpretation of the myth in *De Sapientia Veterum*, or *Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609).[14] Bacon considers Orpheus as the true, or complete, philosopher. Orpheus's taming of 'Infernal Powers' (i.e. Cerberus and Hades) with his lyre to rescue Eurydice, though a failed endeavour, corresponds, in Bacon's analogy, to the workings of the natural philosopher, who subdues nature and attempts to uncover its truths through his work.[15] Bacon considers Orpheus's reconciliation of feral beasts of rivalling temperaments with the use of his lyre to be an allegorical representation of the work of the political philosopher, whose teachings function on a civil realm to reconcile humanity with itself and bring about a better social condition, of the sort he conceived in his *New Atlantis*. Yet Bacon does not see the vocation of the political philosopher succeeding, for Orpheus's *sparagmos* by the Maenads is interpreted as the social revolutions that interrupt the philosopher's millennial work. Thus it is noteworthy that Shelley's 'Orpheus' fragment, in its current state, focuses on the amorous threnody of Orpheus that reconciles all living beings, especially those who would be natural enemies, and regenerates nature, creating a millennial ecosystem. Orpheus appears, in the poetical fragment, as the ultimate philosopher-poet concerned with the apprehension of truth from his natural setting, whose melodious work fuses with his natural surroundings becoming the prophetic *psithurisma*, or wind of change, that can inaugurate new modes of existence, that can reform moral attitudes. Like Bacon's understanding of the failure of the social and moral project of his political philosopher, Shelley questions the stability of the millennial existence depicted in the fragment, as uncertainty and violence pervade the mythological scene and, indeed, his mythopoetical exercise.

***

[14] See *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols (London: Longman and Co., 1857-1874), VI: Literary and Professional Works, vol. 1 (1858), pp. 720-22.
[15] *Works of Francis Bacon*, VI, p. 720.

A similar synergy between nature and architecture is emphasised by Shelley in his depiction of the Roman Coliseum, covered in more lush overgrown vegetation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than how the building is found today. In the prose fragment 'The Coliseum' (begun in Rome on 25 November 1818), nature reclaims its space by engulfing the ruins of the Flavian amphitheatre, becoming another variant of a Temple of Nature:[16]

> 'I see a great circle of arches built upon arches, and walls giddily hanging upon walls, and stones like shattered crags overhanging the solid walls. In the crevices and on the vaulted roofs grow a multitude of shrubs, the wild olive and the myrtle—and intricate brambles and entangled weeds and plants I never saw before. […] There seems to be more than a thousand arches—some ruined, some entire, and they are all immensely high and wide—Some are shattered and stand forth in great heaps and the underwood is tufted on their crumbling summits.' (*Penguin* 625)

[16] Mary's journal entry for 25 November 1818 records, 'S. begins his tale of the Coliseum.' (*JMWS* I, 239) Although Shelley's fictional prose is often ignored, marginalised, dismissed as inferior to his poetry, and considered in light of its problems or inconsistencies, scholarship has lately been re-evaluating its significance within the Shelleyan canon, as these compositions possess the ideological germs that Shelley would develop further in other works (see, for instance, the introduction to Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Zastrozzi & St. Irvyne*, ed. by Stephen Behrendt (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), pp. 9-53). Readings of 'The Coliseum', more or less consistently, usually focus on the ruinous state of the amphitheatre and set the tale against Lord Byron's cynical view of history (in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred*), pointing also to potential inconsistencies in the text. James Notopoulos offers brief considerations on the influences on this fragment and points to works by Shelley and others which parallel four instances in the fragment (Notopoulos, 336-38). Charles E. Robinson evaluates Shelley's vision of the Coliseum as an alternative to Byron's pessimistic considerations of the monument (*Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 76-80). Jerrold E. Hogle briefly analyses the problematic narrative technique of the story ('Shelley's Fiction: The "Stream of Fate"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 30 (1981), 78-99, especially pp. 92-93). Timothy Clark takes a historicist approach, reading the building as an expression of the sublime ('Shelley's "The Coliseum" and the Sublime', *Durham University Journal*, 85.2 (1993), 225-35). Kevin Binfield understands the intergenerational relationships of the tale as Shelley's way of counteracting the pessimistic view of history that is expressed in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV ('"May They Be Divided Never": Ethics, History, and the Rhetorical Imagination in Shelley's "The Coliseum"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 46 (1997), 125-47). Benjamin Colbert examines the piece in the context of travel literature and analyses Helen's descriptions, reflecting on the importance of her father's imaginative guidance to achieve her aesthetic vision (*Shelley's Eye* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 118, 123-24, 179-82). Cian Duffy places the story within the context of Shelley's 'radical revision of the discourse on the sublime' (*Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 163-73, 191). Sarah Peterson focuses on Shelley's use of language to textually translate the Coliseum as a visual object ('Mediating Vision: Shelley's Prose Encounters with Visual Art (1818-1820)', *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 22.1 (2008), 112-31). Sophie Thomas proposes an understanding of the Coliseum beyond its ruinous state and conceives the stranger as an evocation of the past in the present (*Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 72-74, 77). Diane Long Hoeveler analyses the ruinous monument as a space that permits self-growth and communion as well as the relinquishing of selfishness ('Prose Fiction: *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne*, "The Assassins", "The Coliseum"', in *PBS Handbook*, pp. 193-207, especially pp. 204-06). Sarah Wootton reads the amphitheatre as a ruin reclaimed by nature ('Shelley, the Visual Arts, and Cinema', in *PBS Handbook*, pp. 561-76, especially p. 567). Stephen Behrendt discusses the tale alongside other Shelleyan prose fragments, 'Una Favola' and 'The Assassins', analysing nature's appropriation of the Coliseum and the story's emphasis on the interconnection of all things and beings ('"His left hand held the lyre": Shelley's Narrative Fiction Fragments', in *The Neglected Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Webb and Alan M. Weinberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 95-115, especially pp. 104-08).

The image presented by Helen, the old man's daughter, reveals another upaithric construction, 'open to the blue sky' (*Penguin* 625), that challenges the discernment of the boundaries between nature and architecture:

> 'The blue sky is above, the wide, bright blue sky—it flows thro' the great rents on high—and through the bare boughs of the marble-rooted fig-tree, and through the leaves and flowers of the weeds even to the dark arcades beneath—I see—I feel its clear and piercing beams fill the universe and impregnate the joy-inspiring wind with warmth and light and interpenetrate all things, even me.' (*Penguin* 626)

Although Timothy Clark considers that 'the Coliseum in Shelley's account bears little resemblance to any other of his references to architecture', it does bare a conceptual resemblance to instances in Shelley's poetry and letters in which the concepts and language of nature and architecture are fused.[17] The prose fragment is, in fact, in dialogue with these instances: nature uses the pre-existent architecture of the ruins of the amphitheatre to construct a temple, a sacred space of contemplation and reflection, of communion between man and his surrounding environment, as experienced by the old man, his daughter Helen, and the strange figure called *Il Diavolo di Bruto* by the local Romans.[18] Helen's description of the Coliseum

---

[17] Clark, 'Shelley's "The Coliseum"', p. 227.

[18] Scholars perceive the stranger as the most problematic character in the tale, because of its brief appearance in the story and as it epitomises some of the inconsistencies of the text. Some critical views, however, appear to overlook the fact that 'The Coliseum' is, ultimately, a fragment. Mary Shelley's discussion of the tale, indeed, highlights its unfinished nature, as she reveals 'the sort of development' Shelley 'sketched' for the story (Preface to *ELTF* I, x). Shelley's plan seemed to mainly focus on the expansion and refinement of the character of the stranger as 'a Greek,—nurtured from infancy exclusively in the literature of his progenitors,—and brought up as a child of Pericles might have been; and the greater the resemblance, since Shelley conceived the idea of a woman, whom he named Diotima, who was his instructress and guide' (Preface to *ELTF* I, x). It seems that the 'absurd' stranger (Clark, 'Shelley's "The Coliseum"', p. 233) would have undergone alterations had the story been completed.

Regarding the stranger, Thomas Medwin explains, in his memoir of the poet, that Shelley 'meant to have idealised himself in the principal character' ('Memoir of Shelley', *Athenaeum*, 4 August 1832, no. 249, p. 503; *The Shelley Papers* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1833), p. 52). In a footnote to the fifth sentence in the fourth paragraph of Medwin's version of the tale (the end of the third paragraph according to the story's current editorial practices (see *Penguin* 624)), Medwin also observes that 'There never was drawn a more perfect portrait of Shelley himself' ('The Coliseum, A Fragment', *Athenaeum*, 1 September 1832, no. 253, p. 568fn; *Shelley Papers*, p. 129fn). Although Medwin includes the section of the tale (in altered form) to which this footnote is appended in *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847), I, pp. 341-42, he does not include the footnote in this later work. James Notopoulos comments that, 'The stranger who was nurtured from infancy on Greek literature is the counterpart of Shelley, whose enthusiasm and appreciation of Greek literature appear in the introduction to the *Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love*' (Notopoulos, 337). The stranger could be considered an underdeveloped, veiled self-portrait of the poet, but not merely because of the interest in Greek language and literature that Notopoulos notes. The tale's reference to the stranger's loneliness ('He was forever alone', *Penguin* 624) and its description that 'instead of the effeminate sullenness of the eye, and the narrow smoothness of the forehead, shone an expression of profound and piercing thought' (*Penguin* 624), are reminiscent of characteristics of the frail Form, Shelley's self-portrait in

reveals a upaithric construction that permits man to live in 'perpetual commerce' (*Letters* II, 74-75) with nature, as Shelley put it in the letter to Peacock about the greatness of the Greeks; this is a space, like the buildings of Pompeii that the poet described, in which the harmony of the pantheistic spirit is felt, penetrating and connecting all living beings.

The seemingly insignificant details of the tale gain more relevance when understood in tandem with this conception of the Coliseum. Set during Easter, the story contrasts Helen and her blind father, who inadvertently visit the Coliseum,[19] with 'the whole native population of Rome, together with all foreigners who flock from all parts of the earth' to celebrate 'the great feast of the resurrection' in the Vatican (*Penguin* 623). The juxtaposition of these characters, of which the latter remain voiceless, is intended, by extension, as a juxtaposition of the places which they visit; the Coliseum acquires the religious and divine dimension that, Shelley suggests through the implied criticism of Christianity that underlies the fragment, the Vatican does not possess. The Flavian amphitheatre, therefore, becomes a sacred temple in whose space spiritual contemplation has more validity than the futile rituals of faith that are practised in the place considered to be the seat of Christendom, St Peter's Basilica. It is this hypocrisy that Shelley criticises, expressing his difficulty to accept that, during one of the holiest times of renewal in the Christian calendar, those celebrating choose to gather in an opulent and ostentatious ceremony hosted by false ministers of faith to celebrate a religion that contradicts the precepts of its messiah,[20] instead of preferring the space for calm contemplation and quiet repose that nature offers. This is made somewhat explicit in the words of the stranger's greeting of Helen and her father, with whom he immediately expects to have an affinity because of their

---

Adonais. The latter is a figure presented as 'companionless' (l. 272) and as being 'the last, neglected and apart' (l. 296), as well as having profound, overwhelming thoughts, 'And his own thoughts, along that rugged way, | Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey' (ll. 278-79). The frail Form's speech in 'accents of an unknown land' (*Adonais*, l. 301) is also akin to the stranger's preference of a foreign language, his fluency in Greek 'with a peculiar but sweet accent' (*Penguin* 624). However, it should be remarked that, as with all of Shelley's self-portraits, potential similarities do not imply complete identification with the man that pens the description. See chapter three for a discussion of Shelley's self-portrait in *Adonais*.

[19] Although the story explains that, because of the peaceful tranquillity of the area ('No straggler was to be met with in the streets and grassy lanes which led to the Coliseum'), Helen and her father 'had sought this spot immediately on their arrival', the pair only learns they are in the Coliseum after the stranger informs them so (*Penguin* 623).

[20] Cf. Shelley's fragmentary 'The Moral Teaching of Jesus Christ': 'This alone would be a demonstration of the falsehood of Christianity, that the religion so called is the strongest ally and bulwark of that system of successful force and fraud and of the selfish passions from which it has derived its origin and permanence, against which Jesus Christ declared the most uncompromising war, and the extinction of which appears to have been the great motive of his life' (*The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Benn, 1965), VI, pp. 255-56 (p. 255)). 'The Moral Teaching of Jesus Christ' is comparable and often associated with, but should not be mistaken for, the fragment entitled 'On the Doctrines of Christ' (*Prose*, pp. 272-73). Whereas the latter has been ascribed a possible 1817 date, the former fragment, on account of the type of paper on which it appears, has been suggested to have been written around 1821-1822. See *Prose*, p. 476.

visiting the Coliseum instead of St Peter's: '"Strangers, you are two—behold the third in this great city to whom alone the spectacle of these mighty ruins is more delightful than the mockeries of a superstition which destroyed them"' (*Penguin* 624).

Shelley presents the Coliseum as another Temple of Nature visited by a poet in which the promise of millennial regeneration is latent. The old man is described as a figure of ageless wisdom. His most salient characteristics are 'his countenance sublime and sweet, but motionless as some Praxitelean image of the greatest of poets' (*Penguin* 623), and his physical blindness (like Milton was and Homer was reputed to be) which is contrasted with the clarity of vision of his mind's inner eye, as his descriptions of the Coliseum show. As Helen describes the building to her father, he concludes that the Coliseum's endurance and utmost purpose derive from its connection with and the fact that it was overtaken by the external, natural world that surrounds it, from its beginning as 'a nursling of Man's art abandoned by his care', until being 'transformed by the inchantment [*sic*] of Nature into a likeness of her own creations, and destined to partake their immortality' (*Penguin* 626). It is in this setting that he conceives the inception of a millennial world governed by a force that he addresses as 'Love': 'in the contemplation of these majestic records of the power of their kind' humanity 'see[s] the shadow and [?the] prophecy of that which' (*Penguin* 627) Love 'mayst have decreed that he [mankind] should become' (*Penguin* 627, parenthesis added). The Coliseum as a Temple of Nature thus becomes another mirror 'of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 701), a space in which humanity can embrace, through a harmonious existence with nature, its true purpose. The amphitheatre, redefined by the new life granted by the nature that covers it, assumes its status as a symbol of millennial renewal, of 'all that is to be admirable and lovely in ages yet to come' ('Related Passage', *Penguin* 629).

Stemming from the description of the physical materiality of the amphitheatre, the old man's utterances fuse, as in the case in 'Orpheus', the metaphysical and the concrete, for the discussion that ensues between him and Helen is concerned with philosophical reflections on art, nature, morality and historical progression, death and spiritual continuation, imbuing an historical emblem of tyranny and oppression with more harmonious emotions and associations. Shelley's account does not depict the Coliseum or address its context in its entirety (there are no references to its dilapidated state, quarry mining, or the Christian stations adorning it); and the approach which the poet adopts in his vision of the building favours an appreciation of the monument from a seemingly exclusively aesthetic perspective. Shelley's 'The Coliseum', however, is not a depiction that is ignorant of the atrocities that characterise the history of this amphitheatre. Timothy Clark considers the process of Shelley's perceptions of history and

architecture as twofold: 'Clearly Shelley's understanding of architecture rests on first abstracting form from function and second evaluating that form as an expression of a creative spirit understood to transcend, and even in a sense to negate, the historical context that determined the function of the building.'[21] Cian Duffy concurs with Clark, and perceives this attitude as 'extraordinarily un-Shelleyan' for the poet's 'footnote advocates a purely aesthetic — that is a wholly depoliticised — response to the ruin, an aesthetic response which effectively elides both the amphitheatre's historical function and the *process* of its ruination'.[22] However, 'transcend' does not necessarily mean 'negate', and thus Shelley's emphasis on the possibility of appreciating a monument exclusively for its aesthetic and material value is not a negation or elision of its historical context or function. Similarly, Stephen Behrendt does not perceive the footnote (considered as a 'Related Passage' by the *Penguin* editors) as contradictory; rather, its concern is 'to separate the purely physical artefact from the secular and spiritual uses to which it had been put in its "own" (historical) time, in the intervening years, and in Shelley's historical "present"'.[23] It is important to recognise that Shelley's admiration of form – the grandeur of a monument, its awe-inspiring permanence across the ages, the masterful engineering that has sustained it – despite implicating a suspension of the remembrance of its purpose and historical context, does not imply the denial of the latter:

> Nor does a recollection of the use to which it may have been destined interfere with these emotions. Time has thrown its purple shadow athwart this scene, and no more is visible than the broad and everlasting character of human strength and genius, that pledge of all that is to be admirable and lovely in ages yet to come. Solemn temples, [?palaces] where the senate of the world assembled, triumphal arches and cloud-surrounded columns loaded with the sculptured annals of conquest and domination—What actions and deliberations have they been destined to inclose [*sic*] and to commemorate? ('Related Passage', *Penguin* 629)

While the passage proposes that the sublime beauty of the work of a creative genius can be admired notwithstanding its historical context, it also acknowledges the tyranny and oppression that are a constitutive part of the history of monuments, questioning their purpose and reflecting on what they reveal about the society that built them.[24]

---

[21] Clark, 'Shelley's "The Coliseum"', p. 228.
[22] Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*, p. 168.
[23] Behrendt, 'Shelley's Narrative Fiction Fragments', p. 108.
[24] See also the discussion regarding the Arch of Constantine in chapter one.

Shelley's Coliseum affords this construction a new identity, a new set of associations and symbolism, by emphasising the vegetation that covered it and transforming it into a Temple of Nature of spiritual and millennial value. The poet's emphasis is on the amphitheatre's futurity, on the possibility of regeneration conferred by nature. It is this positive association with nature which grants the Coliseum, despite its historical circumstance, a new 'social function', to borrow Jerrold Hogle's expression, as a spiritual haven for millennial expectation.[25] Unlike other Shelleyan texts, 'The Coliseum' has a strong millennial tone that almost overpowers the apocalyptic. The space of this ruinous amphitheatre, while implicitly raising the past by virtue of its history, prompts a discussion that is mostly forward-looking in its configuration of the future, foregrounding the importance of humanity's harmony with nature.

***

Images of the fusion of nature and architecture feature in Shelley's works as early as *Queen Mab* (1813) and as late as *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama* (composed in 1822). The latter composition includes descriptions of two scenes with strong millennial tones, but the fragmentary state of the composition makes it difficult to ascertain whether this tone would have extended to the entire drama. Again, botanical and architectural language reveal a Temple of Nature. The Lady recalls an earlier moment of love spent with her beloved Pirate:

> Why must I think how oft we two sate together
> Under the green pavilion which the willow
> Spreads o'er the floor of the unbroken fountain,
> Strewn by the river-springs that linger there
> Around that islet paved with flowers and moss—
> As soft and sweet as thoughts that die while
> They be renewed forever—
> While musk-rose leaves like flakes of crimson snow
> Showered on us, and the dove mourned in the pines,
> Sad prophetess of sorrow not her own? (*BSM* XIX, 274-77)

[25] Hogle, 'Shelley's Fiction', p. 92. Binfield considers that, for Helen, the Coliseum has lost its social function, whereas for her father 'the social function is different, encompassing a "larger" society—the pigeons and all the creatures within' ('"May They Be Divided Never"', p. 131fn10).

The scene is similar to that presented in 'Orpheus': in a Temple of Nature, to which a willow offers structural support with a 'green pavilion', millennial Love is celebrated, yet the imminence of its destruction haunts the stability of the temple and the scene remembered. The inexorable destruction of this Love, prefiguring the separation of the Pirate and his beloved, is suggested by the dove's prophetic, mournful song, an allusion to the prophetesses of the oracle at Dodona who were called doves.[26] This allusion was deliberate: 'prophetess' was altered from 'prophet of' in the manuscript, revealing that Shelley was indeed thinking of the classical conception of the prophetesses at Dodona being called doves.[27] Later in the drama, the Lady recounts the occurrence, shrouded in the mystery of it possibly having been a dream, of a star falling from heaven into her room and, poised between her plants, deposited what looked like melon seeds in a pot.[28] What ensues before the end of the fragment is her description of the growth of this 'magic plant', her nurturing it with tears and songs, and its venture into the outdoors, escaping the Lady's room to continue its growth and commune with other plants in a Temple of Nature:

---

[26] In his account of the warfare between the Greeks and the Persians, Herodotus explains that

> And what follows, is told by the prophetesses of Dodona: to wit, that two black doves had come flying from Thebes in Egypt, one to Libya and one to Dodona this last settled on an oak tree, and uttered there human speech, declaring that there must be there a place of divination from Zeus; the people of Dodona understood that the message was divine, and therefore they established the oracular shrine. (*The Persian Wars*, II. lv; LCL 117)

Cf. Shelley's 'To S. and C.' (composed in late 1819 or early 1820): 'As from their ancestral oak | Two empty ravens wind their clarion, | Yell by yell, and croak for croak' (ll. 1-3), which subverts the mythical origins of the oracle at Dodona by paralleling Herodotus's story with the contemporary state of affairs of 1819. In line with Shelley's criticism of the tyrannical policies of Viscount Sidmouth and Viscount Castlereagh in the 'popular songs' he composed during this period, 'To S. and C.' casts these two political figures as ravens, instead of doves, to perform the role of evil prophets of tyranny whose utterances and actions do not, Shelley suggests, have public wellbeing in consideration.

[27] See *BSM* XIX, 274.

[28] Nora Crook and Timothy Webb identify four possible influences on this drama: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Milton's *Comus*, Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, and perhaps Edward Trelawny's *Adventures of a Younger Son* (*BSM* XIX, xlix-lii). However, this section of the tale, the story of a woman nursing a plant by feeding it tears (*BSM* XIX, 252-53), is reminiscent of and possibly influenced by John Keats's *Isabella* (1818), even if Shelley's fragment is more visionary and less macabre than the earlier poem. The section of this magical plant in Shelley's fragment also bears echoes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (1816) and 'Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath' (*Sibylline Leaves*, 1817): 'unbroken fountain' (*BSM* XIX, 276-77) – which Crook and Webb identify as a '(i.e. not-yet-surfaced) fountain' and C. D. Locock as a '"calm-surfaced pool"' (*BSM* XIX, 330fn145rev.12-13) – is *unbroken* because still actively flowing, akin to *Kubla Khan*, ll. 12-28, and 'Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath', especially ll. 2-8. *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama* is another Shelleyan composition that has received little critical attention, but of relevance are: Om Prakash Mathur, *The Closet Drama of the Romantic Revival* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1978), pp. 232-33; Crook's and Webb's commentary in *BSM* XIX; Jacqueline Mulhallen, *The Theatre of Shelley* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), pp. 177-208; and Cian Duffy, '"Radiant as the Morning Star": A Little-Known Shelley Fragment and its Context', *Notes and Queries*, 61.4 (2014), 523-25, in which Duffy considers the fragment 'The Prophet' (Crook and Webb's tentative title), also in *BSM* XIX, 172-77, as a possible lyric for *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama*.

It grew out of the lattice which I left
Half open for it, trailing its quaint spires
Along the garden and across the lawn
And down the slope of moss and through the tufts
Of wild flower roots, and stumps of the trees o'er grown
With purple lichens and cold hoary stones
On the margin of the glassy pool,
Even to a nook of violets, where the pale snowdrops die,
And lilies-of-the-valley unblown
Under a pine with ivy overgrown. (*BSM* XIX, 248-51)

The dawn of spring, however, turns this potential temple into a millennial space of elysian beauty, in a passage that relies on the reflection of light and colours for its meaning, and which, like Shelley's letter to Peacock, fuses the language of nature and architecture:

and it seemed
In hue and form that it had been a mirror
Of all the hues and forms around it, and
Copied upon its pictured stalk and rind circulatings of sunny beams,
Which from the swift vibrations of the fountain
Were thrown upon the rafters and the roof
Of boughs and leaves, and on the pillared stem
Of that dark sylvan temple, where it clasps
The shadows of the mossy branch and spray, and the reflections
Of every infant flower and star of moss
And veined leaf in the azure odorous air— (*BSM* XIX, 246-47)

In *Queen Mab*, a tree's trunk and canopy are conceived as the functional, architectural elements of a temple in which millennial and regenerative love is celebrated:

And the fair oak, whose leafy dome affords
A temple where the vows of happy love
Are registered. (VI. 209-11)

Later in the poem, the oak is summoned in a simile to symbolise revolutionary resistance:

> Thus have I stood,—through a wild waste of years
> Struggling with whirlwinds of mad agony,
> Yet peaceful, and serene, and self-enshrined,
> Mocking my powerless tyrant's horrible curse
> With stubborn and unalterable will,
> Even as a giant oak, which heaven's fierce flame
> Had scathèd in the wilderness, to stand
> A monument of fadeless ruin there. (VII. 254-61)

This perception of the oak as a monument, simultaneously invoking its architectural connotations and its use as a symbol, is in line with Shelley's view of the Coliseum, another 'monument of fadeless ruin'.[29] Although the dilapidation process of the Coliseum was still underway during Shelley's historical present and within the tale's fictional universe, the intervening action of nature has repurposed the amphitheatre and renewed its existence, as already suggested, thus becoming a 'fadeless ruin' through nature's bestowal of its own immortality to a man-made, transient object. Nature's permanence and longevity are attractive to Shelley, not merely expressed through the possibility it offers to redefine (tyrannical) human endeavours, like the Coliseum, but also translated in its elements, such as the oak, which offer a natural representation of the steadfastness and perseverance that Shelley believes should be maintained in the struggle against tyranny. The resilience of the oak and all trees more generally, the fact that they can withstand and surmount the apocalyptic convulsions of history, is admired by Shelley, a circumstance which he transposes to the human sphere to constitute an example of what human behaviour should be when confronting oppression, as he expresses in *The Mask of Anarchy*, 'Stand ye calm and resolute, | Like a forest close and mute' (ll. 319-20). The resilience of trees proves a likewise useful symbol to signify the pervasiveness of tyranny. In moments of despondency, Shelley perceived the fact that his poetry failed to produce the sentiment with and the effect for which it was written as the triumph of tyranny,

---

[29] Cf. Milton, *Il Penseroso*, ll. 132-35:

> me goddess bring
> To archèd walks of twilight groves,
> And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
> Of pine, or monumental oak.

which he articulated through an arboreal metaphor in a letter to Peacock (10? August 1821). The strength of trees proves a useful symbol through which to articulate what Shelley understood as the endurance of the cause of oppression, towards the destruction of which Shelley saw himself working but, it seemed to him, to no avail:

> I write nothing, and probably shall write no more. It offends me to see my name classed among those who have no name. If I cannot be something better, I had rather be nothing, and the accursed cause to the downfall of which I dedicated what powers I may have had—flourishes like a cedar and covers England with its boughs.[30] (*Letters* II, 331)

Perhaps Shelley's most memorable use of the oak is as an expression of the potentiality and longevity of poetry in *A Defence*: 'All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn which contained all oaks potentially' (*SMW* 693). Baser poetical attempts and practitioners are distinguished by Shelley from the 'high poetry' that, in its treatment of universal concepts such as love, truth, beauty, hope, and change, has transhistorical and transgeographical resonance and applicability – it is thus 'infinite' in subject-matter and, consequently, longevity. The oak metaphor that sustains the passage allows Shelley to reflect on the importance of poetical influence, to acknowledge the debt poets owe to their predecessors. Just as one acorn is the germ from which entire future oak forests can emerge, so does poetry have embryonic powers insofar as its influence produces many other works, inspiring their birth through the dissemination of the universal values and concepts it embodies and endorses, and therefore creating the millennial worlds incipient in the conjugation of those values. The duality of influence is also addressed by the oak metaphor. Its stress is not merely on the first acorn or high poetry but also on the products of their influence, the oak forests or later works, in whose existence is ensured the immortality and continuation of their progenitors, for, as he puts it in an earlier passage of *A Defence*, 'the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed' (*SMW* 675).

Oaks also prove a useful Platonic symbol in *Hellas*. The example that 'Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup' (l. 793) provides, understood in tandem with Ahasuerus's claim that reality 'Is but a vision' (l. 780), confirms that the past and future 'are idle shadows | Of thought's eternal flight' (ll. 783-84), faint vestiges of the activity of the mind which have no tangible,

---

[30] Cf. William Wordsworth's *The Excursion*: 'Ye Thrones that have defied remorse, and cast | Pity away, soon shall ye quake with *fear*!' but 'Are still permitted to extend their pride | Like cedars on the top of Lebanon | Darkening the sun' (VII. 837-38, 845-47).

independent existence outside of the imagination that envisioned them. Like the mind, which encompasses all past, present, and future realities, so does an acorn contain all the past and future forests which result from its germination. Put in other terms, the potentiality for forests to emerge out of one single acorn is paralleled with the endless potentiality for the human mind to envision millennial worlds and to produce the poetry in which the latter are contained. Oaks, therefore, provide Shelley with a physical embodiment of his belief that the future is contingent on the germination of the mind and the development and enrichment of the imagination.

Trees are more than mere symbols of man's communion with nature, for Shelley's borrowings from botany further facilitate his articulation of apocalyptic-eschatological and millennial change, and poetical creation. Shelley recognises the prophetic symbolism of the oak; like poetry and the poet, it is a conduit for the expression of the divine (in line with Greek thought) and, in its permanence, is evocative of the high poetry which has an enduring power in the development of civilisations and the collective mind of humanity. The polysemous character of the oak also enables Shelley's expression of his apocalypticism. Shelley's interest in the oak is revealing of his workings as both apocalyptist, a writer of an apocalyptic work, and apocalypticist, an interpreter of apocalyptic prophecies.[31] The oak is a symbol for the millennial world he envisions, and its permanence and stability are a reflection of his wishes for the nature of millennium, even if he concedes that it might not be installed or, if it is, that it might be revoked. Trees are, ultimately, a symbol of the imagination itself, of its power to create and transform, to inspire and reveal.[32]

Shelley's response to the oak, which furthers cultural perceptions and interpretations of this specimen, is a descendant of the Greek conception of this variety of tree. The Greek understanding of the sacredness of forests is based on the fact that divine entities were, quite literally, conceived as living there. The origin, development, and death of trees was considered a divine process insofar as trees were intrinsically connected with nymphs, as shown in the following Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite:

---

[31] See both entries in the *OED* (accessed 20 March 2021).

[32] Cf. Blake's emphasis on the symbolism of nature, its undivided existence with the imagination, and of how human character and the self are determined by the ability to perceive, in a letter to his patron the Reverend Dr John Trusler (23 August 1799):

> The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination, & I feel Flatter'd when I am told so. (*The Letters of William Blake: With Related Documents*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 9)

> 'As for him [Aeneas], once he sees the sunlight, he will be nursed by the deep-bosomed, mountain-couching nymphs who dwell on this great and holy mountain [Mount Ida], who belong with neither mortals nor gods. They have long lives, and eat divine food, and step the fair dance with the immortals; Sileni and the keen-sighted Argus-slayer unite in love with them in the recesses of lovely caves. As they are born, fir trees or tall oaks come forth on the earth that feeds mankind: fine and healthy they stand towering in the high mountains, and people call them precincts of the gods, and mortals do not cut them with the axe. But when their fated death is at hand, first the fair trees wither where they stand, their bark decays about them, their branches fall off, and simultaneously the nymph's souls depart from the sunlight'.[33] (ll. 256-72; LCL 496, pp. 178-81)

Trees were, therefore, perceived as an extension of the divine, and forests as the 'precincts of the gods', or *temenos* in the original Greek of the text, the dwelling-place of divine entities which, thusly conceived, offers a space for worship. As 'a piece of land marked off from common uses and dedicated to a god, precinct', the sacred ground of the *temenos* is not restricted to (and therefore not synonymous with) the forest – it can encompass any piece of land as long as it is considered to possess religious importance through its identification with deities.[34] However, trees occupy a position of significance in the definition of this space, as 'What was fundamental in Greek sanctuaries, what defined a sanctuary in the Greek religious mentality, was that it was a sacred space centred around an altar, sometimes including another sacred focus such as a tree or stone, a spring or cave'.[35] Shelley constructs this exact image in *Rosalind and Helen, A Modern Eclogue* (1819). The title-characters arrive at a clearing in the woods, in which the natural formations of the landscape reveal another sacred, upaithric

---

[33] Cf. Milton, *Il Penseroso*, ll. 132-38:

> me goddess bring
> To archèd walks of twilight groves,
> And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
> Of pine, or monumental oak,
> Where the rude axe with heavèd stroke,
> Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,
> Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.

[34] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), II, p. 1774. A *temenos* also encompasses land that is reserved as an official domain (i.e. for kings and chiefs) as well as temples, but the latter are posterior constructions on land that would be considered as the 'precincts of the gods'.

[35] Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Early sanctuaries, the eighth century and ritual space: fragments of a discourse', in *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches,* ed. by Robin Hägg and Nanno Marinatos (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1-13 (p. 8).

construction whose description in the passage betrays a direct acknowledgement of the fact that this is a space in line with early Greek religious practices:

> To a deep lawny dell they came,
> To a stone seat beside a spring,
> O'er which the columned wood did frame
> A roofless temple, like the fane
> Where, ere new creeds could faith obtain,
> Man's early race once knelt beneath
> The overhanging deity. (ll. 105-11; *Longman* II, 273)

Walter Burkert further adds that 'The simple marking with rock and tree is usually sufficient' for the demarcation of the *temenos* .[36] 'The tree', he continues,

> is even more important than the stone in marking the sanctuary, and this corresponds not only to Minoan-Mycenaean but also to Near Eastern traditions. The shade-giving tree epitomizes both beauty and continuity across the generations. Most sanctuaries have their special tree. […] In the Hera sanctuary on Samos the willow tree (*lygos*) remained always at the same spot and was even incorporated into the great altar. […] Particularly old and sacred was the oak (*phegos*) of Dodona which imparted the oracle with the rustling of its branches.[37]

It is, indeed, the sacredness of Dodona as a *temenos* for the worship of Zeus *Naios* ('of the spring') that ancient authors emphasise, but the manner through which prophecies were delivered seems to have captivated them equally. The image of oaks – understood as 'prophetic trees' in 'the famous grove of Dodona, where, for more than eight centuries, the oracles of Jupiter were delivered from his favourite trees, to supplicants from every part of the then civilised world' – can be found, for instance, in tragedies by Sophocles and Aeschylus.[38] Whereas in Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis* (*c*. 450-425 BC), the prophetic speech of the oak is verbalised through the priestesses at Dodona ('Such a fate appointed by the gods was to be

[36] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. by John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 85.
[37] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, pp. 85-86.
[38] H. L. Long, 'Some Enquiry Concerning the Quercus and Fagus of the Ancients', in *The Gardener's Magazine*, ed. by J. C. Loudon (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1839), V, pp. 9-20 (p. 16).

the end, he said, of the troubles of Heracles, as he had heard the ancient oak at Dodona say through the two doves', ll. 169-72; LCL 21),[39] in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, it is the speaking ability of the trees that is highlighted ('When you had come to the lands of Molossia and approached the lofty ridge of Dodona, home of the oracular seat of Thesprotian Zeus and of the incredible marvel of the speaking oak', ll. 829-32; LCL 145). This oracular and oral quality of the oaks is applied by Shelley to a generalised 'leaves', as the echoes of this Greek influence are present in both the letter to Peacock discussed above – 'you hear the late leaves of autumn shiver & rustle in the stream of the inconstant wind as it were like the steps of ghosts' (*Letters* II, 74) – and in the opening tercets of 'Ode to the West Wind'.

***

It is within this context that 'Ode to the West Wind' emerges as a composition 'conceived and chiefly written' in a setting that can be perceived as another Temple of Nature. This temple, however, unlike the ones previously analysed, is not described in detail in the poem or its note. It is unimportant for the present discussion whether Shelley did, in fact, write 'Ode to the West Wind' in a forest; what is of importance is that, by making that connection, he associates the ode to the woods, a significant revelation considering the importance of the Greek conception of nature, forests, and trees in the development of Shelley's own perception of these concepts and, more generally, of his apocalyptic thought. The ode's note, therefore, acquires new significance: in addition to providing a frame of reference for 'Ode to the West Wind', the note contextualises the poem insofar as it constructs an image of the poet-prophet standing among trees, in communion with nature, reading the signs that point to the understanding of millennial love. Like Orpheus in the eponymous fragment and the old man in 'The Coliseum', this temple is visited by a poet-prophet – Shelley himself – in whose space he understands the sound of the rustling leaves as the prophetic tone announcing the initiation of a worldly apocalyptic movement of change. Like William Blake's Bard 'Who Present, Past, & Future sees | Whose ears have heard, | The Holy Word, | That walk'd among the ancient trees' ('Introduction (Experience)', *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, ll. 1-5), Shelley presents himself as discerning 'The Holy Word' of change carried in the wind as it moves through boughs and leaves of 'ancient trees', which, along with his reflections on the power of apocalyptic movements and the importance of poetry for their effect, he sets in the writing that would become 'Ode to the West Wind'. The ode, therefore, is a commemorative address to the wind,

[39] See note 26, above.

not only for its function as carrier of a message for change but, perhaps more importantly, for its role of catalyst of the revelation as, in line with Greek thought, its rustling through the boughs and movement of the leaves in the trees enables the disclosure of a message of eschatological and millennial relevance.

Although the poem itself does not include a description of this Temple of Nature nor specific references to the 'wood that skirts the Arno', the fifth stanza of 'Ode to the West Wind' directly addresses its inheritance of the Greek conception of forests. 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is' (l. 57), the opening line of this stanza, contains within itself three equations. The mesozeugma that holds the line reveals that the poet envisages the forest as another lyre, or Aeolian harp, acknowledging its symbolic importance for the Romantic imagination.[40] In the spirit of Greek thought, the sound generated by the passing of the wind through the lyre is correlated with the sounds of the divine message of the wind that are produced as the latter moves through the boughs and leaves of the forest. The perception of the forest in terms of musical instruments is, indeed, Greek in origin. Theocritus opens his first idyll by associating the pleasant, harmonious music produced by the *psithurisma* (the whispering of the leaves, as the wind rustles through) of a pine with the pleasurable music produced by the goatherd's pan flute (the invention of the god Pan, traditionally regarded as the son of Hermes, the creator of the lyre).[41] Shelley uses the *psithurisma* of pine trees as a sign that Ahasuerus will meet with whoever requests his presence: 'a wind | Will rush out of the sighing pine-forest' producing 'a storm of harmony | Unutterably sweet', a fitting association to describe the enigmatic prophet (*Hellas*, ll. 177-80). Shelley's correspondence of the forest with the lyre, in which trees become organic harps, once again fusing nature with human constructions, is in dialogue with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's pantheistic understanding of the Aeolian harp:

> And what if all of animated nature
> Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,

[40] The editors of *Longman* (III, 211) point to a fragment (or possible complete lyric) by Shelley, whose possible date of composition overlaps with that of 'Ode to the West Wind', that is akin to 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is': 'airs low-breathing | Through Aeolian pines' ('At the Creation of the Earth [The Birth of Pleasure]', ll. 6-7).

[41] 'A sweet thing is the whispered music [*psithurisma*] of that pine by the springs, goatherd, and sweet is your piping, too' (*Idylls* I. 1-3, LCL 28). Theocritus employs *psithurisma*, the Greek onomatopoeic noun meaning 'whispering', to refer to the rustling of the leaves by the wind, thereby adding a sylvan dimension to the general term for the concept that denotes whispering sound. Cf. Ausonius's *The Epistles* (393 AD): 'Reed-grown banks also have their tuneful harmonies, and the pine's foliage in trembling accents talks with its beloved winds' (XXIX. 13-14, LCL 115).

At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

('Effusion XXXV [The Eolian Harp]' (1795), ll. 36-40)

Coleridge responds to the experience of this instrument by extending its function to the entire 'animated' world of existence: the movement of the wind through the harp is analogous to the movement of the world-spirit through living matter, the 'organic Harps diversely fram'd'. His pantheistic perception of the harp is akin to Shelley's remarks to Peacock in the letter discussed above, which relates Shelley's perception of the forest that surrounds Pompeii as a space in which the sacred intercolumniation of trees, like the strings of the lute, allows for the movement of the world-spirit: 'the interstices of their incomparable columns, were portals as it were to admit the spirit of beauty which animates this glorious universe to visit those whom it inspired' (*Letters* II, 73).

Yearning to be in unison with the wind, the poet equates himself with the lyre ('Make me thy lyre'), longing to become an instrument of action of the apocalyptic-eschatological, revolutionary moment that this wind signifies and whose enactment he foresees. Shelley would equate himself to the lyre, or more generally to the harp, although applied in a different context, as early as 1814: 'And I am an harp responsive to every wind. The scented gale of summer can wake it to sweet melody, but rough cold blasts draw forth discordances & jarring sounds' (To Mary Shelley, 4 November 1814; *Letters* I, 418).[42] If Shelley associates the lyre with the forest as well as with the poet, he is, by extension, associating the poet with the forest, which, like the lyre, is transmuted into a symbol of the Romantic imagination, of the prophetic, sacred, and transformative powers of poets and poetry. The forest codifies the poet's ability to receive and communicate divine information, to inspire and create. It is, ultimately, a symbol of the poet himself. The indirect correlation between the poet and the forest established in 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is', is literalised by the speaker's conception of his 'dead thoughts' as 'withered leaves' – 'the leaves dead' (l. 2) of stanza one – to be reignited by the movement of the wind into 'a new birth' (ll. 63-64), alluding both to poetry composed by the inspiration of the wind and the millennial realities that it will encapsulate.

The lyre and the forest further provide Shelley with symbols for the workings of the poetic imagination. 'Be through my lips to unawakened earth | The trumpet of a prophecy!' (ll.

[42] Thomas Moore explains that the concept of man as a lyre, and musical instruments more generally, is a Platonic inheritance; in his *A Vision of Philosophy*, Moore describes Orpheus as having 'trac'd upon his typic lyre | The diapason of man's mingled frame' (ll. 26-27). See Thomas Moore, *Epistles, Odes, and other Poems* (London: James Carpenter, 1806), p. 291fn6.

68-69) sees the poet yearn for the inspirational wind to pass through him, as it does through the forest and the lyre. It is an appeal for his imagination to be reinvigorated and reawakened, for the production of poetry that has the potential of amplifying the urgency of the need for the apocalyptic-eschatological movement that Shelley presages in the wind, directed to the 'unawakened earth' or the 'few' who are asleep and remain fettered by the chains of oppression in *The Mask of Anarchy*. The 'withered leaves' of the unawakened mind are transformed into a more incandescent symbol by the action of the wind: the 'unextinguished hearth' of the imagination is reanimated as the wind passes through, dispersing the poetic 'Ashes and sparks' of a sylvan creative force (ll. 66-67). This memorable image prefigures another one from *A Defence*: 'for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness' (*SMW* 696-97). The wind allegorises the unpredictability of poetic inspiration and the consequent fluctuations it originates in the imagination, on which Shelley also reflects earlier in *A Defence* in terms reminiscent of 'Ode to the West Wind':

> Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre; which move it, by their motion, to ever-changing melody. (*SMW* 675)

The apparent transience of 'the fading coal' and 'the unextinguished hearth' is counterbalanced and, ultimately, subverted by the possibility of being rekindled that remains latent in both images, encapsulated in the potentiality for 'brightness' (even if 'transitory') of the coal and for the scintillating beginnings suggested by the scattered 'Ashes and sparks' as they produce their intended effect. In describing the mind as 'an unextinguished hearth' and 'a fading coal', the passages transform the imagination into an incandescent symbol of possibility and promise through images that accentuate process and lack of finality. Like the lyre and the forest through which the wind announces its presence by producing mellifluous tones; like a hearth and a coal which have the potential of being relit by the passing wind, so does a burdened, weary, and unengaged mind, the result of 'A heavy weight of hours' ('Ode to the West Wind', l. 55), have the potential of being re-inspired into creation and re-energised into engaging with the apocalyptic-eschatological movement taking place.

For a pacifist poet to desire to be in unison with the 'tempestuous' (Shelley's note to 'Ode to the West Wind'), violent West Wind is problematic as it could complicate the harmony of this Temple of Nature; however, Shelley's moral predisposition underlies this seemingly

paradoxical communion. The use of 'tempestuous' to describe the wind is appropriate: the meteorological connotations of the term are supplemented by its (transferred) metaphorical application in political contexts, conveying Shelley's acknowledgement of the potentially dangerous convolutions of revolutionary enterprises. He is, indeed, explicit in his recognition of the violent undertones of the apocalyptic-eschatological force that the wind signifies. There is a reverential, almost fearful, tone in the poetic voice that, in the devastation and violence that underlies the description of the West Wind's apocalyptic-eschatological stirrings as well as in its address – 'wild' (ll. 1, 13), 'Destroyer and Preserver' (l. 14, the titles of the Hindu deities Shiva and Vishnu), 'Uncontrollable' (l. 47), 'impetuous' (l. 62), 'Spirit fierce' (l. 61) – mirrors the fearful oceanic foliage in stanza III. This sense of awe that transpires in the poetic voice's address to the wind, echoing the intonations of biblical poetry, shows that, as much as Shelley welcomes this revolutionary wind of change, he is aware of its potentially problematic might, of its destructive and overwhelming energies: he recognises that a negative outcome is as equally possible as the positive result for which he yearns. Indeed, Shelley acknowledges the difficulty of channelling the overwhelming energies of apocalyptic-eschatological moments into the positive momentum that is necessary for millennial renewal, a sentiment that underpins his sceptical, albeit sincere and optimistic, final interrogation, 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?' (l. 70) as well as the final couplet of *Hellas*, 'The world is weary of the past, | O might it die or rest at last!' (ll. 1100-01). He understands the process through which this millennium is achieved as being heavily dependent on human nature, which, at times, can be not only inconstant and unreliable,[43] but also selfish, callous, and destructive, ignoring the more philanthropic and humanitarian impulses Shelley believes it can embrace.[44] This he felt, for instance, upon reading John Taylor Coleridge's April 1819 review of *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) for the *Quarterly Review* (Shelley received it in Florence in early October 1819 from Charles Ollier, to whom he wrote an extensive commentary regarding its contents on 15 October),[45] and upon arriving in Naples, where the first incident he witnessed – 'an assassination' – affected him to a degree that led him to conclude that 'external nature in these delightful regions contrasts with & compensates for the deformity & degradation of humanity' (To Peacock, 17/18 December 1818; *Letters* II, 60).

[43] See *Letters* II, 110: 'I know nothing from Ollier—Is he yet friendly with you. You know the mind of most of the inhabitants of this earth, is like the moon, or rather the wind, and if you know it is thus today it is no sign that it will be thus tomorrow' (To Leigh Hunt, 15 August 1819).
[44] See Shelley's fragmentary lyric 'Alas, this is not what I thought life was' (1818; *Longman* II, 415-17).
[45] See *Letters* II, 126-29.

That Shelley views nature as an infrastructure that sustains the soul, as suggested earlier in the chapter, and as possessing cathartic properties that protect from daily encounters with what he understands to be the dilapidation of the social, ethical, and moral character of humanity should not be perceived as a misanthropic attitude. In fact, Shelley's assertion in the December letter to Peacock (*Letters* II, 60) springs from his recognition that society is far from being what Shelley would hope it was and, more importantly, of what he knows it has the potential of becoming and achieving, a stance which he develops more fully in *A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love*. It is in honest keeping with his imagination that this recognition arises, for, as much as he records the philanthropic impulses of humanity, he equally records humanity's less aspirational moments. Shelley's philanthropy, in its dual valence as love of humanity and goodness, is shown not merely in moments of praise of his fellow-men or in descriptions of their potential triumphs, but also in his criticism of humanity, in moments that point to its need for improvement. This philanthropic impulse underlies the writing of 'Ode to the West Wind', an indication suggested by Shelley's scribbling of a line of Euripides' *Heracles* (*c*. 416 BC) next to a draft of stanzas IV and v.[46] The line, 'In goodness I, though mortal, surpass you, a mighty god' (l. 342, LCL 9), integrated in Amphitryon's denunciatory address of Zeus for his neglect of the children of Heracles as they are about to be executed, adds an interesting nuance to the final stanzas of 'Ode to the West Wind'. These condemnatory words of Amphitryon to Zeus could, indeed, be Shelley's speaking to the West Wind, and they reveal that an inherent mistrust of the wind subtends the poetic voice's desire to be in unison with this revolutionary power, for, as he had been shown by the most recent example of the French Revolution, these reformist and revolutionary enterprises can be hypocritical forces that deturpate the social morality which they claim to uphold. Power, then, represented through the divinity afforded to the West Wind in the ode and to Zeus in the quotation from *Heracles*, is neither synonymous with nor does it imply the sustenance of morality or the defence of justice, but rather its wielding and application in exorbitant amounts is something that Shelley mistrusts, a sentiment that underlies this Temple of Nature. The fact that the poetic voice yearns to commune with the wind is not an approval, glorification, or support of the destructive violence that invades human liberties. It ultimately betrays Shelley's conceptual belief in revolutions, his recognition that

[46] After a draft of ll. 67-70 of the ode, Shelley wrote 'ἀρετῇ σε νικῶ θνητὸς ὢν θεὸν μέγαν', a line from *Heracles* that translates as 'In goodness I, though mortal, surpass you, a mighty god' (l. 342, LCL 9). See *BSM* V, pp. 286-87. See Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 18-20, 227, for an association of the Euripidean line to 'Ode to the West Wind' and *Prometheus Unbound*.

revolutions possess potential socio-economic, political, and historical benefits which cannot be overlooked because of the misapplication and corruption of its particulars. Their success, Shelley concludes, is contingent on the prioritisation of morality, ethics, compassion, and empathy, which, in turn, is dependent on the engagement of the imagination through poetry:

> 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 or person, not our own. A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination: and poetry administers to that effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the powers of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food. (*A Defence*, *SMW* 682)

Morality and the belief that altruism and goodness should be the lynchpins of revolutionary and reformist enterprises, therefore, are concerns at play in 'Ode to the West Wind' and the Temple of Nature in which it was conceived.

The Temple of Nature is a significant image that recurs in Shelley's oeuvre. Although a space devised for the celebration and fostering of millennial love, these temples are, in line with Shelley's apocalyptic-eschatological perspective, suffused by a sense of their potential destruction, or complicated by the history with which they are associated, as is the case of the Coliseum. That these millennial projects fail, or are complicated by a series of particulars, is not at odds with the view of Shelley as a poet of hope; rather, their failure is a component of an awareness of history's cycles, of a pragmatic understanding of reality and human nature. What is important in Shelley's poetics of hope is that his millennial vision is perennial, that he continues to hope, to believe in love and compassion as universal forces, despite the failure of his social and moral projects. This millennial vision permeates Shelley's poetical and prose works, including his fragmentary compositions. The chapter has given space of analysis to compositions which have received little critical attention, and to fragmentary pieces, showing their importance for a complete comprehension of the workings of Shelley's imaginings. Reading, moreover, 'Ode to the West Wind' alongside these unfamiliar and often neglected

works, allows for a renewed understanding of one of Shelley's most well-known, admired, and widely anthologised lyrics.

III

Climbing to the Light: Millennial Death in *Adonais*

Shelley's ardent desire to mourn, celebrate, and vindicate the life and death of John Keats is evidenced by the rapid production of *Adonais*, written in Pisa between April and June 1821, and published in July 1821, less than six months after the poet's death. The older poet does not merely offer a moving elegy on the passing of his younger contemporary; *Adonais* is also a platform for Shelley's discussion of his spiritual and eschatological preoccupations regarding the meaning of death and the nature of the human soul. This chapter will study the importance, in the context of Shelley's apocalypticism, of the elegy's conceptualisation of Keats as the quasi-mythical Adonais. It will study Shelley's subversion of the traditional association of death and darkness: the poet recasts (and reclaims) death as a realm of splendour, showing that death is the millennial state of the human soul, that millennial continuation is achieved through death. The chapter will present *Adonais* as a poem which does not intend to depict Keats as he perceived himself but rather reconfigures the young poet through a conjugation of Platonic, classical, and biblical images to create a figure that is in harmony with Shelley's apocalypticism, thus transformed into an important symbol in the Shelleyan imaginarium.

Adonais offers a contemplation on mortality, ephemerality, and spiritual continuation, through which Shelley tests the permeability of the boundaries that separate physical and metaphysical realms. The evocation of these concerns in the poem's epigraph, the inscription or *epigramma* traditionally ascribed (albeit wrongly) to Plato, offers an initial insight into *Adonais*.[1] Inspired by previous translations of the *epigramma*, generally included in the various

[1] 'Not one of these epigrams can be accepted as the work of Plato', D. L. Page explains in *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 125. He adds that

> Some of the amatory epigrams [of Plato] would call for longer discussion if their spuriousness had not been already demonstrated at length by Walther Ludwig in *GRBS* 4 (1963) 59-82. Suspicion should be immediately aroused by the fact that these epigrams appear plainly Alexandrian in tone, contents, and style, and have no antecedent whatsoever in the two or three centuries preceding the Hellenistic period. […] The ascription to Plato of the justly celebrated 'Star'-epigrams (I and II) depends wholly on a relatively late book of scurrilous fiction [by Aristippus]; there is no doubt that the other epigrams ascribed to Plato are forgeries, and there is no reason—rather the reverse […]—to except this pair. (pp. 125-26)

Although the epigrams, including the ones that Shelley translated, are no longer accepted as having been composed by the philosopher Plato, they are still referred to, by convention, as Platonic epigrams.

editions of the *Greek Anthology*, Shelley's loose rendition still manages to capture the essence of the Greek original:[2]

> Thou wert the morning star among the living,
> Ere thy fair light had fled;
> Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving
> New Splendour to the dead.[3]

---

[2] The *Greek Anthology* is a collection of short poems and epigrams by minor Greek poets from various regions and historical periods of the Hellenic world, from Classical to Byzantine Greece, offering an excellent and comprehensive insight into the quotidian of the ancient Greeks, addressing matters beyond politics and religion. Its convoluted and interesting history of composition is best explained by John Addington Symonds in his *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880). Meleager of Gadara's original compilation (of 60 BC), or 'Garland', along with the works of subsequent compilers, was rearranged by Agathias (*c*. 530 AD) into a seven-tome edition of this collection of minor Greek poetry. In the tenth century, Constantinus Cephalas revised these previous collections and created the basis for the Anthology with which modern readers are familiar. The monk Planudes, in the fourteenth century, radically modified Cephalas's work: 'he emended, castrated, omitted, interpolated, altered, and remodelled at his own sweet will.' (*Studies*, II, p. 284) Symonds highly disapproved of Planudes' work, or 'mutilation' as it is referred to in the Latin Preface to Lascaris's edition of the *Anthologia Planudea* that Symonds quotes, since it decreased the quantity, quality, and variety that Cephalas's edition offered. The *Anthologia Planudea* took precedence in Western Europe and its abridged nature was only addressed when the *Anthologia Palatina*, a copy of Cephalas's edition, was rediscovered in 1606 and reprinted by Richard Brunck (in 1776) and Friedrich Jacobs (in 1794-1803 and 1813-17). The current version of the *Greek Anthology* is a composite edition of the *Anthologia Palatina* and those sections from the *Planudea* which were not included in the former. Symonds highlights the uniqueness of the *Greek Anthology*, considering it the 'most precious relic of antiquity' (*Studies* II, p. 285), above works by celebrated Greek authors such as Homer or Aeschylus, because of its authenticity to everyday Greek life.

[3] This is one of the two 'Epigrams on Aster' – 'Hesperus' (*Adonais*'s epigraph) and 'Ouranos' (also translated by Shelley, 'Sweet Child, thou star of love and beauty bright') – attributed to Plato, of which Diogenes Laertius (incorrectly, see note 1, above) explains that 'Aristippus in his fourth book *On the Luxury of the Ancients* says that he [Plato] was attached to a youth named Aster, who joined him in the study of astronomy […]. His passionate affection is revealed in the following epigrams which he is said to have written upon them [the youths]' (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III. 29; LCL 184, p. 303). This quotation from Diogenes Laertius's *Lives* is followed by both 'Epigrams on Aster' (LCL 184, pp. 303-04), which Mary Shelley records as having been read by Shelley in 1814 (*Letters* II, 473; *JMWS* I, 49). Michael O'Neill explains that Shelley probably also encountered both epigrams in Apuleius's *Apologia*, which were included in 'the most authoritative Latin text of Apuleius available in PBS's time (and probably the one he read, though neither he nor MWS specifies an edition)', that of 'the renowned Bipontine series of Classical authors', unlike modern versions which only preserve the 'Hesperus' epigram (*Hopkins* III, 925). O'Neill rightly points out that Shelley is likely to have become first acquainted with the epigrams as a schoolboy (*Hopkins* III, 925). Indeed, both epigrams feature in Greek with a parallel Latin translation in Thomas Farnaby's *Florilegium, Epigrammatum Græcorum, Eorumque Latino Versu à varijs redditorum* (London: Felix Kynstonius, 1629), pp. 40-41, the text that was used at Eton for Greek instruction (along with Greek grammar, Aesop's Fables, and the Greek New Testament). See also E. S. Creasy, *Some Account of the Foundation of Eton College and of the Past and Present Condition of the School* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), p. 25.

Thomas Moore also translated the 'Hesperus' epigram, and included it in the note to ode XIX in his *Odes of Anacreon: Translated into English Verse, with Notes* (London: John Stockdale, 1800), p. 83. There are evident similarities between Shelley's and Moore's renditions of the 'Hesperus' epigram. Thematically, both present death as the moment when light escapes; formally, they distance themselves from other translations, which merely transliterate the epigram, by offering four-line compositions of a more lyrical nature. Mary includes the 'Hesperus' epigram under the title 'To Stella', the Latinised form of Aster, in *PW* 349. Moore uses the same title, 'To Stella', as heading to his translation of the 'Ouranos' epigram, included in the note to ode XXII (*Odes*, p. 94). For a detailed history of Shelley's Platonic translations, see Notopoulos, 508-11, 601-02.

The epigraph's evocation of stars foreshadows the light imagery that pervades *Adonais*: death is the moment when 'fair light' escapes, yet Adonais, 'having died', is perceived as 'giving | New Splendour to the dead', a paradox which prefigures the apocalyptic-eschatological themes of continuation and transformation central to the poem. Death does not dull resplendence; the light of life is merely reconfigured in this millennial state and thus Keats, projected as Adonais in Shelley's vision, is able to retain, in death, the guiding role for which, according to Shelley, Keats was destined.

Death is conceived, in the epigraph and later in the poem, as a state of new life, a continuation rather than an ultimate end, a notion illustrated in the Platonic epigram by the Greek references to the 'morning' (Phosphorus or Heosphorus) and evening ('Hesperus') appearances of the planet Venus. The representation in myth of these manifestations is not consistent – some ancient sources present them as two distinct entities, while others conflate Phosphorus and Hesperus into the same being – but both variants of the myth prove to have equal relevance to *Adonais* and its epigraph.[4] On the one hand, that death is not a state that signifies spiritual finality is in line with the conflation of Phosphorus and Hesperus: instead of a strict demarcation between ontological states, in death light is still radiated, and, by extension, it allows Keats, as Adonais, to continue the performance of his guiding role. On the other hand, the epigraph simultaneously creates a separation between life and death that highlights the metamorphosis undergone by Adonais. Adonais is transformed from 'morning star' in life to 'Hesperus' in death, alluding to the daily movement from morning to evening, a metaphor for the crossing of the boundaries between ontological states. Shelley's translation of the epigram adds a complexity that is not present in the Greek original. The formal structure of the epigraph reinforces the distinction between Phosphorus and Hesperus, suggesting that death modifies the radiated light, that Adonais cannot remain the same because he is dead. The change from past, 'wert', to present, 'art', tense; the use of a semi-colon; and the insertion of the adverb 'now' create a disjunction in the inscription that parallels the two human states of being that death separates. The fact that both mythological conceptualisations of Venus are pertinent to

[4] Homer's *Iliad* attributes two different names to the morning and evening appearances of Venus, thus distinguishing them as two separate entities: 'But at the hour when the star of morning [Heosphorus] goes out to herald light over the face of the earth' (XXIII. 226, LCL 171); 'As a star goes among stars in the dead of night, the star of evening [Hesperus], which is set in heaven as the fairest of all' (XXII. 317-18, LCL 171). Virgil employs the Latin equivalents, Lucifer and Vesper, to establish the distinction: 'let us haste to the cool fields, as the morning star [Lucifer] begins to rise' (*Georgics*, III. 324; LCL 63); 'there glowing Vesper is kindling his evening rays' (*Georgics*, I. 251; LCL 63). Conversely, the Greek lyric poet Ibycus, a scholiast on Basil reveals, combines both entities into one: 'The Dawnbringer (Morning-star) and Hesperus (Evening-star) are one and the same, although in ancient times they were thought to be different. Ibycus of Rhegium was the first to equate the titles' (Fragment 331, LCL 476).

Adonais shows Shelley's extensive knowledge of and engagement with Greek mythology, his awareness of its variations, its subtle nuances and symbolisms. The beauty and excellence of Shelley's translation is demonstrated in its ability to elicit disparate, yet equally important interpretations, remaining faithful to the original meaning of the epigram whilst poetically transforming it to become a characteristically Shelleyan composition.

In its depiction of Adonais as the morning and evening manifestations of Venus, the brightest object, apart from the Sun, among those that populate the sky, the epigraph singularises Keats as the brightest star, he who deserves the most renown and should therefore be placed, as Shelley notes in the Preface to the poem, 'among the writers of the highest genius who have adorned our age' (*SMW* 529). Presented as a 'son of light' (l. 36), the poem places Keats in the midst of an exclusive group of visionaries, including Homer, Dante, and Milton, who guide humanity towards its improvement through their defiance of socially and culturally imposed limits to the imagination.[5] The epithet 'son of light' materialises, in the poem, what the epigraph anticipated. Light becomes an intrinsic quality of Keats that speaks to a double aspect of Shelley's conception of the poet: being a 'son of light' is a reference to the poet's enlightenment, manifested in his singular, unrestrained vision, and to his divinity, afforded by the poet's state of communion with nature, with which Keats, in death, has been pantheistically made 'one' (l. 370). The light of enlightenment which becomes an attribute of Adonais/Keats is also a sign of the poet's moral distinction. Identifying Keats with Phosphorus and Hesperus (and with the latter's Roman equivalent in stanza XLVI, 'thou Vesper of our throng!', l. 414), as well as presenting Dante, another 'son of light', as 'the Lucifer of that starry flock' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 693),[6] reveals an evident association with Milton's Satan and, by extension, with Shelley's understanding of this figure's moral superiority:

---

[5] The trinity of poetic excellence to which Keats is added is explained in *A Defence of Poetry*:

> Homer was the first, and Dante the second epic poet: that is, the second poet the series of whose creations bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge, and sentiment, and religion, and political condition of the age in which he lived, and of the ages which followed it: developing itself in correspondence with their development. […] Milton was the third epic poet. (*SMW* 692)

Poets are, in Shelley's 'An Exhortation' (1820), 'Children of a sunnier star, | Spirits from beyond the moon' (ll. 25-26), anticipating the cosmological images and the light of enlightenment used in *Adonais* to reflect on the role of the poet. Shelley's depiction of Milton as 'the third among the sons of light' (*Adonais*, l. 36), dwelling in the 'bright station' (l. 38), reflects William Wordsworth's own elevation of Milton through stellar imagery in 'London, 1802' (1807). Like Shelley's 'sons of light', Milton was, for Wordsworth, above the 'selfish men' (l. 6) who lack 'manners, virtue, freedom, power' (l. 8), and thus his 'soul 'was like a Star, and dwelt apart' (l. 9).

[6] Cf. *PL*, IV. 605-06: 'Hesperus that led | The starry host, rode brightest'; *PL*, V. 708-09: 'as the morning star that guides | The starry flock'. Shelley rephrases the latter passage in a letter to Leigh Hunt: 'he [Hogg] will say that I am like Lucifer who has seduced the third part of the starry flock' (6 October 1821; *Letters* II, 356).

> Milton's Devil as a moral being is far superior to his God […]. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius.[7] (*SMW* 691-92)

To be included in this group of visionaries implies an exclusivity and superiority which is reflected in their occupation, as *Adonais* puts it, of 'that bright station' to which they 'dared to climb' (l. 38), a place of distinction among poets and a recognition of the excellence of the 'son of light'.[8] What is here emphasised, by reinforcing what Shelley understood as the unparalleled poetical talent of Keats, is the poetical hierarchy in which every poet participates. To inhabit the 'bright station' is to be distanced from both common men and other, lesser poets, and is a mark of excellence; yet the poem stresses the 'toil and hate' (l. 45) that characterises its achievement. This group of visionaries is elevated because, unlike lesser poets 'Whose tapers yet burn through that night of time' (l. 40), they 'dared'; they defied conventions with their millennial vision, embarking on a path that not every artist will undertake.

The simile of stanza XLIV, which foreshadows the closing lines of the poem (ll. 493-95), further alludes to this conception of a poetical hierarchy. 'Like stars to their appointed height' the dead 'sons of light' 'climb'[9] (l. 390) continues the metaphor that identifies the 'sons of light' with stars, to show that, likewise to the stars' fixed position (their 'appointed height'), poets have an assigned place in the hierarchy. This poetical taxonomy is continued in death: the 'bright station' which the 'sons of light' populate in life is equated with and continued in 'the abode where the Eternal are' (l. 495), a space, the poem suggests, which only those considered as 'sons of light' in life are to occupy in death. The talent of the poet indeed regulates the entry to this space, for Adonais 'bought, with price of purest breath, | A grave among the eternal' (ll. 57-58). Keats's 'purest breath' alludes, as suggested by the superlative of the adjective, to the excellence of his lyrics; but it is also, quite literally, his obol to enter this realm of excellence.[10] Stanza XLIV reaffirms what the epigraph to the poem anticipated,

---

[7] Conceiving Satan as a morally independent figure, writing about him with imaginative freedom, was, for William Blake, also a mark of Milton's genius: 'Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1798, Plate 6).

[8] Cf. *PL*, III. 587-88: 'So wondrously was set his [the Sun's] station bright. | There lands the fiend.'

[9] Cf. *PL*, III. 718-20: 'stars | Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move; | Each has his place appointed, each his course.'

[10] Cf. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'A Sonnet is a moment's monument,—', the introductory sonnet to his sonnet-sequence *The House of Life* (1881): 'A Sonnet is a coin: […] | 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath, | In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death' (ll. 9-14).

that death does not dull the resplendence of the 'sons of light'. 'The splendours of the firmament of time | May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not' (ll. 388-89), a characteristic Shelleyan construction (see, for example, *Hellas*, ll. 34-37) suffused by the poetic power of hope; the guiding light of high poetry radiates through the adverse consequences of libellous criticism that may temporarily obfuscate its effects, as well as through death, which 'cannot blot | The brightness it may veil' (ll. 392-92). That Shelley conceives death as 'a low mist' (l. 391) shows how it affects the influence of those considered as lesser poets; it obscures their name and therefore their potential influence, unlike that which is envisioned for Adonais, whose 'fate and fame shall be | An echo and a light unto eternity!' (ll. 8-9).[11] The death of Keats thus offered Shelley the opportunity to reflect on poetical longevity and influence, on the justice (or lack thereof) behind history's judgement producing 'immortal stars' (l. 256) or leading to certain poets being hidden by the 'low mist' of death.

Keats is identified, in addition to stellar imagery, with lightnings, another cosmological and apocalyptic manifestation of light. 'Leave me not wild and drear and comfortless,' exclaims Urania upon seeing Adonais's corpse, 'As silent lightning leaves the starless night!' (ll. 222-23). As the Greek goddess of astronomy, she appropriately presents herself in this simile as 'the starless night' which has been left 'wild and drear and comfortless' by the dead Adonais, or the 'silent lightning'.[12] 'The starless night' does not mourn the fading of spiritual light; its sorrow has origin in the fact that light (lightning) is unaccompanied by sound (thunder). Urania thus expresses her grief by representing death as the state which prevents the fulfilment of the synaesthetic pairing of light and sound with which the living Adonais was associated, especially relevant since she is invoked as the 'Most musical of mourners' (ll. 28, 37). Whilst living, the 'splendours' of Adonais's imagination had the power to 'pierce the guarded wit, | And pass into the panting heart' (ll. 102-03) of his audience through poetry, 'With lightning and with music' (l. 104): the synaesthetic moulding of 'shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound' (l. 119), that which is visually, olfactorily, and aurally perceived, is central for the poetic composition to move emotionally and intellectually the audience. Yet Urania's initial understanding of death as a state of ultimate endings is modified when the poem

[11] See Shelley's thoughts on Keats, in a letter to Charles Ollier, in terms that parallel the poetical hierarchy of stanza XLIV: 'Keats, I hope, is going to show himself a great poet; like the sun, to burst through the clouds, which, though dyed in the finest colours of the air, obscured his rising' (14 May 1820 ; *Letters* II, 197).

[12] Muse of astronomy is merely one of the many incarnations of Urania in *Adonais*. In this personification, she is akin to Milton's muse in *Paradise Lost* in which she also embodies sublime poetry. In *Adonais*, Urania is further identified with Aphrodite in her denomination as Aphrodite Urania, representative of heavenly or spiritualised love, who contrasts with the incarnation of Moschus's and Bion's elegies, Aphrodite Pandemos, the representative of sensual or physical love. See Carlos Baker, 'The Evening Star: *Adonais*', in *Shelley: Modern Judgements*, ed. by R. B. Woodings (Glasgow: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 213-27.

turns from lamenting the death of Adonais to conceiving him as free from the 'dream of life' (l. 344). The poetic synaesthesia that death seemed to interrupt is spiritually accomplished, as the immortal soul of Adonais 'is made one with Nature' (l. 370), continuing the synaesthesia with nature's 'music': 'there is heard | His voice in all her music, from the moan | Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird' (ll. 370-72). In this sense, lightning becomes synonymous with the poet and poetry itself, symbolising the power that remains latent in and is encapsulated by poetry.

The poem's use of lighting as a descriptor of poetical power is also extended to other poets. 'The Pilgrim of Eternity' (l. 264), one of the mourners who grieves the death of Adonais, enters the scene 'veiling all the lightnings of his song | In sorrow' (ll. 267-68), but the extremity of the sorrow felt by Lord Byron depicted in *Adonais* is a somewhat hyperbolical representation of Byron's actual sentiments and thoughts regarding Keats's death. Byron laments the passing of his younger contemporary in his reply to Shelley's letter of 16 April 1821, through which he came to know of the event, confessing to be 'very sorry to hear what you [Shelley] say of Keats—[…] Poor fellow!'.[13] Although he demonstrates great interest concerning the cause of Keats's death – both in that reply to Shelley ('I would rather he [Keats] had been seated on the highest peak of Parnassus than have perished in such a manner')[14] and in subsequent letters to his publisher John Murray – Byron does not abstain from expressing his distaste for Keats's poetry, contrasting with Shelley's praise of *Hyperion* (1820) as a poem which 'showed so great a promise' (To Lord Byron, 17 April 1821; *Letters* II, 284). Byron's simultaneous regret regarding Keats's death and criticism of his work is poetically expressed in *Don Juan* (1819-24):

> John Keats, who was killed off by one critique,
> Just as he really promised something great,
> If not intelligible,—without Greek
> Contrived to talk about the Gods of late,
> Much as they might have been supposed to speak.
> Poor fellow! His was an untoward fate:—
> 'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle,
> Should let itself be snuffed out by an Article. (XI. 473-80)

[13] George Gordon, Baron Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-1996), VIII: 'Born for Opposition, 1821' (1978), p. 103.
[14] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, VIII, p. 103.

He seems to reconsider his position by deeming *Hyperion* 'the best of his works' in a later letter to Shelley (30 July 1821)[15] and 'a fine monument' that 'will keep his [Keats's] name', writing to Murray (30 July 1821), even if he reiterates his disapproval in the same document.[16] Keats's death appears to (temporarily) disturb Byron's sense of morality, wishing to 'have omitted some remarks upon his poetry', formally asking Murray to edit his manuscripts and publications to that effect, before adding, in self-defence, that he 'was provoked by his [Keats's] attack upon Pope, and my disapprobation of his own style of writing'.[17]

Closing the procession of mourners comes Shelley himself, whose self-portrait as 'one frail Form' (l. 271) points to a departure in tone, character, and energy from the preceding mourners in Adonais's funereal procession. Milton Wilson describes Shelley's self-depiction in *Adonais* as a 'regrettable' moment in his poetry, produced by the poet's liability 'to behave foolishly and self-righteously when he was attacked', an unfair remark that overlooks the modesty behind a depiction that should not, despite evident similarities, be considered as implying full identification with the poet.[18] The portrayal, rather, offers Shelley the opportunity to continue his meditation on the role of the poet and the creative imagination through light and lightning imagery. Contrasting with Adonais as well as the other resplendent individuals that are included in the procession, the 'frail Form' perceives himself as 'the last cloud of an expiring storm | Whose thunder is its knell' (ll. 273-74), missing the vitality and power evoked in the lightnings employed to characterise those whom the speaker of the poem considers to be poetically exceptional. Instead of a lightning, he is 'a dying lamp' (l. 284), and indeed references suggesting the Form's imminent demise pervade the four stanzas that comprise his

---

[15] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, VIII, p. 163.
[16] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, VIII, p. 163.
[17] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, VIII, p. 104.
[18] Milton Wilson, *Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of his Prophetic Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 5. Earl Wasserman similarly views Shelley's self-depiction in less than positive terms: 'Shelley's so-called self-portrait (stanzas 31-34) has almost always proved unpleasant reading because it seems sadly marred by extravagant self-pity and unmanliness' (*Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 499). Although Carl Grabo is not as severe as Wilson and Wasserman, admitting that Shelley 'was undeservedly maligned', he understands the 'frail Form' as part of Shelley's vision 'of himself' which 'is true enough and the detachment is sufficiently remarkable', but Grabo concludes that 'there is a note which, if not self-pity, is self-dramatization. Shelley suffered at moments from a martyr complex' (*The Magic Plant* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), pp. 365-66). Carlos Baker, conversely, promotes and stresses the importance of a re-evaluation of Shelley's self-portrait, in line with the view proposed in this chapter:

> Although Shelley's dramatization of himself as chief mourner has often struck readers as mere sentimental egotism, the portrait (like that of the Witch of Atlas) is actually an extraordinary complex of ethical attitudes, literary and mythological images, and semiprivate symbolism. When its origins are understood, the self-portrait appears to be less sicklied over with self-pity than involved, as in *Epipsychidion*, with a kind of self-analysis on an ideal plane. (Baker, 'The Evening Star: *Adonais'*, p. 217)

portrait, foreshadowing the final stanzas of the poem in which the speaker, now identified with the Form, embraces death and the spiritual possibilities offered by an atemporal existence. The nouns 'knell' (l. 274) and 'billow' (l. 285) implicitly prefigure the Form's impending death, as does the adjective 'swift' that complements the Form's Dionysian 'pardlike Spirit' (l. 280).[19] The mythological images that the portrait conjures are more explicit, however, of the Form's impending demise. As 'A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart' (l. 297),[20] he appears as a half-dead figure, close to crossing the threshold that separates life and death, ominously vocalising, through 'his partial moan' (l. 298), his realisation that 'in another's fate [he] now wept his own' (l. 300). The frail Form thus becomes another symbol for transience and continuation, a figure caught between ontological states as anticipated in the poem's epigraph. The Form is, indeed, a figure caught in the mechanisms of process. He is an incorporeal 'phantom among men' (l. 272), used here by Shelley not to depict the yet-to-materialise like the Phantom of 'England in 1819' or the Shape of *The Mask of Anarchy*, but its reverse, the soon-to-fade, a presence dispossessed of the vigour of lightnings that as 'A Love', now 'in desolation masked' (l. 281), and 'a Power', now 'Girt round with weakness' (l. 282), he once might have enjoyed.

Ronald E. Becht points out that Shelley, by including this self-portrait of a declining figure, 'isolates and focuses upon the phenomenon of the dying poetic spirit',[21] and, indeed, stanzas XXXI to XXXIV reveal the pain, torment, and isolation which a 'mighty heart' (l. 237) can experience.[22] The Form is isolated: he is 'companionless' (l. 272) and 'of that crew [of mourners] | He came the last, neglected and apart' (ll. 295-96), a self-imposed isolation, rather than the result of rejection by others. He, the poem reveals,

> Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness
> Actaeon-like, and now fled astray

[19] See 'Knell, *n.*' in all senses <www.oed.com/view/Entry/103982>; 'Billow, *n.* 2. b. *figurative* esp. of death as an overwhelming flood.' <www.oed.com/view/Entry/19032>; 'Swift, *adj.* 3. Done or finished within a short time; passing quickly; of short continuance, that is soon over, brief. Chiefly *poetic*.' <www.oed.com/view/Entry/195786> *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021. [accessed 11 March 2021]

[20] Cf. the speaker's accusatory questioning of Urania in the opening lament of the poem – 'Where wert thou mighty Mother, when he lay, | When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies | In darkness? (ll. 10-12) – which establishes a parallel between the manner of demise of Adonais and the Form.

[21] Ronald E. Becht, 'Shelley's "Adonais": Formal Design and the Lyric Speaker's Crisis of Imagination', *Studies in Philology,* 78.2 (Spring 1981), 194-210 (p. 207).

[22] Adonais and the Form are compared again: Urania's portrayal of Adonais as someone 'with weak hands though mighty heart' (l. 237) is echoed in the Form's depiction as possessing an 'ever-beating heart' (l. 294) which shakes 'the weak hand that grasped' (l. 295) the thyrsus he carries.

With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness. (ll. 275-77)

There is a distance between him and others, which leads the Form to avoid their company, as a result of having 'gazed on Nature's naked loveliness', as when Acteon chances upon the disrobed Artemis bathing. Isolation and anguish are the unexpected companions of true knowledge and of an unrestrained millennial vision, exacerbated when this prophetic understanding, as Shelley saw it, cannot effect the millenniums it conceives.

Shelley felt that to be his destiny. He perceived his multiple poetical efforts to share with humanity his apocalyptic-eschatological perspective, the millennial endeavours which he considered humanity as being able to undertake, to have failed.[23] He confessed to Byron that 'Heaven knows what makes me persevere (after the severe reproof of public neglect) in writing verses' (16 July 1821; *Letters* II, 309), and to Charles Ollier, 'I know you will not take my opinion on Poetry; because I thought my own verses very good, & *you* find that the public declare them to be unreadable' (16 June 1821; *Letters* II, 303). It is this knowledge that plagues the Form, whose 'own thoughts, along that rugged way, | Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey' (ll. 278-79). The image shows Shelley's expertly fusing different mythological sources to create meaning; it is an allusion to the *sparagmos* of the metamorphosed Actaeon (by his own hounds) as a result of his punishment by Artemis, as well as to the pursuit of Orestes by the Erinyes, the externalisation of Orestes' guilty thoughts after his matricide at the end of Aeschylus's *Libation-Bearers* (458 BC).[24] The desperation and torment of the speaker as expressed through the Form are evident; for someone who laments death so intensely in the initial movement of the poem, death itself becomes a welcome

[23] See Michael O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 5.

[24] Speaking to the chorus of slave women, to whom the Erinyes remain invisible, a tormented Orestes describes his pursuers, like the Form in *Adonais*, as 'raging hounds': 'These afflictions are no fancies I am having: these are plainly my mother's wrathful hounds! [*egkotoi kunes*]' (*Libation-Bearers*, ll. 1053-54; LCL 146). Aeschylus continues the image of the Furies as hounds chasing their prey in *The Eumenides*. These chthonic deities are awakened by Clytaemnestra's ghost and incited to resume their pursuit – 'You are chasing a beast in your dreams, and giving tongue like a hound who can never desist from thinking of blood' (ll. 131-32, LCL 146) – and, speaking to Orestes later in the play, the chorus of Furies refers to itself in the same manner – 'Like a hound on the trail of a wounded fawn, we are tracking him down by the drip of blood' (ll. 246-47, LCL 146). Shelley's own Furies in *Prometheus Unbound* make use of this classical inheritance and refer to themselves as 'lean dogs' who 'pursue | Through wood and lake some struck and sobbing fawn, | We track all things that weep, and bleed, and live' (I. 454-56). See also, John Flaxman's etchings 'Orestes Pursued by the Furies (from *Choephorae*)' and 'The Furies Pursuing their Victim (from *The Eumenides*)', included in *Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeschylus, Designed by John Flaxman, Engraved by Thomas Piroli; The Original Drawings in the Possession of the Countess Dowager Spencer* (London: Jane Matthews, 1795). These etchings study the plight and guilt of Orestes and offer, by analogy, an interesting visual depiction of the torment of Shelley's frail Form. Flaxman was a contemporary of the poet and it is possible that Shelley was acquainted with this volume and its etchings; see, especially, a letter that Shelley sent to Thomas Jefferson Hogg – 'I return your Flaxman with many thanks' (27 June 1813; *Letters* I, 373), although he does not specify a volume.

prospect for his troubled existence. Critics read, in Shelley's glorification of Keats's memory and poetic worth, and in his judgement of Keats's critics, an attempt, by the older poet, at self-vindication.[25] Yet *Adonais* also serves as an opportunity for Shelley to reflect on his (at times self-imposed) isolation; on the fact that his apocalyptic thoughts and millennial aspirations could, occasionally, become burdensome; and on the potential frustration at being unable to see those thoughts and aspirations effected, the millennial vision encapsulated in his oeuvre actualised.

Shelley's exploration of the analogy between the power evoked by lightnings and the potential of a dormant imagination is not exclusive to *Adonais*. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, capturing 'the uncommunicated lightning' of the poetic mind is essential to compose high poetry, and Shelley sees the social change that can be effected by investigating 'morals and religion' as the discharge of the 'collective lightning' (*SMW* 231). In *Epipsychidion* (1821), the poet draws on language with bellicose undertones to show the simultaneously destructive and creative power of the faculty:

> Imagination! which from earth and sky,
> And from the depths of human fantasy,
> As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
> The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
> Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
> Of its reverberated lightning. (ll. 164-69)

Shelley conceives the human imagination as possessing the characteristics of light, being refracted ('prisms') and reflected ('mirrors'), thus repleting 'the Universe' with hopes and possibilities. Using light to symbolise the imagination is appropriate in the context of Shelley's imaginarium: refraction and reflection suggest possibility, longevity, and dissemination through the influence that poetry exercises across space and time. Millennial possibility is thus envisioned as being dependent on the imagination. The power of the imagination, harnessed through symbolic lightnings, is weaponised to destroy superstition and calumny, dispelling the allegorical darkness of ignorance with the light of knowledge.[26] This conceptualisation of

[25] See, for instance, Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 152; and Susan J. Wolfson, 'Keats enters history: autopsy, *Adonais*, and the fame of Keats', in *Keats and History*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 17-45 (pp. 23, 34).
[26] Cf. *Ode to Liberty*, x. 136-44.

creative power as a blasting arrow-lightning has biblical models found in Zechariah 9:14 – 'And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as lightning' – and Psalms 18:14 – 'Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them'. Mythological allusions also inform the passage: 'Error' is depicted as 'the worm' – akin to both the serpent Python slain by Apollo and the serpentine monster Typhon defeated by Zeus – and correspondingly vanquished by a power that evokes both the Pythian god ('sun-like arrow') and the ruler of Olympus ('reverberated lightning'), another instance of Shelley's fusion of mythological images.[27] The selection of these mythological events, with which the allegorical destruction of ignorance by the imagination is compared, is noteworthy for they, too, are connoted with millennial renewal. These events not only ideologically and narratively parallel the binding of Satan in Revelation 20;[28] but the apocalyptic-eschatological confrontation between Typhon and Zeus is presented as the last obstacle which the god has to overcome in the ascensional progress that establishes him as ruler of the immortals and consequently inaugurates a new world order.[29] Poets are, in Shelley's vision, paradoxical destructive creators, for their imaginative creations correct and curtail nescience and wrong.

It is in these terms that Shelley describes Dante Alighieri in *A Defence*:

> Dante was the first awakener of entranced Europe; he created a language in itself music and persuasion out of a chaos of inharmonious barbarisms. He was the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning; the Lucifer of that starry flock which in the thirteenth century shone forth from republican Italy, as from a

---

[27] See also Shelley's 'Song of Apollo' (composed in 1820): 'The sunbeams are my shafts with which I kill | Deceit, that loves the night and fears the day' (ll. 13-14). Cf. 'Homeric Hymn to Apollo':

> She [Python] used to do much harm to the teeming peoples […] until the far-shooting lord Apollo discharged his powerful arrow at her. […] And there the sun's divine force rotted her down; hence the place is now called Pytho, and the people give the god the title Pythios, because it was just there that the keen sun's force rotted the monster away. (ll. 355-74; LCL 496, pp. 98-101)

[28] See Revelation 20:2-3:

> And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled.

Cf. 'Song of Apollo', ll. 13-14, above; and Hesiod, *Theogony*:

> Then when Zeus had lifted up his strength and grasped his weapons, the thunder and lightning and the blazing thunderbolt, he struck him [Typhon], leaping upon him from Olympus; and all around he scorched all the prodigious heads of the terrible monster. […] the earth melted in the blaze of the burning fire. And he hurled Typhoeus into broad Tartarus, grieving him in his spirit. (ll. 853-68, LCL 57)

[29] See Hesiod, *Theogony*, ll. 881-85 (LCL 57).

> heaven, into the darkness of the benighted world. His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor. (*SMW* 693)

Dante, like Adonais and the other 'sons of light' in the elegy, is perceived as a guide to humanity; his works, described through a synaesthetic conjugation of sound ('music') and light ('spark', 'burning atom', 'lightning'), capable of 'resurrecting' a world obscured by the ignorance of mediaeval oppression. Shelley shows his alertness to etymologies: he juxtaposes the linguistic musicality and regenerative splendour of Dante's poetry with the (intentionally pleonastic) 'inharmonious barbarisms' and the 'darkness of the benighted world'. Dante gives order, shape, and significance to civilisation: poets and their poetry are the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, participants 'in the eternal, the infinite and the one' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 677). Shelley emphasises Dante's 'words' for their millennial potential, what they can create and inaugurate. Words are multivalent and phoenix-like: lodged in the poet's mind, they incipiently carry the light of change and possibility, 'pregnant with a lightning', which has not yet been channelled into poetry. Lightnings, previously proposed as symbols for the poet and poetry, also encapsulate the power of those 'words' which have not yet been composed. Words unarranged in composition are emblems of latent possibility in Shelley's apocalypticism: words have metamorphic potential in the poet's mind, symbols of the light and energy of morality, hope, and love that remains possible of being manifested *until* (a term imbued with possibility and Shelleyan significance) arranged in composition.

Synaesthesia characterises the apocalyptic moment that precedes Dante's rapture in *Paradiso* XIV: the 'splendours, in two rays' (l. 94) that 'described the venerable sign' (l. 101) of the cross of Christ in the sky of Mars were combined with 'sweet harmony' (l. 119) for 'from the lights that then appeared to me, | out from that cross there spread a melody | that held me rapt' (ll. 121-23). The coming of Christ (Matthew 24:27, to which the passage from *Paradiso* alludes) and Jesus himself are associated with lightnings: 'For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day' (Luke 17:24). Even Jesus describes himself in terms of light: he is the morning star in Revelation 22:16, though not expressed through its mythological referents (Phosphorus, Heosphorus, or Lucifer): 'I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star.' Jesus is thus the light of knowledge and love that dispels the darkness of

ignorance and hate, and this is, indeed, the manner in which he was understood by Shelley. Jesus was, for the poet, another 'son of light' (although Shelley is not explicit about this epithet for Jesus), a visionary whose poetical doctrines had a reforming power which Shelley admired. Shelley exalts both Jesus's humanity and his divinity – his 'sublime human character' (Shelley's notes to lines 1090-91 of *Hellas*, *SMW* 587) and his power and energy, not afforded by any supernatural activity to him ascribed, but through the solemnity of the poetical truths he espoused. It was the light of morality that made Jesus the ultimate reformer: 'Doctrines of reform were never carried to so great a length as by Jesus Christ. The republic of Plato and the Political Justice of Godwin are probable and practical systems in the comparison.'[30] Understanding orthodox Christianity as a system that tainted the enlightenment of the teaching of Jesus, Shelley desired to rescue 'the poetry in the doctrines of Jesus Christ' from 'the darkness and the convulsions connected with their growth and victory' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 689), again juxtaposing the resurrecting light of poets and poetry with the blighting darkness of oppression. This desire pervades his works, but Shelley also concentrated his efforts in a material outcome, *Biblical Extracts* (ready for press in early 1813), whose manuscript is not known to exist.[31] Although Shelley envisions the energy of restoring light as encroaching onto and ultimately destroying miasmal darkness, his pragmatic grasp of reality forces him to recognise that the millennial world that this restoring light ushers can subside and miasmal darkness return.

***

At *Adonais*'s turn from lamentation in stanza XXXIX, the traditional association of death and darkness is subverted, and death is reconceived as a sphere of splendour. In death, individuals are 'awakened from the dream of life' (l. 344), and it is life, instead, that offers lack of clarity and insecurity, figured in this movement of the poem as the inscrutable 'night' (l. 352) which blurs reality with 'stormy visions' (l. 345). It is in these terms that Adonais is presented: 'he is not dead' and neither does he 'sleep' (l. 343) for he, instead, lives in death as 'A portion of the Eternal' (l. 340), in a state of unity with the living fabric that sustains the world. Death is apocalyptic in its etymological sense, conceived not as the ultimate end but as the only real life, in which the true nature of the soul can be expressed and through which true existence be

[30] 'The Moral Teaching of Jesus Christ', in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Benn, 1965), VI, pp. 255-56 (p. 255).
[31] See Introduction, pp. 29, 29fn33, for more information regarding *Biblical Extracts*.

experienced.[32] A tone of disillusionment tinges this negative perception of life, conveyed by the speaker through images of putrefaction:

> *We* decay
> Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
> Convulse us and consume us day by day,
> And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay. (ll. 348-51)

The poet's emphasis of the pronoun '*We*' reinforces the juxtaposition established in the poem between the deceased Adonais and the living speaker and audience. Unlike Adonais, whose physical body is buried in Rome but his spirit has been awakened to new life, the living are not only still veiled to existential and eschatological truths, but also leading an inauthentic existence governed by pestilent torments, 'fear', 'grief', and 'cold hopes'. The decomposition traditionally characteristic of the process of death is transferred in *Adonais* to life. The simile moves beyond scientific processes – recalled through the use of 'convulse', 'consume', 'swarm', 'cold' (alluding to *algor mortis*), and 'worms' – and ascribes the role that the natural world performs in the recycling of organic matter to the more abstract, inharmonious emotional and aspirational states that rule human life.

Death offers release from what *Adonais* poses as living putrefaction, from the plagues and torments that quotidianly assail individuals and which frustrate their dreams and aspirations. If in *Hellas* the untrustworthiness of life is pertained to life being 'a vision' (l. 781), the elegist of *Adonais*, anticipating his own demise, has a stronger sense of disillusionment with life and consequently embraces death in the second movement of the poem. His repudiation of life is carried from stanza XXXIX to XL, as Adonais:

> has outsoared the shadow of our night;
> Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
> And that unrest which men miscall delight,
> Can touch him not and torture not again;

[32] Death is apocalyptic, revelatory and truthful, in Edward Trelawny's highly unreliable account of his relations with Shelley and Byron. In an episode that Rosemary Ashton regards as 'a fabrication or exaggeration' (*Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*, intro. and notes by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), p. 274fn56), Trelawny reports that Shelley is supposed to have confessed, 'I am content to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon. My mind is tranquil; I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded; – when Death removes our clay coverings the mystery will be solved' (*Records*, pp. 77-78).

> From the contagion of the world's slow stain
> He is secure. (ll. 352-57)

Images of disease ('contagion'), conflated with ignorance ('miscall') and inharmonious human states ('Envy and calumny and hate and pain'), continue the conception of life as 'decay' and further reveal life's corruptive energy, its disfiguring 'touch' upon and 'torture' of the living. Both disfigurement and deceit are implied in 'the world's slow stain' from which Adonais 'is secure' in death, prefiguring its more ambiguous reiteration twelve stanzas later:

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments. (ll. 462-64)

The kaleidoscopic images conjured in this seemingly positive description of life become more disfiguring than enriching – the two interpretations offered by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill for 'Stains' (l. 463, *SMW* 804) – when read in tandem with the negatively-connoted 'stain' of line 356. Light imagery yet again emerges in the poem. This 'dome of many-coloured glass', read in the context of the negative perception of life in the second movement of *Adonais*, veils true reality with gradations of enticing and inviting coloured light, but these kaleidoscopic images are deceitful, the poet suggests, merely mirages created to conceal the fact that spiritual authenticity can only be achieved in 'the white radiance of Eternity' when 'Death tramples' life's illusion 'to fragments'. These apparently positive images acquire a more negative overtone when read collaterally with Shelley's earlier sonnet 'Lift not the painted veil' (composed between 1818-1819), which anticipates much of the imagery presented in *Adonais*. It symbolically devises life as a deceitful 'painted veil' (l. 1) on which reality is artfully constructed through the combination of 'unreal shapes' (l. 2) with 'colours idly spread' (l. 4), once more employing translucency and radiant images to illustrate life's treachery, its misleading of individuals. The positive conceptualisation of death in *Adonais*, especially in stanzas XXXIX and XL, reflects Shelley's desire to see Keats's memory and spirit outsoar the callous humanity that killed him, the plague that pervaded and corrupted the metaphysical dimension of Adonais's self, for, as he put it in a letter to John Gisborne (16 June 1821), 'envy & ingratitude' – what underlay the bad reviews – 'scourged' Keats 'out of the world' (*Letters* II, 299).

Kaleidoscopic was used above to describe the images that the 'dome of many-coloured glass' conjures, because they evoke the description of and optical effect produced by the kaleidoscope. The kaleidoscope's inventor, Sir David Brewster, described it as an instrument to give 'motion to objects, such as pieces of coloured glass, &c. which were either fixed or placed loosely in a cell at the end of the instrument', to be then reflected on plates or reflectors, placed in 'a draw tube', and observed through 'a convex lens' positioned at the other end of the kaleidoscope.[33] Brewster devised his invention for 'the purposes of rational amusement', 'a general philosophical instrument of universal application' for 'the artist […] to employ […] in the numerous branches of the useful and ornamental arts to which it is applicable', and superior to all its pirated copies (produced by an error in the registration of the patent) which did not comprehend the principles behind its construction and therefore corrupted the 'correct idea of the power of the Kaleidoscope'.[34] Shelley learnt of this invention in a letter from Thomas Jefferson Hogg which is no longer extant.[35] The poet did not share the enthusiasm that transpires in Brewster's views about the kaleidoscope, associating its dissemination to the spread of a contagious disease in his reply to Hogg:

> Your kalleidoscope [*sic*] spread like the pestilence at Livorno. A few weeks after I sent your description to a young English mechanist of that town, I heard that the whole population were given up to Kalleidoscopism [*sic*]. (21 December 1818; *Letters* II, 69)

The 'young English mechanist', Henry Reveley, Maria Gisborne's son by her first husband, proceeded to construct a kaleidoscope following Hogg's apparently wrong description. Replying to Mary's letter of 15 June 1818 in which she inquires if 'the Macchinista' has 'made a Calleidoscope [sic]' (*LMWS* I, 73), Maria Gisborne reveals that 'Kaleidoscopism is at this moment with us in a most triumphant state, though, owing to a *flaw* in the description of your friend [Hogg], Henry has had some trouble with the instrument' (*Letters* II, 69fn3; parenthesis added). Gisborne's tone is different to Shelley's views on the kaleidoscope: she calls it a 'delightful science', 'so captivating an enjoyment!' (*Letters* II, 69fn3).

There is sarcasm in Shelley's tone in his letter to Hogg: unlike 'the whole population' of Livorno which he mentions, Shelley did not appreciate the fanaticism which the

---

[33] David Brewster, *A Treatise on the Kaleidoscope* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1819), p. 6.
[34] Brewster, *Treatise*, pp. 7, 6, 8, 7.
[35] *Shelley and his Circle, 1773-1822*, 10 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961-2002), VI: ed. by Donald H. Reiman (1973), p. 766.

kaleidoscope created, referring to this fervour as 'Kalleidoscopism', as if it presented itself under the guise of a new ideology to follow. Shelley reinforces his criticism of the furore behind this fanaticism by adding, in the letter to Hogg, that 'It was like the fever which seized the Abderites who wandered about the streets repeating some verses of Euripides' (*Letters* II, 69), an allusion to the overwhelming excitement with which the citizens of Abdera were overcome after watching a performance of Euripides' *Andromeda* (412 BC). Shelley's reference to the Abderites to illustrate his aversion to the mania caused by the kaleidoscope is an appropriate, twofold allusion. On the one hand, the people of Abdera were proverbial for absurdity and stupidity: 'Abdera, […] The air was so unwholesome, and the inhabitants of such a sluggish disposition, that stupidity was commonly called *Abderitica mens*.'[36] On the other hand, Donald Reiman explains that the story to which Shelley refers, an obscure allusion probably 'intended to mystify Hogg', derives from Christoph Martin Wieland's *Die Geschichte der Abderiten* (1774), read by Mary in French in 1818 (*JMWS* II, 103).[37] Wieland's work was a satirical comparison of the small-mindedness of the inhabitants of a German town with the foolishness of the people of ancient Abdera, in which the Abderites' enthusiasm for Euripides' play is depicted as having taken the form of a 'frenzy' which 'impel[led] them to sing, well or ill, as the case might be, what they retained in their memory of the exquisite music'.[38] Shelley's reference, however, was not a 'pseudo-classical' allusion, as Reiman suggests, for it originally derives, not from Wieland's satire, but from Lucian's *How to Write History*, whose works Mary lists as having been read by Shelley in Greek in 1816 (*JMWS* II, 97) and by Mary herself in French in 1818 (*JMWS* II, 103).[39] Lucian reveals that the people of Abdera, after seeing *Andromeda*, 'went mad with tragedy' and 'brought their fever away from the theatre with them, and later when they left their bed relapsed into tragedy' (LCL 430, p. 3). Shelley's critique is not of the instrument itself, but of people's blind following of trends, surrendering to its popularity without engaging with the instrument in the spirit in which it was conceived. The 'fever', or 'frenzy', surrounding the kaleidoscope, Shelley suggests, shows the foolishness of those who succumbed to this new fashionable invention without understanding its scientific or aesthetic purpose. This is an interesting perception in the context of *Adonais*, as the poem's speaker considers those who live to exist as 'in mad trance' (l. 347).

---

[36] John Lemprière, *Bibliotheca Classica* (Reading: T. Cadell, 1788), p. 2. Shelley owned this volume; see *Letters* II, 478.
[37] Reiman, *Shelley and his Circle*, VI, p. 766.
[38] Henry Christmas, *The Republic of Fools: Being the History of the State and People of Abdera, in Thrace, Translated from the German of C. M. von Wieland*, 2 vols (London: W. H. Allen, 1861), I, p. 304.
[39] Reiman, *Shelley and his Circle*, VI, p. 766.

Understanding *Adonais*'s 'dome of many-coloured glass' through the kaleidoscope, its optical effects and Shelley's considerations of it, resolves the ambiguity of 'Stains'. Shelley's disapproval of the popularisation of the instrument and of people's frenzied reaction to it is akin to the negative presentation of life in *Adonais*, which disfigures reality, deceives 'those who live' ('Lift not the painted veil', l. 1), and 'distort[s] to many a shape of error | This true fair world of things' (*Prometheus Unbound*, VI. 383-84). The putrefaction of life that Shelley poetically describes mirrors the association of the kaleidoscope with 'pestilence' in the letter, a symbol, not of beauty and truth as envisaged by its creator, but of deception and instability. Like the mimicry of 'the painted veil' and the 'dome of many-coloured glass', the reflection of the coloured glass on the plates of the kaleidoscope creates 'unreal shapes' sensorially perceived, an appealing image which, ultimately, remains an illusion, equal, according to Shelley, to the unreal yet inviting images conjured by life to confine individuals to its degradation of the spirit. The negative perception of life that the second movement of *Adonais* presents is not an isolated moment in Shelley's oeuvre. Colour is, like in lines 462-64 of *Adonais*, the mechanism through which life deceives humans in a Platonic passage in *On Christianity* – 'Human life with all its unreal ills and transitory hopes is as a dream which departs before the dawn leaving no trace of its evanescent hues' (*Prose* 256). Yet the deceit of life through 'a dome of many-coloured glass' anticipates, most memorably, the sentiments on which *The Triumph of Life* is keyed, for life 'triumphs' in that text, because 'it devastates those who live' (*SMW* 815fn604). The kaleidoscope, therefore, becomes another polysemous symbol in Shelley's apocalypticism, imbued by his scientific, Platonic, and millennial thought.[40]

In what has been considered the first poetical treatment of this instrument, Byron employs the kaleidoscope in an image that configures it as a symbol of hope, contrasting with Shelley's considerations: 'and so this rainbow look'd like hope— | Quite a celestial kaleidoscope' (*Don Juan*, II. 743-44).[41] The term is used both figuratively and with reference to the optical object. On the one hand, rainbows are kaleidoscopic insofar as they are caused by the reflection, refraction, and dispersion of light resulting in the appearance of multi-coloured light in the sky. To this is added the implication of beauty which is suggested by the

[40] Cf. Francis Bacon introduces, in his description of the arrangement of the garden, 'over every space between the arches some other little figure, with broad plates of round coloured glass gilt, for the sun to place upon' ('Of Gardens', in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; reissued with corrections 2002), p. 432). These ornaments in the garden perform the same operation as the kaleidoscope: beautiful, colourful images, distorting through artificial means the true quality of light.

[41] For a reading of these lines from *Don Juan*, see Helen Groth, 'Kaleidoscopic Vision and Literary Invention in an "Age of Things": David Brewster, *Don Juan*, and "A Lady's Kaleidoscope"', *ELH*, 74.1 (Spring 2007), 217-37.

etymology of 'kaleidoscope', a composite neologism derived from the Greek words *kalos* ('beautiful'), *eidos* ('form'), and *skoteo* ('to see'), invented by Brewster to describe his 'new Optical Instrument, for creating and exhibiting beautiful forms'.[42] The rainbow is a kaleidoscope, quite literally, as the sailors, in *Don Juan*, see beautiful forms projected on the sky. On the other hand, Byron's rainbow is another 'dome of many-coloured glass' and fits within the context of Brewster's terminology: as an arc of multi-coloured light in the sky, the rainbow evokes the many-coloured glass fragments and convex lens that are essential components of the kaleidoscope. Byron received 'a very well-constructed kaleidoscope' from Murray, who intended it for the recreational enjoyment of the poet, to 'amuse some of your female friends' (22 September 1818).[43]

William Michael Rossetti is right in assuming, with regard to *Adonais*, that 'Perhaps a more daring metaphorical symbol than this has never been employed by any poet, nor one that has a deeper or a more spacious meaning' as the interpretation of lines 462-64 still vexes Shelleyan scholars.[44] Geoffrey Matthews explains the Platonism of the passage by perceiving the 'dome of many-coloured glass' as an allusion to stained glass and the prismatic refraction of white light into multi-coloured light,[45] which conjugates the 'Two different views' offered by Rossetti as 'the essential meaning of these lines'.[46] Acknowledging the 'Platonic idiom' of the stanza, *Longman* concludes that it 'cannot persuasively be referred with precision to any particular source' (IV, 326fn460-68). D. W. Harding also highlights the 'double meaning' of the passage that arises from Shelley's use of 'Stains', the simultaneous 'blemishing' and 'colourful interest of life'.[47] His argument, that 'the contrasting and sometimes barely consistent ideas' of the lines express 'accidental' 'verbal associations', is unconvincing; lines 462-64 display a hand that labours with masterful craft, and Shelley's command of language is anything but 'accidental'.[48] Harding unpersuasively concludes that 'in the earlier fluctuations of his attitude towards death Shelley gives evidence of confusion'.[49] James Notopoulos explains that, as Shelley 'integrates the images' of the stanza 'in a chiastic order', the 'dome

---

[42] Brewster, *Treatise*, p. 1.
[43] Samuel Smiles, *A Publisher and his Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the late John Murray, with an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768-1843*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1891), I, p. 398.
[44] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 140.
[45] *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. by G. M. Matthews (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 211. See also *Longman* IV, 326fn460-68.
[46] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, revised with the assistance of A. O. Prickard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), p. 148.
[47] D. W. Harding, 'The Hinterland of Thought', in *Experience into Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), p. 190.
[48] Harding, 'The Hinterland of Thought', p. 190.
[49] Harding, 'The Hinterland of Thought', p. 191.

of many-coloured glass' refers to 'the Earth rather than […] Life, for the Earth is a sphere' and is, consequently, in accordance with Plato's *Republic*, which Shelley completed reading in 1820; therefore, it constitutes 'the ultimate origin of Shelley's notion that the crystalline dome of the sphere of the Earth imparts its many colours to another' (Notopoulos, 299-300). Notopoulos's reading is persuasive and insightful for what it reveals about the Platonism of the passage. However, understanding the 'dome of many-coloured glass' through the optical effects produced by the kaleidoscope admits following the simile as Shelley composed it, that is, reading the 'dome of many-coloured glass' alongside Life, not Earth. Indeed, the phrase evokes the terminology used to elucidate the composition and functions of the kaleidoscope as directly employed by its creator. A prism, the object usually considered as guiding the meaning behind the 'dome of many-coloured glass', lacks the curvature that dome implies, which Notopoulos seems to have realised, thus his suggestion of 'a chiastic order' for these lines.[50] Shelley's image combines fundamental elements of the kaleidoscope: it conjures the coloured pieces of glass that Brewster chose as objects to be seen in his optical instrument as well as the curvature of the convex lens. Beside the physical aspects of the instrument, Shelley's considerations of the kaleidoscope offer a new light through which to read lines 462-64: his repudiation of the instrument as a fashionable commodity is in line with the negative conceptualisation of life in *Adonais*. Furthermore, Notopoulos proposes that the reading of the phrase is subjugated to the negative connotation of 'stain', for otherwise 'the image would be pointless' as the phrase would refer only to 'kaleidoscopic prettiness' (Notopoulos, 300), kaleidoscope here used in its figurative sense to mean 'bright colours or coloured objects', rather than with the added reference to the instrument itself.[51] The reverse is, as it has been shown, also possible: the implications of 'stain' are clarified once the 'dome of many-coloured glass' is perceived as an evocation of the invention itself and in light of Shelley's criticism of the fanaticism surrounding it. The inclusion of an object of significance within the field of optics in *Adonais*, a poem structured around the dichotomous symbolism of light and darkness, reveals Shelley's interest in and engagement with contemporary scientific discoveries as well as his conjugation of the different philosophies and ideologies that influenced and governed

[50] For the use of the prism as the guiding meaning of lines 462-64 of *Adonais*, see, e.g., Michael O'Neill, '*Adonais* and Poetic Power', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 35.2 (Spring 2004), 50-57 (p. 56).

[51] 'Kaleidoscope, *n*. b. *figurative.*' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/102387> [accessed 14 March 2021]

his imagination, in this particular case, how his scientific predisposition and Platonic thought are at work in the context of his apocalypticism.[52]

Lines 462-64 encapsulate *Adonais*'s subversion of the traditional associations of light and darkness: life is 'a dome of many-coloured glass' that illudes the self and the mind into perceiving it is the truthful existence of the soul, and only after 'Death tramples it to fragments' can the soul achieve the millennial state of truthful existence, 'the white radiance of Eternity.' In its movement away from the perception of death as oblivion or lack of light, *Adonais* participates in the Shelleyan opposition of the beneficial light of knowledge to the destructive darkness of ignorance. Death has released Adonais from 'the shadow of our night' (l. 352), awakening him to a truer existence and separating him from the living who still persevere under 'the shadow' cast by the 'night' of ignorance. Death is conceived as having the power to interrupt the 'mad trance' (l. 347) or disturbance of the senses imposed by life, the deceit that hinders the progress of truth and complete attainment of knowledge, similarly to Luther's revival of European nations in *Ode to Liberty* (ll. 141-44) and Dante's liberation of 'entranced Europe' in *A Defence* (*SMW* 693). Not only is death envisioned as enlightening and signalling the transition from 'the dream of life' (l. 344) to an authentic existence; Shelley ultimately conceives death as the millennial state of the human soul, suggesting that millennial continuation is achieved through death.

This millennial conceptualisation of death is in line with the poem's picturesque description of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome, where Keats (and later Shelley) were buried. Instead of a negative space of desolation, sorrow, and pity, the Preface to *Adonais* depicts this Roman Cemetery as an idyllic 'open space among the ruins' of the ancient city, where 'violets and daisies' grow (*SMW* 529), an image later evoked in the poem as 'a slope of green access | Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead, | A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread' (ll. 439-41). It is, indeed, so amiable and welcoming a space that Shelley declares, 'It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place' (*SMW* 529), suggesting the subversion of the traditional conception of degradation and pestilence in death that the poem develops, and hinting at the speaker's later embrace of this ontological state. Like the stellar imagery of the Platonic epigram which pervades *Adonais*, the

[52] For discussions of Shelley's scientific thought, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926); Carl Grabo, *A Newton Among Poets: Shelley's Use of Science in 'Prometheus Unbound'* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930); Desmond King-Hele, 'Shelley and Science', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 46.2 (1992), 253-65; Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Marilyn Gaull, 'Shelley's Science', in *PBS Handbook*, pp. 577-93.

flowers growing among the dead in the Non-Catholic Cemetery in the Preface, suggestive of a thanatological fertility that recalls the bright and fertile Minoan and Egyptian afterlives, anticipate numerous botanical references and foreshadow the spiritual transformation which is central to the poem.[53] Presented as embodiments of the soul in the physical world, flowers, like the Greek conception of stars embodying the soul in the ether, reveal Shelley's millennial impulses by demonstrating that there is life in death through metempsychosis:

> The leprous corpse touched by this spirit tender
> Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;
> Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour
> Is changed to fragrance, they illumine death
> And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath. (ll. 172-76)

In this transformation of stars to flowers, Shelley creates a network of spiritual symbols to show that light, growth, and millennial continuation are irrespective of mortality and decay.[54]

---

[53] The afterlife of Egyptian mythology is located in the Field of Reeds, a space where crops grow and gods and the blessed dead coexist:

> The character of the Field of Reeds is a reflection of the Egypt of the living: the green, lush, fertile, well-watered Nile valley and Delta, rather than the burning, lifeless desert. […] The Field of Reeds was probably the origin of the Elysian Fields of Classical mythology; not only is the concept similar, the name 'Elysian' has been derived from a Greek pronunciation of *iaru* or *ialu*, the Egyptian word for 'reeds'. (*Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. by John H. Taylor (London: British Museum Press, 2010), p. 243)

Elysium – a realm whose configuration, location, and name vary according to different poets – is another bountiful place of growth; it is there that, so explains Hesiod, dwell 'happy heroes, for whom the grain-giving field bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing three times a year' (*Works and Days*, ll. 172-73; LCL 57). In spite of the lack of consensus regarding the potential Minoan origin of the concept of Elysium, its fertility is a characteristic of Minoan afterlife beliefs as shown on clay painted *lanarkes* – the only 'eloquent material' that elucidates these principles – which depict 'the journey in the afterlife: gardens or groves, a sacred tree, rivers, and the sun' (Nanno Marinatos, *Minoan Kingship and the Solar Goddess: A Near Eastern Koine* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2010), pp. 140, 143). Marinatos further adds, with reference to the *lanarx* of Palaikastro, that the 'scene' there depicted 'must be the paradisiacal landscape, the Minoan Elysium' (Marinatos, *Minoan Kinship*, p. 144).

[54] Cf. Shelley's *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama*:

> Before the golden eye of the broad flower;
> Through the dark lashes of its veinèd lids,
> Now disencumbered of its silent sleep,
> Gazed like a star into the morning light
> With which the purple velvet flower was full;
> And like a poet's heart which the flower o'erflowed,
> Turning bright fancy into sweet sentiment,
> Changed half the light to fragrance. (*BSM* XIX, 254-57)

Flowers, like stars, become guiding beacons and representatives of the memorialisation of Keats.[55] Their vitality defies, on a metaphorical level, the decomposing action of 'the merry worm that wakes beneath' the ground because, even though (biologically) Adonais's organic body is corrupted, his soul has transmigrated to the flowers growing above. The poet imagines Keats's spirit, no longer residing in his physical body (in line with the Platonic *soma-sema*), lodged and finding expression in the flowers that cover and surround the grave, therefore safe from further attacks – alluding to 'The nameless worm' (l. 319) that Shelley identifies as having written the fateful review – and transcending the unsympathetic humanity that killed him.[56] Death is envisioned as allowing release from physical constraints for entry into a millennium that is recast in a spiritual realm. The idealised geographical space of the cemetery reflects the idealised spiritual dimension that Shelley conceives, a speculative exercise as he cannot confirm the certainty of the millennium that he projects in death. The millennium of *Adonais* is not conceived as a realm which has the potential of becoming, like the ones devised in *Hellas*

The association of stars and flowers in the glorification and mythologisation of individuals has Greek and Roman influences, as Symonds explains with regard to the emperor Hadrian's 'informal deification' (another form of millennial continuation) of his lover Antinous:

> Antinous was canonised according to Greek ritual and by Greek priests […]. The star, which was supposed to have appeared soon after his death, and which represented his soul admitted to Olympus, was somewhere near the constellation Aquila, according to Ptolemy, but not part of it. […] It was asserted that as a new star had appeared in the skies, so a new flower had blossomed on the earth, at the moment of his death. This was the lotos, of a peculiar red colour, which the people of Lower Egypt used to wear in wreaths upon his festival. (*Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1879), pp. 66-67)

Antinous was identified with Adonis (a source for Shelley's construction of Adonais), among many other deities: both were youths who suffered an untimely demise and immortalised in flowers after their death (see *Sketches*, pp. 80, 83). Religious cults were formed around both and were worshipped in festivals (Adonis in the Adonia, and Antinous in the Antinoeia).

[55] Cf. *Hamlet*, V. i. 232-34: 'Lay her i' the earth, | And from her fair and unpolluted flesh | May violets spring!'; and Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850):

> 'Tis well; 'tis something; we may stand
> Where he in English earth is laid,
> And from his ashes may be made
> The violet of his native land. (XVIII. 1-4)

[56] Cf. Psalms 22:6: 'But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.' The style and language employed for the chastisement of the reviewer (centred in stanzas XXXVI-XXXVII) follows biblical models, conferring authority to the tone of the elegist and flagrantly exposing the severity of the crime committed. The reviewer is a 'deaf and viperous murderer' (l. 317), a 'noteless blot' (l. 327), and equated with 'canker-worms' (*SMW* 529), again baring biblical parallels – Job 24:20: 'the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered'; and Nahum 3:16: 'the cankerworm spoileth, and flieth away.' This seems to have been a conscious approach, for Shelley describes his attack on Keats's critic using biblical language in letters. In a letter to John Gisborne (16 June 1821), Shelley reveals that, for the writing of *Adonais*, he 'dipped my pen in *consuming fire* for his [Keats's] destroyers, otherwise the style is calm & solemn' (*Letters* II, 300; emphasis and parenthesis added) – a phraseology which he repeats whilst writing to Claire Clairmont on the same day (*Letters* II, 302) – an expression which has biblical echoes, found in Deuteronomy 4:24: 'For the LORD thy God *is* a consuming fire, *even* a jealous God'; Deuteronomy 9:3, 'Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God *is* he which goeth over before thee; *as* consuming fire he shall destroy them'; and Hebrews 12:29: 'For our God *is* a consuming fire.'

or *The Mask of Anarchy*; instead, it is a metaphysical millennium already inhabited by other poets of renown, achieved through the path that death opens.

From stanza XXXIX onwards, there is a re-intensification of light, reassuring the audience (and the speaker himself) of the imperishability and spiritual transformation of Adonais, and culminating, despite the images of darkness, in the brightest stanza of the poem. Although his knowledge of human ignorance and of death as an enlightening state contests his inclusivity in the '*We'* (l. 348) of the poem, the speaker is united with those from whom he was intellectually separated because they are alive, all suffering, as the speaker perceives it, by the torments imposed by life. However, once the speaker acknowledges his own transience and embraces death, confirming his identification with the frail Form, he distances himself from the '*We'* in which he included himself, accordingly assuming, for the final three stanzas, a more singular, personal voice – 'Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?' (l. 469). The distance is both intellectual and physical: as he is guided by Adonais to the place of eternal existence, away 'from the shore' (l. 489) of life and into 'the abode where the Eternal are' (l. 495), he proves to be a son of light.[57] The singularity of his voice, however, reassumes a plural tone as he enters this sphere: the first person singular voice of the stanza's initial six lines is readjusted to be included in the third person plural of 'the abode where the Eternal *are*' (emphasis added), an apt concluding word suggestive of a fraternity in this spiritual, otherworldly collective.

Adonais's final stanza employs a series of nautical images to discuss death, concluding with a description of the process of death, 'I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar' (l. 492). 'Darkly, fearfully, afar' emphasises lack of knowing and uncertainty, an allusion to Shelley's awareness that his millennium recast in death is a speculative exercise. As much as he rejects the false expectations offered by life and considers death as the realm of spiritual fulfilment, he is now entering an unknown space, moving away from what he knows, as the old man explains in 'The Coliseum' (composed 1818), 'We know not if it [death] be good or evil, we only know, it is' (*Penguin* 628). The myriad of meanings implied by 'borne' and their applicability to the carefully-woven tapestry of eschatological life and millennial death presented in the poem, are a testament to, on the one hand, Shelley's apt description of *Adonais* as 'a highly wrought *piece of art*' (To John and Maria Gisborne, 5 June 1821; *Letters* II, 294), and, on the other hand, the

[57] Cf. 'The Coliseum', in the old man's address to 'Love': 'It is thine to unite, to eternize, to make outlive the grave those who have left the living memorials of thee' (*Penguin* 627). Thus poets, the 'sons of light' of *Adonais*, are introduced to 'the abode where the Eternal are', because they have furthered and memorialised 'Love', the power that runs through nature, 'the religion of eternity whose votaries' – 'sons of light' – 'have been exiled from among the multitude of mankind' (*Penguin* 627).

poet's genial linguistic dominance. 'Borne' carries notions of guidance and birth, in addition to being used in nautical senses.[58] The former is in line with the speaker's perception of the moment of death as the moment when Adonais 'Descends on me' (l. 488). Adonais's role in life as guide of humanity acquires a new dimension in death: he becomes a sidereal *psychopompos* whose psyche 'Beacons' (l. 495) his fellow sons of light to an ever-during existence. In its implication of production and birth, which follows biblical paradigms,[59] the use of 'borne' conveys the notion that death is a state of rebirth; the speaker thus perceives himself as having been reborn and reawakened to new life, or truer existence, accessing a spiritual millennium. The embrace of death by the poetical voice is a fitting end to *Adonais* as the natural progression of the poem suggests that death is the *telos* of the speaker's spiritual, intellectual, and emotional journey. This is a journey of eschatological enlightenment and submission, from fear of death to its acceptance – 'What Adonais is, why fear we to become?' (l. 459).

'I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar' bears syntactical and semantical echoes of the closing line of *Frankenstein* (1818), 'He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in the darkness of distance,'[60] which, as Charles E. Robinson has shown, took this form after Shelley's revision whilst composing the fair-copy of the final thirteen pages of the novel.[61] Both participate in the literary tradition that articulates death through nautical images,[62]

---

[58] 'Bear, *v.*[1] I. To carry, and extended uses; III. To produce, yield, give birth to; IV. To push, thrust, press, and extended uses.' There are ten entries of the verb, including phrasal verbs, that are employed in nautical senses. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/16543> [accessed 14 March 2021]

[59] See, e.g., Isaiah 46:3: 'Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne *by me* from the belly, which are carried from the womb'; and Jeremiah 15:10: 'Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!'

[60] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Frankenstein Notebooks*, ed. by Charles E. Robinson, Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics IX, 2 vols (London: Garland, 1996), II, p. 772.

[61] Shelley, *Frankenstein Notebooks*, II, p. 749fn. See also, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (with Percy Bysshe Shelley), *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, ed. by Charles E. Robinson (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2008), pp. 24-31, for a brief, yet detailed, explanation of the history of composition of the novel.

[62] Cf. Keats's 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' (1848): 'then on the Shore | Of the wide world I stand alone and think' (ll. 12-13); Tennyson's *Ulysses* (1842): 'for my purpose holds | To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths | Of all the western stars, until I die' (ll. 59-61). Mary Shelley adds, as an epigraph to her editorial 'Note on the Poems of 1822. By the Editor' in *PW*, the following lines:

> This morn thy gallant bark
> Sailed on a sunny sea,
> 'Tis noon, and tempests dark
> Have wrecked it on the lee.
> Ah woe! Ah woe!
> By spirits of the deep
> Thou'rt cradled on the billow,
> To thy eternal sleep. (*PW* 322)

influenced by an early Greek conception of death, in which the realm of Hades was reached through the crossing of Oceanus, the river encircling the flat disc that Earth was perceived to be.[63] The speaker of *Adonais* reveals that his

> spirit's bark is driven
> Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
> Whose sails were never to the tempest given. (ll. 488-90)

The images that these lines evoke recall Odysseus's crossing of Oceanus (although Odysseus's is a less permanent journey than that in *Adonais*) in book XI of the *Odyssey* – Oceanus 'which one may in no way cross on foot, but only if one has a well-built ship' (XI. 158-59, LCL 104) – and of Hermes *Psychopompos* guiding the souls of the dead in book XXIV. 11-14 (LCL 105). The nautical imagery is reinforced by the use of 'borne', whose occurrence in *Frankenstein* carries the aforementioned multiple implications it does in *Adonais*. The ambiguity of 'borne' simultaneously presents death and rebirth as readings for the line. The former connotation is in line with the eschatology of the early Greek influence. Perceiving the crossing of or drifting in a river as an euphemism for death, *Frankenstein*'s creature, as the speaker in *Adonais*, moves away from the shore of life and, 'lost in the darkness of distance', embraces death, a welcome release from the torments of his painful existence – as the creature confesses, 'Some years ago […] I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation.'[64] This metaphorical reading unites both senses of 'borne' since death, as *Adonais* postulates and considering the creature is ignorant of what lies in this state, can be perceived as a path towards (spiritual) rebirth. In a more literal sense (that is, not in the context of the Greek tradition which suggests death), the

---

These elegiac lines to Percy Shelley, an original composition of Mary's, had been previously published, with minor variations, as 'A Dirge. By the Author of "Frankenstein"', included in *The Keepsake for MDCCCXXXI*, ed. by Frederic Mansel Reynolds (London: Hurst, Chance, & Co., 1830), p. 85. It is also worth noting that nautical images caught Shelley's attention when visiting tombs in Pompeii:

> On each side of the road beyond the gate are built the tombs. How unlike ours! They seem not so much hiding places for that which must decay as voluptuous chamber[s] for immortal spirits. They are of marble radiantly white, & two especially beautiful are loaded with exquisite bas reliefs. […] The higher reliefs, represent one a nautical subject & the other a bacchanalian one. (To Thomas Love Peacock, 23-24 January 1819; *Letters* II, 74)

[63] In the *Odyssey* (*c*. 8th century BC), Circe explains to Odysseus that, to enter the realm of the dead, he must first cross the river that encircles the Earth: 'But when in your ship you have now crossed the stream of Oceanus, where is a level shore and the groves of Persephone—tall poplars, and willows that shed their fruit—there beach your ship by the deep eddying Oceanus, but go yourself to the dank house of Hades' (X. 508-12, LCL 104).

[64] Shelley, *Frankenstein Notebooks*, II, p. 770.

creature can be understood as moving away from the sorrow of what he knows and being reborn into a new life, embracing the possibilities offered by the unknown.

These multiple readings of the line contrast, however, with Anne K. Mellor's view that Shelley's revision simplified the sentence by 'rendering the creature passive'.[65] Mellor considers that the revision stresses that *Frankenstein*'s creature is carried away by hydraulic force, 'provid[ing] a comforting reassurance to the reader that the creature is now powerless and completely gone', which assumes a certainty of the creature's demise that Shelley's reworking does not assert.[66] In fact, it is lack of knowledge that Shelley's revision emphasises. Contrasting with 'darkness *and* distance' (Mary Shelley's original phrasing; emphasis added),[67] 'darkness *of* distance' (emphasis added), like 'darkly, fearfully, afar' in *Adonais*, introduces a speculative dimension to the aftermath of the creature's eschatological journey. The syntax of the revised line suggests that darkness qualifies distance. The distance is thus one that is both spatial (as the creature moves along the water, whether by his own action or hydraulic force, he is concealed by the darkness thus becoming less discernible) and temporal (as the possibility of this new beginning, whether in life or death, lies in the future, its millennial nature is not certain).[68] In a true collaborative literary act, Shelley's revision preserves the dualism of Mary's line yet transforms it to make this dualism more ambiguous, reshaping it to consequently acquire a more poetical tone.

Adonais is a central poem in Shelley's apocalypticism because of the understanding that it offers about the poet's apocalyptic-eschatology perspective. The poem's subversion of the traditional associations of life and death with light and darkness is typically Shelleyan, and reveals itself in *Adonais*'s millennial understanding of death. *Adonais* anticipates what later Shelleyan compositions reinforce. Death is a force of unity and splendour, which shatters the illusions created by life's 'dome of many-coloured glass', 'possibly Shelley's best-known and most impressive image', in Michael O'Neill's words, which this chapter has explained through an understanding of Shelley's perception of and attitude towards the kaleidoscope, a hitherto unconsidered framework for lines 462-64.[69] Shelley's use of Keats as a model for Adonais transforms him into a symbol of his apocalypticism, one that does not presume to bear a

---

[65] Anne K. Mellor, 'Making a "monster": an introduction to *Frankenstein*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 9-25 (p. 16).
[66] Mellor, 'Making a "monster"', p. 16.
[67] Shelley, *Frankenstein Notebooks*, II, p. 642.
[68] See Dante's *Inferno*, XXVI. 118-42, for a potential influence of the discussed nautical image in *Adonais* and *Frankenstein*. The eschatological journeys of the speaker of *Adonais*, who seeks a spiritually virtuous existence in death, and of *Frankenstein*'s creature, who desires a better existence whether offered in life or death, bear echoes of the journey for virtue and knowledge of Dante's Ulysses.
[69] O'Neill, '*Adonais* and Poetic Power', p. 56.

likeness to the real Keats nor to be a faithful representation of what Keats thought of himself or of the role of the poet.[70]

[70] For disapproving criticism of Shelley's engagement with Keats in *Adonais*, see Sacks, *The English Elegy*, pp. 160-61; and James A. W. Heffernan, '*Adonais*: Shelley's Consumption of Keats', in *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 173-91.

IV

The Impossibility of Reconciliation: Orthodoxy and Morality in *Prometheus Unbound*

Prometheus Unbound, composed at intervals between August or September 1818 and mid-1820, and published later that year, has quite rightly earned its place among Shelley's most celebrated compositions. The lyrical drama sees Shelley experimenting with and testing the boundaries of genre and form to offer his unique apocalyptic-eschatological perspective and vision of millennium, which characteristically weaves contemporary scientific thought into his philosophical, moral, religious, and poetical considerations. The singular status of *Prometheus Unbound* is also pertained to the critical apparatus with which it was published. Its Preface is, in fact, as equally central and celebrated in scholarship as the lyrical drama itself, functioning as an explanatory defence of the poetry contained in the lyrical drama to which it is attached as well as, more generally, of that in Shelley's entire oeuvre. The defence of the latter in the final five paragraphs of the Preface, prompted by the April 1819 review of *The Revolt of Islam* in the *Quarterly Review*, is coded as a reflection on the role of the poet and the manner in which poetical influence operates. Shelley's perception that 'Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age' (*SMW* 232) has become apophthegmatic. It is the dual aspect of the role of poets that is here emphasised: they are intrinsically involved in moulding the spirit of their age, simultaneously being influenced by and having influence over the time in which they live. Poets become the 'creations, of their age' as their creative imagination is impressed by the thought and tendencies of their time, which, in turn, are fashioned by the imaginative creations of poets. Poetry, in this conception, is the result of the mind's 'internal powers' working in symbiosis with 'external influences' (*SMW* 231), which encapsulate 'the moral and intellectual condition' (*SMW* 230) of the time, shaped by previous and contemporary artists alike, in addition to the contemplation of nature and its processes. The value that Shelley places on the importance of harmonious reciprocity here comes to the fore, revealing his belief in the interconnection of nature and humanity, and how notions of reciprocity express themselves in every sphere of worldly existence.

In the discussion that opens the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, regarding the choice of treatment of the Greek myth from which the lyrical drama takes inspiration, Shelley establishes this composition as a philosophical reflection on morality and love in hybridised poetical and dramatic form. The choice of Prometheus as subject becomes clearer in this context. Engaging with and contributing to the cultural background that has transformed Prometheus into a polysemous figure that simultaneously symbolises revolutionary enterprise, defiance, and benevolence, as well as typifying the ultimate trickster, akin to the Norse god Loki, Shelley reconfigures Prometheus as a 'poetical character' (*SMW* 229) that not merely supports and champions, but more importantly embodies, moral and intellectual reform:

> In addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement. […] Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends. (*SMW* 229-30)

Shelley himself recognises the distinctiveness of *Prometheus Unbound*, describing the unfinished, three-act form of the composition (his original plan for the lyrical drama) to Thomas Love Peacock as 'a drama, with characters & mechanism of a kind yet unattempted; & I think the execution is better than any of my former attempts' (6 April 1819; *Letters* II, 94). The Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* sets up the lyrical drama as the result of 'emulous originality', to borrow Michael O'Neill's apt phrase: as Shelley explains, his innovation in the treatment of the Greek myth of Prometheus follows the methodology of Greek tragedians.[1] He perceives himself as working in a similar vein to his Greek predecessors, 'employ[ing] a similar licence', one that sanctions his desire to depart from previous adaptations and explorations of the myth, for 'The Agamemnonian story was exhibited on the Athenian theatre with as many variations as dramas' (*SMW* 229). This chapter will explore Shelley's reconception of the mythical character of Prometheus to appreciate the importance of psychological and moral freedom for the poet's apocalyptic-eschatological expectations and millennial desires. The chapter's focus on sections of Acts I, III, and IV of the lyrical drama will bring into relief what can be understood as Shelley's 'inquiry into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus*

[1] Michael O'Neill, 'Shelley *Prometheus Unbound*', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp. 407-18 (p. 407).

Unbound, *SMW* 231), his questioning and rejection of institutionalised forms of authority that subjugate the human intellect and will, and, ultimately, illustrate his unique, composite vision of apocalypse and millennium.

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is structurally and thematically modelled on Aeschylus's own *Prometheus Unbound*, a (now) lost drama which would have been the second or third play of his Prometheus cycle presented on the Athenian stage at an unknown date but no later than 430 BC.[2] Shelley departs from Aeschylus's supposed treatment of this mythological subject, which proposed a reconciliation between Jupiter and Prometheus, because, as he explains in the Preface, the poet strongly disagreed with Aeschylus's treatment of the subject. The notion of a reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus/Jupiter is not explicitly addressed in the extant Greek and Latin sources that refer to the play or to the aftermath of the myth, but rather it is an inference from the succession of events as suggested by the remaining fragments of and about *Prometheus Unbound*, and commentaries of the play. That is, Prometheus's revelation of his secret to Jupiter and the latter's agreement to free Prometheus after the revelation of the secret are taken to imply that Prometheus and Jupiter reconcile, but this reconciliation is not clearly and overtly expressed.[3] A reconciliation between

---

[2] Although originally attributed to Aeschylus, the Aeschylean authenticity of *Prometheus Bound* (*Prometheus Desmotes*) as well as its sequel *Prometheus Unbound* (*Prometheus Lyomenos*) was first doubted by Robert Westphal in 1856 and, in the English-speaking world, in 1977 by Mark Griffith, on account of their striking difference with other Aeschylean plays in addition to their similarity with works produced after Aeschylus's death. Their date of production is unknown, but it is assumed that they were produced sometime before 430 BC (either by Aeschylus, his son Euphorion, or another tragedian) as the comic dramatist Cratinus imitated or parodied *Prometheus Unbound* in *The Wealth-Gods*, produced in 429 BC. The full text of *Prometheus Unbound* is now lost, only remaining in scant fragmentary form (around thirty-six fragmentary lines in Greek and twenty-eight lines in Latin). Although both *Prometheus Bound* and *Unbound* are doubtfully attributed to Aeschylus, it is clear, from their thematic, stylistic, and technical similarities, that they were presented together on the stage. The position of *Prometheus Unbound* in the *Prometheia* is also uncertain; it could have been a second or third play, in both cases preceded by *Prometheus Bound*. Based on the available evidence, a title and contents to what could have been a first or third play in the cycle cannot be ascribed with certainty. The conventional association of *Prometheus Pyrphoros* (*Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*), another title ascribed to Aeschylus, with the *Prometheia* has been opposed by scholars, who now consider it likely to be an alternative (and better suited, according to Alan H. Sommerstein) title for the satyr-drama, *Prometheus Pyrkaeys* (*Prometheus the Fire-Kindler*), produced in 472 BC with *Persians* and the other plays in that cycle. The tight thematic and metrical unity of *Prometheus Bound* and *Unbound* has led Sommerstein to propose the possibility of this cycle either being a dilogy, instead of a trilogy of dramas, or having a first or third play which is only indirectly related to Prometheus. See Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylean Tragedy*, 2nd edn (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010; London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), pp. 227-28). See also Sommerstein's introduction to *Prometheus Bound* (LCL 145, pp. 432-39) as well as his introductory headnotes to *Prometheus Unbound* (LCL 505, pp. 196-99) and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* (LCL 505, pp. 210-13).

[3] Philodemus, in his work *On Piety*, explains that Aeschylus reveals that Prometheus is freed after disclosing his secret to Jove, of how Thetis will give birth to a son mightier than his father and is therefore given in marriage to a mortal by Jove, but he does not explicitly address the question of reconciliation (fr. 90. 4-16; *Philodem Über Frömmigkeit*, ed. by Theodor Gomperz (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1866), p. 41). Likewise, Hyginus does not make a direct reference to a reconciliation, but recounts how the revelation of the secret to Jove results in Prometheus's liberation thirty thousand years after Hercules kills the eagle (see *Fabulae* 54 and 144, and *Poetica Astronomica* II. 15; see *The Myths of Hyginus*, trans. and ed. by Mary Grant, Humanistic Studies 34 (Lawrence: University of

Jupiter and Prometheus, however, is suggested by Prometheus himself in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. Prometheus anticipates (quite accurately, given the Greek etymology of his name) the placation of Jupiter's rage and his subsequent release, how Jupiter's 'mind will one day | be softened […] | one day he will calm his stubborn wrath | and come into unity and friendship with me, | as eager for it as I will be' (ll. 188-92, LCL 145). This reconciliation, however, is part of an exchange of intelligence, and not the result of moral reformation on either part, as Shelley would desire if progress is to succeed. Prometheus envisions Jupiter 'will yet have need of me' (l. 169, LCL 145), at which point his release will be the payment for the revelation of his secret. Unlike Shelley's Prometheus, Aeschylus's title-character fervently awaits for the moment when he can disclose his secret as it will lead not merely to his release, but more importantly to a reconciliation and unity with Jupiter. That in Aeschylus's drama Prometheus wants to be reconciled with Jupiter, without the expectation of moral and intellectual reform (of either party), is concomitant with Greek religion, in which divine moral perfection was not doctrinal, but it inevitably meant that Shelley, in writing his lyrical drama, felt compelled to update the myth to suit both his socio-political and historical context, as well as his personal ideological stance.

To reconcile slave with tyrant, 'the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 229), is to undermine the moral tapestry of the subject, an attitude which would be inconsistent with Shelley's ideological stance and would trivialise the moral struggle that is its subject-matter, thereby reducing the work's dramatic value:

> The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary. (*SMW* 229)

Kansas Publications, 1960)). Mary Shelley records in her journal that 'S. reads fragments of Aeschylus' (10 January 1821; *JMWS* I, 348); the identity of both the fragments and the edition of Aeschylus's works to which she refers is impossible to ascertain with precision. Contemporary editions of Aeschylus's tragedies vary with regard to not only whether they include fragementary ascriptions but also whether the fragments included relate to Promethean plays. Shelley's pocket edition of Aeschylus's works (C. G. Schütz's *Aeschyli Tragoediae* (1809); see *Longman* IV, 87), for example, did not include fragments, whereas Friedrich Heinrich Bothe's *Aeschyli Dramata* (1805) included fragmentary remains of *Prometheus Unbound* in Latin and Greek. After finishing the first act of his Prometheus play, Shelley asked Peacock, 'Will you tell me what there is in Cicero about a drama supposed to have been written by Aeschylus under this title [*Prometheus Unbound*]' (8 October 1818; *Letters* II, 43; parenthesis added). His reference is to Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* II. x, which includes the twenty-eight lines in Latin in which Aeschylus's lost work is partly extant. Cicero's passage is assumed to be a direct copy from the play, a short transcription of Prometheus's address to the chorus of titans recounting the physical torment he endured (LCL 141, pp. 170-73).

Shelley's opposition to reconciliation as an approach to a Promethean drama is grounded on the fact that it was, in effect, another form of slavery. The ancient sources (to many of which Shelley had access) reveal that, after his release, Prometheus wore symbolic bonds, physical signs of his previous punishment in the form of an iron ring wrought from the chains with and the rock to which he was bound, and a *lugos*-crown, a garland made of twigs from the willow tree.[4] Reconciliation, from this perspective, would constitute a retrograde attitude, a step backwards that would invalidate the progress and libertarian potential conquered during the struggle. That Shelley uses *Prometheus Unbound* as an exercise to reflect on the effects and purpose of reconciliation is unsurprising. The lyrical drama is a product of its time, when the re-instalment of Bourbon monarchies across European powers – one of the conclusions from the turbulent period of the French Revolution, and Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars – was felt, among revolutionary supporters, as a disappointing cyclical movement, of history having regressed and the millennial promise of these events having failed.

For Shelley, reconciliation invites cyclical movements, rather than being an instrument of progression. It proposes, as indeed Aeschylus's treatment of the myth does, that the slave, not the tyrant, is the one to recant his position without a guaranteed improvement of his future situation, an asymmetrical stance to which Shelley is categorically opposed. For reconciliation to be a suitable thematic approach for a Shelleyan lyrical drama it would have to present moral and intellectual reform as a possibility for both slave and tyrant, to depict an oppressor that undergoes a reform of character in order to be able to recant his position, and yet, if this was possible, the confrontation that would call for the need of such change would not exist. This thematic approach would divagate towards the Hegelian principle of *versöhnung*, extending the notion of reconciliation (its usual translation in English) beyond its implication of submission and resignation to, rather, encompass a more positive understanding, one that rests on the achievement of unity and harmony, of a new state of being through a transformative

[4] For an account of the ring made from Prometheus's chains and the Caucasian rock, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* XXXIII. 4 and XXXVII. 1; he also refers to Prometheus's invention of storing fire in a fennel stalk in *Natural History* VII. 56. For references to the *lugos*-crown in ancient sources, see Aeschylus's *The Sphinx*, fr. 235 (LCL 505, p. 241); and Aeschylus's *Prometheus Unbound*, fr. 202, in *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 5 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971-2004), III: Aeschylus, ed. by Stefan Radt (1985), pp. 306, 319. See also Hyginus, *Poetica Astronomica* II. 15 (see *Myths of Hyginus*, p. 202), and John Addington Symonds, *An Introduction to the Study of Dante* (London: Smith, Elder, Co., 1872), p. 112: 'It is also possible that Dante remembered the Greek legend of Prometheus, who, when reconciled with Zeus, put on his finger the ring of necessity, and on his brow the willow wand of submission.' See *Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound': A Variorum Edition*, ed. by Lawrence John Zillman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959; repr. with corrections 1960), pp. 723-31, for details of the Prometheus story as it appeared before Shelley's version.

social process that implies the reformation of attitudes and behaviour of two opposing parties. It is a process of conversion, not coercion of one party by another to capitulate that party's position or to acquiesce to a mode of being that denies that party's intellectual and physical freedom. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's social project of reconciliation between individuals and of the individual with society is encapsulated in the distinction between *versöhnung* and *abfinden*; although both terms are translated into English as 'reconciliation', the former has a positive connotation that the latter lacks and only *abfinden* comes close to the English sense denoting submission or resignation. The emphasis of Hegel's *versöhnung* is on the embrace of social conflict, or difference between two opposing parties, to achieve an enlightened position, of the kind that is celebrated in Shelley's millennial cave in Act III of *Prometheus Unbound*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. *Versöhnung* implies a process of social transformation by which opposing parties in a state of discord come to an agreement or harmonised unity through a reform of intellectual positions and moral attitudes. Instead of a return to a previous status quo, the result of this conflict or difference, resolved through moral reformation and mutual understanding, is the embrace of new modes of being, of a transformed social state.[5]

Understanding the difference in connotation of the English *reconciliation* and the German *versöhnung* is crucial to understand the ways in which Shelley distinguishes, in his works, the expression of what he knows society to be and his desire for what society could and should be. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* stands in between these positions: the tyrant does not recant nor become morally reformed, but neither does the enslaved submit, instead remaining, although solitary in his opposition, steadfast to his ideological advocation of universal compassion regardless of individual alliances. However Hegelian Shelley would desire to be, however millennial in appeal the concept of *versöhnung* is, such a composition would not be in compliance with his ideology: for opposing parties to become *versöhnt* would be truly idealistic, creating a fanciful lyrical drama that does not heed the warnings of and examples provided by history. As two ends of a social spectrum, reconciliation and *versöhnung* are unsuitable approaches for *Prometheus Unbound*.

To reconcile 'the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 229), then, only proves beneficial for the tyrant. Without the reformation of moral character, there can only be a temporary appeasement of both parties, dictated by the

[5] See Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Timothy C. Luther, *Hegel's Critique of Modernity: Reconciling Individual Freedom and the Community* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

tyrant's unpredictable volatility, until he decides to resume the unrelenting abuse of those he considers to be his inferiors. Reconciliation simultaneously reaffirms the autocratic power of the tyrant and furthers the insecurity of the position of the oppressed, as the chained Prometheus, speaking to Mercury, recognises:

> Submission, thou dost know, I cannot try:
> For what submission but that fatal word,
> The death-seal of mankind's captivity,
> Like the Sicilian's hair-suspended sword
> Which trembles o'er his crown, would he accept,
> Or could I yield? Which yet I will not yield. (I. 395-400)

Reconciliation, based on recanting one's position without reform of character, as depicted in Aeschylus's treatment of the myth, is not conducive to the sustenance of the moral fabric of society and, ultimately, transforms the apocalyptic moment into a cyclical occurrence that denies the possibility of millennial regeneration.

Shelley redresses the 'catastrophe so feeble' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 229) of reconciliation by choosing, instead, the overthrow of Jupiter and the moral reformation of Prometheus as his preferred treatment of the subject – a break with, rather than a promulgation of the cycle. Although seemingly problematic, insofar as history has shown that overthrows are underpinned by violent methods, Shelley's treatment of the myth is concomitant with his pacifist ideology. In fact, it is grounded on the acknowledgement that pacifism is not necessarily devoid of violent acts, but this is a violence which is only sanctioned when rooted on a desire to ensure a form of justice which has at its base 'Pity, not punishment' (I. 404) of the oppressor. It is an approach that warrants the moral reform of the oppressed, as their enactment of justice is not driven by 'punishment', a desire for revenge marked by an adherence to the *lex talionis*, but rather by 'pity', a regretful compassion for the tyrant's misdeeds. It is a judicial approach whose sole intention is to fight for socio-political change and a universal respect of human liberties, not to pursue retaliation for wrongs endured, a cyclical attitude that Shelley would see discontinued. It is, therefore, significant that the lyrical drama opens with a Prometheus whose moral character has been reformed: the reader does not witness outbursts of hatred and rage towards Jupiter beyond the recollection of the curse which he recanted, only the moment when he achieves the mental and moral clarity that prompts him to exclaim, 'Disdain? Ah no! I pity thee' (I. 53). Prometheus has achieved the clarity of the

poet-prophet: he renounces disdain and contempt, likewise to Ahasuerus when speaking to Mahmud (*Hellas*, l. 762), because they only further apocalyptic cycles, but a social justice exercised through pity, instead, opens the path for the millennium. The composition that follows is an emphatic meditation on the importance of justice exercised through sympathy and ruth, relinquishing further infliction of pain, hate, and suffering, especially if directed towards the 'successful and perfidious adversary' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 229).

Prometheus's judicial system of 'Pity, not punishment' is tested when the Furies are sent to torture him in the latter half of Act I. To their teasing regarding the nature of the torture they are about to inflict, Prometheus replies:

> I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer,
> Being evil. Cruel was the Power which called
> You, or aught else so wretched, into light. (I. 480-82)

Despite knowing that he will suffer, that these 'execrable shapes' (I. 449) are sent by Jupiter to challenge his commitment to his ideology, Prometheus laments, not the imminent traumatic experience he will endure, but the Furies' own fate as 'ministers of pain, and fear, | And disappointment, and mistrust, and hate, | And clinging crime' (I. 452-54). His insistence on the need to exercise sympathy towards the oppressor, which he elevates to the degree of judicial policy, leads to a judgement of the Furies which is not based on their actions. Rather, Prometheus's justice, expressed in language invested with Christ-like inflections, betrays a compassionate understanding of the pain the Furies must suffer as beings who were created to conduct evil and are subserviently bound to an evil power. To choose 'Pity, not punishment', then, is to believe in the possibility and necessity of a world order constructed by wielding moral power over physical power.

Shelley's version of Prometheus confers nuance to the concepts of pacifism and justice. The titan's active defiance is not synonymous with denial or rejection of peace, but is a reminder of the importance of intention, of the careful choice of motive that propels revolutions and reform, as the intention that impels the enactment of justice determines both the nature of the humanity that desires justice and the success of the society that emerges from this justice. His understanding of pacifism shows a complexity that extends beyond notions of anti-violence. In a letter of 7 January 1812 to Elizabeth Hitchener, Shelley discloses his vehement repudiation of offensive violent protests, expressing his belief that support of the oppressed

does not automatically imply hatred of the oppressors. 'Popular insurrections and revolutions I look upon with discountenance; if *such things must be* I will take the side of the People, but my reasonings shall endeavor [*sic*] to ward it from the hearts of the Rulers of the Earth, deeply as I detest them' (*Letters* I, 221).[6] This view Shelley would maintain for the rest of his life. His preoccupation, in promoting an ideological system of nonviolent force born out of love and truth, is to emphasise the need to embrace a sympathetic attitude towards both enslaved and enslaver, a view epitomised by *Prometheus Unbound*. The radicalism[7] of his poetics lies in the way in which that appeal is directed towards the oppressed: the latter's willingness and ability to exercise compassion for the tyrant is crucial to break the cyclical nature of apocalypses, or 'the repetitious morality of revenge', as Harold Bloom so eloquently puts it.[8]

More than the recovering or rewriting of Aeschylus's lost text that the title of Shelley's composition could suggest, the Romantic poet undertakes 'an independent reconception' of the myth, as Michael O'Neill explains, in a conversation with his Greek predecessor which presupposes that myths and stories are not fixed, that they mutate to reflect and meet the demands of the societies that need and create them.[9] In diverging from Aeschylus's approach, Shelley is, in fact, following the practice of Greek tragedians, revealing his understanding of myth as a foundational unit of society whose evolution is necessary to adapt to the mental and socio-historical conditions of the time. He accordingly updates the polysemic significance of Prometheus, making him a figure that is relevant to the cultural, intellectual, and political temperaments of his time, whilst simultaneously being symbolic for his imaginarium.

***

The achievement of a millennial world and of moral reform are bound in Shelley's thought and, indeed, Prometheus's moral and intellectual growth is the first sign, in the lyrical drama, of the possibility of a millennium, that the titan's struggle against Jupiter can have a favourable culmination. Shelley creates a character that is not infallible, one who learns from his previous

[6] The verb 'to ward' carries many significations, but here Shelley means 'to deflect'. See 'ward, *v.*[1] 6. a. To parry, repel, fend off, turn aside (a stroke or thrust, blow, attack, weapon, missile). Now almost always with *off*.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2020. <www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/225626> [accessed 17 August 2020]

[7] 'Radicalism', here, conflates three significations: the notion of reformation and revolution; the sense relating to 'root', that which is inherent in or at the basis of; and that which is progressive or innovative in outlook. See 'radical, *adj. and n.*', especially entries A.2., A.7.a., A.7.b., A.7.c., B.2.b., B.3., B.6.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/157251> [accessed 17 August 2020]

[8] Harold Bloom, *A Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961; rev. and enlarged 1971), p. 308.

[9] O'Neill, 'Shelley *Prometheus Unbound*', p. 410.

feelings of revenge and hate, who breaks the cycle of harbouring inharmonious emotions, to show that moral and intellectual reformation are not only possible but necessary for the forward-looking movement of history. The 'gestures proud and cold, | And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate' (I. 260-61) that uttered words 'quick and vain' (I. 303) have been renounced by forgiving the tyrant, his torturer, and have given way to an expression of selflessness, 'I wish no living thing to suffer pain' (I. 305), that parallels in intention the words of the crucified Jesus, on whom Prometheus is partly based, 'Forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34). Prometheus's insistence on hearing his previous curse uttered out loud brings him to directly face his past mistakes, and it is included in a learning process of moral reformation that does not excuse 'his faults with his wrongs', which, Shelley reminds the reader, is a detrimental aspect of the character of 'the Hero of *Paradise Lost*' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 230). The Prometheus that the reader encounters at the start of the lyrical drama has understood the necessity of moving past sentiments of aversion, retribution, hostility, and fear for the creation of a stable millennial future. He has accepted that ignoring moments of personal injury is not synonymous with forgetting their experience, but it is, however, the required step towards a greater good which can only be achieved through true selflessness.

The fact that Prometheus is morally superior to the tyrant is thus linked with his susceptibility to learn and change. That Prometheus does not remain unwilling to review his position, that he does not remain morally and intellectually stagnant, is acknowledged by his peers. Mercury's words, 'Wise art thou, firm and good' (I. 360), echo the Earth's,

> Subtle thou art and good, and though the Gods
> Hear not this voice, yet thou art more than God,
> Being wise and kind. (I. 143-45)

These two instances are indicative of why Neville Rogers initially understood 'In goodness, I, thou mortal, surpass you, a mighty god', the line from Euripides' *Heracles* (l. 342, LCL 9) that Shelley scribbled at the end of a draft of stanza v of 'Ode to the West Wind', as an Aeschylean extract.[10] As in the case of the Euripedean line that gives voice to Shelley's denunciation of the tempestuous West Wind, the poetic voice of *Prometheus Unbound* has an inherent suspicion of claims of omnipotence and omniscience, of any institutionalised form of authority that

[10] See Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 19, and chapter two for a discussion of Euripides' line in the context of Shelley's thought.

considers and projects itself as ultimate, superlative, or supreme. Shelley dissociates kindness and wisdom from oppressive, inflexible institutionalised forms of authority, from the divinities of orthodox religions, fusing them instead with hope and love, or lack of hatred, as epitomised by Prometheus: 'I speak in grief, | Not exultation, for I hate no more, | As then, ere misery made me wise' (I. 56-58). Past moments of exultation in anticipation of the enactment of the curse, of rejoicing in his hatred for Jupiter, have been abandoned through a process of reflection and examination, of the world, his adversaries, and himself. Although Prometheus reveals that this process of reflection and learning has brought misery, the titan, after having examined his behaviour and thoughts, and, armed with a sympathetic predisposition, has relinquished his hatred, becoming morally reformed which, in Shelley's thought, implies being wise. The weapons of pacifism and morality, therefore, are introspection and self-analysis, which in the humble produce true wisdom in the form of a lack of hate.

Prometheus's freedom to be self-analytical, to examine himself and the world around him, is only possible once he stops 'flatter[ing] Crime, where it sits throned | In brief Omnipotence' (I. 401-02), through the rejection of the dogmatic impositions of institutionalised forms of authority. It is to this rejection that Shelley attributes the creation of great poetry: 'We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 231). Shelley thus correlates humanity's detachment from and repudiation of the constraints imposed upon the mind by orthodoxy with its ability to think and write unfettered by dogmas, preconceptions, and immoralities, to creatively embrace its potentiality and give expression to the human soul. Indeed, for Shelley, John Milton's excellence, the imaginative powers that allow him to be 'a bold inquirer into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 231), is founded on his republicanism, on his ability to have freed himself from the constraints imposed by institutionalised forms of authority that regulate thought, behaviour, and speech. Shelley's emphasis on inquiry, on examination and study with the aim of inciting learned discussions and debate, not based on preconceived and generalised assertions, is important: it is in direct opposition to the practices of orthodox powers, whether religious, monarchical, or judicial, whose policy of producing *ipse dixits* does not invite positive discussion or inquiry. Rejecting the intellectual and moral freedom that inquiry offers is indicative of a force that is insecure of its own power, one that supresses study and investigation for fear of the power of collective individualities, of the dissent and disintegration that can result from the awakening from mass ignorance and the advocation of human individuality. Orthodox systems veil their insecurity and fear behind their

claims of omniscience and omnipotence, as Mercury reveals in his conversation with the chained Prometheus,

> there is a secret known
> To thee, and to none else of living things,
> Which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven,
> The fear of which perplexes the Supreme. (I. 371-74)

This also transpires in Jupiter's confession to the deities assembled in Heaven,

> The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,
> Yet burns towards Heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt,
> And lamentation, and reluctant prayer,
> Hurling up insurrection, which might make
> Our antique empire insecure, though built
> On eldest faith, and Hell's coeval, fear. (III. i. 5-10)

The juxtaposition created in the Preface of *Prometheus Unbound* between 'bold inquirers' and dogmatists – between those who participate in the progression of notions of 'morals and religion' through discussion, and those whose claims to uphold them are annulled by their rejection of inquiry – is transported to the lyrical drama itself.

Prometheus Unbound reflects on the extent to which the value of inquiry and discussion, whether they have a worthwhile and positive impact on their participants, is determined by their purpose, the reason for which they are conducted. Put in other terms, *Prometheus Unbound* shows that the purpose for and intention with which a discussion is designed, is important for the evaluation of the intellectual and moral impact that it has on its contributors. In this context, the lyrical drama becomes a study on the importance, value, and purpose of various forms of discussion, or 'talk'. Discussion and debate with dogmatists, or their agents, can pose obstacles to the path towards the morality of 'bold inquirers'. 'How vain is talk!' (I. 431), concludes the chained Prometheus at the end of his dialogue with Mercury, recognising the detrimental effects of engaging in conversation with those who oppose him in his position merely to tempt him to surrender his stance. When 'talk' is intended to dissuade Prometheus from his resolute defiance, as Mercury's is, it is 'vain', futile and ineffective, not conducive to an enlightened position, to the type of inquiry and examination that leads to

wisdom and morality. This 'talk', rather, affirms the tyranny of autocratic powers, validating the position of dogmatists and perpetuating the fact that institutionalised forms of authority are perceived and perceive themselves as orthodox, in its etymological sense. Shelley ultimately questions the extent to which these powers should be conceived and perceived as orthodox, as correct doctrine and practice that is accepted as tradition, for they blight the human imagination and its innate predisposition towards inquiry.[11]

Attitudes towards inquiry and debate, especially those held by orthodox forms of authority, are reviewed in the millennium that is proposed in the third act of *Prometheus Unbound*. The type of idle 'talk' that characterises the exchange between Prometheus and Mercury is not concomitant with the new world order that is described by the Spirit of the Hour, as, among a transformed humanity,

> None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk
> Which makes the heart deny the *yes* it breathes,
> Yet question that unmeant hypocrisy
> With such a self-mistrust as has no name. (III. iv. 149-52)

A reformed state of being entails a necessary transformation of modes of thought, inquiry, and discussion to eradicate hypocrisy and include a sincere interest in individual moral and intellectual development.

Shelley's lyrical drama supports positive inquiry and discussion as necessary aspects of a millennial existence, therefore emphasising the moral and intellectual benefits that result from engaging with like-minded individuals in the type of discussion that aims to promote study and investigation. Debate and inquiry are, indeed, the central concerns of the millennial cave fostered by nature that features in Act III. The conception of this millennial cave allowed Shelley to engage, once again, with his Greek predecessors, inverting the purpose of Plato's allegorical cave to create a secluded space of enlightenment, instead of ignorance. Whilst Shelley's space offers seclusion from the world, in which knowledge and wisdom, as the result of contemplation, inquiry, and debate, are advanced, it also suggests that seclusion need not imply loneliness. In fact, the form of contemplation and study that *Prometheus Unbound* proposes and promulgates, involves community and conviviality with like-minded individuals,

[11] See 'orthodox, *adj*. and *n.* A.1. and A.2.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/132801> [accessed 18 August 2020]

not isolation. Loneliness was Prometheus's state of being until his release in Act III: the lack of support he experienced in his opposition against Jupiter, when he remained chained with merely ideological cooperation from those he would urge to actively assist him in his struggle, has been supplanted, after his release, by an immersion in nature in the congenial company of Asia and her sister-nymphs.

Shelley's millenniums see him unite fellowship and seclusion in a natural space that promotes harmony and love, and, indeed, it is with an image that anticipates the millennial cave of *Prometheus Unbound* that *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills* concludes:

> With folded wings they waiting sit
> For my bark, to pilot it
> To some calm and blooming cove,
> Where for me, and those I love,
> May a windless bower be built,
> Far from passion, pain, and guilt,
> In a dell 'mid lawny hills,
> Which the wild sea-murmur fills,
> And soft sunshine, and the sound
> Of old forests echoing round,
> And the light and smell divine
> Of all flowers that breathe and shine. (ll. 340-51)

This state of 'mild brotherhood' (*Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, l. 369) is the mode of being proposed in Act III of *Prometheus Unbound*. It is as 'A simple dwelling, which shall be our own' that the freed Prometheus describes the cave to Asia, Ione, and Panthea, 'Where we will sit and talk of time and change, | As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged' (III. iii. 22-24), exploring the intellectual and moral advantages of engaging in 'talk' with those with whom he has an affinity. It is a space conceived with the purpose of exercising the imagination, where progression is achieved through syncretism and synchronisation of diverging schools of thought:

> We will entangle buds and flowers, and beams
> Which twinkle on the fountain's brim, and make
> Strange combinations out of common things,

> Like human babes in their brief innocence;
> And we will search, with looks and words of love,
> For hidden thoughts, each lovelier than the last,
> Our unexhausted spirits; and like lutes
> Touched by the skill of the enamoured wind,
> Weave harmonies divine, yet ever new,
> From difference sweet where discord cannot be. (III. iii. 30-39)

As a hub of discussion and inquiry, the cave epitomises the millennial potential of positive debate and study. It is a space where difference (or, the encountering of alternative perspectives) is welcomed and redefined; no longer implying discord, animosity and contention, it is embraced as a 'sweet' activity which leads to the harmonising of opposites that creates progress, not antagonism. Shelley's millennium embraces difference, recognised as a characteristic of human individualism, and reconceived to no longer be perceived as an antagonistic deterrent to inquiry. Shelley's millennial projects, his reworking of political and social attitudes and perceptions, exhibit idealistic tendencies which are balanced by an acute sense of historical grounding: although his millenniums harmonise difference, he is not blind to the fact that this act of reconciling difference relies on human nature, often too selfish and fickle. The type of learned discussions that shall take place in the cave will, therefore, be concerned with harmonising difference, incorporated as a particular of living communally, as well as with promoting sympathy, both essential aspects in the path towards morality and intellectual awakening. To ensure that difference does not fracture or deviate from the envisioned state of harmonious unity, Shelley stresses the importance of possessing an active imagination: 'A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 682).

The natural setting of the cave provides the adequate encouragement and inspiration for Prometheus, Asia, Ione, and Panthea to exercise their imagination:

> And lovely apparitions, dim at first,
> Then radiant, as the mind, arising bright
> From the embrace of beauty, whence the forms
> Of which these are the phantoms, casts on them
> The gathered rays which are reality,

> Shall visit us, the progeny immortal
> Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy,
> And arts, though unimagined, yet to be. (III. iii. 49-56)

The creative arts are thus presented as a 'virtue' (III. iii. 63) or quality of the cave, the result of an imagination which benefits from discussion, study, and analytical thought. The intellect is allowed to achieve its most poetical state in the cave, when free to inquire, to examine the world and the individual without dogmatic constraints. The type of positive inquiry that the cave symbolises, by embracing 'difference sweet', guided by 'looks and words of love', expressed in 'Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy, | And arts, though unimagined, yet to be', is an instrument of morality and 'enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 682). The millennium for which Shelley yearns, *Prometheus Unbound* suggests, will be achieved when humanity is able to free itself from the constraints of institutionalised forms of authority, from the rule of what is perceived as orthodox, when harmonious inquiry, study, and debate become humanity's mode of being. Only then will humanity achieve its ultimate state of

> gentle, radiant forms,
> From custom's evil taint exempt and pure;
> Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
> Looking emotions once they feared to feel,
> And changed to all which once they dared not be,
> Yet being now, made Earth like Heaven. (III. iv. 155-60)

The undertaking of meditative contemplation and debate in this cave affords Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, and Ione the possibility of complete immersion in the divinity of nature. The cave's sacredness, however, is not merely suggested by its natural state or the fact that it will be inhabited by divine entities; it is also intrinsic to its location, for, as the Earth explains, it is situated beside a temple that used to be consecrated to Prometheus, abandoned in the present time of the lyrical drama (III. iii. 161-75). In its symbolism of new modes of being, the cave codifies the new religious practices of a millennial existence, representing the movement from the old forms of public orthodox worship (the abandoned temple) to the newly established, private sacred contemplation that is achieved in a state of communion with nature (the cave). Traditional forms of worship and ritualistic acts become outdated and irrelevant in

the new millennial world that favours spaces of quiet and meditation, of fraternity between like-minded individuals with the purpose of stimulating intellectual debate and progressive study. The sacredness of the cave of *Prometheus Unbound* finds an equivalent in the eponymous building of 'The Coliseum', which, once it has been re-appropriated and repurposed by nature, becomes a hub and symbol for the possibility of a future governed by love, a space chosen by the narratorial voice and three main characters of the fragment as an alternative to the pomp of Christianity centred in St Peter's Basilica. Notions of orthodoxy are redefined in the millenniums of *Prometheus Unbound* and 'The Coliseum', and indeed of those across Shelley's oeuvre, which invariably include a transformation of old religious customs into creeds based on a new form of 'best worship, love' (III. iii. 59).

Like the Flavian amphitheatre in 'The Coliseum', considered in chapter two, the millennial cave in Act III of *Prometheus Unbound* offers such a perfect balance between nature and man-made architecture that their delimitation becomes challenging. It is a natural space that possesses no marks or stamps of human intervention, yet its features provide an ideal space for human dwelling, in an organic fusion of plants that convolute to form 'mossy seats' (III. iii. 20), a fountain that supplies drinking water and refreshment, and chandeliering stalactites that illuminate an otherwise dark environment by 'raining forth a doubtful light' (III. iii. 17), 'doubtful' because they refract and reflect light rather than being the source from which it emanates. The topography of the cave provides variety with which the imagination can engage, paralleling the multiplicity and potentiality of the mind. This natural environment is furnished with a diversity of textures ('the rough walls are clothed with long soft grass', III. iii. 21; 'mossy seats'), of natural elements (light, water, plants, air), and of natural formations (stalactites; a fountain; seats; a curtain of 'trailing odorous plants', III. iii. 11-12). The cave also provides variety that manifests itself through colours (plants in various shades of green intermixed with other hues; darkness and brightness created by the passing of the day, and the light that is filtered through the curtain and which bounces off the stalactites), scents ('odorous plants', purity of the unpolluted air), and sounds (echoes in the cave; water trickling in the fountain; absence of sound/silence; resonance of 'the ever-moving air, | Whispering without from tree to tree, and birds, | And bees' (III. iii. 18-20), the sounds of animals and *psithurisma* of trees that reverberate within the cave). These natural stimuli co-mingle to create a synaesthetic experience that quickens the senses and, consequently, the mind, in a space where it can be positively influenced by being allowed to wander and wonder with absolute freedom.

There is a harmonious correlation between the natural setting of the cave and the activities which will take place in it. Much like the Pensive Man of Milton's *Il Penseroso* who

finds in ‘the peaceful hermitage’ (l. 168) of a ‘mossy cell’ (l. 169) a space for contemplative activity, to ‘attain | To something like prophetic strain’ (ll. 173-74), the synaesthetic fusion of the different topographical characteristics of the millennial cave in *Prometheus Unbound* shows that this space provides an adequate context for inquiry, debate, and contemplation to be conducted. No artifice was involved in the creation or features of this grotto, allowing the mind that there dwells to be at liberty to think freely and imagine, without the imposing influence of an artificial space that curtails the imaginative capability of the human intellect. An unmanicured space, therefore, free from the taint of human intervention, is squared with and is the proper environment for a mind that thinks freely, unbound from oppressive, burdening thoughts and the constraints imposed upon it by orthodoxy. Act III of *Prometheus Unbound* reflects Shelley’s poetical exploration of the potentialities of landscape; the third act is his articulation of his belief in the mutuality of external space and the mind, of how the imagination is complemented by and should be nurtured in a suitable and propitious physical environment that allows it to remain unfettered by dogmatic impositions.

The symbolism and topography of the cave make this an appropriate space for the physically and mentally unbound Prometheus to dwell, for to worship Love (compassion and understanding) is to appreciate the fine nuance of freedom. The lyrical drama progresses in stages that successively show Prometheus’s attainment of freedom and his ability to retain it. Whilst chained, he is, firstly, psychologically unbound, having been able to relinquish the yoke imposed upon his mind by Jupiter’s dogmatic decrees. Prometheus’s achievement of intellectual freedom before being physically released reflects the lyrical drama’s preoccupation with mental processes, but it also guarantees that psychological liberation is not assumed as secondary to or implied in his deliverance from physical imprisonment; it is presented as crucial for the maintenance of physical independence from orthodoxy. His physical unbinding by Hercules in Act III scene iii finally leads to his residence in a space that is presented as securing both his physical and psychological freedom. Shelley conceived a version of Prometheus whose moral and intellectual progress shows the unsuitability of reconciliation as a thematic approach, for, in its implication of the expectation of the slave’s submission, as already explained, it has the potential to rekindle a cycle of tyranny that compromises Prometheus’s intellectual freedom. The axis of *Prometheus Unbound*, then, is the presentation of a millennium to be conquered when emancipation, especially intellectual and moral, is attained, when one becomes ‘the king, | Over himself’ (III. iv. 196-97), over one’s mind and body in equal measure.

***

Prometheus Unbound is an emphatic assertion of the futility of physical freedom without intellectual and moral independence from orthodox forms of authority, creating, for this effect, a stark juxtaposition between the physically bound, but intellectually free, Prometheus, and the animated Earth and her descendants, who, although physically free, still obey the will and commands of Jupiter as supreme ruler. They might not, indeed, be physically restricted like Prometheus, but their fear of Jupiter is an immobilising force that perpetuates his oppression, a mental imposition that restrains them from physical action, as the Earth reveals when discussing their reaction to the titan's curse: 'We meditate | In secret joy and hope those dreadful words | But dare not speak them' (I. 184-86), and 'Rejoice to hear what yet ye cannot speak' (I. 253). Their inaction is an indirect compliance with tyranny, what truly keeps Prometheus chained.

For Shelley, tyranny is not merely confined to the malicious actions of the oppressor, the imposition of a set of dogmatic beliefs to circumscribe behaviour and thought, or a rejection of inquiry. Tyranny is also division, separation and intellectual disparity amongst the oppressed, personified, in *Prometheus Unbound*, by those who fail to comprehend that Prometheus remains chained and tortured as a consequence of their own dispersion, their inability to harness and direct the fierce, transformative power of the collective against the tyrant. Shelley resolves that not just the actions of the oppressors produce and empower their tyrannical systems, but, more importantly, it is from the passivity of the oppressed that tyrannies are born and thrive, as he puts it in a letter to Mary Shelley (8 August 1821):

> My maxim is with Aeschylus το δυσσεβὲς—μετα μεν πλειονα τικτει, αφετερᾳ [*sic*] δ' εικοτα γεννᾳ—There is a Greek exercise for you.—How should slaves produce any thing but tyranny—even as the seed produces the plant.— (*Letters* II, 325)

The Aeschylean quotation in Greek comes from *Agamemnon*, 'it is the impious deed | that breeds more to follow, | resembling their progenitors' (ll. 758-60, LCL 146), and it is unsurprising that Shelley would choose this particular passage from Aeschylus's play.[12] The extract is concerned with the Greek concept of *miasma*, a pollution that is cyclical in nature, and its implications are echoed throughout Shelley's work, including 'Evil minds | Change

[12] See also Shelley's 'Aeschylus Fragment', ll. 4-5, which offers a loose translation of this extract from *Agamemnon* (*Longman* IV, 87).

good to their own nature' (I. 380-81), Prometheus's characterisation of what he believes to be an ungrateful Jupiter. The botanical simile in the letter reinforces Shelley's belief in the inexorability of this apocalyptic cycle: the slave, in vengefully punishing his oppressor, becomes the tyrant himself and, likewise, disseminates destructive hatred that is not controlled or solely directed towards the just chastisement of the oppressor, as, for instance, the September Massacres and Reign of Terror exemplified. The poet understands the functions of tyrant and slave to exist in a relationship in which roles are interchanged but not abolished. Tyranny is produced by slaves who are intellectually tethered to orthodoxy, as their physical freedom illudes and obfuscates their psychological binding. For Shelley, the illusion of freedom will not be shattered until the mind rejects the trappings of a dogmatic ideology, at which point it can embrace the learning towards moral fortitude that leads to a deviation from and deconstruction of the system that created the slave. Tyranny and slavery, when fuelled by a judicial system of revenge and hatred, of punishment and not pity, engender their like, continuing the circular movement of history that curtails true progress. Physical binding is hard to shake off, but the mental yoke imposed by systematised forms of authority, Shelley suggests, is an invisible power that, as it is harder to recognise, can be equally difficult to escape. Fear and despair, the weapons of orthodoxy, render the oppressed powerless by snuffing the regenerating and creative light of the imagination, its ability to conceive the possibility of emerging from their enslaved state by envisioning a transformed millennial existence. *Prometheus Unbound* is another instance of Shelley's affirmation of the importance of the imagination, of the detrimental effects of impairing the mind's eye, the most important visionary instrument of humankind.

Shelley's interest in the complexities of physical and intellectual freedom is extended to his treatment of the titan's torture, one which crucially highlights its psychological dimension. The poet's approach to the Prometheus myth plays with the readers' expectations: he condenses the traditional details associated with the myth – those pertaining to Prometheus's physical torture in a bleak ravine, with the well-known eagle (or vulture) of Jupiter perpetually eating his regenerating liver – into thirty-two lines included in the lyrical drama's opening speech (I. 20-52), for Act I to focus on the Furies' psychological torment of Prometheus. Shelley's innovative shift, to focus on the psychological aspect of Prometheus's torture, offers an interesting inquiry into the effects that different forms of torture can have on the imagination and its ability to hope. It is an approach which aims to study the delimitations of the resilience and endurance of hope, to understand the extent to which one's hope and one's sense of morality can endure continuous attacks made to the mind and the imagination. The first half of

Act I is the scene of a Prometheus who, though imprisoned, exists in a state of calm enlightenment:

> Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven,
> Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene,
> As light in the sun, throned. (I. 429-31)

It is this 'peace serene' of intellectual freedom that Jupiter targets and challenges through the intervention of the Furies in the second half of the act: to induce the intended submission that physical torment does not produce, Jupiter will attack Prometheus's mind, the organ of hope and the imagination that keeps him steadfast to his ideology. The Furies construct their attack around the dismantling of Prometheus's gift to humanity, deturpating the purity and benevolent intention of his gift of 'clear knowledge' (I. 542) with the insinuation that it was cursed. The image they show to Prometheus is that of a gift that has maddened humanity, one which, instead of producing a state of 'peace serene' akin to the one achieved by the titan, has

> kindled within him a thirst which outran
> Those perishing waters; a thirst of fierce fever,
> Hope, love, doubt, desire—which consume him for ever. (I. 543-45)

The humanity that features in the Furies' vision of despair has not known how to use Prometheus's gift of 'clear knowledge' with balanced temperance to pursue a path of enlightenment, to initiate a learning process of moral reformation. It is with a vision of a confused humanity that the Furies begin and end Prometheus's psychological torture, hoping to inspire the needed despondency that can frustrate his millennial desire of socio-political and moral reform.

It is noteworthy that Shelley denudes Prometheus's gift of fire to humanity, which led to his imprisonment, to its symbolic significance, knowledge. The emphasis on Prometheus's role as the teacher of humankind, his selfless act of granting knowledge to humanity, prompts the recognition of an interesting parallel with the role performed by the Christian god in humanity's acquisition of knowledge in the Bible. Not only are both Prometheus and the Christian god credited with the creation of humankind in their respective mythologies, but it is also under their auspices that their creation gains knowledge, an important parallel in the context of Shelley's lyrical drama because *Prometheus Unbound* is concerned with the

importance of intention, and the disparity in intention behind these two instances is a matter of interest to the poet.[13] There is, in fact, a significant discrepancy in these two circumstances. The biblical account presents knowledge as a possibility, tantalisingly placed by the Christian god within humanity's reach, but of forbidden access, with the intention of demonstrating and asserting autocracy, which Milton, as 'a bold inquirer into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 231), recognised, 'Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe, | Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, | His worshipper' (*PL*, IX. 703-05). Prometheus, conversely, humbly 'boast[s] the clear knowledge' he 'waken'dst for man' (I. 542), openly sharing it without subterfuge or malice, showing a superior morality, as Shelley would recognise of Milton's Satan (*A Defence*, *SMW* 691-92), in his philanthropic desire to contribute to the self-improvement and moral reformation of humanity. These are two different approaches to the importance of intellectual freedom of relevance to the lyrical drama. Both acknowledge the transformative potential of intellectual emancipation, but if the Christian god, like Jupiter, monopolises psychological independence, rejecting it for humanity as a threat to his omnipotence, Prometheus's promotion of a state of equality in the achievement of psychological liberty among all living beings stems from a belief that 'The abolition of personal slavery is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 690).

To show the failure of his cause and effectively torture the titan, the Furies focus on two historical instances that illustrate humanity's misuse of Prometheus's gift of 'clear knowledge': the deturpation, on the one hand, of Jesus's character and principles in the construction of Christianity as an organised system of belief (I. 546-60) and, on the other hand, of the precepts on which the French Revolution was initiated by its self-proclaimed ministers (I. 567-77). Christianity and the French Revolution, unbesmirched, were understood, by the poet, as two magnanimous forces with transformative potential that expanded humanity's imaginative capabilities, two great systems working towards the amelioration of humanity through moral reformation to initiate an improved socio-political and personal reality. It is precisely the millennial magnitude of these two historical moments of remarkable ideological and epistemological significance, Shelley suggests, which makes their failure a tectonic loss.

---

[13] See Genesis 1-3. For an account of Prometheus's creation of mankind, see, e.g., Apollodorus, *The Library* I. vii, and Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods* 5 (1). It should be noted that, in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, the titan is merely the benefactor of humanity, not its creator: 'how infantile they [humanity] were before I made them intelligent and possessed of understanding. I shall say this, not because I have any desire to criticize humans, but to demonstrate the goodwill that inspired my gifts to them' (Prometheus, speaking to the Chorus of Oceanides; ll. 443-46; LCL 145).

The millennial promise and power of Christianity, for Shelley, was a consequence of its ability to have distilled the wisdom of its predecessors from the superstitions and ignobility of their customs:

> Plato, following the doctrines of Timaeus and Pythagoras, taught also a moral and intellectual system of doctrine comprehending at once the past, the present and the future condition of man. Jesus Christ divulged the sacred and eternal truths contained in these views to mankind, and Christianity, in its abstract purity, became the exoteric expression of the esoteric doctrines of the poetry and wisdom of antiquity. (*A Defence*, *SMW* 690)

Thus, before its distortion by those who claimed to follow and uphold its ideals, Christianity was a system of belief whose operative framework paralleled the knowledge and harmony found in the poetical and philosophical teachings of the Greeks. In presenting Christianity 'in its abstract purity' as an inheritor of Greek thought, Shelley does not imply an active, consequential link between these systems, but rather emphasises the affinities between both traditions. Shelley celebrates Christianity 'in its abstract purity' as a system that prioritised equality and fraternity among individuals with the 'exoteric' purpose of demystifying 'the esoteric doctrines' of the Greeks, translating these principles into a language intelligible to all, rather than preserving them for the initiated few. Christianity thus had, for the poet, the opportunity of becoming a revolutionising enterprise in a renewed world, of reforming humanity by fusing the poetry contained in old philosophical tenets with the progressive teachings of Jesus. Shelley expressed poetically his consideration of Jesus as inheritor of Greek philosophy, especially Plato: in his fragmentary 'Prologue to *Hellas*' (composed in 1821), Christ, speaking to the 'Almighty Father' (*BSM* XVI, 28-29 (adds. e. 7, p. 24)), states, 'by Plato's sacred light | Of which my spirit was a burning mirror' (*BSM* XVI, 30-31 (adds. e. 7, pp. 26-27)). It is the moral dimension of Jesus's teachings that Shelley celebrates and what, for the poet, makes Jesus the ultimate reformer: 'Doctrines of reform were never carried to so great a length as by Jesus Christ. The republic of Plato and the Political Justice of Godwin are probable and practical systems in the comparison.'[14] Jesus's millennial project, his vision of a transformed reality and reformed humanity, became the corrupted seed from which the structured system of Christianity emerged, with the potency, as Shelley puts it in *Prometheus*

[14] 'The Moral Teaching of Jesus Christ', in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Benn, 1965), VI, pp. 255-56 (p. 255).

Unbound, of 'swift poison | Withering up truth, peace, and pity' (I. 548-49), perverted by its ministers into an organised, self-perceived orthodox, group ideology that hypocritically derived its appellation from an individual whose beliefs it adulterated. Shelley's sense of Christianity is defined by a separation of what he considers to be its most pure incarnation, as developed by and existing during the lifetime of Jesus, from its distorted state, its lasting manifestation as an immoral institutionalised form of authority. Through the 'mild and gentle ghost' of Jesus 'Wailing for the faith he kindled' (I. 554-55), Shelley laments society's inability to recognise this distortion, and characterises their inaction against it as a form of misuse of Prometheus's gift of 'clear knowledge'. The poet painfully accepts that humankind has not achieved the required degree of intellectual freedom to understand that Jesus and Christianity (in its ascetic form, disseminated after Jesus's demise) are not concomitant and should be discriminated, that Jesus, attached to the title of Christ, has been imbued with a myriad of associations that distance him from the historical figure who undertook a revolutionary and reformist enterprise.

Shelley understood the French Revolution in terms similar to his perception of the advent of Christianity 'in its abstract purity'. It was, for the poet, a defining event that separated historical realities, its millennial force encapsulated in its promise to create a virtuous existence of freedom, equality, and fraternity over the despotic world of the past. Shelley recognised that the influence of the Revolution ramified to all aspects of human endeavour and thought, considering the event as the episteme or *zeitgeist* of his age, 'the master theme of the epoch in which we live,' as he put it in a letter of 8 September 1816 to Lord Byron (*Letters* I, 504). That so many of Shelley's compositions are concerned, directly or indirectly, with the French Revolution betrays the workings of an imagination suffused by the anxieties and frustrations of continuous attempts to positively use the Revolution's failure, of ensuring its millennial potential is redirected to other socio-political ventures, like the Greek War of Independence that is the subject-matter of *Hellas*. For Shelley, the Revolution described a pattern that circled between modes of oppression and freedom. His indignation, more than stemming from a realisation of this revolving process, was instigated by the fact that the pattern reveals humanity's rejection of the mental clarity afforded by intellectual freedom. The Furies, accordingly, torment Prometheus with images of his gift of 'clear knowledge' being embraced and then betrayed in the context of the French Revolution. France is 'a disenchanted nation' which 'Springs like day from desolation' (I. 567-68) by virtue of collective enlightenment, of an apprehension of independence of thought, only to renounce that enlightened position, to jeopardise the triumph over tyranny and re-enter a state of submission, to return to 'the vintage-

time for death and sin' (I. 574). What can be heard through the Furies' torture is Shelley's lament of 'kindred murder[ing] kin' (I. 573),[15] his anguish at the transformation of the formerly oppressed into tyrants who misappropriate power and abuse their newly-acquired freedom by enslaving their peers, the return to a 'struggling world, which slaves and tyrants win' (I. 577). More generally, however, this is Shelley's dirge for a humanity that destroys itself:

> The heaven around, the earth below
> Was peopled with thick shapes of human death,
> All horrible, and wrought by human hands,
> And some appeared the work of human hearts,
> For men were slowly killed by frowns and smiles. (I. 586-90)

To destroy the 'peace serene' (I. 430) of intellectual freedom achieved through a resolute opposition 'Against the Omnipotent' (I. 362), the Furies introduce doubt and despair in Prometheus through an ekphrastic torture that shows humanity in its most spiritually-dilapidated state. It is worth noticing that the images conjured up by the Furies are not fabricated scenarios, but authentic occurrences of traumatic historical moments that expose unpleasant aspects of human nature. This Prometheus knows to be true; therefore, in line with Shelley's pragmatic idealism, when the 'subtle and fair spirits' (I. 658) are sent by the Earth to comfort the overwhelmed titan, they do not deny the confused and disconcerted state of humanity depicted by the Furies, but rather counteract their despairing images by focusing on 'the genuine elements of human society' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 232), the best qualities of human nature, what it can achieve and become. The spirits offer images of rekindled love, hope, freedom, and selflessness: they show humanity struggling against and defeating the rule and dominion of both tyrant and unbending creeds (I. 697-705) and revenge (I. 718-22); how it is inspired by and embraces 'Pity, eloquence, and woe' (I. 723-32); and its existence in a state of communion with nature, which nurtures and develops the imaginative powers of the human mind to compose poetry (I. 743-49). Although the spirits depart leaving impressions of victory in Prometheus's mind, reassuring him that he 'shalt quell this horseman grim, | Woundless though in heart or limb' (I. 787-88), the titan concludes 'Most vain all hope but love' (I. 808). His resilience and conviction are deposited in his union with and feelings for

[15] Cf. Euripides' *Medea* (431 BC): 'Terrible and hard to heal is the wrath that comes when kin join in conflict with kin' (Chorus Leader reflecting on Medea's accusatory words to Jason, ll. 520-21; LCL 12).

Asia, in the restoring and reforming energies of love, compassion and understanding. He is neither defeatist, nor has he lost his optimistic expectation, but, at the end of the first act of the lyrical drama, there is a sense of sobered hope. Prometheus has not succumbed to feelings of revenge or self-pity following his psychological torture,

> Thy words are like a cloud of wingèd snakes;
> And yet I pity those they torture not. (I. 632-33)

Even if his mental 'Peace is in the grave' (I. 638), his ability to hope has not been impaired,

> The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
> With new endurance, till the hour arrives
> When they shall be no types of things which are. (I. 643-45)

However, Prometheus is not immune to the psychological pain that the Furies' images produce – after being tortured, his is a 'woe-illumèd mind' (I. 637). His intellectual freedom might not have been subjugated, and his perseverance in his millennial project might be intact, but the truth which transpires in the images conjured by the Furies to torture Prometheus forces the titan to confront the complexities of human nature. Prometheus is forced to accept that the creativity and imagination that inspire humanity to embrace philanthropic impulses can equally be the root of destruction and hatred.

'Clear knowledge' has led, according to the Furies, not to the state of ordered, stable independence that Prometheus envisioned, but rather to perplexity and disconcertion, 'all best things are thus confused to ill' (I. 628). The Furies describe the instability created by an ineffectual gift: although Prometheus intended to release humankind from the confusion of ignorance, humanity, even after receiving his gift, is at odds with itself, still inhabiting a world of discord and misunderstanding, an image that Shelley resolves in Act III, as discussed earlier in this chapter.[16] The lyrical drama progresses from the state of human confusion in Acts I and II to humankind's assumption of what Shelley believes to be its true condition, 'The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains | Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man' (III. iv. 193-

[16] Cf. Prometheus's description of the bewildered state of humanity before being enlightened by his gift of fire, as depicted in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*: 'In the beginning, though they had eyes and ears they could make nothing of what they saw and heard; like dream-figures they lived a life of utter random confusion all their days' (ll. 447-50, LCL 145).

94), a progression paralleled and represented by the separation and later reunion of Prometheus and Asia, of hope, morality, and love. They are reunited once he is physically freed in Act III, in a millennial celebration that consummates the ordered, stable world of Prometheus's desire. But this scene differs greatly from the previous circumstance of Prometheus's torture: it was 'Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb, | Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life' (I. 21-22), a space only attended by Asia's intermediaries and images, Ione and Panthea, representing the worldly confusion that confirms that 'The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom' (I. 627). Prometheus being apart from his double is Shelley's allegorical suggestion that hope, morality, and love are often separated in tyrannical contexts, a separation that is merely physical, not ideological, as demonstrated in the millennial setting of Asia's 'sad exile' (I. 827) described by Panthea. The first act of the lyrical drama closes with an image of the transformative and regenerative power of love when supported by hope and morality, a characteristic and recurrent scene in Shelley's oeuvre. Asia, like Orpheus in the eponymous fragment, has transmuted the desolate 'far Indian vale' (I. 826), 'rugged once | And desolate and frozen, like this [Prometheus's] ravine' (I. 827-28), into a fecund, harmonious space: her exuberant energy has 'invested' the space

> with fair flowers and herbs,
> And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow
> Among the woods and waters, from the ether
> Of her transforming presence—which would fade
> If it were mingled not with thine. (I. 829-33)

The frozen and still natural world is thus reinvigorated by the poetical power of love, endowed, by its ideological co-existence with hope and morality, with the resilience to subsist in the synaesthetic fusion of all its living elements, creating a congruous, millennial unity that anticipates the regeneration envisioned in Act III. Shelley's millennium, therefore, is achieved through a struggle driven by the conjoined energies and force of love, hope, and morality, the consummation of which Shelley envisions as humanity's *telos*.

***

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is laced with a degree of signification and nuance that Aeschylus's extant and lost Promethean tragedies, as dramas of reconciliation without moral

reform, do not possess. Shelley's Prometheus, while unbound, is free both physically and mentally, whereas Aeschylus's Prometheus, in an unbound state, not only remains intellectually enslaved by orthodox powers but, additionally, his physical independence is marked by the symbols of his previous enslavement, the *lugos*-crown and iron ring which he is forced to wear. Aeschylus's approach to the myth is rooted in and concomitant with the theological and moral conceptions of his fifth-century BC Greek context, but it invariably means that Shelley, as an early-nineteenth-century reader of Aeschylus with reformist views and a moral system devoid of the piety of orthodoxy, understood freedom through reconciliation without moral and intellectual reform as another form of slavery. Achieving and retaining freedom, physical but especially psychological, is the foundation of Shelley's millennial project, a system crystallised in Demogorgon's final speech at the end of the lyrical drama. The speech offers a powerful image that modifies biblical symbols for its articulation, celebrating ideal love as divine whilst maintaining a pragmatic understanding of history. Codified within Shelley's perception of history as a succession of 'cancelled cycles' (IV. 289) is his acceptance of the possibility of historical regression, his recognition that, once gained, freedom can be lost, that love and its corollaries, 'Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance' (IV. 562), can be overturned by inharmonious dispositions.

> Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,—
> These are the seals of that most firm assurance
> Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
> And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
> Mother of many acts and hours, should free
> The serpent that would clasp her with his length,
> These are the spells by which to re-assume
> An empire o'er the disentangled Doom.
>
> To suffer woes with Hope thinks infinite;
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
> To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
> To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent:
> This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be

Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory. (IV. 562-78)

Prometheus Unbound, a lyrical drama steeped in biblical imagery, thus concludes with a linguistic and conceptual approximation to the Book of Revelation. Shelley adopts and reworks images found especially in Revelation 5-8 and 20 to suit a composition concerned with the importance of freethought, compassion, and understanding for the triumph of a system of morality that distances itself from the piety demanded by orthodox faiths.[17] Accepting that historical regression is a possibility leads Shelley to conceive the potential destruction of the millennial state of being achieved in Act III, how 'the seals of that most firm assurance | Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength' may be broken, inducing 'Eternity' to eventually 'free | The serpent that would clasp her with his length'. Shelley's 'serpent' of tyranny, however, even if it does wreck the hard-won millennium of Prometheus's desire, does not share the violent punishment suffered by Satan in Revelation 20:10, which sees him 'tormented day and night for ever and ever'. Shelley does not participate in this retaliative ideology; rather, in line with his belief in 'Pity, not punishment' (I. 404), which should be upheld especially towards the tyrant, Shelley does not condone the serpent's suffering 'to re-assume' a millennium. His stress is on the importance of maintaining, during a new manifestation of the cycle, the steadfast resolution, defiant attitude, and moral fortitude gained whilst facing the previous apocalyptic-eschatological struggle.

Shelley's philanthropic and humanitarian inclinations come through his reconceptualisation of the ontological notions that a new, regenerated existence demands. The final seventeen lines of the lyrical drama demonstrate that 'Language is a perpetual Orphic song' (IV. 415) whose transformative power is deployed by poets in an act of redefinition for the coming millennium. Shelley understands that the achievement of physical and intellectual freedom implies the restructure of modes of being and expression, by making 'Strange combinations out of common things, | Like human babes in their brief innocence' (III. iii. 32-33). Accordingly, the initial six lines of the final stanza (IV. 570-75) are offered by the poet as an outline for or as the signification to the remaining three lines of that stanza (IV. 576-78).

[17] Cf. 'thou art more than God, | Being wise and kind' (I. 144-45), the Earth's words to the bound Prometheus. Shelley thus shows that wisdom and kindness, the virtues through which goodness is achieved, and the basis of his moral system, are not concomitant with orthodox deities, as discussed above (pp. 141-42), thus leading the poet to deduce that the piety required by orthodox systems of faith is not necessary, nor the only path, to achieve morality. Through his conclusion that being an orthodox divinity, or a follower of that system, does not automatically correspond to being moral, Shelley disintegrates, and therefore rejects for his own theological conception, this foundational dogma of orthodox religions.

Concepts including goodness and freedom (IV. 577), 'Empire' and 'Victory' (IV. 578), which evoked and could be associated with ideas of colonialism, revenge, division, or slavery, are stripped of these connotations and refigured for Shelley's millennial project based on a moral system that prioritises *eupsychia*, or the goodness of the human soul.[18]

The end of *Prometheus Unbound*, likewise to the end of *Hellas*, illustrates Shelley's conviction that the achievement of a millennium is not an irrevocable event. The apocalyptic-eschatological struggle that culminated in the overthrow of Jupiter and consequently inaugurated a millennial existence for all living beings is not conceived as a definite or final event in the course of history, the reader realises when the lyrical drama concludes. Rather, the importance of Act IV – and perhaps the reason why Shelley saw the necessity of adding it to his original three-act plan – lies in its presentation of this movement between moments of tyranny and freedom as merely an example of what will most likely become another one of history's 'cancelled cycles' (IV. 289), betraying not only an attention to the patterns of history and mankind, but also to the intellectual honesty from which Shelley cannot escape. Although the composition assumes that tyrannical forces will not be extinguished with the demise of Jupiter, its ending is not despondent, instead illuminating the measures by which, Shelley believes, 'to re-assume | An empire o'er the disentangled Doom.' The poet proposes a system of thought, speech, and action that descends from Prometheus's ideology to ensure, more generally, that tyranny, if it dissolves the millennium, is, once again, supplanted by love. What transpires in Shelley's proposal of this system, however, is his interest in safeguarding human nature, to guide humanity away from inharmonious emotions, and towards the acceptance of 'Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance' as, the poet stresses, 'This *alone* is Life, Joy,

---

[18] *Eupsychia*, interpreted to mean high courage, high spirit, or nobility, is literally translated as 'goodness of soul' and opposed to *kakopsychia*, 'bad natural qualities' (see *eupsychia* in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), I, p. 740; and *kakopsychia* in Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, p. 864). John Addington Symonds identifies *eupsychia* as Euripides' chosen concept to demonstrate the ideological shift evident in his late-fifth-century BC tragedies:

> The old religious basis of Nemesis having been virtually abandoned by him, Euripides fell back upon the morality of passions and emotions. For his cardinal virtue he chose what the Greeks call *εὐψυχία*, stoutheartedness, pluck in the noblest sense of the word—that temper of the soul which prepared the individual to sacrifice himself for the State, and to triumph in pain or death or dogged endurance rather than give way to feebler instincts. (*Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), II, pp. 38-39)

Although originally applied to characterise those most apt to rule, to describe the courage shown in battle by the *aristos*, *eupsychia* came to be associated with the fortitude of moral character (in a Hellenic context) possessed by individuals regardless of the circumstance of their birth, as exemplified by the farmer to whom Electra is given in marriage in Euripides' *Electra* (*c*. 420 BC). It is here employed to illustrate the aspect of Shelley's moral system that is exemplified by his Prometheus.

Empire, and Victory' (IV. 578, emphasis added). Shelley's concern is to guarantee that humankind's moral and intellectual development is not compromised, that it remains, after having improved during the previous struggle, 'Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free', the necessary state 'to re-assume' a stable millennium. The poet's concern, ultimately, is to ensure human nature does not regress with the potential regression of history, that the moral and psychological development of humanity is not lost with the return of a cycle that attempts to dogmatically enslave the human intellect and will. From *Prometheus Unbound*, as indeed from his entire oeuvre, Shelley rises forth as a champion of human possibility, demonstrated in his desire to not see humanity succumb to its own evil tendencies and its indolent acceptance of tyranny and dogmatism (here personified in the 'Destruction', 'serpent', and 'Doom' that are not exterminated even during a millennium), and his belief in its capability to achieve a millennial state of existence.

Coda

‘Must hate and death return?’: Moving the Wheels of History between Apocalypse and Millennium in *Hellas*

Shelley opens the Preface to *Hellas* (1822) with a reflection on his choice of poetical form for what would become his second lyrical drama:

> The subject, in its present state, is insusceptible of being treated otherwise than lyrically, and if I have called this poem a drama from the circumstance of its being composed in dialogue, the licence is not greater than that which has been assumed by other poets who have called their productions epics, only because they have been divided into twelve or twenty-four books. (*SMW* 548)

In asserting that the subject-matter of *Hellas* could only have been treated in a lyrical drama, Shelley gives expression to what his oeuvre exemplifies: his poetical and prose exercises are strategic, the result of a careful attention to form tailored to the subject of the composition as well as to its intended audiences. Only the millennial force of poetry could be employed to discuss the issue of the liberation of Greece from Ottoman oppression, on which, as Shelley understood it, depended ‘the cause of civilization and social improvement’ (*SMW* 549). Shelley’s engagement with the notion of Ancient Greece in *Hellas* continues his views on this particular historical period expressed in other compositions and private letters, and his discussion of it in the lyrical drama is no more idealistic than his considerations of Ancient Greece are elsewhere in his writings. Shelley had an emotional response to Greece, but his engagement with it, as a nation and concept, was predominantly intellectual, influenced by his travels and by an appreciation of art and architecture, but, above all, by reading, in the original Greek as well as in translation, texts from a wide variety of disciplines, regions, and periods. His approach was significantly different, for instance, from that of Lord Byron, who understood Greece for the ways in which it could be used as a symbol and metaphor.[1] Byron’s response to the Greek War of Independence is often juxtaposed with Shelley’s, and considered for the

[1] See Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 3-4, 196.

realism that Shelley's is not perceived as embodying, but which this coda reassesses. Shelley's Preface to *Hellas* reflects on what he considers to be the degradation of modern Greece, when compared to its past; this degradation is the result, Shelley explains, of 'moral and political slavery' which, when 'dissolved', will give way to a millennial Greece (*SMW* 550), a 'brighter Hellas' (l. 1066) free from what tainted the Ancient Greeks, their treatment of women, their reliance on slavery, and the immorality of their divinities. *Hellas* will thus be considered, in this coda, for the ways in which it continues, extends, and reaffirms issues and discussions raised in previous chapters, especially Shelley's understanding of pacifism and violence, and his considerations on the cyclical movement of history.

The writing of *Hellas* is underpinned by a desire to show his support for the Greek cause in the Greek War of Independence, but, more importantly, to mobilise English forces to act in defence of Greek liberty. Shelley thus addresses the 'esoteric few' (To Charles Ollier, 16 February 1821; *Letters* II, 263) who would be the immediate audience of *Hellas*, a lyrical drama which, although underlined by similar concerns to *The Mask of Anarchy*, does not share its formal construction and tone: 'The English permit their oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish tyrant, and to brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilization' (*SMW* 550). *Hellas* has been considered as betraying a more favourable view of Christianity than that which Shelley expresses in other writings, but his inclusion, here, of Christianity alongside 'domestic happiness' and 'civilization' does not signal that his support of the Greek cause implies a support of orthodox Christianity.[2] This statement from the Preface is less concerned with Shelley's personal views about this religious system than with the Christianity of his audience. Shelley shows that *Hellas* is a programme to rouse the 'English people' (*SMW* 550) to side with the Greeks by appealing to what he sees as their natural inclination to protect the organised religion to which they adhere, for England, itself an oppressed nation, to realise that its 'natural sympathy' lies with the Greek cause.

There is an indication of the audience that Shelley intends for *Hellas* in what has now become a memorable line from the Preface: 'We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece' (*SMW* 549). This is not a lyrical drama for a universal readership, but neither was it thusly conceived; it would be difficult for the 'exoteric' (To Leigh Hunt, 14-18 November 1819; *Letters* II, 152) audience of, for instance, *The Mask of*

[2] Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill note that *Hellas* 'offers a more favourable if strictly qualified view of Christianity than one finds elsewhere in S.'s poetry' (Headnote to *Hellas*, *SMW* 805).

Anarchy to feel 'Greek' or identify the Greek germ of 'our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts' without access to the sort of education that would have facilitated this understanding.[3] The unity implied in Shelley's 'we' is not necessarily of what he considered to be his esoteric and exoteric audiences, but that of diverging political factions in England which wrestled with the belief in the need to support the Greek cause, to whom Shelley appeals by presenting Greece as a common ancestor.[4] Yet the idea of Greece, when summoned in philhellenic discourses, was not consistent, invoked as a synecdoche for specific regions or periods of its history, but also appropriated and idealised to suit particular partisan views in ways that differed from the historical reality of Ancient Hellenic society.[5] For Shelley, the period of Greek enlightenment was delimited to the fifth century BC – 'the century which preceded the death of Socrates' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 682-83) – restricted from an earlier consideration which also included the fourth century BC.[6] This period of Greek splendour – which, despite its flaws, 'produced so unparalleled a progress during that short period in literature and the arts' – Shelley perceived to be 'the most memorable period in the history of the world' (*A Discourse on the Manner of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love*, composed in 1818; Notopoulos, 404), a phrase which echoes his hopes for his own historical reality, that 'our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 700). These terms with which he closes *A Defence* offer a parallel between his own time and that of Greek excellence, asserting his belief in the potential for his contemporaries to surpass the achievements of the Greeks, at a time

---

[3] An education that would emphasise this Greek inheritance would permit an acknowledgement of the sort of John Lemprière's in the following statement, whose philhellenism echoes Shelley's statement in the Preface of *Hellas*:

> I am bold to acknowledge, that I feel for the distresses of that land, from the mental resources of whose inhabitants, in the age of Homer, of Thucydides, of Pericles, and of Demosthenes, England herself has derived her admiration and her adoption of freedom of government, of liberality of sentiment, and of patriotic enthusiasm. I earnestly, therefore, entreat you, as the Editor of a widely disseminated paper, to call upon every Englishman to contribute his mite, for the emancipation of those provinces, which are rightly to be denominated the cradle of arts, of arms, of science, and of polished learning. ('The Greeks', *The Examiner*, 14 October 1821, Issue 719, p. 644)

[4] Jennifer Wallace explains that 'it is possible to detect voices from both conservative and liberal groups among the philhellenes' (*Shelley and Greece*, p. 182). Indeed, Greece was appropriated by diverging voices with different aims. If, for liberal groups, Greece was a symbol of resistance to the status quo, conservative voices articulated their philhellenism in nationalistic terms, for to defend Greece then meant the defence of Britain and its values, perceived as stemming from a Greek cultural background. The private philhellenism of conservative groups, however, clashed with public political interests, as 'classicist sympathies' conflicted with 'British imperial interests' (Mark Kipperman, 'History and Ideality: The Politics of Shelley's "Hellas"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 30.2 (1991), 147-68 (152)).

[5] See Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, p. 12.

[6] In *A Discourse on the Manner of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love*, Shelley's introduction to his translation of Plato's *Symposium*, the poet notes that 'The period which intervened between the birth of Pericles [*c*. 495 BC] and the death of Aristotle [322 BC], is undoubtedly, whether considered in itself or with reference to the effects which it had produced upon the subsequent destinies of civilised man, the most memorable in the history of the world' (Notopoulos, 404). *A Discourse* is consulted from the hitherto most authoritative edition of this text, found in Notopoulos, 404-13.

when society had improved on the attitudes and tendencies which compromised the morality of the Greeks.

Shelley counterbalanced his idealisation of this specific period of Ancient Greece by a discussion that proposed to 'see their errors, their weaknesses, their daily actions, their familiar conversations, and catch the tone of their society' (*A Discourse*; Notopoulos, 407). He points to cultural, religious, and political aspects of the society of the Greeks that 'deformed' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 682) and 'were obstacles to the improvement of the human race' (*A Discourse*; Notopoulos, 406). Shelley shows his awareness that divine moral perfection was not a characteristic of Greek religion; although 'The Grecian gods seem indeed to have been personally more innocent' than divinities of other polytheistic societies, 'it cannot be said that as far as temperance and chastity are concerned, they gave so edifying an example as their successor' (notes to *Hellas*, *SMW* 587). He also identifies the reliance of Greek society on slavery and its degrading treatment of women, which he links to their 'regulations and the sentiments respecting sexual intercourse' (Notopoulos, 407), as complicating their morality. Shelley's proposition, that Greek homosexuality originated in the debasement of women and 'thus deprived of their natural object, [the Greeks] sought a compensation and a substitute' (*A Discourse*; Notopoulos, 409), is arguable, but, as Michael O'Neill remarks, it is Shelley's feminism which underlies his consideration of heterosexuality as an expression of the equality of the sexes.[7] The argument of *A Discourse*, however, is aware that relativities in approach to moral attitudes need to be contextualised in their specific historical circumstance, and is concerned with the impact that assumptions of Greek cultural practices have on the potential of his contemporary society: 'When we discover how far 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!' (*A Discourse*; Notopoulos, 407). Shelley's engagement with Greece emphasises how it can be employed by the Europe of his present time in a comparative, constructive exercise, to realise the extent of its improvement relative to its past, but also to acknowledge that its progress needs to continue, and from which the 'many to whom the Greek language is inaccessible […] ought not to be excluded […] to possess an exact and comprehensive conception of the history of man' (Notopoulos, 407).

[7] See Michael O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 66-68, for a balanced discussion of Shelley's *A Discourse*.

***

Shelley characterises the transition between apocalypse and millennium in *Hellas* with the use of 'dissolved' (Preface to *Hellas*, *SMW* 550), when modern Greece, as Shelley sees it, will be free from the 'moral and political slavery' that assails it (*SMW* 550); but this does not imply that he envisions this process to be instantaneous or conflict-free. Violence underlies this lyrical drama: the apocalyptic moment is immanent – 'This is the age of the war of the oppressed against the oppressors' (*SMW* 550) – a moment that will include destructive confrontations and the fall of the tyrant, not shown (though prophesied) in *Hellas* but in line with the apocalyptic propositions of Shelley's previous works. Yet Shelley's pacifism prompts him to consider, in *Hellas* as he does elsewhere, the ways in which the aggressive force of pacifism is used and the morality of the intention that drives the application of violence. It is in this context that Shelley admonishes the actions of the Greeks in the War of Independence. The second messenger enters the scene to report an Ottoman defeat, reaffirming Mahmud's fears:

> the lust of blood
> Which made our warriors drunk, is quenched in death;
> But like a fiery plague breaks out anew
> In deeds which make the Christian cause look pale
> In its own light. (ll. 551-55)

The phrase 'In its own light' emphasises Shelley's reprobation of the approach which the Greeks have taken in their fight for independence. The 'deeds' of the 'Christian cause' are 'pale' not by comparison with the 'deeds' of the tyrant or Ottoman enemies, who 'pay themselves | With Christian blood' (ll. 241-42) and with 'gold, which fills not' (l. 257). The 'Christian cause' makes itself 'look pale' for the way in which it responds to Ottoman attacks, for the massacres of the enemy that compromise the morality of the cause of freedom for which the Greeks struggle.

Shelley's acknowledgement of the issues that complicate the morality of the 'Christian cause' betrays his 'newspaper erudition' (Preface to *Hellas*, *SMW* 549).[8] Contemporary reports

[8] Possible sources for Shelley's 'display of newspaper erudition' about the Greek War of Independence include Leigh Hunt's *The Examiner*, a philhellenic publication with editorials concerned with the mobilisation of the English in favour of the Greek cause (see note 2, above, for an example of the tone of this newspaper's support of the Greeks); and the Parisian publication *Galignani's Messenger*, which had a less reformist agenda than *The*

of the Greek War of Independence reveal the brutality of both Greeks and Ottomans, showing the pertinence of Shelley's statement in *Hellas*. An account written in 1821 declared that 'Each party tried to destroy the other. It was a war of extermination. The Turks were cruel; but the Greeks were still more so'.[9] The *Hereford Journal* gives an account of events relating to the beginning of the war with allusions to the atrocities of rebellious Greeks: 'Advices from all parts of Greece represent that the insurrection is becoming daily more extensive and formidable. In the Morea its progress has been most rapid. At Patras a massacre of the Turks, of three days' duration, took place.'[10] The concern that Shelley expresses in lines 551-55 of *Hellas* – that in retaliating like the tyrant, the Greeks jeopardise the success of their millennial enterprise – is explicit in the poet's private letters. He informs Thomas Medwin of the insurrection of the Greeks 'to vindicate' their 'freedom', with which 'Massacres of the Turks have begun in various parts' and thus ended Shelley's 'Grecian project' – his intended travels across Greece – 'even if other circumstances would permit my being one of the party' (4 April 1821; *Letters* II, 280). Writing to Mary Shelley, the poet laments what he understands as the symbiotic relationship of tyrant and slave:

> We have good rumours of the Greeks here & [of] a Russian war. I hardly wish the Russians to take any part in it—My maxim is with Aeschylus *το δυσσεβὲς—μετα μεν πλειονα τικτει, αφετερᾳ δ' εικοτα γεννᾳ*—There is a Greek exercise for you.—How should slaves produce any thing but tyranny—even as the seed produces the plant.— (8 August 1821; *Letters* II, 324-25)

The anger and hatred that drive the Greek massacres of the Ottomans are incompatible with true millennial progress, Shelley suggests, for, in their replication of the attitudes of the tyrant, the oppressed continue the cycle of retaliative destruction and punishment that is blind to social justice and respect of human liberties.

Shelley's awareness of the 'deeds which make the Christian cause look pale | In its own light' (ll. 554-55) and its inclusion in *Hellas* gives nuance to his support of the Greek cause. Shelley's support of the Greek cause has been critically perceived as historically myopic and idealistic, but Jennifer Wallace has demonstrated that, rather, Shelley's engagement with

---

Examiner. See Cian Duffy, 'Percy Shelley's "display of newspaper erudition" in *Hellas, A Lyrical Drama* (1822)', *Notes and Queries*, 61.4 (2014), 519-23.

[9] John Martin Augustus Scholz, *Travels in the Countries Between Alexandria and Parætonium, The Lybian Desert, Siwa, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, in 1821* (London: Richard Phillips & Co., 1822), p. 16.

[10] 'Sunday's Post', *Hereford Journal*, 30 May 1821, Issue 2650, p. 2.

Greece is consciously aware and deconstructive of philhellenic myths.[11] The importance of lines 551-55 is evident in their ability to allow us to re-examine *Hellas* in light of Shelley's pacifism and its iterations in other compositions. Shelley's support of the Greek cause is rooted in his belief in the liberation of the oppressed from the chains of slavery, and, not least, in his high praise for what he considered Ancient Greece to have been; but his support does not imply condoning the 'lust of blood' (l. 551) or offensive massacres. Shelley's use of 'pale' to characterise Christian deeds in *Hellas* is significant, because it is the only occasion in his oeuvre in which 'pale', an adjective Shelley ascribes to tyranny, is employed to discuss the extent to which the actions of the oppressed weaken, complicate and obstruct, the cause of freedom. When Hassan describes a Greek defeat by the Ottomans, he is accused by Mahmud of having 'painted | Their ruin in the hues of our success' (ll. 452-53), for his description is coloured by Shelley's perception of the heroism of martyred Greeks. A typical Shelleyan Phantom arises from the spirit of the fallen, honourable Greek, who scans the Ottomans as 'giants who look pale | When the crushed worm rebels beneath your tread' (ll. 425-26), reflecting the fears that Mahmud expresses in lines 351-58. Pale tyrants, an allusion to their weakness or imminent fall, are recurrent in Shelley's works: *The Devil's Walk*, l. 131; *Laon and Cythna*, V. li. 6. 2268, VII. vi. 2883, VII. viii. 2893; *Rosalind and Helen*, ll. 424, 464; *Ode to Liberty*, XVI. 228; *The Witch of Atlas* (composed in 1820), LXII. 540; *Ode to Naples* (composed in 1820), l. 96 (Version A; *Longman* III, 641). Tracing the usage of 'pale' thus offers an insight into Shelley's pacifism: when tyrants and slaves permit revenge, anger, and punishment to guide the use of violence, they are both weak, and thus the millennium is postponed.

The admonition that transpires in lines 551-55 against retaliative violence is reinforced in the third choral ode. In spite of its philhellenism, *Hellas* is a lyrical drama that is highly aware that the outcome of the war was still undecided at the time of writing:

> The world's eyeless charioteer,
> Destiny, is hurrying by!
> What faith is crushed, what empire bleeds,
> Beneath her earthquake-footed steeds?
> What eagle-wingèd victory sits
> At her right hand? what shadow flits

[11] Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, pp. 196-97.

Before? what splendour rolls behind? (ll. 711-17)

Shelley would urge, whoever is victorious, whatever faith and empire wins the struggle, to not retaliate and hate, 'For | Revenge and wrong bring forth their kind' (ll. 728-29). Pity is not 'pale'; it is not weakness to show compassion for the defeated, especially the tyrant. Pity should be renewed as wisdom and strength, 'pay that broken shrine again, | Love for hate and tears for blood' (ll. 736-37), in an act of millennial reconceptualisation that echoes the suggestion of the concluding lines of *Prometheus Unbound*, that 'This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be | Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free; | This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory' (IV. 576-78).

It is noteworthy that the only two lyrical dramas that Shelley composed during his lifetime see him engage in a dialogue with Aeschylus. *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas* are twin antithetical lyrical dramas that, in using Aeschylean tragedies as models and points of departure, allow Shelley to offer different perspectives – that of the oppressed and the tyrant, respectively – to reflect on morality and violence. Hearing Mahmud's perspective in *Hellas* reinforces traditional notions of tyranny. *Hellas* gives an extended space to the absolutist power of tyranny, to discussions of bloodshed and cruelty towards the fallen (both Greeks and Ottomans), to the arrogance and egotistical character of the oppressor (especially when speaking to Ahasuerus (see ll. 741-61)). Yet Mahmud becomes, as the lyrical drama progresses, increasingly more pathetic, especially so when faced with the impending collapse of his power and empire. Indeed, Jennifer Wallace reminds us that, in creating Mahmud in light of William Shakespeare's Macbeth rather than Aeschylus's Xerxes, Shelley's depiction of his tyrant 'increase[s] the reader's sympathy for him'.[12] The sympathetic portrayal of Mahmud also reaffirms what underpins Shelley's pacifism and moral approach to violence. That Shelley's pathetic tyrant has been constructed to elicit compassion and sympathy from the reader highlights the poet's suggestion that 'Pity, not punishment' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I. 404) should characterise both the relation of the oppressed to the oppressor, and the former's understanding of social justice. When Shelley defines the 'science of morals' as 'the *voluntary* conduct of men in relation to themselves or others' (*A Discourse*; Notopoulos, 406; emphasis added), he is emphasising the importance of intention, and how goodness and compassion should be extended to all men, including, and especially, the tyrant.

The reader's sympathy for Mahmud is more poignant in the moment when the tyrant is forced to accept that history develops cyclically, to which conclusion he arrives in his dialogue

[12] Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, p. 203.

with Ahasuerus. Shelley's note that Ahasuerus is not 'a regular conjuror' (notes to *Hellas*, *SMW* 586) is important, for it shows that Ahasuerus is less concerned with supernatural occurrences but conceived, instead, in light of Shelley's perception of the figure of the poet. His prophetic talent is translated in his ability to interpret history: he understands history to be a continuum of 'cycles of generation and of ruin' (l. 154) because

> from his eye looks forth
> A life of unconsumèd thought which pierces
> The present, and the past, and the to-come. (ll. 146-48)

'Unconsumèd thought' concentrates in itself a variety of meanings. It alludes to the prophet's extensive knowledge, through which, Hassan concludes, Ahasuerus 'May have attained to sovereignty and science | Over those strong and secret things and thoughts | Which others fear and know not' (ll. 159-61), terms that parallel John Milton's Pensive Man, for whom 'Till old experience do attain | To something like prophetic strain' (*Il Penseroso*, ll. 173-74). Line 147 also implies that Ahasuerus does not forget, especially the teachings of history which provide him with the 'prophetic strain' of his vision, an understanding that surpasses that of the common man.

That Shelley saw the potential of early-nineteenth-century Greece to fulfil the promise of Ancient Greece is revealed in his construction of *Hellas* as a lyrical drama primarily preoccupied with the cycles that history describes. Cycles imply a repetition of the past – 'The coming age is shadowed on the past | As on a glass' (ll. 805-06) says Ahasuerus – and indeed this is reaffirmed in the last choral ode, constructed as a sequence of grammatical structures suggestive of implied comparisons with the past. New versions of past places, occurrences, and heroes have characteristics of their old iterations – '*Another* Orpheus sings *again*', for instance, and 'A *new* Ulysses leaves *once more*' (ll. 1074, 1076; emphasis added). Yet there is a sense that, though 'The world's great age begins anew, | The golden years return' (ll. 1060-61), this Hellas is 'brighter' (l. 1066): replication is not absolute, because there has been progression in religion and morals:[13]

> Saturn and Love their long repose

[13] See Michael O'Neill, '"Wrecks of a Dissolving Dream": Shelley's Art of Ambivalence in *Hellas*', in *The Neglected Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Webb and Alan M. Weinberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 239-60 (p. 246).

Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers
But votive tears and symbol flowers. (ll. 1090-95)

The new religion of this 'brighter Hellas' does not reproduce that of Ancient Greece, for it, too, is subject to Shelley's perception of the process of progress: the process of supersession implies 'incorporating into itself a portion of that which it supersedes' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 690) without full replication. Saturn recalls the beginning of the Golden Age in Virgil's Eclogue IV, but the associations here extend beyond those circumscribed to the Roman (or its Greek equivalent) god of agriculture and renewal. Love, equally, extends beyond its mythological embodiments, to represent, more generally, the idealised force of universal unity which Shelley sees as crucially moving the wheels of history between apocalypse and millennium. In their universality, these forces are 'more bright and good | Than all who fell, than One who rose, | Than many unsubdued', but the process of supersession makes itself felt here by having reformed forms of worship. No longer is reverence and awe expressed through 'gold' and 'blood', an association with tyrannical implications (see *Hellas*, ll. 247-48, and *The Mask of Anarchy*, ll. 238-40, 294); they are reconfigured in innocuous expressions, to worship wisdom and pity.

All of the cyclical images of the last choral ode of *Hellas*, however, lend themselves to a deconstructive exercise. Shelley's use of the ode is an adherence to the Greek convention, but its pertinence to *Hellas* is shown in the ode's formal function as a piece for celebration and lament. The interdependence of content and form is here at play: the ode is an appropriate form through which Shelley can express his regret, with 'little fear, and less surprise' (*The Mask of Anarchy*, l. 345), for the failure he anticipates of his desire for the reincarnation of the excellence of Ancient Greece. Therefore, the initial positivity that transpires in 'The earth doth like a snake renew | Her winter weeds outworn' (ll. 1062-63), like that of all of Shelley's natural cycles, is questioned by the proposed analogy, for the snake, and thus the earth, will shed its skin again. This last choral ode borrows its images from Virgil's Eclogue IV, but this eclogue also reinforces Shelley's characteristic scepticism. Virgil's text does not guarantee that the Golden Age – inaugurated with an auspicious, though unidentified, birth – will not be followed by a new cycle of violence and chaos, and so, despite the return of the reign of Saturn and of Justice (IV. 4-10), 'a few traces of old-time sin live on' (IV. 4-10, LCL 63). Virgil's Golden Age

also lends itself to a deconstructive exercise: if the Golden Age returns, so will a process of deterioration – and the indication that 'old-time sin' remains suggests as much – with which return the lesser ages of historical development (Silver, Brazen, Iron). The harmony of Virgil's Golden Age is perturbed, as is that of Shelley's 'brighter Hellas'.

Shelley's 'brighter Hellas' is, indeed, 'brighter', but it has not been able to fully relinquish the past degradation that contributed to its original failure. The process towards reformation is not complete, and Shelley's pragmatic idealism is expressed in his scepticism about the permanence of the millennium:

> O cease! must hate and death return?
> Cease! must men kill and die?
> Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy.
> The world is weary of the past,
> O might it die or rest at last! (ll. 1096-101)

That Shelley desires and envisions a 'brighter Hellas' confirms Michael O'Neill's consideration about *Hellas* as a composition in which hope 'is at once under strain and capable of a desperate resilience', which is equally true of Shelley's entire oeuvre.[14] Shelley is able, as a poet, to conquer the difficulty of hoping amid despair, of 'anticipat[ing] however darkly a period of regeneration and happiness', that 'hazardous exercise of the faculty which bards possess or feign' (notes to *Hellas*, *SMW* 586). Yet Shelley is not mistaken as to the gradual, convoluted, and complex nature of reform, and thus the millennium he projects, his 'brighter Hellas', deteriorates. If the nature of cycles, however, signifies that projected millenniums are bound to fail, it also promises the return of the millennium and with it, a more reformed – so Shelley would hope – state than its previous iteration. What is crucial to understand regarding the failure of Shelley's millennial projects is that the emphasis is less on the failure of the millennium, than on the ability of recovering millennial modes of existence, of humanity being able to use whatever progress was achieved as a point of departure for the design of a new millennial project, as Demogorgon suggests in his final speech in *Prometheus Unbound* IV – 'These are the spells', alluding to lines 570-78, 'by which to *re-assume* | An empire o'er the disentangled doom' (IV. 568-69, emphasis added).

[14] O'Neill, '"Wrecks of a Dissolving Dream": Shelley's Art of Ambivalence in *Hellas*', p. 241.

What history shows, to an attentive reader like Shelley, is that the spirit of the world remains intact, even if circumstances might change, even if 'New shapes they still may weave, | New gods, new laws receive' (*Hellas*, ll. 207-08):

> Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
> From creation to decay,
> Like the bubbles on a river
> Sparkling, bursting, borne away. (ll. 197-200)

Shelley learns, and thus Ahasuerus later explains, that cycles are the pattern and process from which no living being can escape, an understanding that pervades 'Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon' (1822) and explains Shelley's insistence on its printing at the end of *Hellas*. Everything in nature obeys a cyclical law: Hassan sees in the lunar cycle a sign of Ottoman victory – 'Even as the moon | Renews itself—' (ll. 347-48) – which Mahmud rejects – 'Shall we not be renewed!' (l. 348). However, despite Mahmud's rejection of Hassan's interpretation, *Hellas* suggests a parallel historical trajectory for Greeks and Ottomans. Shelley anticipates a Greek victory, but his 'brighter Hellas' is not permanent, and, likewise, the fall of Mahmud's tyranny is predicted, but the potential for Ottoman rule to rise again is rooted in its destruction. 'Islam must fall' (l. 887) and thus, in terms that parallel the closing couplet of 'Ode to the West Wind',

> The autumn of a greener faith is come,
> And wolfish change, like winter, howls to strip
> The foliage in which Fame, the eagle, built
> Her eyrie, while Dominion whelped below. (ll. 871-74)

Yet a botanical analogy, involving Shelley's favoured trees and seeds, suggests the continuation of the cycle, with a renewed force for Ottoman power:

> And if the trunk be dry, yet shall the seed
> Unfold itself even in the shape of that
> Which gathers birth in its decay. (ll. 889-91)

Hellas is thus concerned with patterns and processes, and how they reflect and are reflected in the inexorability of cycles. If the movement of history must be cyclical, Shelley concludes, then 'Thought, | Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion, | Reason, Imagination' can be relied upon for they 'cannot die' (ll. 795-97). Thought is posed in the lyrical drama as the only force that can reconfigure the patterns of history, supersede the contingencies of history, which is true both of the poet, who envisions a Greek victory, and of Mahmud, who conjures imaginary phantoms that to him certify an Ottoman defeat. What determines this reconfiguration is the state of the human mind, its predisposition to hope or despair, or even to let neither state dominate. Shelley hopes for a Greek victory, aware of what it means in terms of the sustenance of morality, liberty, and love; but, ultimately, *Hellas* shows that either victory, Greek or Ottoman, has the same impact on the development of history, of the whirling 'cycles | Of desolation and of loveliness' (ll. 746-47). *Hellas* suggests that it does not matter which empire wins the struggle, because the scales of power will, eventually, be upturned again, and new cycles resume. As is characteristic of Shelley, however, this despairing conclusion is counterbalanced by a belief that 'fragments' can be 'reassemble[d] | And build themselves again impregnably | In a diviner clime | To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime, | Which frowns above the idle foam of Time' (ll. 1003-07). It is Shelley's greatest achievement to remain hopeful amid such despairing realities and realisations, to believe in the human capacity to 'unlearn | Such bitter faith' (*Mazenghi*, ll. 5-6) as revenge and hate, to relinquish its 'pale imaginings of visioned wrong, | And all the code of custom's lawless law' (*The Witch of Atlas*, LXII. 540-41), to be good, and compassionate, and love.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Aeschylus, *Fragments*, ed. and trans. by Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 505 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009)

—— *Oresteia: Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides*, ed. and trans. by Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 146 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009)

—— *Persians. Seven Against Thebes. Suppliants. Prometheus Bound*, ed. and trans. by Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 145 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009)

Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum (London: Everyman's Library, 1995)

Adamson, Carlene A., ed., '*The Witch of Atlas' Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 6*, The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts V (New York: Garland, 1997)

Apollodorus, *The Library, Volume I: Books 1-3.9*, trans. by James G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 121 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921)

Ausonius, Paulinus Pellaeus, *Volume II: Books 18-20. Paulinus Eucharisticus*, trans. by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library 115 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921)

Babrius, Phaedrus, *Fables*, trans. by Ben Edwin Perry, Loeb Classical Library 436 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965)

Bacon, John, Jr, 'General Dundas's Monument', *The Morning Chronicle*, 7 January 1806, Issue 11432

Barcus, James E., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975)

Bennett, Betty T., ed., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980-1988)

Bothe, Friedrich Heinrich, *Aeschyli Dramata, quae Supersunt et Deperditorum Fragmenta* (Lipsiae: Weidmannia, 1805)

Brett-Smith, H. F. B., ed., *Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry; Shelley's Defence of Poetry; Browning's Essay on Shelley* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1929)

Brewster, David, *A Treatise on the Kaleidoscope* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1819)

Butter, P. H., ed., *Shelley: Alastor and Other Poems, Prometheus Unbound with Other Poems, Adonais* (London: Collins Publishers, 1970)

Cameron, Kenneth Neill, and Donald H. Reiman, eds, *Shelley and his Circle, 1773-1822*, 10 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961-2002)

Carroll, Robert, and Stephen Prickett, eds, *The Bible: Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; reissued 2008)

Christmas, Henry, *The Republic of Fools: Being the History of the State and People of Abdera, in Thrace, Translated from the German of C. M. von Wieland*, 2 vols (London: W. H. Allen, 1861)

Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. by J. E. King, Loeb Classical Library 141 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927)

Collins, Thomas J., and Vivienne J. Rundle, eds, *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory: Concise Edition* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000; reprinted with corrections 2005)

Cook, Elizabeth, ed., *John Keats: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; reissued 2008)

Crook, Nora, ed., *The 'Charles the First' Draft Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 17*, The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts XII (New York: Garland, 1991)

Crook, Nora and Timothy Webb, eds, *The Faust Draft Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 18*, The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts XIX (New York: Garland, 1997)

'Crown and Anchor Meeting; And Proposed Smithfield Meeting', *The Examiner*, 22 August 1819, Issue 608

Darbishire, Helen, and Ernest de Selincourt, eds, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 2nd edn, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-1959)

Darwin, Erasmus, *The Botanic Garden: A Poem, in Two Parts*, 2nd edn (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1807)

—— *The Temple of Nature, or, The Origin of Society: A Poem, with Philosophical Notes* (London: J. Johnson, 1803)

'Disturbances at Manchester', *The Examiner*, 22 August 1819, Issue 608

Donovan, Jack, and Cian Duffy, eds, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose* (London: Penguin Classics, 2016)

Erdman, David V., ed., *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-Plate Commentary* (New York: Anchor Press, 1974; New York: Dover Publications, 1992)

Euripides, *Cyclops. Alcestis. Medea.*, ed. and trans. by David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 12 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994)

—— *Suppliant Women. Electra. Heracles.*, ed. and trans. by David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 9 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998)

Everest, Kelvin, and Geoffrey Matthews, eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, I: 1804-1817 (London: Longman, 1989)

Everest, Kelvin, and Geoffrey Matthews, eds, Jack Donovan, Ralph Pite, and Michael Rossington, contributing eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, II: 1817-1819 (Harlow: Longman, 2000)

Everest, Kelvin, Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, and Michael Rossington, eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, III: 1819-1820 (Harlow: Longman, 2011)

Everest, Kelvin, Jack Donovan, and Michael Rossington, eds, *The Poems of Shelley*, IV: 1820-1821 (Harlow: Longman, 2014)

Farnaby, Thomas, *Florilegium, Epigrammatum Græcorum, Eorumque Latino Versu à varijs redditorum* (London: Felix Kynstonius, 1629)

Feldman, Paula R., and Diana Scott-Kilvert, eds, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987)

Flaxman, John, 'The Furies Pursuing their Victim (from *The Eumenides*)', etching, from *Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeschylus, Designed by John Flaxman, Engraved by Thomas Piroli; The Original Drawings in the Possession of the Countess Dowager Spencer* (London: Jane Matthews, 1795)

—— 'Orestes Pursued by the Furies (from *Choephorae*)', etching, from *Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeschylus, Designed by John Flaxman, Engraved by Thomas Piroli; The Original Drawings in the Possession of the Countess Dowager Spencer* (London: Jane Matthews, 1795)

Garnett, Richard, *Relics of Shelley* (London: Edward Moxon, 1862)

Gomperz, Theodor, *Philodem Über Frömmigkeit* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1866)

Goslee, Nancy Moore, ed., *The Homeric Hymns and 'Prometheus' Drafts Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 12*, The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts XVIII (New York: Garland, 1996)

Grant, Mary, ed. and trans., *The Myths of Hyginus*, Humanistic Studies 34 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1960)

Greenblatt, Stephen, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1997; reissued 2008)

Halmi, Nicholas, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano, eds, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004)

Hennin, Michel, and Carl de Vinck, *Charlotte Corday vertilgte das anarchische Ungeheuer Marat*, *c*. [1793-1799?], [Germany?], Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. by A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 117 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920)

Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia.*, ed. and trans. by Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library 57 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018)

Homer, *Iliad, Volume II: Books 13-24*, trans. by A. T. Murray, revised by William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library 171 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925)

—— *Odyssey, Volume I: Books 1-12*, trans. by A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 104 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919)

—— *Odyssey, Volume II: Books 13-24*, trans. by A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 105 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919)

Homeric Hymns. Homeric Apocrypha. Lives of Homer., ed. and trans. by Martin L. West, Loeb Classical Library 496 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003)

Horace, *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry.*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926)

Hunt, Leigh, *The Descent of Liberty: A Mask* (London: Gale, Curtis, and Fenner, 1815)

Ingpen, Roger, and Walter E. Peck, *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Benn, 1965)

Jones, Frederic L., ed., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964)

Keynes, Geoffrey, ed., *The Letters of William Blake: With Related Documents*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)

Knerr, Anthony D., ed., *Shelley's Adonais: A Critical Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)

Laertius, Diogenes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume I: Books 1-5,* trans. by R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library 184 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925)

Leader, Zachary, and Michael O'Neill, eds, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; reissued with corrections 2009)

Lemprière, John, 'The Greeks', *The Examiner*, 14 October 1821, Issue 719

Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead. Dialogues of the Sea-Gods. Dialogues of the Gods. Dialogues of the Courtesans.*, trans. by M. D. MacLeod, Loeb Classical Library 431 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961)

—— *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the 'Salaries Posts in Great Houses.' Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said 'You're a Prometheus in Words.' The Ship or The Wishes.* trans. by K. Kilburn, Loeb Classical Library 430 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959)

Marchand, Leslie A., ed., *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-1996)

Matthews, G. M., ed., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964)

McGann, Jerome, gen. ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-1993)

Medwin, Thomas, *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted during a Residence with his Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London: Henry Colburn, 1824)

—— *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847)

—— *The Shelley Papers* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1833)

Moore, Thomas, *Epistles, Odes, and other Poems* (London: James Carpenter, 1806)

—— *Odes of Anacreon: Translated into English Verse, with Notes* (London: John Stockdale, 1800)

Murray, E. B., ed., *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)

Orgel, Stephen, and Jonathan Goldberg, eds, *John Milton: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; reissued 2008)

'Parliamentary Proceedings', *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 9 March 1831, Issue 2541

Pliny, *Natural History, Volume II: Books 3-7*, trans. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 352 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942)

—— *Natural History, Volume IX: Books 33-35*, trans. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 394 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962)

—— *Natural History, Volume X: Books 36-37*, trans. by D. E. Eichholz, Loeb Classical Library 419 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952)

Price, Richard, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, 3rd edn (London: George Stafford, 1789)

Quinn, Mary A., ed., *Shelley's 1819-1821 Huntington Notebook: A Facsimile of Huntington MS. HM 2176*, Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics VI (New York: Garland, 1994)

'Reform Meeting at Worcester', *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 6 October 1831, Issue 6717

Reiman, Donald H., and Michael J. Neth, eds, *The 'Hellas' Notebook, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 7*, The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts XVI (New York: Garland, 1994)

Reiman, Donald H., and Neil Fraistat, eds, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2002)

Reiman, Donald H., Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, eds, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 3 vols (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-)

Reynolds, Frederic Mansel, ed., *The Keepsake for MDCCCXXXI* (London: Hurst, Chance, & Co., 1830)

'Robespierre and Bonaparte Compared', *Chester Chronicle*, 1 July 1803, Issue 1463

Robinson, Charles E., ed., *The Frankenstein Notebooks*, Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics IX, 2 vols (London: Garland, 1996)

Rossetti, William Michael, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 3 vols (London: Gibbins and Co., 1894)

Scholz, John Martin Augustus, *Travels in the Countries Between Alexandria and Paræonium, The Lybian Desert, Siwa, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, in 1821* (London: Richard Phillips & Co., 1822)

Schütz, C. G., *Aeschyli Tragoediae* (Oxonii: Typis et Sumtu N. Bliss, 1809)

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Annotated Frankenstein*, ed. by Susan Wolfson and Ronald L. Levao (London: Belknap, 2012)

—— ed., *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments by Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1840 [1839])

—— ed., *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 1 vol (London: Edward Moxon, 1840 [1839])

—— *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1844)

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, (with Percy Bysshe Shelley), *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, ed. by Charles E. Robinson (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2008)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *Adonais*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891)

—— *Adonais*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, revised with the assistance of A. O. Prickard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903)

—— 'The Coliseum, A Fragment', ed. by Thomas Medwin, *Athenaeum*, 1 September 1832, no. 253

—— *The Masque of Anarchy*, preface by Leigh Hunt (London: Edward Moxon, 1832)

—— *A Philosophical View of Reform*, intro. and appendix by T. W. Rolleston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920)

—— *Prometheus Unbound, A Lyrical Drama, In Four Acts, with Other Poems* (London: C. & J. Ollier, 1820)

—— *Zastrozzi & St. Irvyne*, ed. by Stephen Behrendt (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002)

Sophocles, *Ajax. Electra. Oedipus Tyrannus.*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 20 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994)

—— *Antigone. The Women of Trachis. Philoctetes. Oedipus at Colonus.,* ed. and trans. by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 21 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994)

Spedding, James, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, eds, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 14 vols (London: Longman and Co., 1857-1874)

Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, *Greek Lyric, Volume III: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others*, ed. and trans. by David A. Campbell, Loeb Classical Library 476 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991)

'Sunday's Post', *Hereford Journal*, 30 May 1821, Issue 2650

Theocritus, Moschus, Bion, *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion*, ed. and trans. by Neil Hopkinson, Loeb Classical Library 28 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009)

Trelawny, Edward, *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*, intro. and notes by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin Classics, 2015)

Tystaeus, Solon, Theognis, Mimnermus, *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, ed. and trans. by Douglas E. Gerber, Loeb Classical Library 258 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999)

Vickers, Brian, ed., *Francis Bacon: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; reissued with corrections 2002)

Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6.*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916)

Watts, George Frederic, and assistants, *Hope*, 1886, oil paint on canvas, 1422 x 1118 mm, Tate Britain

Yeats, William Butler, *The Poems*, ed. by Daniel Albright (London: Dent, 1994)

Zillman, Lawrence John, ed., *Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound': A Variorum Edition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959; repr. with corrections 1960)

Secondary Sources

Austin, Norman, *Meaning and Being in Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990)

Baker, Carlos, 'The Evening Star: *Adonais*', in *Shelley: Modern Judgements*, ed. by R. B. Woodings (Glasgow: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 213-27

Barnard, Ellsworth, *Shelley's Religion* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964)

Barrell, Joseph, *Shelley and the Thought of his Time: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947)

Becht, Ronald E., 'Shelley's "Adonais": Formal Design and the Lyric Speaker's Crisis of Imagination', *Studies in Philology,* 78.2 (Spring 1981), 194-210

Behrendt, Stephen, *Shelley and his Audiences* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1989)

Bieri, James, *Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Biography: Youth's Unextinguished Fire, 1792-1816* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004)

Binfield, Kevin, '"May They Be Divided Never": Ethics, History, and the Rhetorical Imagination in Shelley's "The Coliseum"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 46 (1997), 125-47

Bloom, Harold, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959)

—— *A Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961; rev. and enlarged 1971)

Blunden, Edmund, *Shelley: A Life Story* (Glasgow: Collins for Readers Union, 1948)

Borushko, Matthew C., 'Violence and Nonviolence in Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 59 (2010), 96-113

Bundock, Christopher, 'Historicism, Temporalization, and Romantic Prophecy in Percy Shelley's "Hellas"', in *Rethinking British Romantic History, 1770-1845*, ed. by Porscha Fermanis and John Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Burdon, Christopher, *The Apocalypse in England: Revelation and Unravelling, 1700-1834* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997)

Burkert, Walter, *Greek Religion*, trans. by John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985)

Bush, Douglas, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937)

Cameron, Kenneth Neil, *Shelley: The Golden Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974)

Carey, Frances, ed., *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come* (London: British Museum, 1999)

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

Chesterton, G. K., *G. F. Watts* (London: Duckworth, 1904)

Clark, Timothy, 'Shelley's "The Coliseum" and the Sublime', *Durham University Journal*, 85.2 (1993), 225-35

Colbert, Benjamin, *Shelley's Eye* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)

Collingwood, R. G., *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945)

Collins, John J., *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd edn (New York: Crossroad, 1984; Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016)

—— 'Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre', in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. by John J. Collins, Semeia 14 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), pp. 1-20

Creasy, E. S., *Some Account of the Foundation of Eton College and of the Past and Present Condition of the School* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848)

Cronin, Richard, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981)

Crook, Nora, 'Shelley's Late Fragmentary Plays: "Charles the First" and the "Unfinished Drama"', in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Webb and Alan. M. Weinberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 297-311

Curran, Stuart, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1975)

Dawson, P. M. S., *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980)

Dietrich, Bernard C., 'Death and Afterlife in Minoan Religion', *Kernos*, 10 (1997), 19-38

Dowden, Edward, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1886)

Duffy, Cian, '"Less Accessible than Thou or God": Where *does* Percy Shelley Locate Ahasuerus in *Hellas*?', *Notes and Queries*, , 61.4 (2014), 517-19

—— 'Percy Shelley's "display of newspaper erudition" in *Hellas, A Lyrical Drama* (1822)', *Notes and Queries*, 61.4 (2014), 519-23

—— '"Radiant as the Morning Star": A Little-Known Shelley Fragment and its Context', *Notes and Queries*, 61.4 (2014), 523-25

—— *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Eagleton, Terry, *Hope without Optimism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015)

Ellis, F. S., ed., *A Lexical Concordance to the Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1892)

Fogle, Richard Harter, 'John Taaffe's Annotated Copy of "Adonais"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 17 (1968), 31-52

Foot, Paul, *Shelley's Revolutionary Year* (London: Redwords, 1990)

Frye, Northrop, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982)

Fulford, Tim, 'Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism', in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. by Tim Fulford (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 1-22

Fuller, David, 'Shelley and Jesus', *Durham University Journal*, 85.2 (July 1993), 211-23

Goldsmith, Steven, *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993)

Grabo, Carl, *The Magic Plant* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936)

—— *A Newton Among Poets: Shelley's Use of Science in 'Prometheus Unbound'* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930)

Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955)

Groth, Helen, 'Kaleidoscopic Vision and Literary Invention in an "Age of Things": David Brewster, *Don Juan*, and "A Lady's Kaleidoscope"', *ELH*, 74.1 (Spring 2007), 217-37

Guirand, Felix, gen. ed., *New Larousse Encylopedia of Mythology*, trans. by Richard Aldington and Delano Ames, intro. by Robert Graves, 12th impression (Paris: Librarie Larousse, 1959; Feltham: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1968; impr. 1977)

Gurr, Jens Martin, 'Views on Violence in Shelley's Post-Peterloo Prose and Poetry: Contradiction, Ambivalence, Ambiguity?', *Studien zur Englischen Romantik*, 'Romantic Ambiguities – Abodes of the Modern', 20 (2017), 83-93

Hamilton, Paul, *Historicism*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003)

Hanson, P. D., 'Apocalypticism', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. by Keith Crim et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 28-34

Hardimon, Michael O., *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Harding, D. W., *Experience into Words: Essays on Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963)

Heffernan, James A. W., '*Adonais*: Shelley's Consumption of Keats', in *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 173-91

Hogle, Jerrold E., 'Shelley's Fiction: The "Stream of Fate"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 30 (1981), 78-99

—— *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of his Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

Hughes, A. M. D., *The Nascent Mind of Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947)

Hunt, John Dixon, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century* (London: Johns Hopkins Press Ltd., 1989)

Kean, Hilda, 'Public History and Popular Memory: Issues in the Commemoration of the British Militant Suffrage Campaign', *Women's History Review*, 14.3-4 (2005), 581-602

Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

King-Hele, Desmond, 'Shelley and Science', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 46.2 (1992), 253-65

Kipperman, Mark, 'History and Ideality: The Politics of Shelley's "Hellas"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 30.2 (1991), 147-68

Leavis, F. R., *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936; repr. 1959)

Lemprière, John, *Bibliotheca Classica* (Reading: T. Cadell, 1788)

Lewes, George Henry, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Westminster Review*, 35 (1841), 303-44

Lewis, Linda M., *The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake, and Shelley* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992)

Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940)

Long, H. L., 'Some Enquiry Concerning the Quercus and Fagus of the Ancients', in *The Gardener's Magazine*, ed. by J. C. Loudon (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1839), V, pp. 9-20

Luther, Timothy C., *Hegel's Critique of Modernity: Reconciling Individual Freedom and the Community* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009)

March, Jennifer, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London: Cassell, 1998: reprint. 2000)

Marinatos, Nanno, *Minoan Kingship and the Solar Goddess: A Near Eastern Koine* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2010)

Mathur, Om Prakash, *The Closet Drama of the Romantic Revival* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1978)

Matthews, G. M., 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley', in *Shelley: Modern Judgements*, ed. by R. B. Woodings (Glasgow: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 162-95

McFarland, Thomas, *Originality & Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)

McGinn, Bernard, 'Early Apocalypticism: The Ongoing Debate', in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions*, ed. by C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 2-39

McNiece, Gerald, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969)

Medwin, Thomas, 'Memoir of Shelley', *Athenaeum*, 4 August 1832, no. 249

Mellor, Anne K., 'Making a "monster": an introduction to *Frankenstein*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 9-25

Mulhallen, Jacqueline, *The Theatre of Shelley* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010)

Notopoulos, James A., *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1949)

O'Malley, Glenn, *Shelley and Synesthesia* ([Evanston, Ill.]: Northwestern University Press, 1964; second printing 1968)

O'Neill, Michael, '*Adonais* and Poetic Power', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 35.2 (Spring 2004), 50-57

—— '"The Mind Which Feeds This Verse": Self- and Other-Awareness in Shelley's Poetry', *Durham University Journal*, 85.2 (July 1993), 273-92

—— *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989)

—— *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)

—— 'Shelley's Defences of Poetry', *Wordsworth Circle*, 43.1 (Winter 2012), 20-25

—— 'Shelley Prometheus Unbound', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp. 407-18

O'Neill, Michael, and Anthony Howe, eds, with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan, *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press) [accessed as an electronic resource: <www.oed.com>]

Page, D. L., *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

Paley, Morton D., *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999)

Peterson, Sarah, 'Mediating Vision: Shelley's Prose Encounters with Visual Art (1818-1820)', *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 22.1 (2008), 112-31

Reno, Seth T., 'The Violence of Form in Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 62 (2013), 80-98

Ricci, Seymour de, *A Bibliography of Shelley's Letters, Published and Unpublished* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1927; reprint. 1969)

Rieger, James, *The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: George Braziller, 1967)

Rigby, Kate, *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020)

Robinson, Charles E., *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)

Rogers, Neville, *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)

Ruston, Sharon, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

Sacks, Peter, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)

Salt, Henry S., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poet and Pioneer, A Biographical Study* (London: William Reeves, 1896)

—— *A Shelley Primer* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1887)

Sandy, Mark, '"Stormy Visions": Shelley's Reinvention of Myth, Memory and Identity in *Adonais*', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 14.1 (2000), 84-94

Scrivener, Michael, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982)

Shelley, Bryan, *Shelley and Scripture: The Interpreting Angel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994)

Silverman, Edwin B., *Poetic Synthesis in Shelley's 'Adonais'* (Paris: Mouton, 1972)

Smiles, Samuel, *A Publisher and his Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the late John Murray, with an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768-1843*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1891)

Sommerstein, Alan H., *Aeschylean Tragedy*, 2nd edn (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010; London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013)

—— *The Tangled Ways of Zeus: And Other Studies In and Around Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Sourvinou-Inwood, Christiane, 'Early sanctuaries, the eighth century and ritual space: fragments of a discourse', in *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches,* ed. by Robin Hägg and Nanno Marinatos (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1-13

Symonds, John Addington, *An Introduction to the Study of Dante* (London: Smith, Elder, Co., 1872)

—— *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1879)

—— *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880)

Taplin, Oliver, 'Homer', in *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, ed. by John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; repr. 1988), pp. 50-77

Taylor, John H., *Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London: British Museum Press, 2010)

Tetreault, Ronald, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987)

Thomas, Sophie, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2008)

Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta, 5 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971-2004), III: Aeschylus, ed. by Stefan Radt (1985)

Vargo, Lisa, 'Unmasking Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*', *ESC*, 13.1 (1987), 49-64

Versnel, H. S., *Triumphus: An Inquiry Into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970)

Wallace, Jennifer, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

Wasserman, Earl, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971)

Webb, Timothy, *Shelley: A Voice not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977)

Webb, Timothy, and Alan. M. Weinberg, *The Neglected Shelley* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015)

Weinberg, Alan M., *Shelley's Italian Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1991)

Whitehead, Alfred North, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926)

Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; rev. 1985)

Wilson, Milton, *Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of his Prophetic Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959)

Wolfson, Susan, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997)

—— 'Keats enters history: autopsy, *Adonais*, and the fame of Keats', in *Keats and History*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 17-45

—— *Romantic Shades and Shadows* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018)

Woodman, Ross, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964)

Young, Art, *Shelley and Nonviolence* (Paris: Mouton, 1975)