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ABSTRACT

John Metson, Shelley's Idea of Nature: A Study of the Interrelationship of Subject and Object in the Major Poems, Ph.D thesis, University of Durham, 1995.

The thesis offers an interpretation of Shelley's poetry which focuses on his treatment of external nature. Its main argument is that a subject-object dialectic lies at the basis of his thought and style. Manifesting itself as a tension and oscillation between dualist and monist tendencies, this dialectic underlies the opposing strains of thought associated with his sceptical idealism; it informs the relationship between various contraries with which he is recurrently concerned, such as reason and feeling, necessity and freedom, language and thought; and it accounts for some major characteristics of his style--for example, its self-reflexiveness, indeterminacy, and restless forward momentum. Nature is found to play a complex dual function in this dialectical process: first, as the circumference to the circle of which mind is the centre, it provides the material of thought and poetry; secondly, through its cyclic processes, it serves as an emblem of the mind's dynamic relationship with that material. In finding the characteristic thought-pattern of his poetry to be constituted of a creative-destructive interplay of contraries, the thesis contends that Shelley is a significant exponent of Romantic irony. Such a reading of his work mediates between an earlier tradition of interpreting him as a Platonising poet of nature and the more recent emphasis that has been given to his philosophical scepticism and political radicalism. Throughout, attention is given to the interacting influences of his direct experience of nature (as recorded mainly in his letters) and the representations of nature he encounters in his reading. The following poems, chosen for their importance in Shelley's canon and as clear illustrations of his treatment of nature, are discussed chronologically in successive chapters: Queen Mab, Alastor, the 1816 odes, Prometheus Unbound, Adonais, and The Triumph of Life.

SHELLEY'S IDEA OF NATURE
A Study of the Interrelationship of Subject and Object
in the Major Poems

Ph.D. Thesis

John Metson

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University of Durham
Department of English

1995



15 AUG 1996

To ELAINE MALCOLM

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Editions and Abbreviations

For Shelley's poetry written before the end of 1817, I use The Poems of Shelley, ed. G.M. Matthews and Kelvin Everest, 1 of 3 vols in progress (London: Longman, 1989-). For his later poetry, I use Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977). For poems which appear in neither of these editions, I use Shelley: Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corr. G.M. Matthews (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). The following journals and editors are referred to by abbreviation:

<u>ELH</u>	<u>ELH: A Journal of English Literary History</u>
Hutchinson	<u>Shelley: Poetical Works</u> , ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corr. G.M. Matthews (London: Oxford University Press, 1970)
I&P	<u>The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley</u> , 10 vols, Julian Edition, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter Edwin Peck (London: Ernest Benn, 1926-30)
<u>JEGP</u>	<u>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</u>
Jones	<u>The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley</u> , ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964)
<u>KSJ</u>	<u>Keats-Shelley Journal</u>
<u>KSMB</u>	<u>Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin</u>
M&E	<u>The Poems of Shelley</u> , ed. G.M. Matthews and Kelvin Everest, 1 of 3 vols in progress (London: Longman, 1989-).
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>
<u>MLN</u>	<u>Modern Language Notes</u>

- Murray The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. E.B. Murray, 1 of 2
 vols in progress (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993-).
- PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association
- R&P Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism,
 Norton Critical Edition, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B.
 Powers (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977)
- RES Review of English Studies
- SiR Studies in Romanticism

The use of curled brackets in quotations from Jones, and of angle brackets in quotations from Murray, indicate editorial conjectures according to the practice defined in Jones, I, viii, and Murray, pp. xxi and xli.

Chapter 1

Introduction: 'Ten Thousand Orbs Involving and Involved'

In the Preface to her edition of Shelley's Posthumous Poems (1824) Mary Shelley describes her husband's way of life and preoccupations as follows:

His life was spent in the contemplation of Nature, in arduous study, or in acts of kindness and affection. He was an elegant scholar and a profound metaphysician; without possessing much scientific knowledge, he was unrivalled in the justness and extent of his observations on natural objects; he knew every plant by its name, and was familiar with the history and the habits of every production of the earth; he could interpret without a fault each appearance in the sky; and the varied phenomena of heaven and earth filled him with deep emotion. He made his study and reading-room of the shadowed copse, the stream, the lake, and the waterfall....Such was his love for Nature that every page of his poetry is associated, in the minds of his friends, with the loveliest scenes of the countries which he inhabited. (Hutchinson, pp. xxv-xxvi)

Although it is hardly a balanced view of Shelley's interests, much of what Mary Shelley says here about his love of nature is borne out in his writings--his letters and journal entries as well as his poetry. Indeed, the language of her Preface is so reminiscent of the material she has been collecting and editing that her portrait appears to be drawn from it as much as from her memory.

As if in anticipation of her exalted view of him as a lover of nature, Shelley writes in his essay 'On Life' (1819) that an 'intense delight' in the

external world 'is esteemed to be the distinguishing mark of a refined and extraordinary person' (R&P, p. 475). Moreover, he evidently regarded it as an important qualification of the poet. Although in his sonnet 'To Wordsworth' (1816) he condemns the 'Poet of Nature' for his political tergiversation, he nevertheless aspired to be a nature poet after the Wordsworthian example. Describing his education as a poet in the Preface to The Revolt of Islam (1818), he writes, 'I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes, and the sea, and the solitude of forests', and he goes on to identify the two main components of his poetic training as a wide knowledge of literature and a varied experience of 'the beautiful and majestic scenery of the earth' (Hutchinson, pp. 34-5). Having seen some of the remnants of classical art in Italy, he writes to Peacock from Rome on 23-24 January 1819, that he now understood 'why the Greeks were such great Poets....They lived in a perpetual commerce with external nature and nourished themselves upon the spirit of its forms' (Jones, II, 74). As Mary Shelley suggests, his own poetry bears the frequent imprint of his direct observation of natural phenomena and scenery, and in Prometheus Unbound (1820) and its accompanying lyrics particularly he attempts to recapture something of the spirit of openness to nature that he finds in Greek art.

Although for over a century after his death it was to a considerable extent as a poet of nature that Shelley was read and judged, this aspect of his poetry has since been almost completely overlooked, as John Freeman has observed.¹ The main cause of its neglect has been its association with an interpretation of his poetry which in recent decades has been generally discredited by a greatly increased awareness of his philosophical scepticism and political radicalism. Prior to this critical sea-change, Shelley was widely regarded as a mystical Platonist who internalised the outward forms of nature as symbols of a transcendent ideal--a conception which was never wholly

separable from the sentimental Victorian myth of the 'beautiful and
ineffectual angel'². His preoccupation with nature has never recovered from
its contamination with these views. Consequently, while Wordsworth's idea of
nature continues to be much discussed in terms of its ideological and
philosophical implications, Shelley's is considered almost extraneous to his
major interests.³

In re-examining Shelley's attitude to the external world in this thesis, I
shall argue that both the former concentration on this aspect of his work and
the current neglect of it are equally misrepresentative of its importance to
his other poetic and philosophical concerns. Moreover, I shall suggest that an
understanding of Shelley's view of nature offers a means by which the
visionary idealist and the revolutionary sceptic can be seen as less exclusive
of each other than the swing in critical opinion has tended to suggest. Both
conceptions of the poet have, after all, always had their adherents, and most
critics have attempted to accommodate both, though they have nearly always
done so by subordinating one to the other. Shelley's bifurcated vision is now
commonly referred to as his sceptical idealism. No two critics, however, mean
precisely the same thing by the term, and above all they differ about the
relative importance of the opposing tendencies, and about the nature of the
relationship between them.⁴

In this chapter, within the context of a survey of relevant critical
approaches to Shelley's work, I aim to show in broad terms how his concept of
nature can explain the connection between quite contrary aspects of his
thought. I begin by considering some of the characteristics of the nineteenth-
and earlier twentieth-century views of Shelley as a nature poet, and I return
first of all to Mary Shelley's comments about him in her editions of his
poetry.

Mary Shelley's remarks about Shelley's poetry are in many ways typical of later Victorian views, and, as P.D. Fleck has suggested, were probably influential in forming them.⁵ Motivated mainly by a concern for the reception of the poems, she plays down his dangerous opinions in the Prefaces to her 1824 and 1839 editions, and her portrayal of him in the first of these as primarily a lover of nature is one of the ways in which she does so.⁶ In the 1839 Preface and Notes she writes of him with greater critical distance, and her tone of reverence is more obviously qualified by an implicit censure. This ambivalence extends to her judgement of the poems, which she divides into two types--on the one hand, those which are 'purely imaginative' and reveal his 'clinging to the subtler inner spirit, rather than to the outward form', and on the other, those which 'sprang from the emotions of the heart', some of which derive from 'sentiments inspired by natural objects' (Hutchinson, p. xxii). This is certainly a questionable categorisation of the poems, but it points to an important contradiction both in Mary Shelley's response and ultimately in the poetry itself. She makes it clear that she prefers the poems which 'sprang from the emotions' to those which are 'purely imaginative', for the latter she finds too subtly metaphysical and remote from common human feeling. This fault, however, is turned to account in her mythologizing of the poet. His imagination is seen as a form of escape from harsh reality and painful human contact:

[from] the sad vicissitudes of human life...he delivered up his soul to poetry, and felt happy when he sheltered himself from the influence of human sympathies, in the wildest regions of fancy....He loved to idealize reality; and this is a taste shared by few....In this, Shelley resembled Plato; both taking more delight in the abstract and the ideal than in the special and tangible. (Hutchinson, p. xxii)

This portrayal clearly conflicts with the lover of nature she describes in 1824, who was 'unrivalled in the justness and extent of his observations on natural objects', and also with the poet who gives spontaneous expression to 'the sentiments inspired by natural objects'. There is a further contrast between his avoidance of 'human sympathies' in his 'purely imaginative' poems and his description, in the other class, of 'emotions common to us all', such as love, grief and despondency. In Mary Shelley's account there are thus clearly divergent tendencies in Shelley's poetry between his idealization of, and hence escape from, the external world, and his close observation and immediate response to it, and between his tendency to speculative thought and his expression of immediate feeling.

The tenor and many of the details of Mary Shelley's view of the poet are regularly repeated in criticism throughout the Victorian period. Her distinction between Shelley's two kinds of apprehension of nature is particularly common. Parke Godwin, for example, writes in 1843:

Shelley was by no means deficient in sensibility: he loved the external world; was ever living in the broad, open air, under the wide skies; and was keenly alive to the picturesque and harmonious in Nature. But his power of reflection predominated over the power of his senses. He was more at home in the microcosm of his own thoughts, than in the larger world of Nature. He was ever proceeding from the centre, that is, of his own mind, outward to the visible universe. He was ever transferring the operations of his mind to the operations of Nature.⁷

In the opinion of Margaret Fuller Osoli, Shelley surpasses all other poets of his day in two characteristics, his fertility of fancy, and his sympathy with nature.⁸ For Robert Browning, 'his noblest and predominating characteristic' is 'his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of

Beauty and Good in the concrete'.⁹ W.B. Yeats too, though interpreting Shelley as a Platonist and symbolist, speaks of his consciousness of the externality of things, and emphasizes his view that mind 'cannot create, it can only perceive'.¹⁰

There is however often a tendency among Victorian critics, particularly those who peddle the more extreme forms of the angelic myth, to lose sight of the importance to Shelley of an immediate apprehension of the external world, and at the same time to suggest an absence of intellectual substance in his imaginative flights. A contrast with Wordsworth's greater concreteness is often the occasion of their doing so. For example, Walter Bagehot writes, 'Wordsworth describes the earth as we know it, with all its peculiarities.... Shelley...rushes away among the stars; this earth is an assortment of imagery, he uses it to deck some unknown planet', while Francis Thompson, the doyen of Shelley's sentimental Victorian interpreters, considers that 'he deviates from the true Nature poet, the normal Wordsworth type of Nature poet: imagery was to him not a mere means of expression, not even a mere means of adornment; it was a delight for its own sake'.¹¹ Even where a tension is acknowledged between Shelley's powers of internal and external expression, an emphasis is usually given to the former. Thus Matthew Arnold, who sees in him 'a passionate straining after both', concludes that 'the right sphere for Shelley's genius was the sphere of music' because he lacked the 'intellectual force' and 'sanity' to master the representational medium of words.¹² A more common and indulgent explanation of Shelley's departure from the world of sense impressions and plain sense was sought in what was regarded as his childlike simplicity. Mary Shelley herself speaks of his 'luxury of imagination, which sought nothing beyond itself (as a child burdens itself with spring flowers, thinking of no use beyond the enjoyment of gathering them)' (Hutchinson, p. xxii), and ultimately she, like Browning and Yeats,

gives the main emphasis to his Platonising inwardness and transcendentalism.

Although the New Critics are mainly hostile to Shelley their assumptions about him are essentially the same as those generally held in the nineteenth century, as Timothy Webb has pointed out.¹³ Leavis's complaint about his 'weak grasp upon the actual' recalls William Hazlitt's description of his poetry as a 'confused embodying of vague abstractions';¹⁴ the comparison he draws with the concreteness of Wordsworth has been made many times before; and the lack of correspondence he detects between outward things and feelings, and between feelings and ideas, is reminiscent of Arnold's criticism. W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot to some extent go along with Leavis, the former complaining that Shelley 'never looked at or listened to anything', the latter that he deals in 'abstract ideas' which are merely adolescent, and in sound rather than sense.¹⁵ Eliot thus perpetuates the notions of Shelley's poor intellect, musicality and immaturity that have long been current.

For at least the first half of the twentieth century Shelley continues to be read primarily as a Platonist or pantheist, and with regard to his representations of the external world the emphasis remains on his abstractness, and his tendency to assimilate natural forms to an inward conception of unity.¹⁶ Richard Harter Fogle, comparing the imagery of Keats and Shelley in 1949, clearly articulates some of the best insights of his own and earlier periods into Shelley's attitude to nature when he writes:

Shelley's poetic world is not a literal transcription of his perceptions of the natural world, but a conscious arrangement and composition of these perceptions....While Keats permits things to rest in their complexity, Shelley consciously imposes upon them the order of his intellect, reshaping them according to his restless and masterful will....He is sometimes concerned less with the world as it is than with the world as he would have it....[His] poetry strives continually to express by images an absolute truth or beauty beyond the scope of

imagery....[He] is abstract in that his poetry continually climbs towards abstraction on steps of concrete imagery....[He] is intellectually a Monist, emotionally and instinctively a Dualist. He is always attempting to reconcile these two poles of his nature, and never quite succeeding.¹⁷

This helps us to identify certain features of Shelley's treatment of nature which are inferred if not explicitly defined in much of the criticism we have considered so far, and which can be summarized as follows. First, he has a tendency to transform outward impressions into an abstract and inward ideal, which supplants the concrete actuality on which it depends. Nature therefore has two functions in his poetry which tend to conflict: it is at once the subject and the material of poetry, or, in other words, it serves as both the object of perception and the source of poetic images. Related to this conflict is a tension between inner and outer worlds, and, correspondingly, between thought and feeling. There is also a sense that Shelley's poetry has a tendency to break away from referentiality, to enjoy what Mary Shelley calls the 'luxury of imagination', and Arnold the condition of music. Moreover, as Fogle says, he is both a monist and a dualist, always striving vainly towards a conception of ideal unity. These various forms of tension, which are all finally reducible to a relationship of attraction and repulsion between subject and object, are, I shall argue, an important characteristic of Shelley's poetry throughout his career. However, the complex structure and process of thought to which they contribute are quite different in effect from any conception of Shelley's poetry that has so far been considered.

In considering the subject-object relationship in Shelley's poetry there are two paradigms from his own writing that I wish to make use of, both based on the idea of the circle. The first of these is his much-favoured metaphor of the centre and circumference of a circle, generally used to describe the situation of the individual mind in the surrounding universe.¹⁸ It is thus employed in 'On Life', a short but complex essay which gives his fullest statement in prose of his understanding of the relationship between mind and nature. Through an examination of this essay I will show that there is a philosophical basis to Shelley's poetic treatment of external nature as it has so far been defined.

The essay's central argument, following Hume, but more immediately the 'intellectual system' (R&P, p. 476), as Shelley calls it, of Sir William Drummond, is that there is only a nominal distinction between ideas and external objects, and that therefore life is to be conceived as a unity. However, the image of the circle of existence consisting of centre and circumference tends to resist the notion of complete unity, and suggests rather what Wasserman calls a 'paradoxically monistic dualism'.¹⁹ The two axioms upon which Shelley's philosophy rests--on the one hand, 'nothing exists but as it is perceived', and on the other, mind 'cannot create, it can only perceive' (R&P, pp. 476, 478)--are the basis of this paradox. Assuming a distinction between perceiver and percept at the very moment of denying there is such a distinction, the two statements also contradict each other concerning which is prior. Thus the circle is also the figure of a circular logic by which mind and nature exist interdependently; which is perhaps the nearest that Shelley can come to conceiving that absolute unity to which the 'intellectual system' leads him.

There is, however, another weakness in his reasoning which renders even

this conception of a duality-within-unity an unstable one. The statement 'nothing exists but as it is perceived' represents a further contradiction in being an objective assertion of complete subjectivity. In A Defence of Poetry Shelley rewords this doctrine as 'All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient' (R&P, p. 505). This version is not only, as Terence Allan Hoagwood points out, less dogmatic and therefore more truly sceptical, but it avoids the contradiction of the statement in 'On Life' by distinguishing the point of view of the 'percipient' from that of the statement's speaker, who, like Hume and Drummond, allows the possibility of an unknowable world beyond perception.²⁰ It thus makes no objective claim to unity. In his statement in 'On Life', on the other hand, Shelley, unwittingly it would seem, moves from a position of strict phenomenalism to one of objective idealism. This shift becomes all the plainer when, having denied the separate reality of distinct individual minds and described 'The words, I, you, they' as 'merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind' of existence, he then proceeds to say, 'Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption, that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind' (R&P, pp. 477-8). But the phenomenalist position that he has until now been expounding leads to precisely this conclusion, and it is only when he introduces the self-consciousness of 'I, the person who now write and think', and so objectifies the unity he has been proclaiming, that he is compelled to shift his ground.

Shelley's attempt to overcome the epistemological dualism of mind and matter through a view of life as a unity thus gives rise to an ontological dualism of the self-conscious subject and a merely notional unity of mind and its objects. There are therefore two senses in which the essay speaks of life as a unity: first, it is an immediate, subjective experience, involving 'an unusually intense and vivid apprehension', and causing those affected to 'feel

as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being'; and second, it is an object of reflection, the result of a thread of reasoning, which leaves 'the relations of things...unchanged' (R&P, pp. 477-78). The 'great miracle' of life as a unity in the first sense, the essay suggests, even if in some way it can be experienced by children and those subject to the state of 'reverie', cannot be fully comprehended intellectually; we can only come to 'that verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down on the dark abyss of--how little we know' (R&P, pp. 475-78). But as an object of thought it becomes the projection and ultimately the assertion of a unity which is unknowable and inexpressible as experience. In his discussion of Shelley's 'intellectual philosophy' Wasserman writes:

Shelley wishes not only to formulate a liberating phenomenistic interpretation of Existence but also to include in his conception of the 'universe' the trans-phenomenal realm of absolute Being that embraces and stands behind Existence.²¹

Wasserman has been taken to task by a number of critics for this comment, and not without some justice, for he provides little argumentative basis for it, relying instead on his claim that Shelley 'wishes' to conceive of a 'realm of absolute Being'.²² Nevertheless, it can be argued from 'On Life' that in the two modes in which unity is discussed--as 'that which is all', but also as something which lies beyond that 'all'--Shelley does, perhaps inadvertently in this essay, give a place to the trans-phenomenal in his philosophy. Thus understood, 'On Life' provides a useful insight into Shelley's sceptical idealism. The two strains of his thought included in this term coincide and become indistinguishable in the phenomenalist unity which the assertion that

'nothing exists but as it is perceived' is intended to explain. But the contradictions in his argument also reveal that his scepticism and idealism diverge in response to the subject's irrepressible self-consciousness and its need to project an ideal and objective other as a means of self-definition. The essay thus points to an opposition between subjective and objective, monist and dualist views of the world.

So far we have arrived at a view of Shelley's relation with the external world which is not essentially different from that which is typical of the criticism already considered. It is also congruent with accounts given by various critics writing in the 1950s and 1960s of the treatment of nature in Romantic poetry generally and Wordsworth particularly. William Wimsatt refers to what Wordsworth calls 'the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination' to explain the Romantic spiritualization of the landscape, and the warping of vehicle by tenor.²³ Geoffrey Hartman observes in Wordsworth's poetry a recurring process by which in successive stages the autonomous imagination transcends nature, the light of the senses is extinguished, the progress of poetry is temporarily halted, and finally the poet returns to nature once more.²⁴ This description of the mind-nature interchange in Wordsworth lies somewhere between the Coleridgean argument of M.H. Abrams that for the Romantics imagination and art have the power of synthesizing the natural and the human, and Paul de Man's view of the intentional nature of Romantic poetry and the irremediable split between consciousness and the external world.²⁵ 'On Life' also bridges these two points of view in that it overtly proclaims the unity of ideas and external objects but tacitly reveals such a notion to be unrealizable.

A similar tension is repeatedly revealed in Shelley's poetry, as all those who have seen it as striving towards a Platonic oneness implicitly recognize. Yet this is still not an adequate account of the subject-object relationship

in his poetry. For, as I shall go on to show, the two contrary positions between which he is pulled are not statically opposed as in an irresolvable antithesis, but are rather involved in a continuously reciprocating interplay. This oscillating process bears some resemblance to the cyclical stages that Hartman observes in Wordsworth's poetry, but is far more dynamic and pervasive, operating at all levels of Shelley's poetry. Above all, through giving priority to neither nature nor mind, it becomes for Shelley, not a chastening and corrective process as for Wordsworth, but a means to creative freedom.

iii

To explain this dynamic relationship of nature and mind it is necessary to go beyond the static metaphor of the centre and circumference, and I therefore refer to a second paradigm, that of the natural cycle. This appears in Shelley's poetry in a variety of forms--in the daily, monthly and yearly rotation of the heavenly bodies, in the hydrological and electrical cycles as Shelley understood them, and in various cycles of death and rebirth. These and the various phenomena associated with them are repeatedly used by Shelley to represent the way in which subject, object and their projected unity are caught in a continuous cycle whereby the relationships between them constantly shift and change. It is hardly too much to say that the tensions, ambiguities and tautologies of these evolving and revolving relationships are the major subject of Shelley's poetry.

Although in its ramifications this cyclical process is infinitely complex, in its bare bones it is very simple, and is readily described. Its first stages, in fact, already have been. Through its interrelation with nature the mind conceives of what is initially a unity between them. This ideal unity inevitably eclipses and supplants nature as an externality. But the self-

consciousness re-asserts itself to drive a wedge between mind and the unity it has conceived. External nature is then rediscovered but in an alienated state. The mind seeks reintegration with nature, but the original unity, now an abstraction, stands between them. Finally, through the sceptical dismantling of this abstraction, the possibility of a reunion between mind and nature arises, and the cycle can continue.

This cycle is observable in a variety of forms in Shelley's writing. At its most basic level it is a process of thought by which perceptions constantly succeed one another. Shelley describes this process in a prose fragment entitled 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind':

But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards;--like one in dread who speeds through the recesses of some haunted pile, and dares not look behind. The caverns of the mind are obscure, and shadowy; or pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals. If it were possible to be where we have been, vitally and indeed--if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience,--if the passage from sensation to reflection--from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation, were not so dizzying and so tumultuous, this attempt would be less difficult.²⁶

In this description of thought's headlong motion we can trace the same analysis of mind that underlies the exposition of the 'intellectual philosophy' in 'On Life'. In both instances Shelley relies on a dialectical triadic structure of subject, object and their objectified unity. What Shelley calls 'sensation' or 'passive perception' is always irretrievably past because 'sensation' cannot be thought without immediately turning into 'reflection'. If it can be spoken of at all as a present experience, it involves the wholly

unconscious mergence of subject and object. But that putative present experience, so urgently desired, can only be consciously known through becoming an object of 'reflection' or 'voluntary contemplation' in the future. Hence, as he writes in 'On Life', 'man ...exist[s] but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be' (R&P, p. 476). The objectifying consciousness, by permanently banishing the knowledge of present sensation into the future (just as it allows past sensation only to be known in the present), provides the impetus to thought's forward motion. But when Shelley refers to this motion as the 'dizzying' and 'tumultuous' 'passage from sensation to reflection' I think we must infer that he means not one single transition but a consecutive series of them, as sensation and reflection, subjectivity and objectivity, leapfrog each other in a rapid and continuing dialectical progression; but he may well speak of this 'passage' in the singular because the effect is of only one sensation--that which is always past, 'beautifully bright indeed, but shining not' beyond the portals of the mind's caverns. But because what is conceived as belonging to the past is sought in the future, past and future become oddly alike, as do flight and pursuit, while to go forward is always in a sense to go back, and vice versa.

The desired convergence of sensation and reflection, which would allow us 'to be where we have been, vitally and indeed' and 'at the moment of our presence there...[to] define the results of our experience', is thus conceived as the unattainable origin and end of thought. Without this notion of unity or power, however delusive and destructive it may turn out to be, there can be no process of interaction between thought and its objects. At the same time, it is revealed as the product of this process, and therefore its original centrality is also paradoxically denied. The process can in consequence appear to usurp the position of the power it creates and destroys. In the 'Ode to the West Wind', for example, the 'Spirit' of the wind, the 'Destroyer and

Preserver' (14), is evidently a process that has become a power: it is the actual motion of the wind and the process of death and destruction, but the poet also grants it the status of an 'unseen presence' (2), or moving power. But in such cases the process-turned-power itself is absorbed into a yet larger process; and so the autumn west wind is only the manifestation of a stage in the cycle of the seasons, and will have to give way to winter and spring. Just as the projection of mind and nature as a unity creates another duality, so the stepping outside of one cycle necessarily involves stepping into a larger one, and so the process widens indefinitely. A recurring emblem of these cycles within cycles is the image of concentric circles or spheres, such as the 'Ten thousand orbs involving and involved', which spin with 'self-destroying swiftness', in Panthea's vision of the Earth in Prometheus Unbound Act 4 (241, 249). Through the successive displacement of cycles the dialectic remains teleological, always throwing up a new power to replace the one it dethrones. 'Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed', Shelley writes in A Defence of Poetry (1821; R&P, p. 500), but the unveiling is only pursued in the expectation that the 'naked beauty' lies within. The process is therefore not merely rotational but progressive as well; it does not stop with the triadic relationship of nature, mind and their synthesis or 'power', but becomes a dialectic between power and process, which is capable of endless self-renewal and self-expansion.

The interaction of the circle and cycle paradigms, in the first of which nature functions as the object of mind, and in the second as a figure for its own revolving relationship with mind, is responsible for much of the complexity of Shelley's poetry, and for a number of its characteristic features of style. In particular, it gives rise to various forms of indeterminacy. Like subject and object, figure and reality also oscillate between attraction and repulsion, sometimes becoming indistinguishable and

even appearing to change places, as in the inversion of similes and the interweaving of tenor and vehicle, which have been noted by William Keach.²⁷ There is a similar alternation between allegory and symbol, and between external reference and self-reflexiveness, and the figural modes not only coexist but interact, confirming and undermining each other with an effect sometimes of almost vertiginous instability. Shelley's dialectic operates within the moral and political as well as the metaphysical spheres, and with the same tendency to indeterminacy, for just as unity and power have contradictory aspects, so any form of good subjectively experienced is potentially an evil once conceived objectively as an abstraction. Hence, as Geoffrey Matthews has pointed out, recurrent concepts and symbols in Shelley's poetry can express directly opposite qualities depending on their context.²⁸

According to John Frere, Coleridge once remarked of Shelley that he was 'a man of great power as a poet, and could he only have had some notion of order, could you only have given him some plane whereon to stand, and look down upon his own mind, he would have succeeded.'²⁹ Indeed, Shelley's poetry constantly dismantles any such 'notion of order', or 'plane', even while it seeks to establish one. Alternating between subjective and objective viewpoints, he finds no firm ground of reference either inside or outside his writing, which consequently often slides between different levels of fiction and reality, and resists the closure of a final coherence. There is, in other words, a dialectic to be observed not only within the poems but in their relation to the world outside them, which includes the author, the reader, and the conditions of the time in which both live. The poetry's failure to achieve completeness or unity of meaning, to bring together world and text, always has the potential to be either a curse or a blessing. It can be the cause of deep pessimism, but on the other hand the dialectic itself, through its own destructive creativity, can, or can almost, be felt to constitute the goal

whose very notion it persistently demolishes; and the two responses are never far removed from each other.

iv

A number of recent critics have found in Shelley's poetry some kind of dynamic or dialectical process resembling the one I have described. Foremost among these is Jerrold Hogle, who identifies a preconscious 'radical transference' as the basic drive of his writings. Starting with the declaration in 'On Life' that an 'object of thought' is always a 'thought upon which any other thought is employed' (R&P, p. 478), he goes on to explain transference in a way that is similar to my own explanation of the fragment 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind':

Each basic thought is...a motion between at least two 'externalities'. It is a drive toward a counterpart rising ahead of it and a harking back to a different one receding in its wake. It seeks a future relationship that may carry forward a portion of a previous one now outside it and already dissolved....Every instant of mental life is a passing from moments only partially remembered to others that redefine their predecessors from a later angle only to be redefined themselves at other moments far ahead.³⁰

Although I am indebted to Hogle's account of Shelleyan transference my own understanding of it is essentially different. At no point does Hogle question, or consider that Shelley questions, the latter's stated belief in the underlying unity of thoughts and things (or what Hogle refers to as 'externalities'), even though the main force of transference is aimed at the dethroning of any such centre at one with itself. Rather, he argues that transference 'generates "inside" and "outside" as functions of itself'.³¹ Yet

Shelley's scepticism cuts two ways on the question of subject-object relations: it casts doubt on the distinction between ideas and external objects, but it also questions the notion of their unity. In the cyclical process of his thought there is, as we have seen, a close connection between an empirical dualism of subject and object and a transcendental dualism, and both have an essential function in that process at the same time that they are repeatedly undermined by it. As William Ulmer writes, 'transference is meaningless except in relation to an otherness...[which is] as endemic to Shelley as transference itself'.³² The flaw in Hogle's interpretation is underscored by one particular material inaccuracy. In arguing the all-subsuming function of transference he claims it is written at the end of 'On Life' that '"motion produces mind" rather than the reverse', but what Shelley actually writes is: 'It is said that mind produces motion and it might as well have been said that motion produces mind'³³ (R&P, p. 478). In thus giving equal weight to both propositions, Shelley makes almost explicit the dialectical nature of the mind's operations.

Timothy Clark argues that Hogle's idea of transference is a version of romantic irony that lacks the justification of a transcendental conception of the subject.³⁴ The dialectical process of Shelley's poetry which I have been describing does, on the other hand, more fully exemplify the characteristics of romantic irony. Recent commentators on this literary mode have not, by and large, singled out Shelley as one of its practitioners, while those critics who have noted the presence of irony in his work have generally meant little more by the term than that he remains sceptical of his own ideal imaginings.³⁵ Yet Shelley's writing, I suggest, fits some accounts of romantic irony well. Lilian Furst, for example, stresses the 'openness' of romantic irony and its

affirmation of an infinite universe, in which flux, change and growth

were the norms, and where indeterminacy, chaos, ambivalence and relativism were evaluated as positive preliminaries to a progression towards the ideal....The polar tensions of contradiction and paradox were esteemed as productive stimulants to growth in a sequence that comprised negation as well as assertion.³⁶

Anne Mellor explains Friedrich Schlegel's concept of ironic transcendentalism in poetry as a dialectical interdependency 'between enthusiastic creation and sceptical decreation...between the ideal and the real, between the chaos of becoming and the orders of being'.³⁷ Isobel Armstrong, referring to the philosophy of Hegel and his idea of being as 'the process of its own becoming' rather than to Schlegel, finds a similar dialectic to be a characteristic of idealist nineteenth-century poetry:

Being is mediation or transition; it is the continual and reciprocal construction and deconstruction of self and other. It is the perpetual movement between subject and object. It is neither static subject, nor static subject against static object, but the continual movement by which one recreates the other. Reality is not outside the self: it is the act of relationship.³⁸

At its most characteristic and successful, Shelley's poetry is underpinned by a relationship of subject and object such as this, and aspires to affirm a principle of being through the continual process of becoming which this relationship represents.

Several critics deny that Shelley is concerned with questions of ontology except in the negative sense of doubting the existence of all metaphysical powers. They do so broadly for two types of reason. On the one hand, those such as Kenneth Neill Cameron and P.M.S. Dawson, who lay stress on Shelley's engagement with current political issues, believe the main function of his

poetry is to offer 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence' and to 'exalt and ennoble humanity' with poetic fictions rather than to make claims to metaphysical truth.³⁹ On the other hand, critics like John W. Wright and Ronald Tetreault, who emphasize his view that 'Language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination and has relation to thoughts alone', consider that by means of the synthetic power of metaphor or the play of signifiers Shelley's poetry creates its own self-sustaining linguistic universe which involves no transcendental presence.⁴⁰ These two approaches, broadly classifiable as allegorical and symbolic, are not wholly dissimilar to rival conceptions of Shelley that have been current since his own time. Whereas Cameron and Dawson are the heirs of the early Owenites in reading him mainly politically, Wright and Tetreault, finding a tendency in his poetry towards aesthetic autonomy and abstract idealism, belong, despite their denials of his metaphysical intent, to the tradition which Mary Shelley helped to form in speaking of his 'love of abstract beauty' and 'luxury of imagination, which sought nothing beyond itself'. It is not difficult to find evidence in support of both points of view in Shelley's work, yet a comprehensive interpretation needs to embrace the two, and this a dialectical understanding of his poetry makes possible. Moreover, in accommodating both it also corrects them. In spite of their anti-metaphysical bias, both approaches assume a logocentric ontology, whether they admit it or not. Shelley, more fully sceptical than either class of critics quite realizes, deconstructs both allegorical and symbolic impulses in his work by pitting them against each other; and at the same time the interrelationship between becomes, in the way that Armstrong suggests, the basis of an ironic but nevertheless affirmative idealism.

Many critics have recognised in Shelley a conflict between what might be characterised in general terms as the eighteenth-century values of rationality, scepticism and a socially-based morality, and the more typically

Romantic preferences for feeling, idealism and a view of ethics which gives scope to the individual conscience. Several, particularly those who stress his Platonism, have often observed a development from one tendency to the other in the course of his career,⁴¹ but most critics now tend to see them as held in constant tension throughout. The moral ambivalence that Floyd Stovall finds in Shelley between altruism and a search for personal fulfilment is echoed in Richard Cronin's observation of the poet's commitment to two kinds of morality, one social and normative, the other individual and empathic.⁴² Ross Grieg Woodman considers him torn between 'a desire to reform the world and a desire to transcend it', and Earl Wasserman similarly sees two rival aspirations in his work, one based on human and natural perfectibility, the other on the idea of a perfect eternal afterlife.⁴³ Indeed, most of those who follow C.E. Pulos in emphasizing Shelley's debt to sceptical philosophy, also admit an intuitive tendency to transcendentalism in his poetry, which in various ways they seek to reconcile with his prevailing rational anti-dualist doubt.⁴⁴ Stuart Sperry seeks to redress the balance against these critics by stressing the 'emotional power and feeling' of Shelley's verse, and suggesting that the 'recent emphasis on Shelley as not only a philosopher but a philosopher of a specifically skeptical cast has obscured the fact that he is one of the great visionary idealists of world literature'.⁴⁵ The main objection to all these approaches, however, is that in seeing his scepticism and idealism, his thought and feeling, as merely antithetical qualifications of each other, they inevitably diminish both.

Although a number of critics have observed a dialectical oscillation or interdependence between contraries in Shelley's poetry, they have generally done so by giving ultimate priority to his idealism. For example, Bloom sees a pattern whereby a moment of heightened relationship between the mind and its universe is subsequently dissipated yet not invalidated by experience.⁴⁶

Influenced by Bloom, Daniel J. Hughes describes a cyclical action in the poetry by which an originating potentiality is repeatedly recuperated from the actuality of form.⁴⁷ Wasserman is conscious of an interdependence between faith in ultimate Being and a sense of the deceptiveness of the phenomenal world, but his final position is decidedly transcendentalist. Ulmer, too, believes that Shelley's idealism takes priority over his scepticism, arguing that both are 'oriented to truth-as-presence'.⁴⁸ Like Wasserman, he is aware of dialectical tensions between the two attitudes, but considers their mutually-sustaining relationship ultimately privileges idealism because the 'contraries are linked in a dynamic symbiosis that takes place within the closed circle of metaphorical form.'⁴⁹ I would argue on the other hand that the interdependence is equal, and that Shelley quite deliberately breaks open the 'closed circle of metaphorical form' to submit his poetry to processes of change and renewal that include the world beyond its verbal boundaries. Indeed, if he places confidence in the transforming and redeeming power of poetry it is because he actually, not merely figuratively, admits the paradox that poetic failure is unavoidable as well.

v

The poems I have chosen to concentrate on in this study cover Shelley's career from beginning to end with a roughly even spread, are of recognized importance in his canon, and clearly illustrate his treatment of nature. They are considered in turn in the ensuing chapters, whose contents I briefly summarize as follows:

Chapter 2: Queen Mab (1813) is revealing of formative influences, opinions and patterns of thought which Shelley adapts and elaborates in later work. In this chapter I am primarily concerned with tracing a tension between the overt monism and latent dualism which is apparent in the poem's concept of nature.

Chapter 3: In the poems of the Alastor volume (1816) a concern with the relationship of subject and object takes the place of the mind-matter speculations of Queen Mab, thus indicating Shelley's shift from an eighteenth-century materialism to a Romantic poetic idealism. In examining Alastor's portrayal of idealism's self-defeat, I focus on its themes of nature and solitude, particularly as they convey Shelley's response to the poetry of Wordsworth.

Chapter 4: 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' (1816) show a recovery of Shelley's confidence in the transformative powers of poetry. In these two odes he fully develops his sense of a dialectical relationship between nature and mind, an understanding of which is encapsulated, I suggest, in his concept of 'Power'.

Chapter 5: The range and depth of the dialectical process are greatly extended in Prometheus Unbound, where, I argue, it becomes the basis of the poem's dramatisation of a moral and political revolution. I begin this chapter by looking at the poem's relationship with 'Mont Blanc' and The Revolt of Islam (1818), and then consider the ways in which Shelley's ideas about nature and politics entwine. Prometheus's moral reform is viewed in terms of a renunciation of desire for a former unity with the external world, an act which is transformed by Asia into a process of poetic and political self-renewal. The final two acts are considered largely as they affect the coherence of the play by only partially conforming to its liberating dialectic.

Chapter 6: In the course of arriving at a view of death which overcomes grief and fear, Adonais (1821) proposes various conceptions of the relationship between nature and mind. These I relate to discussions on similar topics between Shelley and Southey in 1811-12, and to his reading of Keats, and argue that through the interaction of different notions of life and death,

the poem reaches an open, life-affirming conclusion, rather than a closed, dualist one.

Chapter 7: This chapter on The Triumph of Life looks particularly at Shelley's rehandling of images of nature found in his various literary sources. I challenge Paul de Man's view that the poem represents a repudiation of poetry, arguing that in its oscillation between memory and forgetfulness, and between the viewpoints of 'actor' and 'spectator', it is saved from an absolute pessimism.

Notes

1. 'Shelley's Ecology of Love', in Paradise of Exiles: Shelley and Byron in Pisa, ed. Mario Curreli and Anthony L. Johnson, Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Romantic Reassessment, No. 80 (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1988), pp. 31-51.
2. 'Byron', The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, ed. R.H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-77), IX (1977), 237. For accounts of the origin and spread of the angelic myth, see George Mathewson, 'Matthew Arnold's "Ineffectual Angel"', KSMB, 21 (1970), 3-6, and Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 1-32.
3. These implications of Wordsworth's concept of nature have been considered by, among others, James K. Chandler, Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Alan Liu, Wordsworth: The Sense of History (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Marjorie Levinson, Wordsworth's Great Period Poems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jonathan Bate, Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition (London: Routledge, 1991); and Nicholas Roe, The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992).
4. For some accounts of Shelley's sceptical idealism see C.E. Pulos, The Deep

Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), passim; Donald H. Reiman, Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study Based on a Text Newly Edited from the Bodleian Manuscript, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, No. 55 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), pp. 3-18; Earl R. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1971), pp. 131-53; Kenneth Neill Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 150-77; Stuart Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1975), pp. 95-118, 199-205; Tilottama Rajan, Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 58-96; Jerrold E. Hogle, Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 294, 316-7; William A. Ulmer, Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 11-18.

5. 'Mary Shelley's Notes to Shelley's Poems and Frankenstein', SiR, 6 (1966), 226-54.
6. Susan J. Wolfson analyses the way in which Mary Shelley's Prefaces and Notes construct a notion of Shelley that will appeal to his audience. In particular, she suggests that Mary Shelley's classification of the poems into two types (which I go on to discuss) is indicative of her attempt to address both popular and elite classes of readers, 'Editorial Privilege: Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley's Audiences', in The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein, ed. Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39-72.
7. 'Percy Bysshe Shelley', United States Magazine and Democratic Review, December 1843: pp. 602-23, in Shelley: The Critical Heritage, ed. James E. Barcus (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 395.
8. 'Modern British Poets', Papers on Literature and Art, 1846, in Barcus, p. 420.
9. 'Essay on Shelley' (1851), The Complete Works of Robert Browning, gen. ed. Roma A. King, 5 vols (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), V, 150.

10. 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' (1900), Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 65-95.
11. Bagehot, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley' (1856), Literary Studies, ed. Richard Holt Hutton, 3 vols (London: Longmans, 1895), III, 290; Thomson, Shelley (written in 1889, first published in 1908; rpt. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1935), p. 50.
12. 'Maurice de Guérin', in Super, III, p. 34 and n.
13. Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 25-6.
14. Leavis, Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry (1936; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 194; Hazlitt, unsigned review of Shelley's Posthumous Poems, Edinburgh Review, July 1824, in The Young Romantics and Critical Opinion 1807-1824: Poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Keats as Seen by Their Contemporaries, ed. Theodore Redpath (London: Harrap, 1973), p. 388.
15. Auden is quoted by Patricia Hodgart, A Preface to Shelley (London: Longman, 1985), p. 114; Eliot, "Shelley and Keats", The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Poetry to Criticism in England (1933; London: Faber & Faber, 1964), pp. 87-102.
16. Notable expositions of Shelley's Platonism occur in Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century Poetry (New York: Russell and Russell, 1936), pp. 209-75; and J.A. Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1949). An emphasis on his use of the external world as a source of mystical symbols is found in G. Wilson Knight, The Starlit Dome (1941; London: Methuen, 1955) 179-96; Peter Butter, Shelley's Idols of the Cave (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1954); Neville Rogers, Shelley at Work: A Critical Enquiry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); and David Perkins, The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959). Carl Grabo concentrates on his interest in natural science, which he considers to reflect a neo-Platonic or pantheist view of the universe as an image of

the human mind, A Newton Among Poets: Shelley's Use of Science in Prometheus Unbound (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1930); and The Magic Plant (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1936). Various studies of Shelley's natural imagery stress his elusive, abstract and synaesthetic qualities as expressions of an impulse towards a unity of mind and nature: O.W. Firkins, Power and Elusiveness in Shelley (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1937); Richard Harter Fogle, "The Abstractness of Shelley", Philological Enquiry, 24 (1945), 362-79; rpt. in Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), pp. 215-40; Glenn O'Malley, Shelley and Synaesthesia (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

17. Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley, pp. 13, 17-18, 22-23.
18. For other instances of this metaphor, see 'The Coliseum' (written 1818-19), I&P, p. 303; Peter Bell the Third (1819), 294; Adonais (1821), 418-20; A Defence of Poetry (1821), R&P, p. 488; 'On the Devil and Devils' (written probably in 1820 or 1821), I&P, VII, 100. As A.N. Whitehead says, Shelley often writes "with a definite geometrical diagram before his inward eye", Science and the Modern World (New York, 1926), p. 123.
19. Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 141.
20. See Hoagwood, Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and Its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), p. 112.
21. Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 150.
22. See Charles E. Robinson, Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 246; Timothy Clark, Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 40; and Hoagwood, p. 218 n.
23. 'The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery', in The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (1954), rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness:

- Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), pp. 77-88; Wordsworth, Preface to the 1815 edition of his Poems, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 33.
24. 'A Poet's Progress: Wordsworth and the Via Naturaliter Negativa', Modern Philology, 59 (1961), 214-24.
25. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 527-60; de Man, 'Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image', in Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), pp. 65-77. For their application of their respective theories to Shelley in particular, see Abrams's criticism of Prometheus Unbound in Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), pp. 299-307, and de Man's criticism of The Triumph of Life in 'Shelley Disfigured', in Harold Bloom et al., Deconstruction and Criticism, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 39-73.
26. I&P, VII, 64. I&P give a probable date of 1815-19 for the composition of the fragment.
27. Shelley's Style (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 50-52.
28. 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley' (1957), rpt. in Shelley: Modern Judgements, ed. R.B. Woodings (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 162-95 (pp. 163-64).
29. The remark was recorded by John Frere in 1830, quoted in Barcus, p. 355.
30. Shelley's Process, p. 10.
31. Shelley's Process, p. 86.
32. Ulmer, p. 17.
33. Shelley's Process, p. 9. It is true that in A Refutation of Deism (1814)

Eusebes says that 'mind deserves to be considered as the effect, rather than the cause of motion' (I&P, VI, 56), but Eusebes is a Christian, who is making a debating point, and not to be confused with Shelley.

34. 'Shelley and Deconstruction: A Critical Discussion of Shelley's Place in Recent Critical Debate', paper given at the International Shelley Conference, Gregynog, 15-17 August 1992.
35. Discussions of Romantic irony include: Douglas C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London: Methuen, 1969); Stuart M. Sperry, 'Toward a Definition of Romantic Irony in English Literature', in Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of a Literary Tradition, Festschrift for Carlos Baker, ed. George Bornstein (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh University Press, 1977), pp. 3-28; David Simpson, Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1979); Anne K. Mellor, 'On Romantic Irony, Symbolism and Allegory', Criticism, 21 (1979), 217-29; Mellor, English Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Lilian R. Furst, Fictions of Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). Of these only Sperry draws attention to Shelley as an exponent of Romantic irony, but his definition of the mode as primarily a form of indeterminacy does not specify the dynamic interaction of contraries that is emphasized in other accounts. Romantic irony is invoked to explain a sceptical qualification of expressions of transcendentalism in the 1816 odes by Gerald McNiece, 'The Poet as Ironist in "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"', SiR, 15, (1975), 311-336, and Ronald Tetreault, The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), pp. 63-94; and in Prometheus Unbound by Sperry, Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 116-17.
36. Furst, pp. 43-44.
37. 'On Romantic Irony, Symbolism and Allegory', pp. 226-28.
38. Language as Living Form in Nineteenth Century Poetry (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 21.
39. I quote Shelley's Preface to Prometheus Unbound (R&P, p. 135), and his

- Note to Hellas, 197-238 (R&P, p. 416 n.). See Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 159-60, and Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 3-5, 99, 107, 112, 236. Studies of the poet figure in Shelley's poetry by Kelvin Everest and Timothy Clark likewise argue that the apparently 'private' concerns of this figure are an expression of Shelley's 'public' ones; see Everest, 'Shelley's Doubles: An Approach to "Julian and Maddalo"', in Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference, ed. Everest (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp. 63-88, and Clark, Embodying Revolution.
40. Tetreault, The Poetry of Life, pp. 3-16, 170-79; Wright, Shelley's Myth of Metaphor (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1970), pp. 1-12.
41. For example, Browning, 'Essay on Shelley', King, V, 147; A.M.D. Hughes, The Nascent Mind of Shelley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947); Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of A Vision (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); Milton Wilson, Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Ross Grieg Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); and Andrew Welburn, Power and Self-Consciousness in the Poetry of Shelley (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).
42. Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), pp. 145-52; Cronin, Shelley's Poetic Thoughts (London: Macmillan, 1981) pp. 77-132.
43. Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision, p. 3; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 3-5.
44. See Reiman, Shelley's "The Triumph of Life", pp. 4-5; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 131-53; Lloyd Abbey, Destroyer and Preserver: Shelley's Poetic Skepticism (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 1-10; Angela Leighton, Shelley and the Sublime: A Study of the Major Poems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 25-47.
45. Stuart Sperry, Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. ix.

46. Shelley's Mythmaking (1959; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 45, 93, 146-7.
47. 'Potentiality in Prometheus Unbound', SiR, 2 (1963), 107-26; 'Kindling and Dwindling: The Poetic Process in Shelley', KSJ, 13 (1964), 13-28.
48. Ulmer, p. 13.
49. Ulmer, p. 15.

Queen Mab: 'The Moral and Material Universe'

When a pirated edition of Queen Mab appeared in 1821 Shelley wrote a letter to The Examiner and the Morning Chronicle dissociating himself from the publication.¹ The poem itself he admits was written in a 'sufficiently intemperate spirit'; further, he has no doubt 'that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature.' As if in excuse, he mentions that he was only eighteen when he wrote it, though in fact he was well over twenty by the time it was complete in February 1813. For Mary Shelley, who quotes the whole letter in her Note to Queen Mab, Shelley's self-criticism helps to justify her own disparagement of his youthful revolutionary ardours.² However, the letter is thoroughly disingenuous, for while Shelley disavowed the poem in public, he privately relished its popular success and notoriety, as other letters he wrote at this time reveal. 'You may imagine how much I am amused,' he wrote to John Gisborne, 'For the sake of a dignified appearance however, & really because I wish to protest against all the bad poetry in it, I have given orders to say that it is all done against my desire.'³ This also makes clear that Shelley's main embarrassment was the literary quality of the work: 'villainous trash' is how he describes it to Charles Ollier.⁴ Thus while seeming to distance himself from the poem's 'intemperate', 'crude' and 'immature' political and religious sentiments, Shelley actually uses his public letter to head off hostile criticism of its literary and philosophical failings.

Although Queen Mab has not been without its admirers, particularly among those who have valued it for its vigorous political polemic, few critics would deny that these failings are real.⁵ In this chapter I shall argue, however, that the very inconsistencies and confusions of its ideas are of interest in revealing the early formation of a structure of thought that remains with him for the rest of his career. These various incoherences, it will be found, centre very largely around the poem's concept of nature. Moreover, in defining some of its emergent patterns of thought, I shall suggest that, despite certain obvious literary weaknesses, the poem is worthier of our attention than Shelley suggests, and contains subtleties we normally associate with his later poetry.

i

Given that it is subtitled A Philosophical Poem, Queen Mab does indeed show a remarkable disregard for logical consistency. Commentators have remarked a number of its contradictions: for example, Barrell finds in the poem 'a strange mixture of humanitarianism and science, of intellectualism and emotionalism, of D'Holbach and Rousseau'; Woodman sees a conflict between what he calls Godwin's immaterialism, Holbach's materialism, and Thomas Taylor's and John Frank Newton's Orphism; and Grabo, Curran and Hogle note Shelley's difficulties with the concept of necessity.⁶ The full title, however, not only claims for the poem a certain basis in reasoning, but points to an important source of its incoherence. David Duff draws attention to the contemporary Jacobin associations of the term 'Philosophy' and also to the connections with romance suggested by the name Queen Mab.⁷ It is doubtful, however, whether the poem achieves the synthesis of its radical philosophy and conservative poetic form that he supposes, for the combination of a Southeyan supernatural machinery, by which the fairy queen transports the spirit of Ianthe in a magic

car to her etherial palace, and Mab's materialist and revolutionary polemic
remains an insuperable anomaly.⁸ A further cause of the poem's doctrinal
incoherence is the huge range and diversity of material upon which it draws.
It is as if Shelley intended the work to be a compendium of his knowledge and
opinions concerning all important branches of learning, including metaphysics,
political theory and the natural sciences, and at the same time to reflect his
wide reading in ancient and modern literature. The Notes, addressing subjects
as various as astronomy, prostitution, the concept of necessity, and
vegetarianism, and including long undigested gobbets of numerous authors in
their original Greek, Latin and French, are perhaps the clearest indication of
Shelley's failure to assimilate his materials. They also emphasize a conflict
within the work between prosaic fact and reason on the one hand and the
fictions of poetry on the other.

A work which is comparable with Queen Mab in terms of its youthful
ambition, declamatory style, and confusion of philosophical, religious and
political subject matter is Coleridge's Religious Musings (written in 1794).
This poem, moreover, reveals a philosophical tension which, I shall argue,
also lies at the heart of Queen Mab. Distinguishing true religion from
superstition, Coleridge writes:

'Tis the sublime of man,
Our noontide majesty, to know ourselves
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole!
This fraternises man, this constitutes
Our charities and bearings. But 'tis God
Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole;
This the worst superstition, him except
Aught to desire, Supreme Reality! (126-33)

Here Coleridge expresses simultaneously a pantheistic sense of unity and a belief in a supernatural God who, though diffused through the world, is also distinct from it. Thomas McFarland finds this conflict to be one of Coleridge's major preoccupations, and in his discussion of the Biographia Literaria (1817), he argues that behind the work's heterogeneous and often contradictory material a reticulative principle is to be discerned in Coleridge's search for a rapprochement between Spinozist pantheism and Kantian idealism.⁹ Obviously the youthful Shelley does not compare in depth and range of thought with the Coleridge of the Biographia, but it can be shown that in Queen Mab he too is torn between monist and dualist philosophical systems, and that the contradictions we find in the poem are largely attributable to this conflict. The two poets admittedly view the issue from almost opposite positions, yet there is a degree of convergence, for while Coleridge, essentially a transcendentalist, shows himself drawn in the Biographia towards Spinozism, Shelley's monist materialism is constantly disrupted by a tendency to dualism. They are also responding to very different philosophical influences. When he wrote Queen Mab, Shelley's knowledge of Spinoza was probably limited (although he quotes him in his Notes), and of Kant even less, but as a result of his reading of British empirical and French rationalist philosophy, and of eighteenth century poetry, the question of the relationship of mind and nature was as important to him as it was to Coleridge.¹⁰

Shelley's declared philosophy in Queen Mab is monistic, whether he is following the rigorous materialism of Holbach, or adopting a loose form of pantheism derived from sources as various as Pope, Erasmus Darwin and Wordsworth.¹¹ His Note to the assertion 'There is no God!' (VII, 13) repeats the arguments of The Necessity of Atheism (1811), but he now emphasizes that these apply to a creative God only and do not affect the 'hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe'; thus he is justified in adding

quotations not only from Bacon and Holbach expressing atheist views, but from Pliny and Spinoza expressing pantheist ones (M&E, pp. 381-91). 'Nature' in the poem is sometimes identified with the impersonal and amoral necessity of Holbach's Système de la nature, and sometimes approximates to "'the Soul of the Universe the intelligent & necessarily beneficent actuating principle'", which is how he defines the object of his belief in a letter of 3 January 1811 to Hogg.¹² There is clearly an inconsistency here, to which we will return, and yet in their rejection of dualism the atheist and the pantheist are at one. Shelley's awareness of the proximity of the two positions is revealed in his account of a conversation he held with Southey (who claims to have taught him the term pantheist)¹³ in the winter of 1811-12: 'he says I ought not to call myself an Atheist, since in reality I believe that the Universe is God.-- I tell him that I believe that God is another signification for the Universe.'¹⁴

Throughout Queen Mab Shelley makes use of various commonly held eighteenth-century ideas that identify, or at least establish a close correspondence between, the physical and moral spheres. He often expresses the animistic belief that, as he puts it in A Refutation of Deism (1814), 'Matter, such as we behold it, is not inert. It is infinitely active and subtile.'¹⁵ Thus Mab says, 'The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight/ Is active, living spirit. Every grain/ Is sentient both in unity and part' (IV, 142-4),¹⁶ and,

I tell thee that those viewless beings,
Whose mansion is the smallest particle
Of the impassive atmosphere,
Think, feel and live like man... (II, 231-34)

As M.H. Abrams has pointed out, the idea of an animate universe readily

combines with the Stoic and Platonist notion of a world soul. Hence Mab addresses the 'Spirit of Nature' as the 'Soul of that smallest being,/ The dwelling of whose life/ Is one faint April sun-gleam' (III, 226-32).

A corollary of the idea that the human and physical worlds share a common life is the belief that moral changes within human society are accompanied by corresponding changes in the environment. Thus Shelley espouses the theory, which he probably derived from John Frank Newton, that the oscillation of the earth's poles will gradually diminish, thus bringing in an everlasting spring which would accompany a similar revolution in human society.¹⁸ 'There is no great extravagance', he says in his Note on the subject, 'in presuming that the progress of the perpendicularity of the poles may be as rapid as the progress of intellect; or that there should be a perfect identity between the moral and physical improvement of the human species' (M&E, p. 374).

Another idea linking the moral and the physical, to which Shelley refers, is the catastrophic theory that the earth itself has experienced upheavals of its surface corresponding to similar upheavals in human society. Thus 'Earthquakes and wars' (VI, 100) are associated, and in a striking anticipation of Prometheus Unbound we are told, 'Earth heard the name [of God]; earth trembled, as the smoke/ Of his revenge ascended up to heaven,/ Blotting the constellations' (VI, 111-13), where once again, bloodshed and volcanic eruption are equated. The theory of catastrophism was available to Shelley in various versions, of which there are two main types, differing in their emphasis. The more strictly scientific view, based on the investigations of geologists such as James Hutton and Georges Cuvier, was that periods of intense volcanic activity followed each other in natural cycles.¹⁹ According to the other form of the theory, which had a moral or theological basis, and was strongly influenced by Thomas Burnet's The Sacred Theory of the Earth (1691), the cataclysmic disruption of the earth was the result of human

corruption. Although they differed in their views about the ultimate cause of change, the two types of theory were not, however, completely separate. Cuvier, for example, makes a comparison between volcanic and political eruptions: 'Nature also has had her intestine wars, and...the surface of the globe has been broken up by revolutions and catastrophes';²⁰ and Burnet's Sacred Theory regards itself also as a scientific theory. Both aspects of catastrophism are fully present in the second canto of Queen Mab, which offers a vision of the past, and accounts for the destruction of empires. The naturalistic explanation he derives mainly from Holbach, who speculates that periodically the human race and human civilization have been all but annihilated by natural revolutions.²¹ For his moral (though anti-theological) view Shelley is indebted to Volney, who holds that 'Terrible catastrophes remind the human species, that the laws of nature, and the precepts of wisdom and truth, cannot be trampled on in vain'.²² Thus the destruction of the 'Metropolis of the western continent' (II, 188) is seen on the one hand as part of an inevitable cycle of rise and fall that affects all of nature (II, 211-224), and on the other as the result of 'wealth, that curse of man', and his abandonment of 'Virtue and wisdom, truth and liberty' (II, 204; 206). Shelley combines the same two attitudes towards 'Monarchs and conquerors', whom he calls 'The earthquakes of the human race' (II, 121-3): they are both part of the inevitable natural order and manifestations of a corruption transgressing that order.

The interrelation of moral and physical health is a recurrent theme of the Notes of the poem. Writing of equality (Note to V, 93-94) he says: 'Labour is required for physical, and leisure for moral improvement....A state which should combine the advantages of both, would be subjected to the evils of neither. He that is deficient in firm health, or vigorous intellect, is but half a man'.²³ Elsewhere we learn that prostitution causes 'body and mind

alike [to] crumble into a hideous wreck of humanity', and 'idiotcy and disease' to be passed on to succeeding generations.²⁴ The whole of the long Note on vegetarianism depends on the idea that health of body and mind are inseparable: thus 'Crime is madness. Madness is disease.'²⁵ Even the practice of religion can cause a mania requiring the care of a physician.²⁶

ii

But while Queen Mab's stated philosophy is that God and the world, and mind and matter, are one, the poem also reveals this unity as constantly liable to fissure. As we have seen, its atheistic materialism may be consonant with the pantheist rejection of a creative deity, but hardly with such concepts as the 'Spirit of Nature' and 'Soul of the Universe'. In Spinoza's strict use of the terms God and Nature, as found in the passage Shelley quotes in his Notes, there is perhaps no conflict between pantheism and materialism.²⁷ But loosely defined pantheistic ideas such as pervaded much eighteenth-century thinking on the question of mind and matter, God and the world, often convey a sense of immanence rather than a consistent monism. The contradictions that we find in Shelley's work are therefore by no means exclusively his own. For example, Newton's dualist and mechanistic view of the universe nonetheless includes a unified theory of mind and matter, treating both as forms of energy, and thus, as Grabo points out, representing a form of pantheism.²⁸ Reflecting a similar world view, Pope's 'All are but parts of one stupendous whole,/ Whose body, Nature is, and God the soul' occurs within the context of a conventionally theistic description of the universe; and it is as a young theist himself that Shelley quotes the first of these lines, in a letter of January 1811, with the approving comment that it is 'something more than Poetry'.²⁹ It is certainly something less than full pantheism, as indeed are numerous other scientific and poetic descriptions of the animation of matter that appeared in the

eighteenth century.³⁰ The advocate of such theories who had most influence on Shelley was Erasmus Darwin. His The Temple of Nature (1803), 'a work whose assertion of the unity of human and natural spheres left a lasting stamp on Shelley's conceptions', as Curran remarks, was an important model for Queen Mab in particular.³¹ It nevertheless exemplifies the dualist philosophy of nature which he outlines at the beginning of Zoonomia (1794-6): 'The whole of Nature may be supposed to consist of two essences or substances, one of which may be termed spirit, and the other matter.'³² The temple of Nature in Queen Mab embodies this same distinction, in being the material form in which the 'Spirit of Nature' resides (I, 264-77).

According to Wasserman, the 'paradoxically dualistic monism' of Shelley's so-called 'intellectual philosophy', as outlined in 'On Life', is what 'essentially distinguishes [it]...from both materialism and the popular dualism of mind and matter'.³³ However, Shelley's account of his philosophical development in 'On Life' gives a somewhat misleading impression that he passed through well-defined stages, idealism superseding materialism as materialism had dualism, when in fact none of these positions was systematically argued, or held to the absolute exclusion of either of the others. In fact Shelley is never wholly a dualist or a monist, but is always subject to a tension between the two. In Queen Mab, for example, we find elements of mind-matter dualism, and also of idealism, mixed in with Holbachian materialism. Indeed, Shelley's commitment to the unity of mind and matter is constantly under assault from certain poetic and philosophical demands that his materialism cannot satisfy. These are revealed in a number of the poem's areas of concern, which we will consider in turn. They include the question of necessity and free will; the tendency of poetry to deify through personification; the desire for life after death; and the conflict between reason and feeling.

In one of his Notes Shelley expounds the Humean doctrine of necessity. In

supposing an ineluctable chain of cause and effect operating equally through the material universe and the human mind, this theory is consistent with the Holbachian view of necessity that is found in Canto VI of the poem. Shelley's Note also draws on Godwin, who is himself dependent on Hume.³⁴ In Political Justice (1793), however, Godwin also introduces the teleological notion of society's inevitable progress towards truth--an idea which, as Mark Philp shows, he takes over from Priestley and Hartley, though translating their theological terms into the language of truth and reason.³⁵ Shelley does something very similar by combining a Holbachian impersonal necessity with the 'Spirit of Nature' which has intelligence and will, and which in due course will usher in an 'age of endless peace' (III, 325). Both Godwin and Shelley, in other words, conflate a causative and a purposive view of necessity. In arguing that the purpose works through the causal chain, whose links include the human mind, Godwin is able to dispense with the dualism of his theological sources. Yet he does not envisage a complete identity between purpose and cause. In the last paragraph of Political Justice he suggests that although the progress towards truth is inevitable, it can be accelerated by the human intellect.³⁶ Shelley makes the same point in his An Address, to the Irish People (1812): 'these great changes...will certainly happen....But...it all depends upon yourselves how soon or how late' (Murray, p. 25). Thus for both Shelley and Godwin there is an interrelation but not a perfect conformity between ends and means. Failing satisfactorily to integrate a teleological with a mechanistic idea of necessity, they are left with elements of dualism and free will which conflict with their arguments from Hume. In Queen Mab, which lacks 'subtler discriminations' in such matters, Shelley scarcely recognizes that there is a problem, and in so far as he does he evades it. In a passage foreshadowing Asia's interrogation of Demogorgon, Queen Mab raises the question of the origin of evil (IV, 89-103), but since she can blame

neither a benevolent Nature nor human free will, the responsibility falls on 'Kings, priests, and statesmen' (IV, 104). In a later Holbachian passage, however, she refers to the Spirit of Nature as the 'eternal spring/...of happiness and woe' (VI, 190-1). Through such inconsistencies the question of free will and its relationship with necessity is avoided, but it will resurface in Shelley's later poetry, notably in Prometheus Unbound.

A similar inconsistency in the conception of Nature in Queen Mab is to be found in the varying degree to which it is the subject of personification. On the one hand, as the impersonal force of necessity, it is 'Unlike the God of human error', and requires 'no prayers or praises' (VI, 199-200), and on the other, it is deified as the 'Spirit of Nature', for whom the universe is its 'fitting temple' (I, 268). This contradiction is responsible for some of the poem's more absurd effects. For example, a passage beginning 'Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,/ Necessity! thou mother of the world!' goes on to congratulate Nature for treating all humankind with impartiality, which she is able to do 'Because thou hast not human sense,/ Because thou art not human mind' (VI, 197-219). However, the contradiction is not originally Shelley's, for even the arch-materialist Holbach treats nature with an almost religious veneration. Though he begins his Système de la nature by insisting that the term Nature is not a personification, he ends it with a hymn to Nature; and, as Cameron points out, Shelley's line 'Necessity! thou mother of the world!' is taken from a footnote in Holbach's work.³⁷ What makes their inconsistency the more flagrant is that both writers offer an account of the historical development of religious belief, the origin of which they attribute to the human tendency to deify the phenomena of nature.³⁸ Shelley even quotes parts of Holbach's account in his Notes, beginning with the words: 'La première théologie de l'homme lui fit d'abord craindre et adorer les éléments même, des objets matériels et grossiers' (M&E, p. 386). Shelley's description of the

growth of religion (VI, 72-102) is similar to Holbach's, though it also draws on Volney, who includes a lengthy chapter on this subject in The Ruins.³⁹ All three writers define certain important stages: the deification of the elements; the attribution of powers to a world soul; and the fabrication of a first cause called God. Thus described, the development of religion, in its first two stages if not in its third, shows a curious similarity to the slide from materialism through pantheism to dualism that we have seen Shelley himself to demonstrate in Queen Mab. The parallel, however, far from being acknowledged in the poem, is actually suppressed. Not only does Shelley's passage betray no sign of conscious self-reference, but there is one important factor in the development of religion, mentioned by Holbach and Volney, that Shelley--for an understandable reason--omits: namely, the role of metaphor and poetry. Volney explains how, at an early stage of civilization, natural phenomena were given metaphorical animal and human names, which in time came to be believed in as realities.⁴⁰ Holbach claims that the first metaphysicians and theologians were natural philosophers and poets, who 'believed that they had made an important discovery in subtly distinguishing nature from herself' by imagining a mover of nature called God.⁴¹ Poets also, he suggests, had a social function in propagating religious ideas:

Poetry, by its images, by its fictions, by its numbers, by its harmony and rhyme, struck the mind of the people, and engraved on their memory those ideas which they were willing to give them; and at its voice the entire of nature was animated, it was personified as well as all its parts; earth, air, water, fire, took intelligence, thought, life; the elements were deified; the sky, that immense space which surrounds us, became the first of gods'.⁴²

Although Shelley omits such ideas from Queen Mab, he was fully alive to the

affinities of poetry and personification with religion, as a letter of 11th June 1811 to Elizabeth Hitchener reveals:

Imagination delights in personification; were it not for this embodying quality of eccentric fancy we should be to this day without a God....this personification, beautiful in Poetry, inadmissible in reasoning in the true style of Hindoostanish devotion, you have adopted. (Jones, I, 101)

In Queen Mab Shelley suppresses this knowledge, but it is the last poem in which he does so, for one of the remarkable features of all his later poetry is its self-referential quality, and its consciousness that the 'embodying quality' of the poetic imagination has an inevitable tendency to throw up new gods, even while it deposes old ones. Since nature provides the materials of thought and poetry, it is nature that is thus deified--turned by the poet into 'Forms more real than living man,/ Nurslings of immortality' (Prometheus Unbound, i, 748-9). The delusiveness of such figments remains a theme for Shelley throughout his career, and receives its final illustration in the feminine 'shape all light' of The Triumph of Life (352). As the personified embodiment of the natural elements, she demonstrates poetry's unavoidable effect of 'subtly distinguishing nature from herself' by granting a reality to its own metaphors. In Queen Mab Shelley closes his eyes to the personifying and deifying effect of poetry by asserting an artificial monism, but all the later poems we shall be considering in different ways acknowledge this problem and attempt to deal with it.

A further subject which reveals the flaws in Shelley's assertions of monism is that of postmortality. One of the principal causes of Shelley's later dissatisfaction with the philosophy of materialism, as he explains in 'On

Life' (R&P, p. 476), is that it allows no possibility of an afterlife. Although he is always sceptical of postmortal survival, there remains 'a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution' (R&P, p. 476), as his letters of 1811 and 1812 reveal. 'I have considered it in every possible light & reason tells me that death is the boundary of the life of man,' he writes on 16 October 1811, 'Yet I feel, I believe the direct contrary' (Jones, I, 150). This tension between his reason and his feelings concerning an afterlife is a major cause of Shelley's vacillation between monism and dualism. Even before he reads Holbach in 1812, he recognizes the incompatibility of materialism with the hope of a future life. In a letter of 3 January 1811 he tells Hogg, 'I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that...some vast intellect animates Infinity--If we disbelieve this, the strongest argument in support of the existence of a future state instantly becomes annihilated.' But he recognizes a difficulty with this belief: 'can we suppose', he goes on, 'that...[eternal life] will arise spontaneously as a necessary appendage to our nature, or that our nature itself could be without a cause, a First Cause, a God' (Jones, I, 35). Thus while his hope in a future life requires a belief in God, his scepticism resists it. In trying to satisfy both inclinations he postulates the existence of a non-transcendent and non-creative God--a 'pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe', as he calls it in Queen Mab (M&E, p. 381). But it remains unclear whether such a deity is identical with or different from the universe. Writing to Hitchener on 11 June 1811, he attempts to define his position exactly, but his very emphases and repetitions betray his uncertainty: 'I acknowledge a God, but merely as a synonyme for the existing power of existence....it is therefore the essence of the universe, the universe is the essence of it--it is another word for the essence of the universe' (Jones, I, 101). Shelley's ambiguous understanding of the nature of God is reflected in his view of life after death. In another

letter to Hitchener, in which he contemplates the possibility that both body and soul are annihilated on death, he writes:

Yet one of the properties of animal soul is consciousness of identity-- if this is destroyed, in consequenc{e} the soul whose essence this is, must perish; but as I conceive, & as is certainly capable of demonstration that nothing can be annihilated, but that everything appertaining to nature, consisting of constituent parts infinitely divisible, is in continu{al} change, then do I suppose, & I think I have a right to draw this inference, that neither will soul perish; that in a future existence it will lose all consciousness of having formerly lived elsewhere, will begin life anew, possibly under a shape of which we have no idea....I flatter myself that I have kept clear of supposition--
(Jones, I, 110)

Here Shelley links the perpetuity of natural life in its continual cycle of change with the immortality of the individual soul, thus reasoning by analogy with nature to reach a supernaturalist conclusion, but again his lack of conviction is evident. In Queen Mab he addresses the issue in the context of the approaching age of perfection which he describes in the last two cantos. At first he suggests that when this new day dawns people will stand 'Immortal upon earth' (VIII, 211), though in the Notes he emphasizes that the immortality he has in mind is purely subjective, the result of being able to intensify the succession of ideas in the mind to such an extent that each moment appears of infinite duration (M&E, pp. 404-6). Such an idea anticipates his later espousal of Drummond's idealism, the only philosophy, he claims in 'On Life', consistent with contemplations of eternity (R&P, p. 476). In the ninth canto he admits that death is inevitable, but here it is 'the voyage of a darksome hour' (IX, 174),

That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
And happy regions of eternal hope.
Therefore, O Spirit! fearlessly bear on:
Though storms may break the primrose on its stalk,
Though frosts may blight the freshness of its bloom,
Yet spring's awakening breath will woo the earth. (IX, 162-67)

Again by analogy with natural processes, the poem postulates a life beyond the grave, and hence implicitly a dualism which is at odds with its stated philosophy.

The tension between reason and feeling, which the question of an afterlife reflects, is another area in which the unity of mind and nature is seen to come under strain. This tension does not go wholly unacknowledged, for the poem affirms that in a renovated world 'Reason and passion [will] cease to combat there' (VIII, 231). But it is as a Godwinian rationalist that he makes such a claim. Just as Godwin argues that the passions should not be eradicated but rather purified in accordance with reason,⁴³ so the reconciliation of reason and passion envisaged by Shelley in Queen Mab is one in which reason retains precedence. He describes their relationship in the golden age of the future as follows:

Reason was free; and wild though passion went
Through tangled glens and wood-embosomed meads,
Gathering a garland of the strangest flowers,
Yet like the bee returning to her queen,
She bound the sweetest on her sister's brow... (IX, 50-4)

Thus the obedient passions are subject to the queen-bee of reason. However, in various ways the metaphor subverts this ordered monarchy of the hive. Though

'Reason was free', passion, ranging at will, appears to be freer. Passion also has a more immediate contact with wild nature, which reason only knows at second hand, and as the gatherer of garlands it has the primary poetic function. Nature here therefore is associated with an imaginative freedom which lies outside and has the potential to disrupt the rational social order. Yet generally in the poem Nature in its personified form is associated with reason, and the law of one is the law of the other. This opposition of feeling and thought, of nature as it is directly apprehended and Nature as an abstraction, is symptomatic of a crucial tension in all Shelley's later poetry between subjective and objective ways of thinking--a tension which translates itself into figural terms as a competition between symbolic and allegorical modes.

In Shelley's letters of 1811 and 1812 the division of his loyalty between reason and feeling is a recurrent topic, and his claim to be the 'undivided votary' of reason is often inadvertently belied by his remarks in an even clearer way than it is in Queen Mab.⁴⁴ For example, to Hitchener on 11 June 1811 he writes that he would 'with greater pleasure admit than doubt' the existence of a deity 'on the score of feeling' (Jones, I, 100). Rationally, however, he cannot explain the origin of such feeling, for, he says, arguing from Locke, 'since all ideas are derived from the senses this feeling must have originated from some sensual excitation, consequently the possessor of it may be aware of the time, of the circumstances attending its commencement' (Jones, I, 100). Yet knowledge of the sensual origin of religious feeling is what constantly eludes and fascinates him. It is for this reason that he is interested in the emotional effect on him of natural scenery. For example, in July 1811 he writes to Hitchener from Cwm Elan as follows:

This country of Wales is excessively grand; rocks piled on each other

to tremendous heights, rivers formed into cataracts by their projections, & valleys clothed with woods, present an appearance of enchantment - but why do they enchant, why is it more affecting than a plain, it cannot be innate, is it acquired?--Thus does knowledge lose all the pleasure which involuntarily arises, by attempting to arrest the fleeting Phantom as it passes - vain almost like the chemist's aether it evaporates under our observation; it flies from all but the slaves of passion & sickly sensibility... (Jones, I, 119-20)

On 26th July he writes again in similar terms:

Nature is here marked with the most impressive character of loveliness and grandeur, once I was tremulously alive to tones and scenes - The habit of analysing feelings I fear does not agree with this. It is spontaneous, & when it becomes subjugated to consideration ceases to exist. But you do right to indulge feeling where it does not militate with reason, I wish I could too-- (Jones, I, 127)

Shelley's disparagement of feeling in these letters does not disguise his real regret for the passing of the 'fleeting Phantom' and of the time when he was 'tremulously alive to tones and scenes'. In both passages he describes the evanescence of spontaneous feeling at the moment it becomes an object of thought. This inevitable process is what, in the fragment 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind', he calls the 'passage from sensation to reflection', which makes it impossible 'to be where we have been, vitally and indeed' (I&P, VII, 64). The fleeting phantoms, vanishing apparitions and forgotten dreams of an immediate, unselfconscious apprehension of the external world flit through Shelley's poetry from Alastor to The Triumph of Life, and their elusiveness is a constant reminder of the unbridgeable division between feeling and thought. Queen Mab, however, in asserting the primacy of reason, and urging the conformity of passion to rational truth, minimizes the depth of

this division, and discounts the power of feeling to unsettle any objective formulation of unity.

iii

All the suppressed contradictions that are detectable beneath the defiant self-certainty and optimism of Queen Mab reappear in more conscious and complex form in Shelley's later work. Indeed they become the basis of a series of dynamic tensions that are fundamental to both the content and style of his poetry. But we find not only some of the components of these tensions in Queen Mab but also an emerging sense of their dialectical interrelationship. And just as the contradictions we have noted all revolve round the very eighteenth-century concern with the relationship of mind and matter, so it is some typically eighteenth-century ideas about the operations of physical nature that provide Shelley with the terms that describe the character of that dialectic as it later evolves in his poetry.

There are two such ideas in particular that are of significance in this context, and they are both almost commonplaces in the philosophical and scientific writings that Shelley draws on in Queen Mab. The first is defined in A Refutation of Deism (1814), where Shelley writes, 'The laws of attraction and repulsion, desire and aversion, suffice to account for every phenomenon of the moral and physical world' (Murray, p. 115). He expresses the same idea in Queen Mab thus:

the minutest atom comprehends
A world of loves and hatreds; these beget
Evil and good: hence truth and falsehood spring;
Hence will and thought and action, all the germs
Of pain and pleasure, sympathy or hate,
That variegate the eternal universe. (IV, 145-150)

Here and in the Refutation Shelley extends the Newtonian idea of the tensions sustaining matter into the moral sphere, as Holbach and Volney have done before him,⁴⁵ and the laws of attraction and repulsion thus become another example of the correspondence of mind and matter. In the later poems, however, as we shall see, these laws can be seen as governing the relationship between mind and the external world. They therefore correspond to the image of the centre and circumference which describes the 'paradoxically dualistic monism' of Shelley's 'intellectual philosophy'. In view of the fissiparous nature of the mind-matter unity in Queen Mab, it is tempting to interpret the laws of attraction and repulsion in the same way here, even though to do so is to introduce into the poem an element of self-reference and self-doubt that is not generally apparent. Indeed, read in this light, the passage quoted above gains considerably in interest and significance. In its obvious sense it merely accounts for all motive forces as forms of desire or aversion. But if the 'world of loves and hatreds' that each atom comprehends is understood as a unity riven by the kinds of tensions we have been discussing, then it is from this single source that good and evil, truth and falsehood promiscuously spring; and 'will and thought and action' are driven, not by simple responses to 'pain or pleasure', but by a dialectic of interactive forces. The passage thus becomes a description of the polarities and processes we find constantly at work in Shelley's poetry.

The second idea taken from natural science that describes the dialectic of Shelley's poetry is simply stated in his Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists (1812), where he writes: 'Do we not see that the laws of nature perpetually act by disorganization and reproduction, each alternately becoming cause and effect' --to which he adds, 'The {analogies} that we can draw from physical to moral topics are of all others the most striking' (Murray, p. 53). The particular analogy he has in mind here links the natural

cycles of death and rebirth with the cycles of tyranny and freedom in politics. This is partly the import of the following passage from Queen Mab:

Thus do the generations of the earth
Go to the grave, and issue from the womb,
Surviving still the imperishable change
That renovates the world; even as the leaves
Which the keen frost-wind of the waning year
Has scattered on the forest soil, and heaped
For many seasons there, though long they choke,
Loading with loathsome rottenness the land,
All germs of promise, yet when the tall trees
From which they fell, shorn of their lovely shapes,
Lie level with the earth to moulder there,
They fertilize the land they long deformed,
Till from the breathing lawn a forest springs
Of youth, integrity, and loveliness,
Like that which gave it life, to spring and die.
Thus suicidal selfishness, that blights
The fairest feelings of the opening heart,
Is destined to decay, whilst from the soil
Shall spring all virtue, all delight, all love,
And judgment cease to wage unnatural war
With passion's unsubduable array. (V, 1-21)

The passage shows clearly how good and evil, as part of one process, are 'alternately...cause and effect', and consequently not always easy to distinguish, just as the trees which deform the land with dead leaves also fertilize it and give birth to a new forest. It also illustrates the Lucretian idea of the permanence of matter through change, which, as we have seen, offers the sceptic a monistic alternative to life after death. ⁴⁶ But in representing the inseparability of good and evil, life and death in a

perpetual round of change, the seasonal cycle can image no lasting conjunction of earth and heaven, or time and eternity, and spring's awakening is therefore a doubtful basis for hope of renovation in the human sphere. An implicit acknowledgement that this is so is found in Shelley's recourse to the idea of a perpetual spring in Queen Mab (IX, 1-22, and Note to VI, 45-6), The Revolt of Islam (IX, xxvi, 3699) and Prometheus Unbound (III, iii, 84-107); and in Adonais (154-180) the failure of nature's seasonal rebirth to include the survival of the mind after death is a cause of lament. The '{analogies}' that we can draw from physical to moral topics' would therefore seem to be applicable only if they are something less than metaphorical--that is, if nature and mind are considered not merely as similar in their difference but as identical in kind. As soon as a split between them is admitted, as it always is, if only implicitly, the analogies cease to work. However, the usefulness of the metaphor from nature lies not merely in its function as a parallel to the processes of mind, but also in what it reveals about the relationship between mind and nature. In other words, nature serves as both the image and the object of mind--a dual role which is the source of much self-reflexive and self-cancelling complexity in Shelley's poetry.

In the passage quoted above we see a movement towards this kind of complexity, which shows itself primarily in a wavering between literal statement and metaphor. Initially Shelley seems to say that the generations survive through a circulation of matter in literally the same manner as trees, though there may also be a suggestion of transmigration that involves more than merely physical permanence. The last six lines, on the other hand, comparing the regeneration of trees to that of human values, are clearly metaphorical. They consequently take a first step towards a dualism of mind and matter which immediately undermines the basis of the comparison. This is also an implication of the content of the metaphor, whose import is that the

purified feelings, associated here with natural regeneration, will cease to be involved in 'unnatural war' with judgement. The natural cycle as applied to the mind thus includes a division between the mind's rational judgement and natural passions.

What the metaphor of natural cycles therefore describes is a relationship between the human mind and the external world which constantly oscillates between difference and identity, attraction and repulsion. And metaphor itself, as the record of that relation, is marked by the same oscillation. Just as 'the laws of nature perpetually act by disorganization and reproduction', so, as Shelley later explains in A Defence of Poetry, living metaphors in time become lifeless abstractions, and require poets 'to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized' (R&P, p. 482). Indeed, as we shall find in succeeding chapters, much of Shelley's poetic practice and theory depends on such cycles of creation and destruction in the relationship of mind with its objects.

In its somewhat crude juxtaposition of conflicting philosophies and its agglomeration of ill-assorted influences Queen Mab does rather blindly and almost in spite of itself point in the direction in which Shelley's poetic career is destined to go. There is however a great distance to travel between this poem and Alastor. In its ideas and broad outlook, Queen Mab is still very much an eighteenth-century poem. Its expression of a materialist or pantheist monism, in particular, belongs to an eighteenth-century rationalism and religious scepticism. Coleridge's attraction to Spinoza is of a quite different order and reflects a poetic and characteristically Romantic desire for the subjective experience of unity. In contrast, the Shelley of 1812 is suspicious of poetry, feelings and the self, as his early letters amply testify even while demonstrating his fascination with all three,⁴⁷ and his ebullient advocacy of a monist philosophy in Queen Mab can be seen as a not

wholly successful attempt to resist the dualist tendencies with which they are associated. But in the ensuing three years this holding operation becomes unsustainable, as the demands of poetry, feelings and the self increasingly press their claims. The result is that his speculations about the connection between mind and matter, the moral and the physical, are replaced by a self-conscious relationship of subject and object. The focus of his attention then shifts away from such subjects as the laws of nature and a universal soul towards the operations of his own mind.

Notes

1. 22 June 1821, Jones, II, 304.
2. Hutchinson, p. 838. In the first edition of The Poetical Works of 1839, Mary Shelley, at the request of her publisher, allowed the more blatantly atheistical sections of Queen Mab to be cut, but restored them in the second edition, partly in response to criticism; see Fleck, pp. 228-29.
3. 16 June 1821, Jones, II, 301. Cf. Shelley's letter to Claire Clairmont, 16 June 1821, Jones, II, 301-3. Stephen Behrendt exposes the fiction that Queen Mab was never meant for publication, Shelley and His Audiences (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 83. William St Clair underlines the point by offering evidence of Shelley's contacts with the piratical publishers, The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp. 512-518.
4. 11 June 1821, Jones, II, 298.
5. 'A perfectly original poem on a great subject', was G.B. Shaw's verdict, quoted in Cameron, The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical (London: Victor Gollancz, 1953), p. 241. The importance of Queen Mab in nineteenth-century radical circles has been considered by David Palmer, Shelley: His Reputation and Influence (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1982), pp. 150-86, and Paul Foot, Red Shelley (1980; London: Bookmarks, 1988), pp. 229-45.

6. Barrell, Shelley and the Thought of His Time (Yale: Archon Books, 1967), p. 73; Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley, pp. 75-87; Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, p. 20; Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, pp. 17-18; Hogle, Shelley's Process, pp. 38-9.
7. Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 54-112.
8. For this supernatural machinery Shelley seems mainly, though by no means exclusively, indebted to Southey's The Curse of Kehama (1810), esp. Canto VII (less so to his The Vision of the Maid of Orleans, originally part of Bk IX of Joan of Arc (1795), which is a source suggested by M&E, p. 268). In a letter to Hogg, 7 February 1813, Shelley mentions Milton's Samson Agonistes (1671), Greek tragedy and Southey's Thalaba the Destroyer (1801) as influences on the verse-form of Queen Mab (Jones, I, 352). For the dream-vision in which earth and human history are viewed from the heavens, Volney's The Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires (1791) is the major source.
9. McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
10. For Shelley's reading of Spinoza, see Reiman ed., Shelley and His Circle: 1773-1822 (1961-86), VIII, 730-43; and for his reading of Kant, see M. Roxana Klapper, The German Literary Influence on Shelley, Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Romantic Reassessment, No. 43 (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, 1975), pp. 50-52. Both Spinoza and Kant are included in Shelley's order of books from Thomas Hookham on 17 December 1812 (Jones, I, 342), but by the time he received them, in late January at the earliest, the poem, if not the Notes, of Queen Mab was approaching completion (see Shelley's letter to Hookham, 26 January 1813, Jones, I, 350).
11. Shelley read Baron d'Holbach's Système de la nature (1770) in 1812, and twice refers to it as a book of 'uncommon powers' in letters to Godwin (3 June and 29 July 1812, Jones, I, 303 and 315-6). Pantheist ideas are clearly present in, for example, Pope's An Essay on Man (1733-4), I, 267-280, Darwin's The Temple of Nature (1803), passim, Coleridge's 'The Eolian

- Harp' (1795), 44-48, and Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' (1798), 93-102. They are also expressed by the sceptical participant (Philo) in David Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (1779), ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 195-223, and by a similar figure (Hylas) in a similar dialogue in Sir William Drummond's Academical Questions (1805), facsimile edn, with intro. by Terence Allan Hoagwood (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1984), pp. 217-281.
12. Jones, I, 35. See e.g. Queen Mab, VI, 197-219 and III, 214-40 for opposing representations of 'Nature'.
 13. See Southey's letter to John Edmund Reade, 12 June 1838, New Letters of Robert Southey, ed. Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), II, 474.
 14. Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, 2 January 1811, Jones, I, 215. Cf. the expression of a similar view in Jones, I, 101.
 15. Murray, p. 116. H.W. Piper, The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of the Imagination in the English Romantic Poets (London: The Athlone Press, 1962) discusses the importance of the idea of animated matter for the Romantic poets, and Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular. M&E, pp. 288-89 n. and 304-6 n., and Cameron, The Young Shelley, pp. 392-93 n. suggest Shelley's possible sources on the subject. See Shelley's letters to Elizabeth Hitchener, 26 November 1811 and 2 January 1812 (Jones, I, 192-3; 215) for further accounts of his belief in the animation of matter.
 16. The notion that rocks and mountains are formed of organic life is found in Erasmus Darwin, The Temple of Nature, IV, 429-56. This work was included in the order of books from Thomas Hookham in December 1812 (Jones, I, 342).
 17. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 64.
 18. Newton, The Return to Nature, or, A Defence of the Animal Regimen (London: Cadell, 1811), pp. 9-11. Other possible sources for this theory are Antoine-Nicholas, Marquis de Condorcet, Esquisse d'un tableau historique

des progrès de l'esprit humain (1796); Pierre Simon, Marquis de Laplace, Exposition du système du monde (1796); and Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis, Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme (1802). All of these works are mentioned in Shelley's Notes to Queen Mab.

19. See Hutton, Theory of the Earth, with Proofs and Illustrations, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1795), and Cuvier, Essay on the Theory of the Earth, trans. Robert Kerr (Edinburgh, 1813). While there is no firm evidence that Shelley read either of these works, it is likely that he at least read reviews of them. Cuvier's Essay was reviewed in the Edinburgh Review, January 1814.
20. Cuvier, trans. Jameson, p. 6.
21. Holbach, Système de la nature, trans. William Hodgson, 4 vols. (London, 1795), III, 54-55.
22. Volney, The Ruins (London, 1801), p. 61.
23. Note to V, 93-94; M&E, p. 366.
24. Note to V, 189; M&E, p. 372.
25. Note to VIII, 211-212; M&E, p. 414.
26. Note to V, 112-13; M&E, p. 367.
27. Shelley quotes from Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1670) in his Note to VII, 13; M&E, p. 391.
28. Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, pp. 89-103.
29. Jones, I, p. 35. Shelley slightly misquotes the line from Pope's An Essay on Man (1733-34), I, 267-8.
30. Various exponents of this view are discussed by Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, pp. 89-158, and Piper, pp. 3-27.

31. Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, p. 15.
32. Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life (London, 1794-96), p. 5.
33. Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 141.
34. See Frank B. Evans III, 'Shelley, Godwin, Hume and the Doctrine of Necessity', Studies in Philology, 37 (1940), 632-40.
35. Philp, Godwin's Political Justice (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 89-95.
36. An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness, 2 vols (1793), facsimile edn, Revolution and Romanticism Series (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1992), II, 893-95.
37. Holbach, I, 32-3 and IV, 694-96; Cameron, The Young Shelley, pp. 254 and 396n.
38. Holbach, II, 9-97; Queen Mab, VI, 72-102.
39. Volney, ch. 22; pp. 176-239.
40. Volney, pp. 191-203. Condorcet's Esquisse also traces the origin of religion to the metaphorical nature of language; see June Barraclough's translation (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955), pp. 37-8.
41. Holbach, II, 68.
42. Holbach, II, 58.
43. Political Justice, pp. 136-9.
44. Letter to Hitchener, 11 June 1811, Jones, I, 99. Leighton, pp. 28-36, draws attention to this conflict in Shelley's early letters.
45. Holbach, I, 86-7; Volney, p. 29.
46. See Lucretius, De Rerum Natura (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), I,

215-264.

47. See John Freeman, 'Shelley's Early Letters', in Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp. 109-28.

Alastor: A 'Traacherous Likeness'

In Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude, written three years after Queen Mab, Shelley turns from the circumference to the centre of knowledge, from objective rationalism to subjective idealism, and in doing so he finds his characteristic voice as a poet. The very comprehensiveness of the earlier poem's vision proves its primary limitation. To borrow the language of Shelley's critique of rationalism in the Defence, Queen Mab contains 'more moral, political, and historical wisdom than...[it knows] how to reduce into practise', and lacks the imaginative inwardness of what he calls 'the poetry of life' (R&P, p. 502). It is a basic assumption of Alastor, on the other hand, that 'Poetry is not like reasoning' (R&P, p. 503), but issues obscurely from the poet's subjective consciousness. The contrast between Ianthe's dream in Queen Mab, with all the world and its history laid out before her, and the Poet's fleeting vision in Alastor of an idealized 'Being whom he loves' (M&E, p. 462), could hardly illustrate more clearly the radical shift in Shelley's perspective.

Alastor's theme of solitude, to which its subtitle draws attention, is directly connected with this change. The two essays 'On Love' (1818) and 'On Life', which relate closely to the poem, reveal Shelley's idealism to be deeply solipsistic in implication. In defining love as the thirst for 'a soul within our soul' (R&P, p. 474), and life as a unity in which there is no real distinction between thoughts and things--definitions which the Poet could be intended to illustrate--they both give an overriding emphasis to the subject self. The essays, however, give little indication of the darker side of

idealism and solitude which is evident in Alastor. The gloomy introspection to which the poem gives expression is, as Mary Shelley explains in her Note to the poem, in part a reflection of the difficult circumstances in which it was written. She specifically refers to her husband's ill-health, poverty and, somewhat euphemistically, his 'loss of friends' (Hutchinson, p. 30). His estrangement from his first wife, his family and the society which he had wished to take an active part in reforming certainly contributed to his feeling of isolation, and to this was added a sense of political isolation by the triumph of reactionary Europe in 1815.¹ However, Shelley's pessimism at this time is not attributable solely to external causes, for as Alastor shows, its own subjective idealism which in one sense is a response to a 'cold fireside and alienated home' (76) is in another a cause of alienation and hence inherently inclined to self-defeat.

A major corollary of Shelley's departure from the rationalism of Queen Mab is a new regard for nature and landscape which is no longer hampered by a distrust for feelings. Again, the essays 'On Love' and 'On Life' provide a rationale for this aspect of his idealism: nature offers 'a secret correspondence with our heart' (R&P, p. 474) in the absence of human sympathy, external objects are indistinguishable from ideas, and a delight in nature, far from being the preserve of 'slaves of passion and sickly sensibility', as he wrote to Hitchener in July 1811, is now 'the distinguishing mark of a refined and extraordinary person'. Alastor is Shelley's first major poetic expression of this sense of community with the external world, though again it reveals limitations and dangers in the attitudes expressed in the essays. Personal experience contributes to his growing appreciation of natural scenery. Between 1811 and 1815 he travelled extensively in Britain and abroad, and the different landscapes he encountered leave their impression on the natural descriptions of Alastor.² The Holbachian abstract and impersonal

concept of nature, adhered to with difficulty even in Queen Mab, is now clearly inadequate and gives way to the responsive, relational nature that Shelley finds in, above all, the poems of Wordsworth.

Indeed, Wordsworth is the primary influence on the new direction of Shelley's poetry. One of the earliest records of Shelley's interest in Wordsworth is his transcription in a letter of 2 January 1812 (Jones, I, 217) of a few stanzas of Wordsworth's 'A Poet's Epitaph' (1800). This poem, quoted from memory (to judge by the mistakes), and quoted again briefly in a letter to Godwin of 5 July 1812 (Jones, I, 312), evidently impressed Shelley considerably, and was influential upon his recurring depiction of the frail poet figure. The last stanza he quotes, describing such a poet, is as follows:

The outward shews of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude. (45-8)

Here are briefly drawn together the themes of Alastor that we have identified: poetic idealism, solitude and the love of nature. Shelley's poem, however, is primarily a response to The Excursion (1814), which (at least, in Shelley's perception) radically revises Wordsworth's former attitude to these themes. Shelley's adoption of a similar attitude occurs therefore at a moment when he senses that Wordsworth, his great exemplar, has abandoned it, along with his earlier revolutionary sympathies.³ This betrayal becomes the focus of Shelley's feelings of profound ambivalence concerning the idealist project on which he is embarked, and a bitter reminder of its inevitable failure. For this reason, as G. Kim Blank writes, the poem 'moves back and forth between discovering and questioning Wordsworth's influence, between taking him on and

shaking him off'.⁴ This relationship of attraction and repulsion has a pervasive symbolic presence in the poem, where the process in which a subject seeks an alluring but deceptive self-reflection in its object everywhere repeats itself. This self-reflectiveness in fact is inherently deceptive, for in predicating both a difference and identity between subject and object it ensures every reflected image has two aspects, one inviting identification and unity, the other objectification and separation. In Alastor, the most relentlessly self-reflective of Shelley's poems, there is a constant swing between these points of view, each one unsettling the other.⁵ As a 'Poet of Nature', Wordsworth is an emblem of both poetry and nature, and shares with them a distorting quality of reflectiveness that can only return a 'treacherous likeness' (474).

In this chapter I propose to account in such terms for the idealist dilemma which Shelley confronts in Alastor. One manifestation of this dilemma is a certain ambiguity in the term idealism itself, and my use of it here therefore needs to be clarified. In both its general and philosophical sense the term can occupy various points on a scale between two extremes of meaning, at one of which the ideal and the real cease to be distinguishable, while at the other they are poles apart. In speaking of the idealism of Shelley and the early Wordsworth I mean their hope in the earthly possibility of a convergence--however remote or dimly apprehended--between the real and the ideal, whether in poetry, politics or philosophy. Shelley's dilemma, therefore, is that while he cannot excuse Wordsworth for his abandonment of that hope, he finds himself in Alastor driven very close to abandoning it too. The moral aspect of this problem is addressed mainly in the Preface, and since the interpretation of its highly ambiguous two paragraphs has been a prime source of division among critics of the poem, I shall begin my discussion here. Following that, the poetic and philosophical issues raised by the Poet's

quest will be considered, especially as they relate to the poem's treatment of external nature. Finally, I shall look at the poem as itself a quest--as a poem, that is, in pursuit of itself--an aspect of the work that particularly involves the function of the narrator.

i

An important example of the poem's swing between subjective and objective viewpoints is to be found in the discrepancy between the sympathetic rendering of the Poet and his quest in the poem and the censure of his 'self-centred seclusion' in the Preface. This apparently back-tracking authorial criticism has elicited a wide variety of responses from critics of Alastor. Several, following Mary Shelley's hint that the poem is rather 'didactic than narrative' (Hutchinson, p. 31), have argued that there is no significant conflict--that the poem does illustrate the lesson of the Preface. E.K. Gibson, for example, considers that it holds up for criticism the Poet's neglect of human sympathy in his pursuit of an illusory ideal;⁶ and for Marilyn Butler it represents an attack on the kind of contemplative withdrawal from politics recommended by Wordsworth in The Excursion.⁷ The conflict has been downplayed in a quite different way by Clark, who, believing the moralism of the second paragraph of the Preface to have been commonly misunderstood, stresses the praise of the Poet in the first in arguing that he embodies progressive cultural forces.⁸ Dawson, considering Shelley's attitude to solitude generally, offers two alternative accounts of it that roughly parallel the responses of Butler and Clark to Alastor: 'When a man seeks retreat it either implies a repudiation of public hope, or signifies a temporary retirement which will allow him to renew the struggle later or to contribute to it by spreading the influence of good.'⁹ Solitude is to be blamed as a withdrawal from the political struggle or commended as being

necessary to it. Either way, Alastor is rescued as a politically radical poem, even though, aside from the Preface, its concerns are almost entirely private and introspective.

Other critics grant more significance to the discrepancy between the poem and the Preface, explaining it in terms of a conflict of attitudes they find in the poem. Thus Stovall writes of a tension between egotism and altruism; Baker considers the Poet torn between communion with nature and human love; and Wasserman sees the poem as a debate between an earth-bound Wordsworthian nature-loving narrator and a transcendentalist Poet.¹⁰ Each of these interpretations has a certain validity, but a fault they all have in common is a failure to recognize the close connection between the conflicting attitudes they describe. This connection is most easily traced in the poem's central theme of solitude. As Dawson's remark indicates, solitude has opposing aspects, one that is allied to love and hope, the other to their absence. Alastor demonstrates that these are indeed aspects of a single mental disposition. Cronin goes some way towards explaining the nature of the link between them. The Poet uses his imagination, he says, 'not in the manner which Shelley offers in the Defence as a description of the moral sense, the "identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own", but to pursue the embodiment of "his own imaginations"¹¹. What, however, is not acknowledged by either Cronin or the Defence but is made evident in Alastor is that, as Ulmer writes, the 'imagination inherently resists socialization'.¹² In other words, ideal love is by its very nature solipsistic, even alienating.

This paradox is a familiar one in Romantic literature and occurs in most of the important influences on the poem. Wordsworth and Coleridge are both aware of the dangerous autonomy of idealism, and of the conflicting claims of natural solitude and human society.¹³ This conflict is also a persistent theme

of the writings of Rousseau, whose Reveries of a Solitary Walker (1782) is in this respect of particular importance to Alastor.¹⁴ The heroes of Goethe's The Sorrows of Werter (1774), Chateaubriand's René (1802), Godwin's Fleetwood (1805) and Owenson's The Missionary (1811) all seek love in a loveless world, and indulge their ideal longings alone with nature.¹⁵ In various ways they demonstrate the contrary aspects of solitude, which can serve as either a retreat from or a challenge to the existing social order, and be either elevating and noble or destructive and selfish. The Poet in Alastor follows in this tradition: the isolation in which he leaves his 'alienated home' with 'an imagination inflamed and purified', as the Preface puts it, is the same 'self-centred seclusion' for which he is condemned.

Autobiographical and biographical readings of Alastor have tended to be simplistic, but are not to be wholly discounted, for the poem does, I think, reveal an awareness in Shelley of a certain congruence between his own recent history and the careers of some of his models, particularly in its portrayal of the erosion of hopeful idealism.¹⁶ Indeed, over the period covered by Queen Mab and Alastor his passage from the isolation of defiance to the isolation of defeat offers a foreshortened parallel to the earlier progress over a much longer time of his three great literary mentors, Rousseau, Godwin and Wordsworth. That it does so no doubt owes something to the fact that it is during this period that he falls under their influence. Rousseau's increasing sense of persecution in middle life and retirement from political controversy to the Island of Saint-Pierre; Godwin's slow retreat from the defiance of the first edition of Political Justice, and from reliance on reason alone as the instrument of human improvement, and his growing isolation; and Wordsworth's 'loss of confidence in social man'¹⁷ after the unfolding events in France in the 1790s, and his withdrawal from the mainstream of life to the Lake District in 1799--all have their parallel in the admittedly still youthful Shelley of

1815.

Of the three predecessors, it is to Wordsworth and his political change of heart that Alastor particularly refers. However much Shelley may have felt betrayed by The Excursion, its publication in 1814 was well timed to coincide with and confirm his own awareness of the alienating and regressive aspects of idealism. 'To Wordsworth', one senses, is in part an elegy for a former self. His description in this sonnet of Wordsworth's earlier poems as 'Songs consecrate to truth and liberty' (12) suggests, however, a somewhat exaggerated sense of the radicalism of the Lyrical Ballads and the 1807 volume of poems, and consequently an exaggerated sense also of the apostasy represented by The Excursion. Shelley's feelings of betrayal were grounded in a real alteration in Wordsworth, but they also had the convenience of allowing him to identify with the younger poet while disguising from himself his similarity to the older one, and thereby, in Harold Bloom's terms, relieving his anxiety of influence.

18

This ambivalence towards Wordsworth is particularly evident in the Preface, and the manner in which it relates to the poem. The first paragraph expresses sympathy and admiration for the Poet, and describes his quest as follows:

He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted....But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself a Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture....He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave. (M&E, pp. 462-3)

In certain ways this is a misleading summary of what happens in the poem. In suggesting that knowledge and the external world 'cease to suffice' when the Poet 'suddenly' conceives a desire for communion with an epipsyche, the Preface disregards the important role of nature in fostering the desire and providing the medium through which it is pursued. Moreover, it misrepresents the narrative by reducing to two short sentences the greater part of the poem describing the Poet's quest after his dream of the 'veiled maid'.

In fact the Poet's search for 'a prototype of his conception' is not quite as vain as the Preface suggests. Exactly what Shelley means by a 'prototype' might be in doubt,¹⁹ but on two occasions after his dream he has glimpses of what would appear to be manifestations of the original 'veiled maid'. Beside the 'silent well' (484) he sees 'Two starry eyes' (490), which are reminiscent of her 'beamy bending eyes' (179), and are in turn recalled, as Wasserman has suggested,²⁰ by the 'two lessening points of light' (654) formed by the horns of the moon as it sinks below the horizon at the moment of the Poet's death. These three encounters with self-reflections mark the endings of three distinct stages in his quest, which occupy successive sections of the narrative (67-191, 192-492, 493-671). While each is in various ways a repetition of the last, they also show a gradation of decreasing emotional intensity.

In the first section, the Poet pursues 'Nature's most secret steps' (81), roaming through the sites of past empires till he reaches the most ancient, Thebes and Ethiopia, both considered the cradle of civilization according to Volney,²¹ and sees 'The thrilling secrets of the birth of time' (128). From there he wanders on to the Vale of Kashmir, where he has his vision. For the description and significance of this location Shelley is largely indebted to Owenson, whose missionary Hilarion meets Luxima here, at the foot of

a lofty mountain, which seemed a monument of the first day of creation. It was a solemn and sequestered spot, where an eternal spring seemed to reign, and which looked like the cradle of infant Nature, where she first awoke in all her primeval bloom of beauty. It was a glen, skreened by a mighty mass of rocks, over whose bold fantastic forms and variegated hues dashed the silvery foam of the mountain torrent.²²

In Alastor this becomes a 'dell, where odorous plants entwine/ Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower,/ Beside a sparkling rivulet' (146-8). These elements from Owenson's description, perhaps with reinforcement from Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (written in 1798), from now on in Shelley's work will be established symbols of an introspective awareness of the origins of mind and poetry, just as the 'veilèd maid', recalling Luxima (and possibly Coleridge's 'Abyssinian maid'), is the first of a succession of feminine Shelleyan epipsyches.²³ A frequent characteristic of such figures is their association with external nature. The location of the Poet's vision, and nature's deadness once the vision has passed, make the 'veilèd maid' no exception, and suggest that part of the significance of his dream of erotic union is the subjective mergence of mind and nature.

The recovery of this dream is the apparent aim of the second stage of the Poet's quest. He pursues it, however, by courting death, seeking at once Nature's 'cradle, and his sepulchre' (430), as if aware that the original unity of nature and mind is not to be found this side of the grave. He finds his self-image in the 'silent well' (484) located in the Georgian Caucasus near the 'Chorasmian' (272), or Caspian, Sea, thought to be the site of the Garden of Eden and therefore the origin of both life and death.²⁴ But neither his wan reflection nor the 'Spirit' (479) embodied in the landscape is the 'ideal prototype' he seeks, and hence the earlier erotic intensity is largely

absent. Although the 'Spirit' responds to him, nature's reflective likeness soon becomes more obviously personified as the 'starry eyes' (490), and hence gives way to difference and otherness as the eyes lead the Poet away from communion with nature, and away from the introspective enclosure of the woods, the twining odorous plants, and the fountain.

In the final section of the narrative the Poet's remaining 'Hope and despair' (639) diminish yet further as he resigns himself to death. The 'two lessening points of light' are not personified as eyes, but remain objectively external, a weak self-reflection that is extinguished on death. Physical death is therefore tantamount to the death of desire. Once again he finds himself in a natural enclosure, a 'nook' (572), perhaps based on the Solitary's 'nook' in The Excursion (III, 51).²⁵ This spot marks the Poet's end but possibly a new beginning too, for it overlooks a panoramic landscape, suggestive of a future life, though, like the 'veiled maid' and the reflection in the well, this might also be a 'treacherous likeness', concealing the 'immeasurable void' (569) into which the river of life falls.

The gradual decline of the Poet contradicts the claim of the Preface that he was struck by a 'sudden darkness and extinction', and so lends support to the idea that his life is intended to parallel the decline in creativity and radicalism that Shelley saw in Wordsworth, as Mueschke and Griggs have argued.²⁶ On such an interpretation there is also a rough correspondence between the section of the narrative describing the Poet's pursuit of 'Nature's most secret steps' (67-106) and Wordsworth's descriptions of his youthful enjoyment of nature in 'Tintern Abbey' (1798) and the 'Immortality' ode (1807). On the other hand, if, as the Preface claims, the poem truly has an 'instruction' based on the Poet's negative example, it is one that bears out the Wanderer's correction of the Solitary: his condemnation of self-destructive idealism, his warning that solitude's 'mild nature can be

terrible' (The Excursion IV, 1032), and his view that nature should be regarded as a source of correction rather than vision.²⁷ In his portrayal of the Poet, Shelley, it would seem, is torn between the opposing aspects of Wordsworth represented by the Solitary and the Wanderer--even as Wordsworth himself is.

In the Preface to Alastor we can see Shelley attempting unsuccessfully to extricate himself from this dilemma. His misrepresentation of the Poet's quest in the first paragraph reveals his deep involvement in the fate of his hero, whose Wordsworthian decline and failure he is unwilling to face. Nevertheless, he cannot avoid facing it, and consequently in the next paragraph he adopts the stance of the Wanderer addressing the Solitary. Yet the moral is grudgingly given: 'The picture', we are told, 'is not barren of instruction'; the Poet's seclusion is 'self-centred', not 'selfish', as the 'meaner spirits' mentioned later are; and he is 'avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion' (M&E, p. 463, my emphases). What is more, Shelley seems to excuse him by going on to compare him favourably with the loveless 'meaner spirits'.²⁸

O'Neill has suggested that this class of people, which he notes does not appear in the poem, is introduced to counter Wordsworth's disapproval of the disappointed idealist's 'wilful disesteem of life/ And proud insensibility to hope'.²⁹ This indeed seems likely, but given that the Poet is like as well as unlike Wordsworth, it comes as less of a surprise to note that there is a strong degree of similarity between the 'meaner spirits' and the Poet himself. Shelley writes of them as follows:

They who, deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their

apportioned curse. They languish, because none feel with them their common nature. They are morally dead. They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country. (M&E, p. 463)

There is not a phrase here that cannot, with a little latitude of interpretation, be seen as applicable to the sceptical, idealist and 'self-centred' Poet. Shelley has thus, inadvertently as it were, damned him further in seeking to defend him. The implication is that all erstwhile hopeful idealists, whether in the mould of the Solitary or the Wanderer, share a similar fate, and one form of solitude can readily assume the likeness of another. The 'meaner spirits' therefore have more to do with the poem than at first appears. The Preface goes on to distinguish the 'pure and tender-hearted' and the 'selfish, blind, and torpid', both of which classes exemplify a kind of solitude, since both 'attempt to exist without human sympathy'. But which, ultimately, does the Poet more closely resemble? Is he indeed one of the 'luminaries of the world', or one of 'Those who love not their fellow-beings[,] live unfruitful lives', and are doomed to a 'slow and poisonous decay'? In the second paragraph of the Preface we see Shelley admitting this painful question at the very moment that he fends it off. The lines from The Excursion referring to Margaret (I, 500-2) which he quotes at the end of the Preface--'The good die first,/ And those whose hearts are dry as summer's dust,/ Burn to the socket'--consequently express his deep ambivalence about Wordsworth and the idealism he both represents and condemns.

The main difference between the responses of the two poets to the idealist dilemma is that whereas Wordsworth accommodates himself to the defeat of idealism, Shelley does not, and hence can say in his sonnet to Wordsworth: 'One loss is mine/ Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore' (5-6). In 'Tintern Abbey' (1798) and the 'Immortality' ode (1807) Wordsworth seeks to

overcome his regret for a lost vision and nature-communion with a philosophic acceptance of the loss. In The Excursion this inward deliberation is dramatised and taken a stage further in the debate between the two main protagonists. The Wanderer rejects the Solitary's failed idealism, which was once his own, in favour of a conservative and Christian redefinition of it: hope is redirected towards the next world, and nature and solitude are found conducive not to visionary rapture but to patient humility. In decrying fruitless regret, however, the Wanderer goes further than Wordsworth in the earlier poems, for he also denounces the object of that regret as a dangerous delusion, not recognizing, as the earlier Wordsworth does, that his new-found hope derives from the idealism it supersedes. For Shelley therefore the Wanderer, and by association Wordsworth, have betrayed their former selves, but Wordsworth even more so in that he undermines the Solitary's position by portraying him also as having lost his revolutionary faith. All three, therefore, in Shelley's eyes, stand condemned by Margaret, who, like the Poet in Alastor, wastes away through clinging to a forlorn hope. The quotation from The Excursion at the end of the Preface is thus turned against Wordsworth, and can be read as an endorsement as well as a condemnation of the Poet.

Wordsworth is always wary of the 'abyss of idealism', as he calls it in his note to the 'Immortality' ode, and of the 'feeling or image of intense unity' which, in his fragmentary essay 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', he describes as the effect of the sublime, even though a former apprehension of the ideal and the sublime are the bedrock of his poetry. ³⁰ This tendency to defer to a remote and safe distance an ideal unity with nature from which he continues to draw sustenance is recognized by Shelley when he says of Wordsworth in Peter Bell the Third (1819): 'He touched the hem of Nature's shift,/ Felt faint--and never dared uplift/ The closest, all-concealing tunic' (315-7). It is this attitude in Wordsworth that enables him to conceive of two aspects of nature,

solitude and the ideal, and to drive a wedge between them. For Shelley this is what constitutes his betrayal, for while he too is aware of these two aspects, he also finds that they are inseparable, and the knowledge that they are so is the basis of the irresolvable impasse of Alastor.

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ii

In spite of Wordsworth's pervasive influence in the poem, Shelley's treatment of the Poet as a figure in the landscape owes him very little. Whereas Wordsworth's figures usually have a strong human presence which stands out against their natural surroundings, the Poet, who is like a 'Spirit of wind' (259) and an 'elemental god' (351), is almost naturalised.³¹ Although at a moment of despair the Poet can say that nature 'echoes not my thoughts' (290) and decreasingly seeks an emotional bond with nature as the poem proceeds, his entire being in the poem is nevertheless conveyed to us in terms of his chameleonic response to the external world. Conversely, the external world is presented to us only as he subjectively perceives it, and is therefore entirely a landscape of the mind, without any of the objective solidity of Wordsworth's Lake District. The use of landscape in Alastor is much closer to that of certain novels whose idealist heroes find in nature the material of their dreams and desires. Godwin's Fleetwood, for example, tells how, 'I was engaged in imaginary scenes, constructed visionary plans, and found all nature subservient to my command'.³¹ Chateaubriand's René says of the ideal creature of his dreams, 'I embraced her in the winds and thought I heard her in the river's moaning. Everything became this vision of my imagination--the stars in the skies and the very principle of life in the universe'.³³ The exotic adventure and scenery of Owenson's The Missionary likewise have an idealist cast, underlined by a Brahmin pundit's curiously Berkeleyan explanation to the hero that 'matter has no essence, independent of perception'.³⁴ One

manifestation of an immaterialist tendency that these novels share with Shelley's poetry is their emphasis, in descriptions of nature, on what Locke calls the secondary or sensible qualities of things, such as their colours, odours and sounds.³⁵ For the sceptical idealist, whether in the mould of Berkeley or Drummond, these qualities are purely subjective, offering no evidence of a primary material substance, and wholly deceptive in their suggestion of any such unchanging reality outside mind.³⁶ Shelley's famed lack of concreteness, for which he has often been contrasted with Wordsworth, can thus be seen to derive from a philosophical and literary tradition which resists the dualism Wordsworth increasingly espouses.

By 1815 Shelley was well-versed in this tradition and had formed the main philosophical allegiances of his adult career. Alastor clearly demonstrates the position, owing much to Drummond, which he is later to define in 'On Life'. For example, the mutually defining relationship of the Poet and his surroundings illustrates the two basic axioms of Shelley's philosophy laid down in this essay: that mind 'cannot create, it can only perceive', and that 'nothing exists but as it is perceived'. Intended to be expressions of unity, these statements, as we have seen, nevertheless imply an irreducible difference and mutual dependence between perceiver and percept. The subject-object tensions of such a philosophy are mirrored in Alastor by a corresponding attraction and repulsion between metaphorical sign and referent. Thus the Poet's increasing tendency through the three stages of his quest to view nature externally is paralleled by the poem's increasing use of an allegorical mode. After his dream, when he first becomes conscious of nature's otherness, his journey to the source of a river grows more obviously allegorical of an internal quest. On leaving behind him the 'secret well', and his hope of communing with nature, his journey down river becomes almost mechanically allegorical of his journey through life, to the extent that he

can spell out its meaning in an apostrophe to the stream (502-14).

The tensions between objectification and identification are at their most intense in the long central section of the narrative, which partly for this reason is not only the most obscure section of the poem, but also the most original and prophetic of Shelley's future development. Where there is no real distinction between ideas and external objects, there can also be none between sign and referent, with the result that we often find metaphors becoming confused with or displacing the meanings to which they refer, so producing the confusion of tenor and vehicle noted by Keach, and what Empson calls 'short-circuited' comparisons.³⁷ For example, in the following lines there is an apparent reversal of the expected positions of the two terms of a simile describing the motion of the Poet's boat--a boat which is itself a symbol for the mind in the sway of inspiration:

As one that in a silver vision floats
Obedient to the sweep of odorous winds
Upon resplendent clouds, so rapidly
Along the dark and ruffled waters fled
The straining boat. (316-20)

There is not merely a reversal, however, for at the same time that the boat is compared to a visionary, the latter 'floats/ Obedient to the...winds' like a boat. In the absence of a stable relationship of difference between them, sign and referent thus reflect backwards and forwards, as in a hall of mirrors, endlessly multiplying images, of which the 'prototype', the origin of meaning is lost; hence 'almost all familiar objects are signs, standing not for themselves but for others, in their capacity of suggesting one thought, which shall lead to a train of thoughts' (R&P, p. 477). The poetry thus creates what

Hillis Miller, speaking of literary texts in general, and using Shelleyan metaphors, calls a 'textual web' that covers a 'vertigo of the underlying nothingness'.³⁸ Similarly in Alastor the voice of the 'veiled maid', 'Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held/...[the Poet's] inmost sense suspended in its web/ Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues' (155-7), and having woken from his dream, he finds his path beset by dizzying voids, chasms, depths and gulfs, which repeatedly reveal themselves beneath the network of images of which nature and mind are composed.

This network, however, does not only cover an abyss. In what is to become a recurrent metaphor, we read of 'some inconstant star/ Between one foliated lattice twinkling fair' (463-4), and thus beckoning the Poet forward in hope. In the terms of 'On Life', the view of life as a unity brings us not only to the 'dark abyss--of how little we know', but is also the object of our 'high aspirations "looking both before and after"' (R&P, pp. 478, 476). But the feared abyss and the desired telos are similar and in Alastor both appear in the guise of death, which is beneath the Poet, as it were, in the depths of the sea and whirlpools of the river upon which he is borne, and also ahead of him as the object of his quest. Thus the poem suggests a certain identity between means and end. The impulse that drives the Poet on is not merely the hope of some remote goal, but also the result of a process in which that goal is immediately involved; and in so far as one aspect of what the Poet seeks is the mergence of mind and nature, he is impelled not simply by the attractive forces leading to that end, but rather by an alternating push and pull between subject and object. At one level this process can be observed in the repetitive element in the three stages of the Poet's quest, each of which, as we have seen, ends with some kind of convergence or mirroring of mind and nature, which is immediately interrupted. But the same process also occurs at a lesser scale in the poem, as illustrated in these lines describing the Poet

at sea in a storm:

Calm and rejoicing in the fearful war
Of wave ruining on wave, and blast on blast
Descending, and black flood on whirlpool driven
With dark obliterating course, he sate... (326-29)

The action of wave on wave and blast on blast resembles the repetitive activity of the mind as it successively creates self-images and dissolves them with new ones. The 'black flood' is like the 'dark flood' (190) of sleep that obliterates the Poet's dream--and 'Sleep and death', he soon reminds us, are what divides him from 'Vision and Love' (366-69). The eclipse of consciousness that attends union with his 'Vision' is thus both a remote absolute and a continuing experience. The Poet meanwhile is 'Calm', above the conflict which he is also actively engaged in, showing a combination of objectivity and subjectivity which the 'icy summits' and the wave-lashed 'cavern'd base' of the Caucasus (352-57), in an anticipation of 'Mont Blanc', also suggest.

Shelley's fragment 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind', describing thought as 'like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outward' provides a revealing commentary on the Poet's passage along the river:

If it were possible to be where we have been, vitally and indeed--if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience,--if the passage from sensation to reflection--from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation, were not so dizzying and so tumultuous, this attempt would be less difficult. (I&P, VII, 64)

This passage recalls Wordsworth's lines from 'Peele Castle' (1807) expressing

the same difficulty: 'Not for a moment could I now behold/ A smiling sea, and be what I have been' (37-8).³⁹ Yet in Alastor, in the Poet's ascent of the backward-flowing stream, Shelley does attempt to reverse the direction of thought's movement in order to recover an original sensation from self-conscious reflection. In this process sensation and reflection are themselves engaged in a rapid and revolving interplay, which is indeed 'dizzying', as the waters rise 'Circling immeasurably fast,.../ With dizzy swiftness, round, and round, and round' (381-8). The water's 'dizzying' motion (suggesting both vertigo and vortex) resembles the dialectical effect of Friedrich Schlegel's irony, in which, as Furst writes, 'The self became conscious of itself as a perceiving consciousness in a spiralling movement that encompassed the opposing poles of self-immersion and self-detachment'.⁴⁰ This motion also runs in two directions: if in Shelley's fragment it is not quite clear whether the 'passage' described is backwards or forwards, nor is it in the poem, where the river flows variably upstream and downstream, and where the Poet seeks 'Nature's...cradle, and his sepulchre' (429-30). For Shelley ends are origins, and being both they are also neither, but rather phases in a continuing cyclic process.

Alastor thus shows Shelley's developing sense of a dialectical interrelationship between ideas of unity, origination and power and the processes which create and destroy them--a dialectic which eventually bears fruit in the optimism of Prometheus Unbound. In Alastor however the Poet's quest fails, for, as we have seen, over the course of the poem the reiterative process runs down, and he is left at the end in a state of weary hopelessness, like that of Rousseau and the other phantoms who fall by the wayside in The Triumph of Life. Indeed, what Paul de Man has explained as this poem's awareness of the inevitable disfiguring effect of figuration is anticipated in Alastor.⁴¹ Here the attempt 'to be where we have been' is shown to be

impossible because, as the Poet's ageing and 'treacherous' (474) self-image in the well and various other mirror images in the poem make clear, a distorted reflection is all we ever see of an original sensation.

One effect of the distorting image is the tendency to personification and dualism such as we observed in Queen Mab. Indeed, the passage from that poem explaining how the concept of God derives from a personification of natural phenomena is transferred almost unchanged to the Alastor volume as a poem in its own right with the title 'Superstition'. It is included partly no doubt, as Neil Fraistat suggests, to serve as a rejoinder to the Wanderer's views on natural religion in The Excursion (IV, 631-762).⁴² Shelley's sense that Wordsworth was particularly inclined to animate the physical world is recorded in Peter Bell the Third, where we learn that Peter had the kind of mind that 'made alive/ The things it wrought on; I believe/ Wakening a sort of thought in sense' (310-12). But as Keach points out, Shelley attacks Wordsworth in this poem for characteristics that are in fact his own.⁴³ In 'Superstition' he seems tacitly to acknowledge that he shares the personifying tendency, for the one change he introduces--the replacement of the term 'God' at the end of the original passage with a list of his attributes: 'name, and form,/ Intelligence, and unity, and power'--broadens its reference beyond the God of established religions to all spiritual self-projections, including those in his own work. The Assassins, written and left incomplete in 1814, is Shelley's first work after Queen Mab to give clear expression to the spiritualizing and personifying nature-love which 'Superstition' castigates. The Assassins, we are told, 'idolized nature and the God of nature' to the extent that eventually 'the wide circle of the universe...appeared too narrow and confined to satiate' (Murray, pp. 128-29) the longings which it inspired. In Alastor similarly, nature prompts a desire in the Poet for something beyond itself which is personified as the 'veiled maid' and later as 'Two starry eyes'. The

latter's emergence from and interruption of the Poet's rapt contemplation of nature is closely described. A 'Spirit' which is 'clothed' in the landscape, and therefore scarcely distinguishable from it,

Held commune with him, as if he and it
Were all that was,--only...when his regard
Was raised by intense pensiveness,...two eyes,
Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought (487-90)

Thus the self-consciousness of 'intense pensiveness' breaks into the communion of mind and nature, transforming their subjective unity into a hypostasis which beckons the Poet away from communion with his immediate surroundings. In 'Oh° there are spirits of the air' (1816) we encounter these 'starry eyes' again, and here the equivalence between the mind's proneness to personify and the treachery of nature's images is made particularly clear, for the 'starry eyes' and the 'false earth' are closely linked and found equally inconstant.

Nature's inconstancy or mutability is a major theme in the Alastor volume, and it is one that is fraught with ambiguity. This is partly because Shelley reflects two ancient but quite different traditions of dealing with the subject. Most commonly (as in Ecclesiastes, for example), the theme of mutability occasions a lament, a pessimistic view of earthly life, and, in religious writers, a reliance on Heaven's eternity. For a sceptical tradition (well represented by Lucretius), however, there is nothing outside the flux of nature, which is universal, eternal, even beneficent. In 'Mutability', published with Alastor, Shelley demonstrates both attitudes: he regrets an irretrievable past but submits himself willingly to an unpredictable future; and both are present in the paradox of its final line, 'Nought may endure but Mutability'. In lamenting mutability he particularly reflects Spenser's

'Mutabilitie' cantos in The Faerie Queene, Rousseau's Reveries of the Solitary Walker and Wordsworth's The Excursion; while his acceptance of a universal flux derives mainly from such eighteenth century sceptical writers as Holbach, Godwin and Darwin.⁴⁴ The opposing standpoints, however, as Shelley is well aware, often have more in common than the conflict of dualist and monist philosophies at first suggests. The sceptics, for example, often stress a principle of permanence that lies within cycles of change. For Darwin, life and matter survive changes in form through a species of Pythagorean transmigration.⁴⁵ Holbach, after describing the continual circulation of matter, writes:

such is the eternal circle, that all that exists, is forced to describe. It is thus that motion, breeds, preserves for a time, and successively destroys, parts of the universe, the one by the other, whilst the sum of existence remains always the same.⁴⁶

This can be compared with Spenser's description of the role of change in sustaining the universe. The following stanza is Nature's judgement on the dispute between Jove and the character Mutability concerning which of them has ultimate sway in the world:

I well consider all that ye have said,
And find that all things stedfastnesse do hate
And changed be; yet, being rightly wayd,
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being do dilate,
And turning to themselves at length againe
Do worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne,
But they raigne over Change, and do their states maintaine.⁴⁷

The full importance to Shelley of the earth-born Titaness Mutability and her defiance of Jove appears later in his career, but already in the Alastor poems he has absorbed Spenser's sense of the interdependence of change and permanence, while resisting his confirmation of Jove's supremacy--as his 'Nought may endure but Mutability' succinctly demonstrates. Wordsworth, too, in The Excursion, has a more complex response to natural vicissitude than is expressed by the Wanderer's high-toned detachment. The Solitary shows an ambivalence not unlike Shelley's, in complaining at one moment that 'Mutability is Nature's bane' (III, 458), and at another delighting in nature's 'Alternate and revolving' (III, 316) patterns of change.⁴⁸ Various related aspects of Shelley's response to the opposing notions of mutability in his predecessors can be observed. First, in showing the similarity between them he draws attention to their inconsistencies and to the dualist tendencies they all share--the materialist Holbach as well as the Christian Spenser. Secondly, he thereby also expresses his own acute ambivalence concerning mutability, aware of both its destructive and renovating potential, and its simultaneous dependence on and opposition to the idea of an unmoving, unchanging centre. But thirdly and most importantly, mutability for Shelley has an internal aspect; and here it is the condition not merely of the mind's susceptibility to change, as in 'Mutability', but of the relationship between mind and nature in their oscillation between identity and difference. Nature's inconstancy, in other words, represents a relationship of subject and object which veers between unity and separation, between nature's responsiveness to the mind and its alienation, and between the mind's participation in natural processes of change and its aspiration to a fixity outside them. The complex situation consequently arises whereby mutability symbolizes an alternation between different attitudes to mutability.

To understand Shelley's concept of mutability thus is to recognize how

deeply ambivalent his sonnet 'To Wordsworth' is in its treatment of both Wordsworth himself and its themes of loss and inconstancy. The valued Wordsworth of the past, the poem tells us, 'wept to know/ That things depart' (1-2), and was like a 'star' (6) and a 'rock-built refuge' (9) above a turbulent sea of change. Yet his attitude of lament, of looking down on the world's turbulence from a position of remoteness and security, though representing a fidelity to what has been lost, is also a kind of infidelity to a necessary process of change, both in nature and politics. The attempt to preserve an image of the ideal by standing apart from the mutable world is self-defeating, and leads only to the political and religious conservatism that the poem laments as Wordsworth's betrayal. 'The irony which evolves is this: the speaker's regret over the loss is paradoxically bound to his condemnation'; this comment by Kim Blank on Shelley's other poem about Wordsworth, 'Verses Written on a Celandine' (written 1816), is equally applicable here.⁴⁹ Wordsworth's loss of childhood and youth is equivalent to Shelley's loss of the former Wordsworth, and in lamenting the loss, the sonnet repeats his error, thus demonstrating the unavoidable defeat of its own Wordsworthian idealism.

Shelley's ambivalence concerning mutability is thus closely bound up with his dilemma as an idealist. In the Alastor volume there are the beginnings of a sense that mutability, in its widest signification, has a renovating as well as a disfiguring power. Wherever in the poems we find the expression of a willingness to embrace the uncertainty of change or death--as in 'Stanzas.-- April, 1814', 'On Death', 'A Summer Evening Churchyard', 'Mutability', as well as in parts of Alastor--there is a flickering optimism that anticipates Shelley's later more successful attempts to win hope from despair. For example, the Poet's passage by boat, though ultimately failing of its purpose, is the precursor of several later such voyages in which Shelleyan figures

venture joyously upon the unknown. In the Alastor poems and throughout Shelley's career the moon is a recurrent symbol of inconstancy, and one that particularly stresses its connection with the objective vision of self-consciousness; thus the Poet, waking from his dream of unity, gazes 'on the empty scene as vacantly/ As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven' (201-2). The moon, however, is also a symbol of renewal, as is made explicit in Peter Bell the Third, where Nature's reply to the coy Wordsworth who dares not lift her hem is a quotation from Boccaccio: 'Bocca baciata non perde ventura/ Anzi rinnova come fa la luna' (iv, 328-9)--'A mouth that's been kissed does not lose its charm;/ Rather it renews itself as does the moon'.⁵⁰ Likewise in Alastor the moon that sinks at the Poet's death (whose blood 'ever beat in mystic sympathy/ With nature's ebb and flow', 652-3) carries a faint suggestion that its eclipse is not final.

The dominant attitude of the Alastor poems, however, is one of backward-looking regret rather than forward-looking expectancy, and mutability is associated with loss rather than renewal. Nature's images are treacherously distorting, enticing the Poet on, but eventually draining him of hope that they can disclose the unitary origin he seeks. The narrator, who undergoes a parallel transition from hope to despair, begins the poem with an invocation to the parental nature of Queen Mab and to the inspiring nature of Wordsworth and Coleridge--a combination which is itself revealing of the proximity of the materialist and the dualist positions--but he ends with the realization that 'Nature's vast frame' (719) is not as he conceived it.⁵¹ The idea of nature as a personified origin has at least been discredited, even if a more progressive and hopeful conception has yet to be fully achieved.

understood as the language of God, often informs the Romantic desire for communion with nature.⁵² In its non-religious form it is frequently found in the work of Shelley. In Alastor, for example, the Spirit by the well 'Held commune' with the Poet, 'for speech assuming' the forms of the landscape (486-7). 'On Love' speaks of the 'eloquence in the tongueless wind', while 'On Life' offers the view that 'almost all familiar objects are signs' (R&P, pp. 474, 477) like words. Since nature and language share the same status as a system of signs, both are equally the material of the poet. The sentence from Tasso quoted in 'On Life' and the Defence--'Non merita nome di creatore, sennon Iddio ed il Poeta' (R&P, pp. 475, 506)--for Shelley offers more than a simple parallel between God and the poet with their different spheres of creativity; in the terms of his 'intellectual philosophy' they are really not distinguishable. When therefore the narrator in Alastor invokes the 'Great Parent' (52) in Wordsworthian language there is a suggestion that this parent is the 'Poet of Nature', Wordsworth himself, and that the narrator's 'natural piety' (3) is directed towards Wordsworth's poetry as well as towards the natural world.

An implication of the nature-language identification is that almost everything the poem says about nature could also be said about language and poetry, and particularly its own language and poetry. The Poet's pursuit of a self-image projected upon nature is therefore a representation of the poem's pursuit of itself within itself, as Tilottama Rajan recognizes.⁵³ In thus representing and also being a quest, Alastor resembles those works which Roland Barthes describes as being 'by a fundamental ruse, nothing but their own project: the work is written in seeking the work, which begins fictively when it ends practically.'⁵⁴ Yet it is important to stress that in Alastor there is difference as well as identity between the practical quest and the fictive quest. Moreover, the author, who suffers a demise in the Barthesian

scheme, is not quite killed off in Shelley's poem, though he remains tantalisingly difficult to locate.

The narrator is a primary agent of the poem's self-reflexiveness. Contrary to Wasserman's contention that he and the Poet are characterised differently, the Poet, as various other critics have argued, is rather his self-projection, just as the 'veiled maid'--'Herself a poet' (161)--is a self-projection of the Poet.⁵⁵ The narrator's desolate pessimism at the end of the poem and his sense of the destruction of his earlier hopes for some positive revelation in the telling of his tale certainly point to his personal involvement in the fate of the Poet. At the same time he is not clearly distinguished from the author who writes the Preface, whose admiring sympathy for the Poet he shares. In fact the only thing that clearly does differentiate him is his fictive belief in the actual existence of the Poet. By virtue of this one difference, however, he plays a vital role in enabling Shelley to preserve a distance from his narrative while at the same time vicariously identifying with it. In this respect he performs a similar function to the fictional voices which utter the prose introductions to Julian and Maddalo and Epipsychidion. While apparently drawing attention to the duality of author and text, reality and fiction, they actually serve to break it down.

The Preface contributes to this effect. Like all authorial prefaces, it purportedly locates the author outside the main text as the origin of its meaning.⁵⁶ Hence it offers to explain the poem's 'allegorical' import and moral 'instruction' (M&E, p. 463). But not only does the poem itself resist any such closed interpretation, but, as we have seen, the authorial detachment of the Preface is subverted from within by an alternative voice warmly identifying with the Poet. While the real author remains out of sight, the Preface-writer is shown to be as much a part of the fiction as the narrator and the Poet; he shares their hope and despair and is a vicarious participant

in the quest. The author is therefore excluded from but also inscribed in the text, absent and present like Shelley's skylark--'Thou art unseen,--but yet I hear thy shrill delight' ('To a Skylark', 20)--an invisibly remote creator who is himself created in the act of singing. He is thus involved in a dialectical interplay with the text by which both remain as elusive as the 'veiled maid'. She, indeed, is the sought-after image of which he is the indefinitely deferred meaning.

The narrator's relation to his narrative is emblematic of Shelley's relation to his poem, both being marked by an alternation between identification and objectification. This alternation is evident in the invocation and coda as it is in the Preface. The narrator invokes Nature initially in a tone of passionate and sexual entreaty, but then switches suddenly to say, 'though ne'er yet/ Thou hast unveil'd thy inmost sanctuary,/ Enough from incommunicable dream/...Has shone within me' (37-41), and refraining as it were from lifting Nature's hem, he appropriately lapses into Wordsworthian language to complete his invocation. But as he makes clear, only by adopting such a stance, making do with 'Enough' but not all, and remaining objectively outside the sanctuary, is he able to begin his tale. A consequence, however, of this necessary authorial detachment is that the Poet's quest for unity is defeated from the very beginning, just as the poem as a whole is defeated by the authorial detachment of the Preface-writer.

At the end of the poem, the narrator shows the same ambiguous attitude. He elaborately invests the Poet's death with pathos but at the same time denies that the expression of pathos is possible, thus giving an ambivalent gloss to Wordsworth's 'too deep for tears';⁵⁷ and while he claims that the Poet will live on in the 'simple strain' (703-12) he has uttered, he also asserts that the 'feeble imagery' and 'cold powers' of poetry are inadequate to mourn his death. The poem cannot surmount this contradiction, which reflects its own

failure to convey a unified meaning. Like the Poet, the poem also in a sense dies without fulfilling its quest, or knowing whether there is a possibility of life and meaning beyond its own enclosed, deceptively reflective world, and beyond its own death.

By definition, such survival is only to be sought outside the confines of the text. In The Revolt of Islam there is a suggestion as to where it might be found. The mysterious Woman in the first canto describes how her revolutionary fervour in youth was partly learned from a poet like the one in Alastor:

A dying poet gave me books, and blessed
With wild but holy talk the sweet unrest
In which I watched him as he died away--
A youth with hoary hair--a fleeting guest
Of our lone mountains: and this lore did sway
My spirit like a storm, contending there alway. (I, xxxvii, 453-59)

Here the death of the poet is not regarded as a defeat. Rather, in the act of dying he transmits his life to the Woman and so ensures his survival.

Similarly, through the dying Poet in Alastor, Shelley, a 'fleeting guest' in his own poem, transmits himself and his meaning to the reader. The poem, too, though dying away like the Poet, is recuperated beyond its own termination, and paradoxically lives on as a successful poetic record of the inevitability of poetic failure.

Notes

1. Shelley expresses with some bitterness his sense of isolation in letters to Godwin of 21 February and 6 March 1816 (Jones, I, 453, 459). His despondency concerning contemporary European political events is clearly expressed in a letter to Hogg in August 1815 (Jones, I, 429-30), and in

his sonnet 'Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte' (1816).

2. Shelley's river trips down the Reuss and Rhine in 1814, and up the Thames in 1815 are particularly influential. R.D. Havens notes certain similarities between landscape descriptions in Alastor and those included by Shelley on 18 and 30 August 1814 in Mary Shelley's journal, 'Shelley's Alastor', PMLA 45 (1930), 1098-115.
3. Mary Shelley records that she and Shelley read The Excursion on 14 September 1814, and no doubt expresses their common view in pronouncing Wordsworth 'a slave', The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, 25.
4. Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 111.
5. Keach provides an extended discussion of reflexiveness in Alastor in Shelley's Style, pp. 79-88.
6. 'Alastor: A Reinterpretation', PMLA 62 (1947), 1022-42; rpt. in Reiman and Powers, pp. 545-69.
7. Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760-1830 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 140-41
8. Clark, Embodying Revolution, pp. 95-142.
9. Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator, p. 103.
10. Floyd Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley, pp. 145-52; Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry, pp. 41-60; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 11-41.
11. Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, pp. 84-5 (Cronin's emphases).
12. Shelleyan Eros, p. 27.
13. Hartman discusses this issue in relation to Wordsworth's The Excursion,

- Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814, pp. 292-323, and Kelvin Everest discusses it in relation to Coleridge's 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' (1795) and 'Fears in Solitude' (1798), Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-98 (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 222-36, 270-80.
14. The relationship of Alastor to Rousseau's Reveries is discussed in Edward Duffy, Rousseau in England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 93-5, and Donald L. Maddox, 'Shelley's Alastor and the Legacy of Rousseau', SiR, 9 (1970), 82-98.
15. Shelley refers to Werter in a letter to Hogg of 2 June 1811, Jones, I, 95; to Fleetwood in two letters to Godwin, of 24 February and 25 April 1812, Jones, I, 260 and 287, on both occasions drawing attention to the theme of rural seclusion; and to The Missionary four times, with some disdain in a letter to Hitchener of 11 June 1811, Jones, I, 101, but with considerable enthusiasm in letters to Hogg of 19 June, 20 June and 28 July 1811, Jones, I, 107, 112 and 130. There is no firm evidence of Shelley having read René, but parts of it are very close to Alastor.
16. For biographical readings, see Paul Mueschke and Earl L. Griggs, 'Wordsworth as the Prototype of the Poet in Shelley's Alastor', PMLA, 49 (1934), 229-45; Joseph Raben, 'Coleridge as the Prototype of the Poet in Alastor', RES, n.s. 17 (1966), 278-92; and Maddox. Marcel Kessel responds to Mueschke and Griggs with an autobiographical reading in 'The Poet in Shelley's Alastor: A Criticism and a Reply', PMLA, 51 (1936), 302-10. Timothy Webb dismisses Raben's interpretation in 'Coleridge and Shelley's Alastor: A Reply', RES, n.s. 18 (1967), 403-11.
17. The Excursion, IV, 261.
18. See Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
19. Havens believes the 'prototype' indicates a real human version of the 'veiled maid', whereas Gibson argues that what the Poet seeks does not belong to the physical world. I agree with O'Neill's view that Shelley makes no clear distinction between the real and the ideal, The Human

- Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 12.
20. Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 33.
 21. The Ruins, pp. 266-9.
 22. The Missionary: An Indian Tale, 3 vols (London, 1811), I, 141.
 23. There is some doubt as to whether Shelley had read 'Kubla Khan', which was not published until 1816, when he wrote Alastor. Raben and Webb (see note 16 above) dispute the likelihood of his having done so. Cameron suggests that he might have seen it in manuscript, perhaps shown it by Godwin, who was close to Coleridge in 1815, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 610 n. 4.
 24. For the identification of the Caucasus as the site of Eden, see Luther L. Scales, 'The Poet as Miltonic Adam in Alastor', KSJ, 21-22 (1972-73), 126-44.
 25. The reference to The Excursion is suggested by L.H. Allen, 'Plagiarism, Sources and Influences in Shelley's Alastor', RES, 18 (1923), 133-51.
 26. See note 16 for reference to Mueschke and Griggs. John C. Bean complains with some justice that critics have tended to concentrate attention on the Preface and the beginning and end of the poem, to the neglect of the continuation of the Poet's quest after his vision, 'The Poet Borne Darkly: The Dream Voyage Allegory in Shelley's Alastor', KSJ, 27 (1974), 60-76.
 27. The Wanderer's condemnation of unrealistic political hopes occurs in The Excursion, IV, 123-196, a passage which is of particular importance to Alastor.
 28. As has been noted by Christine Gallant, Shelley's Ambivalence (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 21, and Norman Thurston, 'Author, Narrator and Hero in Shelley's Alastor', SiR, 14 (1975), 130.
 29. O'Neill, The Human Mind's Imaginings, p. 13; The Excursion, IV, 1029.

30. Fenwick Note to the 'Immortality' ode, The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 61; 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', Owen and Smyser, II, 353-4.
31. See, for example, the figures of Martha Ray and the Leech-gatherer in Wordsworth's 'The Thorn' (1798) and 'Resolution and Independence' (1807), and commentaries on these poems, respectively, by Paul D. Sheats, The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 197-202, and Stephen Prickett, Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Poetry of Growth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 163-67.
32. Fleetwood; or, The New Man of Feeling, ed. Pamela Clemit (London: William Pickering, 1992), p. 19.
33. René, in Atala/René, trans. Irving Putter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), p. 96.
34. The Missionary, I, 71.
35. See Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 132-143.
36. For Berkeley's and Drummond's refutation of Locke on this question, see George Berkeley, Of the Principles of Human Knowledge (1710), in The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, ed. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop, 10 vols (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1948-57), II (1949), pp. 44-45; and Sir William Drummond, Academical Questions (1805), facsimile edn, with intro. by Terence Allan Hoagwood (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1984), pp. 33-38.
37. Shelley's Style, pp. 51-52; William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 191.
38. J. Hillis Miller, 'Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, I' and 'II', The Georgia Review, 30 (Spring and Summer 1976), 11-12 and 337, quoted in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), p. 273.

39. Cf. David Hume's statement that memory and imagination 'never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of...[an] original sentiment', Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals (1777), ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (1888), rev. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 17.
40. Fictions of Romantic Irony, pp. 38-39. Cf. Lisa Steinman's observation that the Poet's quest represents the endless 'regress of consciousness [in which] for any image of a given mental activity there is always a further image to represent a consciousness of that activity', 'Shelley's Skepticism: Allegory in Alastor', ELH, 45 (1978), 255-69. Godwin describes consciousness in similar terms as 'a sort of supplementary reflection, by which the mind not only has the thought, but adverts to its own situation and observes that it has it. Consciousness therefore, however nice the distinction, seems to be a second thought', Political Justice, I, 325.
41. Paul de Man, 'Shelley Disfigured', in Deconstruction and Criticism, Harold Bloom et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 39-74.
42. Fraistat, 'Poetic Quests and Questioning in Shelley's Alastor Collection', KSJ, 33 (1984), 161-81. Martin Crucefix, in 'Wordsworth, Superstition and Shelley's Alastor', Essays in Criticism, 33 (1983), 126-147, sees both 'Superstition' and Alastor as an attack on Wordsworth's tendency to project supernatural beings.
43. Keach, p. 96.
44. See esp. Reveries (1782), trans. Peter France (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 88, 137; The Excursion, III, 458-61, and IV, 10-17; Godwin, Political Justice, I, 332; Darwin, The Temple of Nature (London, 1803), Canto II, 1-4, 41-44.
45. See The Temple of Nature, Canto IV, 417-28, and Note to l. 417.
46. Système de la nature, trans. William Hodgson, 4 vols (London, 1795), I, 75-6.
47. The Faerie Queene, Book VII, canto VII, stanza lviii.

48. The passage in which the Solitary celebrates the 'Alternate and revolving' cycles of nature (iii, 307-324) later becomes a source for Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820).
49. The Influence of Wordsworth on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 60.
50. Translation by Reiman and Powers, p. 335.
51. Cf. Queen Mab, VI, 197-8; Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey' (1798), 93-102; Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), 26-33.
52. See Ian Wylie, Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 81-93.
53. Rajan, 'The Web of Human Things: Narrative and Identity in Alastor', in The New Shelley: Later Twentieth Century Views, ed. G. Kim Blank (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 85-107.
54. Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. xiii.
55. Keach, p. 88, Cronin, p. 89, Rajan, Dark Interpreter, p. 76, and Hogle, Shelley's Process, p. 50, for example, see the Poet as an image of the narrator rather than his opposite.
56. Cf. Gayatri Spivak's description of the relationship between preface and text as one in which the preface defines only to defer the authority of the text, in her Preface to Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (1967), trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. x-xii.
57. The final words of Wordsworth's 'Immortality' ode (and of his 1807 volume of poems).

Chapter 4

The 1816 Odes: 'Fleeting Power'

If the critical reception of Alastor seemed to Shelley an unwelcome confirmation of what the poem suggests are its own 'cold powers' (710), his two lyrics of the summer of 1816, 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc', show a remarkable recovery of confidence in the power of poetry and in his own powers as a poet. In fact, one of the ways these poems not only demonstrate but explain his new-found assurance is by boldly addressing the very notion of 'power'. This is one of the most problematic concepts in Shelley's writing, drawing from him, in different contexts, the extremest responses of antipathy and desire. On the one hand, from the very beginning of his career, whether as a materialist or a sceptical idealist, and for political as well as philosophical reasons, he is opposed to the notion of a primal power or cause. On the other, power is the term he applies variously to love, to the wind that draws music and poetry from the lyre, and to 'the interfused and overruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things'¹. The question of how he can sustain such contrary attitudes is crucial to an interpretation of his poetry from 1816 onwards, and in so clearly raising it the two odes have proved something of a touchstone for critical responses to his work.

Wasserman believes that a 'conviction' of an ultimate cause based on imagination overrides Shelley's rational doubt in the two odes, and that power and 'Intellectual Beauty' are therefore to be understood as transcendent realities, if sceptically provisional ones, which manifest themselves in the world of change.² The majority of critics have since rejected the notion of

the 'One Mind' on which Wasserman bases his reading, and instead regard the transcendentalist language of the poems as a means of expressing subjective experience. On this view, power is an imaginative hypothesis with an ethical or psychological significance rather than a metaphysical one. Hogle takes this approach a stage further by interpreting power as the process of transference by which such hypotheses are conceived. His interpretation of the poems consequently appears as a mirror image of Wasserman's, whose terms it inverts. Thus, while the 'secret strength of things' in 'Mont Blanc' (139) is understood by Wasserman as the 'motionless Power', which reveals itself, in 'successive transformations of transcendent snow', as flowing glaciers, streams and rivers, for Hogle it represents the mobility of transference, which conceals itself behind ideas of static absoluteness. At issue between them is the notion of causality: the power which Wasserman regards as a first cause is for Hogle only the 'effect of its own effects' --that is, power as cause is only a manifestation of Shelley's revisionary conception of power as transference.

Shelley has himself been exercised by this question long before 1816. Despite his repeated rehearsals of Hume's sceptical arguments about cause in The Necessity of Atheism (Murray, p. 4), the Notes to Queen Mab (M&E, pp. 375-76), and A Refutation of Atheism (Murray, p. 121), his concept of power remains uncertain. In the Queen Mab Note he writes, 'What is power?--id quod potest, that which can produce any given effect. To deny power is to say that nothing can or has the power to be or act' (M&E, p. 378). Here power appears to be a property of existing things, though there is an element of circularity in the notion of things possessing the 'power to be'. In the poem, however, power and necessity are much closer to an originary force: 'Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,/ Necessity! thou mother of the world!' (VI, 197-8). We find the same inconsistency in a letter to Hitchener of 11 June 1811. Here he

describes God as 'the existing power of existence' (Jones, I, 101), a description which corresponds to the definition of power in the Queen Mab Note. The evident circularity of his phrase is underlined in the letter by his speaking of God and power both as 'adjuncts' to the substantial universe and as 'the unknown cause, the supposititious [sic] origin of all existence' (Jones, I, 100). According to Sir William Drummond, Shelley's uncertainty is one which has long bedevilled metaphysics:

Is power a cause, or an effect? Philosophers do not appear to have decided this question. Sometimes they speak of power, as if it were the principle which had occasioned all things, and by which the universe itself was produced; at other times they they seem to consider it, as having resulted from some being already existing....Power cannot be at once the principle and the attribute of being. It cannot be both the consequence and the origin of existing substance.⁸

In A Refutation of Deism Shelley refers in a footnote to Drummond's 'very profound disquisition' on power and echoes him in the text: 'If Power be an attribute of existing substance, substance could not have derived its origin from power' (Murray, p. 121). Eusebes, the Christian who speaks these words and who plays devil's advocate in most of the dialogue, does not, however, consider the possibility that power might be the principle rather than the attribute of being. Thus, although Theosophus the deist, who believes in a substantial God, is confuted, Shelley skirts the question concerning power posed by Drummond. In Alastor there is again an ambiguity in his attitude. The Preface tells us that power 'strikes the luminaries of the world with sudden darkness and extinction, by awakening them to too exquisite a perception of its influences' (M&E, p. 463). The poem itself, in contrast, resolutely avoids naming or defining the mysterious force that lures the Poet to his

destruction. It is as if here Shelley heeds his own warning in the last two lines of 'Superstition' that to give the world's influences and their causes 'name and form,/ Intelligence, and unity and power', is to elevate an attribute into a principle.

In the 1816 odes, however, Shelley uses the term power quite freely and without apparent wariness of its philosophical implications. We are therefore compelled to ask: what precisely is his concept of power in these poems, and how has it changed since formerly? Neither Wasserman nor Hogle, I suggest, accurately represents Shelley's position. While Wasserman's view is incompatible with Shelley's consistently stated scepticism concerning first causes, Hogle's contention that power is 'the effect of its own effects' shares the same circularity as Shelley's earlier definitions of power and God, and in the final analysis does not escape the notion of a first cause. Moreover, despite Shelley's oft-expressed adherence to Hume's argument on causality and his admiration for Drummond, his poetry is not so closely tied to their philosophies as Hogle suggests. In the ensuing discussion of 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' I shall mediate between these two critics' views by arguing that Shelley is still divided between the alternative conceptions of power as a principle and as an attribute. However, I also intend to show that he now develops a Romantic ironic understanding of their dialectical interrelationship, whereby each depends on but also undermines the other. Seen in this light, power can no longer be interpreted merely as an imaginative hypothesis, for the dialectic which renders cause and effect interdependent also destroys any notion of priority between reality and art, referent and sign. Shelley's confidence in handling the idea of power in the 1816 odes derives therefore from a sense not of its fictionality, but of its creative and revolutionary potential.

His elaboration of a new conception of power in these poems is inseparably



connected with and to a large extent determined by a parallel development in his understanding of the relationship between subject and object. As a result of his visit in 1816 to Switzerland, where the poems were written, and of the various literary and landscape influences with which it was associated, Shelley's awareness of the complex intertwinings of mind and nature, imagination and experience, books and life was considerably deepened. I propose therefore to look first at certain relevant aspects of this Swiss experience, before going on to address directly the poems which emerged from it.

i

One of the books which helped to form Shelley's idea of Switzerland before he went there was Godwin's Fleetwood (1805). Ruffigny, the character in the novel who becomes the hero's mentor, is a venerable Swiss who lives alone in the mountains of the Canton of Uri. When Fleetwood goes to visit him there, the old man describes his mode of life as follows:

'I pass some hours of every day...in this apartment; but my life is principally in the open air: I think more than I read; and I am more attached to the great and living volume of nature, than to the cold, insensible, mechanically constructed pages and sheets that have been produced by my fellow creatures. Let no man despise the oracles of books° A book is a dead man, a sort of mummy, embowelled and embalmed, but that once had flesh, and motion, and a boundless variety of determinations and actions. I am glad that I can, even upon these terms, converse with the dead, with the wise and the good of revolving centuries. Without books I should not understand the volume of nature....The furniture of these shelves constitutes an elaborate and invaluable commentary; but the objects beyond those windows, and the circles and communities of my contemporaries, are the text to which that commentary relates.'

There is some irony that Godwin, who is not renowned for his sympathy with nature, and had never visited Switzerland, should put these words into the mouth of a character whose existence belongs wholly to the 'cold, insensible, mechanically constructed pages' of a book. However, when read through the eyes of Shelley, the passage acquires a new resonance, for it accurately describes the mutually dependent relationship between nature and books that is repeatedly revealed in his life, his writing, and in the interaction between the two.

Indeed, it is never more clearly revealed than in the influence upon him of Fleetwood itself. From the very first, Shelley's letters to Godwin in 1812 model his relationship with the philosopher on that of Fleetwood and Ruffigny.¹⁰ Returning from Ireland in April 1812, he at first sought a house in Merionethshire, as 'the scene of Fleetwood's early life', and invited Godwin to Wales in order 'that I s[hould] first meet you in a spot like that in which Fleetwood met Ruffigny; that then every lesson of your wisdom might become associated in my mind with the forms of Nature where she sports in the simplicity of her loveliness and magnificence, and each become imperishable together.'¹¹ The interpenetration of fiction and reality, mind and nature could hardly be plainer. In 1814 Fleetwood is again relived when Shelley, Mary Godwin and Claire Clairmont, on their elopement tour abroad, intend to settle in Uri. Like Fleetwood, they make a tour of Lake Lucerne by boat, and the scenery they witness is described in History of a Six Weeks' Tour (1817) much as it is in the novel.¹²

Switzerland was almost inevitably their destination again in 1816, and not only because Claire Clairmont and Shelley, for their separate reasons, hoped to meet Byron there. Other literary figures high in Shelley's esteem had connections with this country: Rousseau was a native of Geneva and his Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse is set there; Wordsworth had visited in 1790 on a

walking tour which he draws on in Descriptive Sketches (1793); and Coleridge had written 'Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni' (1802).

Switzerland, moreover, as Fleetwood emphasizes, was a republic renowned for its freedom-loving traditions, where Shelley, who was not sure of returning home, might feel politically comfortable.¹³ His party was also following a fashion: Switzerland was now a popular resort as a result of the grand tour and the growing taste for mountain scenery in the eighteenth century.¹⁴

Thus Shelley went to Switzerland heavily laden with preconceptions and prepared responses, and we can see him experiencing the country both through and against these in his letters and poems. Various remarks to Peacock show him to be ruefully aware of treading a well-worn tourist route, and of responding to the landscape with conventional raptures.¹⁵ By describing himself in a number of hotel registers as a 'Democrat, Philanthropist and Atheist' he clearly intended to dissociate himself from the mass of visitors who, ever since Gray had found the Alps 'pregnant with religion and poetry', had been responding to the mountains with religious enthusiasm, even though his own 'extatic wonder, not unallied to madness' is hardly different, despite his non-belief.¹⁶ Similarly, in his two odes he may reject the supernaturalism of his literary models in their treatment of the external world, but he also acknowledges that the landscape would be a vacancy without their mediating function. His attitude is therefore comparable to Ruffigny's: 'living' nature may seem anterior to 'dead' books, but without them it is meaningless; and while they provide a 'commentary' on nature, nature is itself a 'volume' and a 'text', implying derivation from and reference to an anterior mind. There is therefore no clear priority but rather an interdependence between mind and nature. In Shelley's two poems we can even detect echoes of Ruffigny's remark that, despite a preference for the open air, he is glad to 'converse with the dead, with the wise and good of revolving centuries'. In the Scrope Davies

manuscript of 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (M&E, pp. 525-8) the poet speaks of having had 'Hopes of strange converse with the storied dead' (52). These hopes were thwarted, and it was the return of spring, 'wooing/ All vocal things that live' (56-7), that made the Spirit of Beauty present, though in the next stanza 'joy' and 'hope' are also known through 'studious zeal'--that is, through books rather than nature. In 'Mont Blanc' 'the wise, and great, and good/ Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel' the mountain's voice, which is otherwise 'not understood' (81-3), and yet the ultimate source of this voice in either nature or mind is again left undefined.

His intense preoccupation while in Switzerland with the mind-nature relationship is undoubtedly connected with his reading of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were much in his thoughts at the time. ¹⁷ When he writes to Peacock from Geneva on 15 May 1816 that he misses England, and mentions as among his special ties 'Our Poets & our Philosophers, our mountains & our lakes' (Jones, I, 475)--almost in one breath, as if they were indissolubly connected--he is probably thinking mainly of these two Lake poets. However, in his next letter of 12 July, Rousseau and his novel Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse (1761) are in the forefront of his mind, and it is under their influence that he continues to consider the relative claims of mind and nature; though for Shelley the question receives an added piquancy from the experience he describes of reading the novel while sailing around Lake Geneva where its events are set. One of the novel's themes is the power of love to transform not only those it touches but nature as well: St Preux, for example, writes to Julie, 'Let us animate all nature, which is absolutely dead without the genial warmth of love.' ¹⁸ Both Byron and Shelley refer to their passion as an 'overflowing' of Rousseau's own passionate genius, which to Shelley seems to overflow into the actual scenery of the lake, subordinating its reality to the novel's fiction. ¹⁹ The places Rousseau describes, he writes,

present themselves to the imagination as monuments of things that were once familiar, and of beings that were once dear to it. They were created indeed by one mind, but a mind so powerfully bright as to cast a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality (Murray, p. 217).

Here Shelley clearly echoes the sentiments of Rousseau's lovers who in later life see these same scenes as memorials of their former passion.²⁰ Although by this remark he seems to be deifying the creative imagination, as St Preux does his love, neither Shelley nor Rousseau actually privileges mind over nature in this way. Shelley can state the exact opposite point of view, writing in the same letter to Peacock that 'Meillerie is indeed enchanted ground, were Rousseau no magician' (Murray, p, 215); and Rousseau, likewise, speaks of 'a kind of supernatural beauty' belonging to the mountains of Valois, 'which charms both the senses and the mind'.²¹ At the same time, both writers also see the subject-object relation as reciprocal. In Rousseau's novel Julie tends to speak of love in terms of rendering and receiving: 'The source of true happiness', she writes, 'is not confined to the desired object, nor to the heart which possesses it, but consists in a certain relation between the one and the other'; and her perception of the outer world is similarly reciprocal: 'The delightful solitude of the groves seemed to heighten our sensibility, and the woods themselves appeared to receive additional beauty from the presence of two such faithful lovers.'²² In his letter to Peacock Shelley expresses a comparable view of the relationship between the novel and its setting: 'It is inconceivable', he says, 'what an enchantment the scene lends to those delineations, from which its own most touching charm arises'; and likewise to Hogg he writes of Julie 'giving & receiving influences from the scenes by which it was inspired'.²³ In his letters Shelley thus follows Rousseau quite

closely in that his uncertainty of the priority of nature or mind tends towards a view of their reciprocity.

It is possible to see 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' as respectively emphasizing the two sides of the issue: while the 'Hymn' addresses intellectual realities, one may argue, as Blank does, that in 'Mont Blanc' the mind is more influenced than influencing.²⁴ There are other ways in which the two poems seem to counterbalance one another: one is concerned with beauty, the other with the sublime; one is distinctly emotional, the other, at times, icily cerebral; and one professes a form of faith, while the other is pervaded with doubt. These oppositions, however, like that between mind and nature, are found to be based on complementarity and mutual dependence once the poems are examined in more detail.

ii

'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'

Shelley's title, 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', adroitly anticipates some important and contradictory aspects of the poem. It draws attention to a wide range of religious antecedents by its use of the term 'Hymn', and specifically recalls Spenser's 'An Hymn of Heavenly Beauty' (1596).²⁵ But at the same time the notion of 'Intellectual Beauty' places the poem in the eighteenth-century tradition of hymns to abstract concepts, and sharply distinguishes the title from Spenser's by implying the radical scepticism of what he calls in 'On Life' the 'intellectual system' of Drummond (R&P, p. 476). The poem, accordingly, employs a religious form and language for an anti-religious purpose. This strategy, however, raises a crucial question: what ultimately is the difference, in ontological terms, between the 'Spirit of BEAUTY' (14), by whose 'spells' (83) the poet is bound to a secular alternative to faith, and the 'God and ghosts and Heaven' whose 'Frail spells' (27-29) it replaces?²⁶

The common critical response that Shelley is proposing a humanist hypothesis, which may 'exalt and ennoble' without being true, is inadequate, I suggest, on two counts. ²⁷ First, it pays insufficient regard to Shelley's acute awareness of the deifying effect of poetry and personification, and of the essential similarity therefore of the two kinds of spells. Second, it tends to miss the genuinely revisionary nature of the Spirit, which is as it were divided against itself in its resistance to its own hypostasis. In the following discussion of Shelley's 'Hymn' I shall argue that it is this very contradiction within the Spirit of Beauty that constitutes its poetic and revolutionary 'power' (78).

First of all, the 'Intellectual Beauty' of the title, with which the Spirit is synonymous, is itself an ambiguous concept, and not only to be thought of in sceptical terms. As Matthews and Everest have indicated (pp. 523-4), the term was widely current in contemporary writing, and was generally used to distinguish an inward beauty of the mind from an outward, sensuous beauty. It is in this sense that the phrase is used, for example, in C.M. Wieland's Agathon (1766), as translated by J. Richardson in 1773, where reference is made to the 'Platonic maxim, that external beauty is a reflection of the intellectual beauty of the soul.' ²⁸ This understanding of 'intellectual beauty' obviously runs counter to the sceptical notions of Drummond, and Wasserman for this reason rejects it, though his curiously contradictory insistence that 'Intellectual Beauty...is a divinity of the mind only' ²⁹ actually lends weight to a Platonic interpretation of the term. It is true ³⁰ that the poem shows little direct influence of Plato, but the Platonic reference of its title is strongly suggested by the fact that Shelley's only other use of the term occurs in his translation of Plato's Symposium. Although the translation was written two years after the 'Hymn', his re-use of a phrase from the title of one of his own poems is likely to have been

deliberate, particularly as in Plato's Greek the word 'beauty' is unqualified. Moreover, the repetition does seem to indicate a significant similarity between Shelley's and Plato's conceptions of beauty. In the Symposium Diotima explains that the true lover of beauty, after proceeding from a love of beautiful forms to a love of wisdom and the beauty in souls, would, in Shelley's words,

turn towards the wide ocean of intellectual beauty, and from the sight of the lovely and majestic forms which it contains, would abundantly bring forth his conceptions in philosophy;...[until eventually he beheld] the divine, the original, the supreme, the self-consistent, the monoeidic beautiful itself.⁴⁰

All earthly beauty, it would appear, is a participation in the divine beauty, and the beauty of mind mediates between them, without being clearly separable from either. Diotima's distinctions between divine, mental and physical beauty are therefore somewhat imprecise. In Shelley's 'Hymn' we can find the same mutually informing categories of beauty, for the Spirit, which is the 'shadow of some unseen Power', visits 'Each human heart and countenance' (7) and shines upon 'human thought...[and] form' (15). Furthermore, the distinctions between the types of beauty represented here are again far from clear. The Spirit could be the same as the 'unseen Power' or only its manifestation: it is the 'shadow' of this power, but also has its own 'shadow' (46, 59); and although, like power, it is 'unseen' (2), it also has 'hues' (14), is 'fair' (83), and in various ways manifests itself in the external world. Moreover, just as the 'wide ocean of intellectual beauty' in the translation of the Symposium appears to be at once exclusive and inclusive of lower and higher grades of beauty, the identification of the 'Intellectual Beauty' of Shelley's title with either the visible or invisible aspects of the spirit, or with

both, is left unclear.

The title, then, while expressing scepticism concerning transcendent and external realities, at the same time admits both, just as the 'intellectual philosophy' as expounded in 'On Life' purports to demonstrate the unity of life, yet cannot quite collapse the dualisms of subject and object and of time and eternity. Shelley's use of the term 'intellectual' thus encapsulates the peculiar contradictions of sceptical idealism as he conceives it. In the poem we find that 'Intellectual Beauty', far from having a purely mental existence, is constantly reconstituted and dissolved by the dynamic interrelation between noumenal and phenomenal worlds. This interrelation is somewhat differently depicted in what are discernible as the poem's two parts: the first four stanzas, reflecting the poem's origins in hymns to abstract qualities, attempt a general description of the nature and operations of the Spirit of Beauty; the final three give a brief history of the poet's relationship with it in the manner of Wordsworth's 'Immortality' ode.

The first part proceeds by repeatedly qualifying its own statements and heading off false inferences, swinging back and forth between affirmation and doubt. By the end of stanza 4 it achieves a view of the 'Spirit of Beauty' that is a considerable refinement, though not quite a revision, of the poem's opening proposition: 'The awful shadow of some unseen Power/ Floats though unseen among us'. The similes following this statement in the first stanza, and describing the spirit's veiled and evanescent appearances in the world, begin the refining process. They conclude by likening these appearances to 'aught that for its grace may be/ Dear, yet dearer for its mystery' (11-12). In context, 'grace' and 'mystery' refer respectively to physical beauty and spiritual origin, and yet both are religious terms, and equally suggestive of a supernatural influence upon the natural. The priority of one to the other is thus tacitly questioned. The preceding similes likewise depict an interaction

between different phenomena rather than a unidirectional influence of one upon the other: 'moonbeams' and 'piny mountain', 'clouds' and 'starlight', 'memory' and 'music' (5-10) could all equally be a 'grace' or a 'mystery'. Moreover, although these similes employ the word 'Like' in emphatic anaphora, we cannot fail to read them as instances rather than likenesses of beauty--which again undermines the idea of the 'Spirit of Beauty' as an original essence independent of its physical manifestations. Thus the first stanza confirms the ambiguity of the spirit's description as a 'shadow', hovering between presence and absence, the visible and the invisible.

This ambiguity is continued in the next stanza, which laments the very inconstancy which in the first stanza has been celebrated as part of the spirit's 'mystery'. In response to his own question 'Why dost thou pass away...?' (16), the poet says,

Ask why the sunlight not forever
Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain river,
Why aught should fail and fade that once is shewn. (18-20)

Again there is an uncertainty concerning the relationship between the earthly mutability described here and the spirit's inconstancy: which is an expression of which, and which therefore is cause, and which effect? This uncertainty is also evident within the image that Shelley employs here. At first it seems that the Spirit of Beauty, 'that dost consecrate/ With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon' (13-14), is being likened to the 'sunlight', but since the 'hues' of light are the result of refraction, the Spirit is really more like the 'rainbows' caused by the interaction of spiritual light and earthly water. This reading of the Spirit as effect rather than cause is reinforced by the later comparison of the Spirit's light to 'music by the night wind sent/

Through strings of some still instrument' (33-4). However, although 'rainbows' and 'music', as analogues of the Spirit, are products, in both comparisons an ambiguity remains, since spiritual 'sunlight' and 'wind' are clearly spoken of as creative agents.

The complex relationship of the seen to the unseen is more fully explained as that of mutability and permanence. The essence of beauty, we have learned from stanza 1, is its evanescence. A paradox of the same order is expressed by the idea that 'Nought may endure but Mutability', where mutability and permanence can be understood both to depend on and to cancel each other. Stanzas 2, 3 and 4 explore this relationship further. Following the poet's loss of a sense of power and permanence in the face of the Spirit's departure in stanza 2, he refuses in stanza 3 the consolation offered by the fictions of religion. Only the 'Spirit of Beauty', he claims, can offset 'Doubt, chance, and mutability' (31). These, however, are the very qualities that make the 'Spirit of Beauty' what it is. In stanza 4 he draws closer to a recognition of this essential contradiction. He acknowledges the double aspect of the Spirit, which is 'unknown and awful' but has a 'glorious train' of qualities, such as 'Love, Hope, and Self-esteem' (37-41), which are experienced transiently in the human world. Faith is inevitably absent from Shelley's version of the theological virtues, but if his poem nevertheless expresses a kind of faith, it is because faith and doubt are dialectically related in the same way as permanence and change, faith resting on a sceptical questioning of its every formulation. The paradox of the poem is most completely expressed in the striking description of the Spirit as 'Like darkness to a dying flame' (45). The darkness here is both desired and feared: it keeps the flame alive but also threatens to engulf it; it is the darkness of the 'night wind' and the 'midnight stream' (33-35), which signify the principle of movement and change 'that to human thought...[is] nourishment' (44), but it is also the 'gloom'

(23) of 'This dim vast vale of tears' (17); it is thus both a means of renewed life and an ultimate end. This paradox achieves its complete realization in Adonais, with the poet's recovery of hope through his final willing embrace of death. In the 'Hymn' Shelley shrinks from this total submission to mutability, begging the spirit, 'Depart not---lest the grave should be,/ Like life and fear, a dark reality' (47-8). This demand for permanence represents a failure of Shelleyan faith, as it is equally a failure of doubt. The apparent loss of nerve is symptomatic of a conflict in the poem which is not to be confused with its dialectical contraries. Despite the interrelational and ironic significance of the Spirit of Beauty, in the last resort it is exempt from the processes it represents, as we shall again find in the final stanza.

The second section of the poem begins in stanza 5 with a corrective to the fears with which stanza 4 ends. His youthful pursuit of 'ghosts' of the 'departed dead', and invocation of the 'poisonous names' of religion (49-53), are comparable to his urging the invisible Spirit of Beauty not to depart. But the spirit, he finds, is not to be sought outside nature, by active pursuit, or by a backward-looking regret for what has departed; rather, it takes him unawares with the coming of spring, descending 'like the truth/ Of nature on...[his] passive youth' (78-9), and is experienced as a forward-looking expectation, as the promise of 'buds and blossoming' (58).

Present 'joy' (68) and future 'hope' (69), desire and its fulfilment, are related in another manifestation of the poem's dialectic between the here and the beyond in stanza 6, which in this respect prefigures Prometheus Unbound, Act II, Scene v, where Asia, like the poet in the 'Hymn', joyfully awaits the imminent release of the 'world from its dark slavery' ('Hymn', 70). The term 'awful LOVELINESS' (71) is almost an oxymoron in suggesting both the beautiful and the sublime, and thus brings the seen and unseen realms into relationship once again; as does the poet's hope that 'thou.../Wouldst give whate'er these

words cannot express' (70-2), which shows a confidence in the convergence of sign and referent such as the Poet in Alastor despairs of.

In the final stanza, however, the commitment to interrelational process is considerably weakened. He celebrates afternoon and autumn, not as harbingers of more creative times and seasons, but for their own serene harmony, and he asks the Spirit to 'supply/ Its calm' (80-1) without anticipation of succeeding storm, which is its usual Shelleyan corollary. The tone of resignation is usually attributed to the influence of Wordsworth's 'Immortality' ode, but at least as influential is the fourth volume of Julie, in which St Preux gladly acknowledges that at last 'a peaceful serenity has succeeded to the storm of the passions'.³² Shelley's self-dedication to the spirit in this stanza is related to his earlier plea, 'Depart not', though it takes the form of a bias towards faith rather than doubt: both attitudes assume a primal power, the priority of permanence to change, instead of an interrelation between the two, and both are found in Wordsworth's poem and Rousseau's novel. Like other critics, therefore, if for somewhat different reasons, I find the last stanza sits incongruously with those that precede.³³ In the first published version of the poem in 1817, this weakness is even compounded by a change Shelley makes to the 1816 Scrope Davies version. The earlier 'fleeting Power' of the penultimate line is now replaced by 'SPIRIT fair'. It is the former oxymoron, however, which more accurately captures the spirit of the poem, for if 'Intellectual Beauty' is indeed to be addressed as a power, it is one only by virtue of its state of constant transition and self-effacement.

'Mont Blanc'

The conception of power in 'Mont Blanc' is in its main emphasis the reverse of what it is in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. Whereas in the latter poem power is experienced in the human realm as an inward, transforming presence, in 'Mont Blanc' it is a remote, inhuman, amoral cause, like Necessity in Queen Mab, and is imaged upon an external landscape which is as 'vacant and desolate' as life in the absence of power in the 'Hymn' (17). 'No voice from some sublimer world' is heard in the 'Hymn' (25), but in 'Mont Blanc' the 'voice' of the 'great Mountain' (80) is both felt and interpreted.

This difference between the two poems can in part be understood in terms of the genres to which they separately belong. Through praise or petition a hymn inevitably internalizes and humanizes its addressee, even if this is a mere abstraction. As Queen Mab illustrates, an impersonal force like Necessity may need 'no prayers or praises', but nevertheless becomes a personified self-projection the moment it is apostrophised. In Shelley's 'Hymn', the apparently abstract 'Intellectual Beauty' of the title is likewise humanized as an object of worship and desire in the poem, becoming what in 'On Love' is called an 'antitype' of the self or 'a soul within our soul' (R&P, p. 474). 'Mont Blanc', though classed as a hymn by Bloom,³⁴ owes more to an eighteenth-century loco-descriptive tradition of poetry, of which Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' is its most immediate example. In fact, Shelley uses this tradition as a counter to Coleridge's 'Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni'. As a hymn to a landscape that has been read about but not seen, Coleridge's poem is, one might say, almost entirely a product of mind. For Shelley in 'Mont Blanc', on the other hand, 'Nature was the poet',³⁵ in the sense that the poem records a direct encounter with 'the naked countenance of earth' (98), and aims at a certain fidelity of description. His subtitle, 'Lines Written in the

Vale of Chamouni', as Blank points out, echoes Wordsworth's 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', but it also somewhat pointedly refers to Coleridge's title.³⁶ As Shelley writes in his Preface to History of a Six Weeks' Tour (1817), his poem 'rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity' of the Alps (Murray, p. 181); and in its pursuit of this aim, even F.R. Leavis allows the poem a 'certain vividness'.³⁷ But the poem's specificity to place and its descriptive accuracy are for Shelley not only a means of conveying the 'deep and powerful feelings' (Murray, p. 180) excited by the landscape, of relating outer to inner in the way Leavis expects, but also of doing exactly the opposite: that is, showing the landscape to be literally 'untameable' and 'inaccessible', even by human thought, and using the mountain's blank externality as an image of a wholly external and impersonal, 'Remote, serene, and inaccessible' (97) power. Implicit within such a conception of power is a rejection of the conventionally religious response to the sublime exemplified by Coleridge, who is less concerned with seeing the mountain as it is than with investing its 'naked countenance' with his own God-adoring soul. This power is also the reverse of the Rousseauistic power of mind, which casts 'a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality'. Confronted with Mont Blanc Shelley discovers the limits of the mind's unaided powers of imagination: as he writes to Peacock, 'I never knew--I never imagined what mountains were before.'³⁸ Unknown to Shelley, Wordsworth in The Prelude also records that when he first saw Mont Blanc his mental preconception was ousted by reality:

That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye
Which had usurped upon a living thought
That never more could be. (The Prelude (1805), vi, 524-8)

In Shelley's poem, likewise, 'the very spirit fails' (97), defeated in its attempt to inhabit and humanise the mountain's usurping 'soulless image'. However, he does not 'grieve', nor does he seek compensation in the domesticated Vale of Chamonix, which for Wordsworth made 'rich amends,/ And reconciled us to realities' (The Prelude (1805), VI, 531-2). Instead, he contemplates a reconciliation with nature enabling him to 'Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel' (83) its sublime otherness, as represented by the voice of the 'great Mountain' (80).

Such a reconciliation involves a contradiction, however, for by definition this otherness lies beyond human understanding or feeling. Frances Ferguson describes this contradiction when she suggests that 'Mont Blanc' 'attempts to think of the mountain as physical and without metaphysical attributes, and fails; it attempts to imagine a gap between the mountain and the significances that people attach to it, and fails'.³⁹ She argues further that this failure reveals in Shelley a Wordsworthian sense of the exquisite mutual fittedness of nature and mind, and that consequently the sublime experience becomes an assertion of the transcendental power of human thought. I, too, shall argue that the poem's conception of power is ultimately not one of pure externality, and that the poem at least partially 'fails' in the way Ferguson describes, but I shall also show that for Shelley the imagined 'gap' between nature and mind that she speaks of is as real and important as their correspondence. For this reason I find the poem's idea of power bears traces of the dualism of Locke, and is not so strictly phenomenalist and Humean as a number of critics have assumed it to be.⁴⁰

The first two sections of 'Mont Blanc', dealing with the relationship of mind to the flow of sensations passing through it, show the presence of both these types of philosophy in the conflicting subject-object tendencies towards mergence and separation. Section 1 introduces the subject of the interaction

of inner and outer with the image of the river of the mind. Here, as Blank has noted,⁴¹ there are three separate but overlapping metaphors, each of which, in a slightly different way, explores the relationship of give and take, difference and identity, between the mind and its contents. In the first of these, occupying the first three and a half lines, the contents of mind are represented as a river, which, in 'reflecting gloom' and 'lending splendour' (3-4), both affect and are affected by the mind which contains them. But since the valley of the mind is not actually mentioned, a sense is also conveyed that the river is all there is, and that mind and its objects are therefore one. The next metaphor--'where from secret springs/ The source of human thought its tribute brings/ Of waters' (4-6)--again distinguishes inwardly and outwardly produced thoughts, but unites them in one river. In the third metaphor, which occupies the rest of the section, the sounds of the 'feeble brook' (7-8) and the cascading river are likewise blended without quite becoming indistinguishable. In the way that this first section stands apart from yet also merges with the sections that follow--just as its metaphorical river seems to merge with the actual Ravine of Arve--it is itself in a sense a 'feeble brook...with a sound but half its own' (6).

The poem's enactment of its own meaning, and consequent confusion of metaphor and reality, become more pronounced in the second section. Although the Ravine of Arve is clearly a real external object, with an almost overwhelmingly vivid presence, the opening 'Thus thou' (12) has the curious effect of subordinating it to the river of the mind in Section 1, and in fact the Arve is explicitly spoken of as the 'likeness' of an original 'Power' from which it 'comes down' (16), and the ravine as an image of the poet's 'own...human mind' (36). The dual function of the ravine as 'both object and emblem of the poet's thinking', as O'Neill describes it, is not untypical of Shelley's self-reflexive tendency to confuse the distinction between the

externally real and the internally metaphorical, thus denying the priority of one to the other.⁴² The confusion of functions is inherently dynamic, creating between ravine and mind a constant interplay of dependence and contention, which is represented by the interaction of 'woods' and 'winds', 'river' and 'rocks', 'cloud shadows and sunbeams' (10-11, 15). And this interplay is also both object and emblem, a third entity between the mind and the ravine, which intimates an elusive higher reality prior to them both. Thus the contending elements produce an effect of religious mystery: the windswept pines, 'swinging' (23) like censers (as Bloom has remarked),⁴³ release 'odours' (23), reminiscent of the 'incense' in Coleridge's 'Hymn' (80); a waterfall 'Robes some unsculptured image' (27), recalling the 'white robed waterfall' and monumental rocks in Wordsworth's The Excursion (iii, 47-67); and the roar of the ravine masks a 'strange sleep' of 'deep eternity' (27-9). These intimations, however, are themselves only passing 'shadows' and 'Ghosts' (45-6), which offer no assurance of a supporting substance.

A further corollary of the dual role of the ravine as object and emblem of the poet's thought is that he is both participant in and observer of the scene before him--both 'Holding an unremitting interchange/ With the clear universe of things around' (39-40) and musing, in the process, on his 'own separate fantasy' (36). Shelley does not claim like Coleridge to be rapt in self-forgetfulness, as if hearing 'some sweet beguiling melody,/ So sweet, we know not we are listening to it' ('Hymn', 17-8). Yet he does hint at the possibility of such a state in the 'strange sleep' of silence that lies behind 'the voices of the desert' (27-8), or the play of thought. These voices, as the imperfect likenesses of the 'Power' from which they 'come down', mask the very silence they aspire to, just as 'reflection' distorts the 'sensation' which it originates from and seeks to reproduce. Shelley nevertheless attempts once again in 'Mont Blanc' that same 'dizzying and tumultuous' ascent of the

river of thought which he has previously attempted in Alastor, and which he describes as being so difficult in his fragment 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind'.

On this occasion, however, the attempt is successful, to judge by the final exclamation 'thou art there°' (48), which is addressed to the 'Dizzy Ravine' (34) certainly, but also to power as the source of thought--power which cannot be named without it becoming yet another 'shade', 'phantom' or 'faint image'. This final coming together of noisy ravine and still power, of image and reality, is not quite the same as the subject-object unity represented by the dream of the 'veiled maid' in Alastor. Rather, it shows that the endless deferral of an external or ultimate reality by a flow of interrelating mental images has, after all, a converse implication, which Wasserman defines when he writes that, although it is in vain, 'the act of searching for the coincidence of the thing-in-itself and mental image is itself constitutive of reality for the human mind'.⁴⁴ However, with his commitment to the idea of a Shelleyan 'One Mind' of existence, which transcends human reality and is distinct from 'Power' or 'Ultimate Cause', Wasserman misses the full import of the dialectic he identifies in 'Mont Blanc'.⁴⁵ For the poem erodes the differences not only between thoughts and things but also between the ontological categories that Wasserman insists on. This is made particularly evident in the concluding, and highly ambiguous, lines 34-8 of Section 2. Attempts to explicate this passage almost inevitably fall foul of its deliberate intention to dissolve grammatical and semantic distinctions.⁴⁶ The main difficulty concerns the conceptual definition of the 'Dizzy Ravine', addressed as 'thou', 'thee' or 'thy' throughout the passage. First, as object and emblem of the poet's thought, the ravine is both identifiable with his mind and separate from it: 'when I gaze on thee/ I seem.../ To muse on my own separate fantasy,/ My own, my human mind' (34-7). In the ensuing lines this confusion increases, until

eventually only a barely coherent syntax distinguishes the ravine from the 'legion of wild thoughts' (41), the 'still cave' (44), or even the 'breast' (47) where thoughts and images originate. Blending empirical and Platonic philosophical influences, the passage thus leaves unspecified whether the ravine is external actuality or internal image, ideal form or insubstantial shadow, reality of power or only its 'likeness'. But the effect is not so much to merge the opposing concepts as to reveal their dynamic interdependence and to deny the priority of one over the other. The final affirmation, 'thou art there!' (48), embraces within its conception of 'thou' the whole complex of interrelating oppositions represented by the 'many-coloured, many-voiced' (13) ravine; and this dynamic all-inclusive 'thou' is power, which under another aspect symbolised by the mountain becomes the 'still and solemn power of many sights,/ And many sounds' (128-9); but here, before it is graced with a name, it is less a principle than an attribute which is constituted of the interplay of its own representations.⁴⁷

Thus 'Mont Blanc' reveals a confidence, largely lacking in Alastor, in the capacity of thought and language to embody reality, even though, paradoxically, the existence of that reality remains always in doubt. But this victory in defeat is not permanent or assured, for the experience of power as interrelational process, as an attribute of being, is inevitably superseded by the contemplation of power as a primal, subsuming principle, just as immediate sensation is always superseded by self-conscious reflection. This transition is marked in the poem by the poet's turning from the ravine to the mountain at the beginning of Section 3. His sceptical opening, 'Some say that gleams of a remoter world/ Visit the soul in sleep,--that death is slumber' (49-50), and his self-questioning 'do I lie/ In dream?' (54-5), indicate that he is actually emerging from that self-oblivious state--akin to the 'strange sleep' of the landscape--which by the end of the previous section the ravine has all

but induced.

At this point further significant comparisons with Alastor suggest themselves. In that poem, also, the Poet's vision is attributed on waking to the unconscious realms of sleep and death (209-13). Later, while he communes with a spirit of the landscape, 'as if he and it were all that was,...his regard/ Was raised by intense pensiveness' to behold 'Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought' (487-90). In 'Mont Blanc', similarly, after his communion with the ravine, the poet 'look[s] on high' to see in the shape of the mountain the 'unfurled/... veil of life and death' (52-4). Thus in both poems the intercommunion of mind and nature is interrupted by a self-conscious awareness of a third entity, a notion of transcendence, which emerges from that communion and becomes in turn the object of the mind's attention. In 'Mont Blanc', however, the passing of a state of visionary absorption, with the transition from sensation to reflection, is not an occasion for despair as in Alastor, and nor does the notion of power any longer present the impasse of an unbridgeable gap between its reality and its representation. In Alastor the main symbol of power is the Poet's dream of union with the 'veiled maid', but between her presence in the dream and her absence in the waking world there is no reconciliation. But in 'Mont Blanc' there is not a complete separation between this experience of power as presence and the subsequent projection of power as absence. For, as Ferguson has shown, just as there is a reciprocity as well as an opposition between the River Arve and its valley, so is there between the ravine and the mountain, each as it were requiring and defining the other;⁴⁸ and just as the poet does not completely internalize the ravine, nor does he succeed in viewing the mountain as purely physical and external.

E.B. Murray has pointed out that when Shelley visited the mountain he did not actually see its peak because it was covered in cloud.⁴⁹ His position after all was therefore not totally different from that of Coleridge, who had

not seen the mountain at all and in his poem thoroughly humanises it by the exercise of his inward imagination. To a lesser extent Shelley does the same in 'Mont Blanc'. He does so mainly by addressing the mountain, like the ravine, as 'Thou' (80), despite its utterly inhospitable landscape, and by giving it a 'voice', like the 'voices' of the 'many-voicèd vale', even though its snows are 'silent', and 'None can reply' to questions concerning its origins (74-5). The same ambivalence can be understood to lie behind the 'awful doubt, or faith so mild' (77) that the mountain teaches. Kapstein suggests that this 'doubt' and 'faith' can be explained in terms of Shelley's necessarianism, as learnt from Holbach and Godwin and expressed in Queen Mab, and refer respectively to a disbelief in nature's good intentions towards mankind and to an acceptance of this state of affairs.⁵⁰ However, Shelley has long left behind the materialism on which such views are based, and although they are not irrelevant, they do not provide a sufficient basis for interpretation here. 'Doubt' and 'faith' are rather alternative responses to the sublime, one reflecting a sense of its inhuman vacancy, and the other stemming from the mind's inevitable tendency to give it meaning. In the fragment, 'The Coliseum', written in 1818, Shelley puts into the mouth of a blind old man an account of the sublime experience. This account is hardly to be taken as Shelley's own, since it emphasizes the response of faith: sublimity excites us, the old man says, 'because we enter into the meditations, designs and destinies of something beyond ourselves....And this is Love. This is the religion of eternity' (I&P, VI, 304).⁵¹ However, in his idea that there are two circles which surround our internal nature, one 'which comprehends, as well as one which mutually excludes, all things which feel' (I&P, VI, 303), he provides the basis for an explanation of Shelley's response to the sublime in 'Mont Blanc'. Here doubt and faith (responses to what the old man calls 'awfulness and beauty', I&P, VI, 304) correspond to the two

the two kinds of circle and interact in a similar way: the circle of the comprehensive imagination is inevitably too small when confronted with the infinite, and therefore itself becomes exclusive, prompting the need for a yet larger circle, which again proves inadequate, and so on. Between the impossibility of not projecting an interpretation on the landscape and the impossibility of providing an adequate one there is therefore a constant tension. Hence the 'mightier world of sleep' seems to 'Spread far around and inaccessibly/ Its circles' (55-7), in the same way that the Colosseum's walls are built in a series of concentric circles.

The description of faith as 'So solemn, so serene' (78) clearly echoes the lines, 'The day becomes more solemn and serene/ When noon is past' in the last stanza of 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (73-4), where the poet espouses a similar faith. But Shelley appears to be questioning the conclusion to this poem in 'Mont Blanc', not only in his explicit juxtaposition of faith and doubt, but in the ambiguous statement 'that man may be/ But for such faith with nature reconciled' (78-9). His eventual preference for the difficult 'But for such faith' in the place of the much clearer 'In such a faith' in the Scrope Davies manuscript suggests that he consciously adopts a more complex attitude to the idea of faith than is expressed in the Hymn.⁵² At a certain level faith does indeed reconcile mind and nature, as Rousseau, Wordsworth and Coleridge bear witness, each laying claim to a relationship with nature that has a supernatural underpinning. But for Shelley, such faith also alienates, because it only ever rests on a mental image which falls short of, distorts and eclipses external reality. His religiously-inclined predecessors are therefore like the blind old man in 'The Coliseum', whose inability to see the otherness of the outer world frees his inward vision to remake nature in its own image. 'Mont Blanc' demonstrates that there is no complete reconciliation of mind and nature, but that through their dialectical interplay it is

possible to experience the reality of both, which is also the reality of power.

The contradictory nature of Shelley's attitude to faith and power is clearly revealed when he writes, 'Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal/ Large codes of fraud and woe' (80-1). The voice of the god-like and monarchical Mont Blanc is able, paradoxically, to overturn religious and social hierarchies. The mountain's voice, however, recalls the voices of the ravine, and represents not only authoritarian power but power as interrelational process, which both enthrones and dethrones notions of primacy. This is 'not understood/ By all' (81-2), or even by 'the wise, and great, and good', who, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, may 'Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel' (81-3), but at the same time 'deny and abjure...the Power which is seated on the throne of their own soul' (A Defence of Poetry, R&P, p. 508).

In Section 4 the dual aspect of power is considered again in the emphatically drawn contrast between the cycles of growth and destruction evident in nature and power that 'dwells apart in its tranquillity/ Remote, serene, and inaccessible' (96-7). But in various ways the poem undermines this contrast and shows the realms of permanent power and changeful nature to be mutually informing. To which realm, for example, do the creeping glaciers belong? They would seem to be alien to the 'dead and living world' (113) whose limits they overthrow, and yet 'the flood of ruin/...that from the boundaries of the sky/ Rolls its perpetual stream' (107-9) shows that motion and destruction belong even to the remote peaks. In his letter to Peacock from Chamonix Shelley emphasizes the living movement that belongs to the seemingly lifeless mountains: 'In these regions everything changes, and is in motion....One would think that Mont Blanc, like the god of the Stoics, was a vast animal, and that the frozen blood for ever circulated through his stony

veins'.⁵² To convey his sense of the absolute power embodied in the mountain he enjoins Peacock to imagine Ahrimanes 'throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death and frost'.⁵³ But such images of human kingship in the poem actually make power seem rather less 'Remote, serene, and inaccessible' than has been stated, particularly as we are told that the 'city of death, distinct with many a tower/ And wall impregnable' is after all 'not a city, but a flood of ruin' (105-8), calling to mind the fate of Louis XVI and the French Revolution.

The 'flood of ruin' could, of course, also refer to the desolating wars waged by Napoleon. The question therefore arises as to which comes first: tyranny or revolution, power or change. 'Earthquake, and fiery flood' are cited as instances of natural mutability, and yet in the previous section the 'Earthquake-demon' and 'a sea/ Of fire' (72-4) are suggested as possible causes of the mountains. Power, it would seem, might be the effect of change as well as its cause. Shelley's scientific interest in glaciers and the nature of their movement has a bearing on this issue. In his letter to Peacock he mentions both the naturalist Horace Bénédict de Saussure's belief that glaciers have 'their periods of increase and decay' and Buffon's rival theory that glacial ice will ultimately spread to cover the earth.⁵⁴ However, he steers a course between them to argue his own view that, since the snow on the mountains 'perpetually augments,...the glaciers [too] must augment and will subsist, at least until they have overflowed this vale.'⁵⁵ In the poem, where the glaciers seem to belong to both a natural and a 'remoter world' (49), we again find Shelley combining a knowledge of their place within the hydrological cycle with an absolutist view of their power. He speaks first of their advance as inexorable, and the land they overcome 'Never to be reclaimed' (114), but the section ends with a description of the life-giving river, which is fed by the glaciers, feeds the ocean in turn, and 'Breathes

its swift vapours to the circling air' (126)--it only remaining to be added that the 'circling' of these vapours eventually returns the snow to the mountains. The reference to torrents 'from...secret chasms in tumult welling' (122) recalls Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan', whose 'sacred river' also has associations of fertility and war, but Shelley probably has in mind at the same time the actual source of the River Arveiron, which issues from a cave at the base of one of the glaciers of Mont Blanc, and which he saw on his visit to Mont Blanc.⁵⁶ This is also described by Dorothy Wordsworth in her 'Journal of a Tour on the Continent' (1820), and in the significance she attaches to the scene her account has a curious correspondence with Shelley's poem. She writes:

No spectacle that I ever beheld--not even the ocean itself--has had an equal power over my mind in bringing together thoughts connected with duration and decay--eternity, and perpetual wasting--the visible and invisible power of God and Nature.⁵⁷

Mountain, glacier and river bring together similar opposing thoughts for Shelley, though in a way that reveals their dialectical interdependence: the invisible primal power and the visible dynamic power of nature are both unlimited, and yet each also makes and unmakes the other.

The final section unambiguously asserts that 'the power is there' (127), that the 'secret strength of things' (139) inhabits Mont Blanc. But with its description of snow falling on the mountain it also completes the previous section's account of the hydrological cycle, and thus affirms the all-pervasive power of natural process at the same time. The interaction of 'flakes' of snow, which are the congealed images of 'swift vapours', with the 'sinking sun' and distant 'star-beams' is an interplay of frozen and fading

metaphors respectively representing the earthly and the heavenly. Meanwhile, 'Winds contend/ Silently there' (134-5), stressing the convergence of turbulent interaction and silent power. Moreover, 'none beholds' (132) the falling snow, which indicates that the apprehension of power and the completion of its cycle depends on the imaginative 'tribute' (5) of the human mind (143). The last three lines make the same point more forcibly--

And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind's imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy? (142-4)

The question fittingly concludes the poem on a note of sceptical uncertainty. The notion of power is indispensable to the activity of the mind in its relations with the external world, and yet because the dependency is mutual, there can be no certainty that either the external world or power are more than projections of the mind. Between these two propositions the entire mental drama of the poem is enacted.

'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' occupy a central place in Shelley's canon, for in these poems he first develops a full dialectical awareness of the relations between mind and its objects. In so doing he discovers how the opposing notions of power as cause and as effect can be conceived as engaged in a mutually creative and destructive interplay. Power is thus reclaimed from religious faith and the repressive ideologies of his predecessors to become an essential component within a new liberating aesthetic. In the poems we have been considering this aesthetic is exercised within the relatively private form of lyric. Much of Shelley's future poetry will be devoted to exploring its possibilities in other genres and in more public and political areas of concern.

Notes

1. 'Essay on Christianity' (1817; Murray, p. 250).
2. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 190-96, 222-38 (p. 231).
3. See, for example, Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 236-251; Spencer Hall, 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc"', Studies in Philology, 70 (1973), 199-221, and 'Power and the Poet: Religious Mythmaking in Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"', KSJ, 32 (1983), 123-49; Webb, Shelley: A Voice not Understood, p. 136-42; Jean Hall, The Transforming Image: A Study of Shelley's Major Poetry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 43-63; Cronin, pp. 224-30; and Tetreault, The Poetry of Life, pp. 63-94.
4. Hogle, Shelley's Process, pp. 59-86, and 'Shelley as Revisionist: Power and Belief in "Mont Blanc"', in G. Kim Blank, The New Shelley: Later Twentieth Century Views (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 108-27.
5. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 234-5; and see Hogle, Shelley's Process, p. 86.
6. Hogle, 'Shelley as Revisionist: Power and Belief in "Mont Blanc"', p. 118; Shelley's Process, p. 11.
7. Shelley's later reiterations of Hume's argument on cause appear in 'The Mind' (?1815-19; I&P, VII, 59); 'On Polytheism' (?1820-21; I&P, VII, 151); 'On a Future State' (?1818; I&P, VI, 208-09); and 'On Life' (R&P, p. 478).
8. Academical Questions, p. 5.
9. Ed. Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering, 1992), p. 69.
10. William St Clair, p. 316, notes that Shelley's first letter to Godwin, 3 January 1812 (Jones, I, 219-21) resembles a fictional letter of Fleetwood seeking the acquaintance of Macneil.
11. Letters to Godwin, 25 April and 24 February 1812, Jones, I, 260, 287.

12. Fleetwood, p. 69; History of a Six Weeks' Tour, Murray, pp. 196-7. Their coasting of the lake in search of a suitable habitation also sounds like an imitation of St Leon's circuit of Lake Como with his family in Godwin's St Leon (1799), ed. Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering, 1992), p. 90.
13. Concerning Shelley's uncertainty about returning home, see remarks in letters to Godwin, 3 May 1816 (Jones, I, 472), and to Hogg, 18 July 1816 (Jones, I, 493).
14. See Jeremy Black, The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in The Eighteenth Century (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992); and Marjorie Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory (1959; New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).
15. See esp. the first paragraph of his letter to Peacock, 22-28 July 1816 (Murray, p. 220).
16. Gray's letter to Richard West, 16 November 1739, quoted in The Picturesque: Literary Sources and Documents, ed. Malcolm Andrews, 3 vols (Mountfield, E. Sussex: Helm Information, 1994), I, 111; Shelley's letter to Peacock, 22-28 July 1816, (Murray, p. 223).
17. Byron writes, 'Shelley, when I was in Switzerland, used to dose me with Wordsworth physic even to nausea', Medwin's 'Conversations of Lord Byron', ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), quoted in Robinson, Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight, p. 18. When Shelley writes to Peacock on 17 July 1816, asking for literary news, he mentions specifically that 'Coleridge is in my thoughts' (Jones, I, 490.)
18. Julie, trans. William Kendrick, as Eloisa, or a series of original letters, 4 vols (London, 1803), facsimile edn, 2 vols (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), I, p. 192.
19. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, III (1816), 741; Shelley's letter to Peacock, 12 July 1816, Murray, p. 217.

20. Eloisa, III, 215.
21. Eloisa, I, p. 121. Charles Robinson conjectures that Shelley wrote the note on the Clarens stanzas in Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, III, which suggests that the landscape around Lake Geneva is naturally invested with love, and that 'If Rousseau had never written, not lived, the same associations would not less have belonged to such scenes', Shelley and Byron, p. 25. Robert Brinkley questions Robinson's conjecture, and argues rather that the note was written against Shelley's view of the power of human love over nature, 'Documenting Revision: Shelley's Lake Geneva Diary and the Dialogue with Byron in History of a Six Weeks' Tour', KSJ, 39 (1990), 66-82. I think this unlikely, in view of what I see as Shelley's notion of a reciprocal relationship between nature and mind.
22. Eloisa, II, 32; I, 95.
23. Letter to Peacock, 12 July 1816, Murray, p. 212; letter to Hogg, 18 July 1816, Jones, I, 493.
24. Blank, Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley, p. 175.
25. J.R. Watson discusses Shelley's handling of the hymn genre in 'Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and the Romantic Hymn', Durham University Journal, n.s. 54 (1993), 203-10.
26. David Fuller points out how closely the poet's veneration of the Spirit of Beauty follows Christian practice, 'Shelley and Jesus', Durham University Journal, n.s. 54 (1993), 211-23.
27. Cronin and Spencer Hall (see n. 3 above) put forward the view that 'Intellectual Beauty' is a hypothesis. Cameron suggests that the metaphysical ideas in the poem are merely intended to 'exalt' mankind, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 243. The quoted phrase is from Shelley's note to Hellas, 197-238.
28. Quoted by Notopoulos, p. 197-8.
29. Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 191.

30. Notopoulos points out (p. 196) that there is no evidence that Shelley read Plato shortly before or at the time of writing 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. Shelley was no doubt influenced by the pervasive Platonism of Eloisa: 'The true philosophy of lovers is that of Plato' writes Rousseau in a footnote, II, 29.
31. Notopoulos, pp. 449-50.
32. Eloisa, IV, 166.
33. Cronin, p. 230, finds the Wordsworthian language of the final stanza inconsistent with what goes before; Leighton, p. 57, considers that its Wordsworthian calm conflicts with the preceding emotional intensity.
34. Shelley's Mythmaking, pp. 11-45.
35. Letter to Peacock, 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 223.
36. Blank, Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley, p. 171.
37. Revaluation, p. 199.
38. 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 223.
39. 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc": What the Mountain Said', in Romanticism and Language, ed. Arden Reed (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 202-14 (p. 203).
40. The view that 'Mont Blanc' expresses a Humean conception of power is to be found in Spencer Hall, 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc"', Studies in Philology 70 (1973), 199-221; Tetreault, The Poetry of Life, pp. 63-94; and Richard Isomaki, 'Interpretation and Value in "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"', SiR, 30 (1991), 57-69). The influence of Locke on the poem is noted by I.J. Kapstein, 'The Meaning of Shelley's "Mont Blanc"', PMLA, 62 (1947), 1046-60, and Timothy Clark, Embodying Revolution, pp. 110-11.
41. Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley, p. 173.

42. The Human Mind's Imaginings, p. 44.
43. Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 27.
44. Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 227.
45. John Rieder provides a critique of Wasserman's reading of 'Mont Blanc' on these grounds, 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc": Landscape and the Ideology of the Sacred Text', ELH, 48 (1981), 778-798 (pp. 789-90).
46. Useful commentaries are provided by I.J. Kapstein, pp. 1046-60; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 227-28; and O'Neill, The Human Mind's Imaginings, pp. 44-46.
47. John B. Pierce similarly argues that these lines express the 'importance of process--as opposed to product--in the active imagination', '"Mont Blanc" and Prometheus Unbound: Shelley's Use of the Rhetoric of Silence', KSJ, 38 (1989), 103-26 (p. 108).
48. See Ferguson, p. 205.
49. 'Mont Blanc's Unfurled Veil', KSJ, 18 (1969), 39-48.
50. Kapstein, pp. 1054-55; Spencer Hall takes a similar view, 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc"', pp. 214-15.
51. Timothy Clark takes the old man's words to represent Shelley's views, and consequently argues that the 'sublime experience...is assimilated to Shelley's understanding of love', 'Shelley's "The Coliseum" and the Sublime', The Durham University Journal, n.s. 54 (1993), 225-235 (p. 231).
52. 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 227.
53. 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 226.
54. 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 226. Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon expresses his theory in 'La Théorie de la terre', vol III of Histoire Naturelle (1749).

55. 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 226.
56. Shelley describes the source of the Arveiron in his letter to Peacock, 22-28 July 1816, Murray, p. 224; as does Mary Shelley in Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818), ed. D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1994), pp. 124-26. Writing to Peacock from Rome on 20 November 1818, Shelley says that 'The glaciers of Montanvert & the source of the Arveiron is the grandest spectacle I ever saw' (Jones, II, 55-56).
57. Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt (London: Macmillan, 1941), p. 286. Cf. Coleridge's description of a cataract in a letter to Sara Hutchinson, in which he speaks of 'the continual change of the Matter, the perpetual Sameness of the Form--it is an awful Image & Shadow of God & the World', in Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl L. Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), II (1956), 853-4.

Prometheus Unbound: 'The Embrace of Beauty'

Following the mainly personal and epistemological preoccupations of his poems of 1815-16, Shelley's sense of a 'slow, gradual, silent change'¹ away from post-revolutionary despondency in the English political climate of 1817 was accompanied by his own more hopeful literary re-engagement with moral and political themes. His main production of that year, The Revolt of Islam, was, as he explains in the poem's Preface, expressly intended as a response and an encouragement to the perceived alteration in the public mood. Expressing a more tenuous hope than Queen Mab, it acknowledges the difficulties that lie in the path of reform, and, in accordance with Godwinian gradualism, defers its expectation of a total social transformation to the distant future.²

Prometheus Unbound, written in Italy during a period of intense creative activity between September 1818 and December 1819, and Shelley's outstanding poetic expression of revolutionary optimism, combines aspects of both the earlier poems: it again seeks to justify the recovery of radical hope in the aftermath of the failed French Revolution, but, as in Queen Mab, it also offers a vision of a complete human and natural renovation.

In recasting the themes of the earlier poems Prometheus Unbound far surpasses them both--a judgement most critics have shared with Shelley himself.³ Yet it is by no means an unflawed work, and in fact suffers from similar kinds of incoherence to those that mar Queen Mab and The Revolt of Islam. This chapter begins with a consideration of these common failings as a prelude to attempting to answer certain questions to which they give rise. First, what, if anything, predisposes Prometheus Unbound, like its two

predecessors, to the particular faults it displays? Secondly, if the usual assessment of the relative merits of the three poems is valid, what enables Prometheus Unbound to rise above its faults in a way that the other two do not? Finally, how far are its conceptual disjunctions even an inevitable concomitant of its peculiar achievement? In its pursuit of a revolutionary ideal--an aim which is, after all, inherently contradictory--the play runs so perilously close to self-defeat that this question is difficult to answer finally. Where 'Hope creates/ From its own wreck the thing it contemplates' (IV, 573-4), not only do success and failure have a way of looking the same, but productive failure becomes difficult to distinguish from the unproductive. We can, however, examine the nature of the play's paradoxes, and attempt to identify patterns of thought against which questions of coherence can be weighed. In this endeavour, it will be found that the dialectic Shelley has evolved in his understanding of the relations between mind and nature lies at the heart of its conception of the Promethean liberation.

One particular natural image which occurs in all three poems, and which draws attention to some of the different kinds of inconsistency they share, is the idea of perpetual spring, used as an emblem of a regenerate world. This concept, linking connotations of hope and change with the idea of eternity, is an apt symbol for the conjunction of earth and heaven, and illustrates the poems' common unitive tendency, which we have already observed in Queen Mab, and which is most clearly expressed in the two later poems by the reunion of hero and heroine at the climax of their plots. However, it raises various awkward questions. The most obvious of these concerns immortality, which on the one hand is a sine qua non of the ideal state which a perpetual spring represents, but on the other is inconceivable, or at least undesirable (witness Ahasuerus), in the realm of nature. In each poem Shelley is forced to find a way round this problem. In Queen Mab's renovated world mankind will

enjoy an immortality which is, however, only virtual and subjective; and since death is inevitable, in Canto IX a paradisaal afterlife is envisaged, even though this defeats the object of the earthly paradise described in Canto VIII. In The Revolt of Islam, after the defeat of the revolutionary forces, Cythna urges Laon to take comfort from an 'everlasting Spring' (IX, xxvi, 3699) within his own heart. Yet this inward immortality is not expected to be realized outwardly, except as a survival through time in the memories of future generations. In Prometheus Unbound Act III the contradiction is faced more openly. Pervaded by the 'warmth of an immortal youth', the Earth tells us that, although 'disease and pain' are banished, 'death' is not (III, iii, 89; 94; 105). Asia's response, 'O mother! wherefore speak the name of death!' (III, iii, 108), sounds like the play's acknowledgement that the Promethean revolution is not all it might be in the human sphere. Thus in all three poems the image of perpetual spring re-emphasizes a dualism whose defeat it is meant to represent.

Shelley's use of the image is revealing of certain figural confusions as well as metaphysical ones. It is never quite clear to what extent the prophecy of a perpetual spring, which Shelley derives from both literary and scientific authorities, belongs to the realm of fancy or fact, and is intended metaphorically or literally.⁴ This type of ambiguity, which we have already noticed in Queen Mab, besets the visionary purposes of all three poems. In The Revolt of Islam, Canto I, for example, the narrative moves seamlessly from the poet's despair about the outcome of the French Revolution at the beginning to his arrival at the Temple of the Spirit at the end, making no clear division between reality and fiction. Similarly, Maurice Bowra notes that in Prometheus Unbound the new dawn is marked by manifestations as various as the brotherhood of man and poisonless nightshade berries--which are apparently of quite different figurative status.⁵ Such inconsistencies leave us in doubt as to

whether the poems refer to a world outside or enact their own, whether they teach 'reasoned principles of moral conduct' or offer (as Shelley claims) 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence', and whether, in Bowra's terms, they are intended as a 'prophecy' of what will actually happen or only a 'summons' to exercise reason and love.⁶

Confusions of this kind are inseparable from what appears to be a more compositional incoherence afflicting the three poems. As befits their universal theme, all three, in Curran's words, are 'encyclopedic in structure and content'.⁷ It is questionable, however, whether Prometheus achieves the successful synthesis of its component elements that Curran believes distinguishes it from the other two.⁸ In A Defence of Poetry Shelley draws a distinction between a 'poem', which relates to the unchangeable and universal, and a 'story', which, like a 'moral aim' (R&P, pp. 485, 488), belongs to a particular period and place, and is rendered obsolete by time. Where exactly a 'story' or a 'moral aim' ends and a 'poem' begins is a question Shelley does not pursue, but his distinctions do suggest something of the uncomfortable mix of rhetorical modes and literary genres to be found in the three poems. If Queen Mab shows a conflict between its dream-vision framework and materialist polemic, the Revolt, as many critics have found, suffers a much more serious disjunction between its elements of epic narrative and allegorical myth, despite Shelley's assertion that 'unity is one of the qualifications aimed at' in the poem.⁹ Prometheus, likewise, is pulled in the contrary directions of externalizing drama and internalizing lyric.¹⁰ In each case the values associated with the opposing genres belong on the one hand to what Shelley calls a 'poem', and on the other to a 'story' or a 'moral aim', and are thus parallel to the notions of eternity and time that are unsuccessfully wedded in the concept of everlasting spring.

Despite such contradictions in Prometheus Unbound, a long tradition of

criticism has found the main force of its meaning to be unitive. Thus for critics from Mary Shelley to M.H. Abrams the reunion of Prometheus and Asia stands for the reintegration of the human race with nature.¹¹ R.H. Fogle describes the poem as 'a gigantic effort to synthesize the abstract with the concrete, the ideal with the actual'.¹² Others, seeing Asia as embodying love and other human qualities rather than nature, regard the poem as imaging the attainment of a psychic or social wholeness.¹³ Wasserman and Curran also see the play as syncretic, in fulfilment of the wish Shelley expresses in a letter to Peacock of 23-24 January 1819 to compose a work 'embodying the discoveries of all ages, & harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled'.¹⁴

Many other critics, on the other hand, responding to the evident disharmonizing and disunifying forces in the play, have seen its main achievement as the dramatisation of a non-dualist process of constant transformation rather than the expression of an ideal unity. Thus Carl Grabo and Linda Lewis argue that, in accordance with Godwinian perfectibilism, Shelley portrays not the attainment of perfection, but the infinite progress towards it.¹⁵ Considering the poem's ontology rather than its politics, Daniel Hughes suggests it repeatedly enacts the restoration of the mind's sense of its potentiality through the collapse of its actualized conceptions.¹⁶ For several critics the liberation of Prometheus is primarily a figure for the play's own continual process of releasing language from the authority of external reference.¹⁷ Hogle disputes Curran's view of the play as a syncretic key to all mythologies, and considers rather that through a process of transference it unsettles the hierarchical myths it juxtaposes.¹⁸ All such interpretations, however, are open to the objection that in arguing the priority of perfectibility to perfection, of potentiality to actuality, of language to thought, or of transference to its own self-projections, they

overlook the interdependence of these contraries. Moreover, the non-teleological process each describes is itself in danger of being reified as another form of Jovian power, thus replacing one type of dualism with another.

Conscious of such pitfalls in post-structuralist criticism generally, Tilottama Rajan suggests that the reader has a role in reconstructing meaning from the disunified text of Prometheus Unbound, arguing that the drama 'responds to...an approach which intertextualizes fiction and reality, and recognizes that they mutually make and remake each other.'¹⁹ A reading of the play which is congruent with this view is offered by Isobel Armstrong, who argues that Shelley constructs 'a world which has relationships, but without priorities, a world where mind and language are each dependent, but without being secondary to each other', and that within this world the paradigms of reciprocity, dialogue and dialectic are the means by which relationships of domination are broken.²⁰ Through its examination of the interrelations of nature and mind in the play this chapter will find much to endorse this view. In the first section it will consider Prometheus Unbound in relation to the earlier poems, 'Mont Blanc' and The Revolt of Islam, as a means of placing it in the evolution of Shelley's thought. The second will look generally at his attitude to nature and its connection with his other ideas at the time of writing his play. Subsequent sections will then examine acts of the play in turn, except that the last will take Acts III and IV together.

i

Even at the outset it is clear that the unity of heaven and earth, as represented by the image of perpetual spring, is an idea that is incompatible with a dialectical tension and process. That Shelley should use such an image in The Revolt of Islam and Prometheus Unbound might seem surprising considering that in 'Mont Blanc', as we have seen, he has already arrived at a

dialectical understanding of the relationship between permanence and change. A partial explanation for the seemingly backward step in his thinking is that the epistemological dialectic that he evolves in the 1816 odes does not translate easily to his new political subject-matter. For the cycles of change that constitute a vital part of that dialectic are precisely what he wishes to see come to an end in the political sphere, where they are, after all, attended by rather more serious practical consequences than are the fluctuating transactions of individual mind and external nature. Hence, even in a work of such political realism as A Philosophical View of Reform (written 1819-20) he can express a lively hope in the eventual accomplishment of a perfect and permanent social order, while remaining resolutely sceptical concerning any comparable teleology in metaphysics. Indeed, he consciously upholds this distinction, writing that 'It is in politics rather than in religion that faith is meritorious'.²¹ The 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' reflects this view in rejecting the 'Frail spells' of religion but concluding with an avowal of political hope. However, as previously argued, the 'Hymn's' conclusion contradicts its metaphysical logic. The Revolt and Prometheus, it could be said, commit the same error on a larger scale in basing their political optimism on a metaphysical dualism which they repudiate. On the other hand, in the period these poems were written Shelley seems increasingly to recognize, despite his remarks in A Philosophical View of Reform, that the distinction between religious and political faith is a misleading one; and the primary indication that he does so is his tendency, which is much more pronounced in Prometheus than in the Revolt, to apply to their moral and political concerns the same dialectic that is more consistently deployed in 'Mont Blanc'.

The thematic structure of 'Mont Blanc' clearly anticipates that of Prometheus Unbound Acts I and II, and in the poet's apprehension of the Alpine

landscape we find the same basic pattern of relationships that underpins the action of the play. His rendering and receiving interrelationship with the Ravine of Arve and imaginative entry into the 'cave of the witch Poesy' parallels Asia's journey in pursuit of echoes from her valley to the cave of Demogorgon, and his projection of a remote power on to the mountain is like the mountain-bound Prometheus's projection of Jupiter. In adapting the scheme of 'Mont Blanc' Shelley also switches from an epistemological emphasis to a political and moral one: the mind-nature interrelation associated with the ravine becomes human love, embodied in Asia, and the power of the mountain becomes the more overtly political power of Jupiter. A further change Shelley makes in Prometheus is to reverse the order in which mountain and valley appear. In this way Act II ends with the equivalent of the moment of visionary climax at the end of the second section of 'Mont Blanc', and thus the play is given an upward trajectory through its first two acts instead of the parabolic one of the ode. The change becomes the basis of a significant departure from the reciprocity of valley and mountain in 'Mont Blanc', for as the play moves into the third act the overthrow of power by love becomes permanent, thus terminating the dialectical oscillation, and, as in the 'Hymn', turning a process of constant change into a fixed ontological principle. This reversal contradicts one of the fundamental principles of the play, the unending interrelationship of love and power, eros and thanatos, which, like their counterparts in 'Mont Blanc', are linked in a cycle in which love inevitably turns into power, and power is only dethroned by love, and which thus are constantly creating and destroying each other. Their interchangeability is demonstrated in the Sixth Spirit's song in Act I. Having read how Agathon in Plato's Symposium applies Homer's description of the tender-footed goddess Calamity to Love, Shelley in turn, as Webb observes, simply reverses the process and applies Agathon's description of Love to Desolation.²²

In The Revolt of Islam we can see the emergence of the dialectic of love and power that Shelley develops in Prometheus Unbound. The entanglement of good and evil is conveyed in various ways, notably by the image of the snake and eagle wreathed in fight at the beginning (I, viii-xiv, 192-252). The plot involving the separation of Laon and Cythna at the hands of Othman, the imprisonment of one on a mountain-top and the other in a cave, and their reunion, recalls the structure of 'Mont Blanc' and anticipates the plot of Prometheus, both of which are vehicles for the expression of a dialectical pattern of ideas. There are, however, divergences between the plots of the two poems that show Shelley in the Revolt to be still grappling unsuccessfully with certain contrarities in his attempt to find a basis for political hope. The most important difference is that in the Revolt the reunion of the protagonists is not accompanied by the fall of the tyrant, as it is in Prometheus. Having dedicated themselves to the revolution of the Golden City, Laon and Cythna suddenly accept its defeat with perfect equanimity, and direct their hopes instead to an indefinitely distant spring of freedom and to an 'everlasting Spring' of personal immortality. The result is that at this point in the work there is a sharp divergence between its public and private themes--between the temporal 'story' of political revolution and the eternal 'poem' which is more concerned with the protagonists' inward transformations, or, in the words of the Preface, 'the growth and progress of individual mind' (Hutchinson, p. 32). Cythna's image of 'everlasting Spring', which in David Duff's view creates 'a perfect link between...the prophecy of revolution and the doctrine of individual transcendence', is therefore rather an attempt to conceal the unbridgeable gap between them.²³ Although in Prometheus Unbound Act III Shelley again uses this image to mask a disjunction between the political and the psychic, they are nevertheless brought much closer together by the poem's investment of both kinds of hope in the liberation of Prometheus

and his reunion with Asia.

A further illustration of the progress Shelley makes between 1817 and 1819 towards a dialectical understanding of the relation of inner and outer, the temporal and the eternal, is found in a comparison between Cythna's speech in which she urges Laon to hope with images of autumn winds and winged seeds (IX, xx-xxxvi, 3640-3792) and the poem it anticipates, the 'Ode to the West Wind'. In both autumn is viewed as the seed-time for the coming spring, but for the poet of the ode it is much more than this: he invokes its processes of death and decay not merely in the expectation of future rebirth but because destruction is itself a form of preservation which makes rebirth a present reality. Thus the poem suggests a convergence of change and permanence that eludes Cythna in the Revolt. Hope of a coming spring nevertheless remains essential to this process, but unlike Cythna, the poet of the ode does not dwell on the interval of winter, for while the stagnation of this season is compatible with her gradualist expectations, it is antithetical to the west wind's immediately transforming power. Hence, if winter comes, spring follows close behind.

Prometheus Unbound, begun only a year after the Revolt was completed, is clearly an attempt to correct the earlier poem's main failings. The disappointments of the defeat of revolution are now more squarely faced. Hope is not transferred to some remote, unearthly goal, but is sought in the very processes in which defeat inevitably plays a part. Godwinian gradualism is consequently tempered by a sense of the immediate possibilities of the present. Moreover, the imaginative transformation of external nature is recognised as a double-edged weapon, which can both dethrone and reinstate projections of Jovian authority.

At the basis of the dialectical relationship between power and love is a similar one between mind and nature. The connection between the two pairs of contraries, and an important aspect of the dialectic they share, are implicitly conveyed by Asia's speech to Demogorgon in which she gives a history of Prometheus's relations with Jupiter (II, v, 32-109). The disconcerting truth that she unwittingly reveals in this speech is that the 'wisdom, which is strength' (II, iv, 44) which Prometheus originally granted to Jupiter is essentially the same gift of knowledge that he bestows on the human race to alleviate the ills of Jupiter's reign. If their similarity is not immediately apparent, that is because Jupiter's power is manifestly political, while mankind exercises dominion only in the natural sphere. Prometheus's gifts of speech, science, medicine, navigation all in different ways bring the physical world under human control. A certain illusory immortality--and hence transcendence of the natural world--is also granted: Prometheus awakens hopes which 'hide with thin and rainbow wings/ The shape of Death' (II, iv, 62-3); poetry's listeners become 'Godlike...exempt from mortal care' (II, iv, 78-9); and sculpture 'mimicked and then mocked/...The human form, till marble grew divine' (II, iv, 80-2)--that is, at first imitated nature, and then transcended it. In this description of the artistic manipulation of materials Asia's speech reveals Shelley's deep awareness of the political implications of aesthetic idealism. At one level the 'alleviations' (II, iv, 98) of art are displacements of political realities;²⁴ at another they involve an exploitation of nature--or a 'mocking' in both senses of the word--which is equivalent to the political exploitation of people. The phrase, 'the Celt knew the Indian' (II, iv, 94), is expressive of various forms of domination, and not only suggests a political, commercial and intellectual appropriation of the east by the west, but reflects on the union

of Prometheus and Asia, mind and nature. Asia's dilemma, in short, is that the love which binds them, and the aesthetic and political ideal which their union represents, are close kin to the power that drives them apart. Hence, while 'Man looks on his creation like a God', he also becomes 'the scorn of Earth, / The outcast, the abandoned, the alone' (II, iv, 102-5).

Asia's complaint to Demogorgon is similar in its sentiments to stanza 17 of the 'Ode to Liberty' (1820). Here the poet addresses Liberty to deplore the fact that human mastery of the external world can coexist with submission to political tyranny. The 'He' of the first line is the 'power unknown' (233) in the previous stanza, but he fulfils the same educative role as Prometheus in Asia's speech.

He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever
 Can be between the cradle and the grave
 Crowned him the King of Life. Oh, vain endeavour!
 If on his own high will, a willing slave,
 He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor.
 What if earth can clothe and feed
 Amplest millions at their need,
 And power in thought be as the tree within the seed?
 Or what if Art, an ardent intercessor,
 Diving on fiery wings to Nature's throne,
 Checks the great mother stooping to caress her,
 And cries: Give me, thy child, dominion
 Over all height and depth? if Life can breed
 New wants, and wealth from those who toil and groan
 Rend of thy gifts and hers a thousandfold for one! (241-255)

What is the point, the poet asks, of mastering nature through technology and art if the wealthy continue to enjoy the gifts of liberty and nature ('thy' and 'hers', 255) ²⁶ at the expense of the poor? There is, however, a

significant irony within the expression of the question, in that the language of domination is used equally of the Promethean gifts of knowledge and art and the Jovian reign of oppression. Various critics have attempted to explain Shelley's use of the vocabulary of oppression for radical ends, but none sufficiently acknowledges as a factor his view of good and evil, of revolution and reaction, as 'inextricably entangled'.²⁷ The language of the stanza from the 'Ode to Liberty' and of Asia's speech to Demogorgon implicitly answers the questions they raise: the reason mankind's efforts to transform the world through the power of mind fail to extirpate the evil of oppression is that they share oppression's taint.

Prometheus Unbound and the 'Ode to Liberty', however, are themselves pervaded by precisely this kind of idealist aspiration. The fourth stanza of the ode, for example, describes how art, poetry and philosophy distilled from nature the elements of Greek civilisation, until

Athens arose: a city such as vision
Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
Of battlemented cloud,
...
Peopled with forms that mock the eternal dead
In marble immortality. (61-74)

Recalling the Temple of the Spirit in The Revolt of Islam, this visionary blend of Hellenism and romance well illustrates the idealism of the poet described in the Fourth Spirit's song in Prometheus Unbound, who creates from the visible world 'Forms more real than living man,/ Nurslings of immortality!' (I, 748-9). This idealist aspect of the Greek spirit in Shelley's drama derives from various influences to which Shelley was subject after leaving England, all of which involve an attitude to nature such as

Asia's speech describes. The most important of these are Plato's dialogues, and his Symposium in particular, which Shelley translated in 1818. Prometheus is deeply imbued with the thought of this work, but especially with its idea that a love of beauty in external forms leads on to a love of ideal beauty.²⁸ He was also influenced by certain commentators on Greek art, who tended to interpret it in Platonic terms. A.W. Schlegel, whose A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature (1809-11) Shelley was reading during the journey to Italy, describes Greek tragedy as ideal in conception:

The ideality of the representation chiefly consisted in the elevation of everything in it to a higher sphere. Tragic poetry wished to separate the image of reality from the level of nature to which man is in reality chained down, like a slave to the soil.²⁹

At the same time he emphasizes that the Greeks succeeded in 'combining the ideal with the real, or, to drop school terms, an elevation more than human with all the truth of life'.³⁰ J.J. Winckelmann, whose Histoire de l'art chez les anciens (1764) Shelley began reading in December 1818, has a similarly Platonic appreciation of Greek sculpture.³¹ His Reflections Concerning the Imitation of the Grecian Artists in Painting and Sculpture (1766), which Shelley may or may not have known, but which enunciates some of the theory underlying the Histoire, stresses the importance for Greek artists of drawing on the actual forms of nature, but also argues:

[The] multiplied occasions of observing nature in all her motion, and in all her various aspects, not only rendered the Grecian artists capable of representing her various beauties with energy and truth, but also encouraged them to go yet further, and to make a new step towards perfection, under the guidance of those very principles which Nature had

furnished them with. After contemplating nature in her fairest forms, they imagined forms yet more fair and striking: they thus acquired ideas of beauty superior to those Nature herself had exhibited....This ideal beauty had no existence but in their elevated conceptions, but it far surpassed anything which had hitherto passed for beauty in the esteem of mankind.³²

Winckelmann no doubt influenced Shelley's appreciation of the classical art which he encountered in Italy, and particularly Rome, and which was another source of his interest in Hellenism. During his first year in Italy, where he arrived in March 1818, he travelled much of the country's length and breadth, and as Mary Shelley writes, and his letters show, he was deeply impressed by the 'wonders of Nature and Art in that divine land.'³³ He was often particularly struck by the close conjunction of the two. For example, of the landscape around Lake Como he writes, 'The union of culture & the untameable profusion & loveliness of nature is here so close that the line where they are divided can scarcely be discovered'.³⁴ The ancient remains that he found in Rome and Pompeii represented this union of nature and art to perfection, and caused him to speculate on the cause of Greek cultural excellence:

I now understand why the Greeks were such great Poets, and, 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 on the spirit of its forms. Their theatres were all open to the mountains & the sky. Their columns that ideal type of a sacred forest with roof of interwoven tracery admitted the light & wind, the odour & the freshness of the country penetrated the cities. Their temples were mostly upaithric, and the flying clouds, the stars or the deep sky were seen above. O, but for that series of wretched wars which terminated in the Roman conquest of the world, but for the Christian religion which put a finishing stroke to the ancient system; but for those changes which

conducted Athens to its ruin, to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived!³⁵

Shelley clearly has in mind the same buildings and the same thoughts when Asia describes how, through the influence of Prometheus,

Cities then
Were built, and through their snow-like columns flowed
The warm winds, and the azure aether shone,
And the blue sea and shadowy hills were seen... (II, 94-7)

Although these passages show that Shelley considered the Greeks' aesthetic and political excellence to be based on their close contact with nature, he frequently expresses his appreciation of Greek art, as Winckelmann does, in terms of its ideal beauty and transcendent abstractness. After his first visit to Rome in November 1818 he writes to Peacock: 'Behold the wrecks of what a great nation once dedicated to the abstractions of the mind.'³⁶ Concerning the wall paintings he saw at Pompeii in January 1819 he writes, 'There is an ideal life in the forms of these paintings of an incomparable loveliness....It seems as if from the atmosphere of mental beauty that surrounded them, every human being then caught a splendour not his own,' and of some figures in bas-relief he says that they demonstrate 'the supernatural loveliness of...[the Greek] genius. They scarcely touch the ground with their feet, & their wind-uplifted robes seem in the place of wings'.³⁷

In Prometheus Unbound, and particularly in its last three acts, which were written after his experiences of Pompeii and Rome, Shelley would seem to be trying to replicate something of the 'atmosphere of mental beauty' which he saw in the Greek paintings. At the birth of Asia, Panthea tells us, love burst

from her, 'like the atmosphere/ Of the sun's fire filling the living world' (II, v, 26-7), and the Earth in Act IV is wrapped in 'the animation of delight/..., like an atmosphere of light' (322-3). Indeed, there is a sense in which the drama as a whole attempts to dissolve external reference in order to create its own ideal world which floats freely of the ground. Among various critics who see the play in this light, Tetreault suggests that it aspires to the kind of aesthetic autonomy and abstract idealism belonging to music, and that, 'Concerned with the world not as it is but as it could be, it stands apart from nature but not from social engagement'.³⁸ Such a statement, however, reveals the serious inadequacies of the point of view it represents: it disregards the poet's dependence on nature--the fact that art is nature's 'child' ('Ode to Liberty', 252); it makes an unjustifiable separation between nature on the one hand and culture and society on the other; above all, it overlooks the play's continual dismantling of its own ideal formulations.

Asia's speech to Demogorgon should be enough to correct these errors. However, the mission of Prometheus and the role of nature within it has a further aspect of which this speech reveals nothing. Asia at this point makes no mention of how the very self-defeat which she describes, which is the situation of Prometheus in Act I, can be turned to creative good, nor how the one-sided relationship of mind and nature can be changed to achieve this end. Considering that it is primarily she who shows how in Act II this revolution is to be realized, her omission might seem curious, except that Prometheus's unbinding has yet to occur. For this liberation, which Prometheus and Asia achieve between them, is in fact a demonstration of how the mind can, by renouncing its will-driven urge to master the external world, reverse its tendency to transcendence, and unbuild its own constructions of power by which it has become enslaved. Indeed, perhaps the main achievement of Prometheus Unbound and its accompanying lyrics is their development of this act of

renunciation into a process of poetic self-renewal, in which metaphors and 'beautiful idealisms' which have become dead, conservative and abstract are repeatedly broken up to reveal once more the 'before unapprehended relations of things'.³⁹

In this process the external world plays an indispensable role, for the 'relations' to which Shelley here refers in the Defence are specified as 'subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression' (R&P, p. 482)--between, in other words, nature and mind, and mind and poetry. In these two kinds of relations nature can be understood as having the same dual function O'Neill identifies as belonging to the ravine in 'Mont Blanc': first, it is the object of mind, and secondly, it is an emblem of the mind's relations with that object; and these two functions are never separate but constantly play off against each other.⁴⁰ The 'Ode to the West Wind' and 'The Cloud', both published with Prometheus Unbound, well demonstrate the poetic process of renovation through destruction, and the double role of nature within it. In the former, in which the poet commits his 'dead thoughts' to the wind to quicken a 'new birth' (63-4), the wind, as well as being the external presence in which the mind seeks to lose itself, is also emblematic, through its seasonal and destructive character, of the cyclical process that characterizes the relations of mind and nature. 'The Cloud', similarly, subjectively depicts the interaction of the cloud, an image of mind, with the surrounding elements, but at the same time objectively allegorizes this interaction as the cloud's participation in the hydrological cycle.

Asia has a dual function in the play which is comparable to that of external nature in these lyrics, and it is primarily in this sense that Mary Shelley's association of her with nature is justifiable.⁴¹ Firstly she is the 'antitype' of Prometheus, whose separation from her parallels his alienation

from the natural world. In this role she embodies the natural qualities of the heart, contrasting with his intellectualism, and her parentage, as Curran notes, connects her with the earth, whereas he is associated with heavenly fire.⁴² Her name also establishes an east-west contrast with the Greek Prometheus, recalling the similar opposition between occidental culture, reason and will, and oriental nature, beauty and sensibility, as represented by the two protagonists, Hilarion and Luxima, in Owenson's The Missionary. Secondly, like the revolutions of change in nature, her actions serve as an emblem of the creative and liberating relationship that can exist between mind and the external world, and indeed between Prometheus and herself. The ways in which they do so will be considered in the discussion of Act 2, but they are prefigured in the Preface by Shelley's description of the ruinous and overgrown Baths of Caracalla in Rome, where in springtime, he tells us, the poem was chiefly written.⁴³ A symbol of political and artistic power, this building has been reduced to ruins but also transformed to living beauty by the destructive agency of nature.

iii

It is generally understood that in Act I Prometheus undergoes a moral reformation which sets in train the events of Act II and leads ultimately to his unbinding. The nature of his reformation, however, has been a matter of dispute. Most critics have interpreted it to involve his recantation of his curse against Jupiter, though there have been differences between them as to when exactly in the act his repentance takes place.⁴⁴ Others have disputed that Prometheus repents at all, arguing that his retraction of the curse would be tantamount to his ceasing to resist Jupiter's tyranny.⁴⁵ According to this view, the primary virtue that he displays and develops in Act I is the will to endure. The issue is of importance not only for the way in which we read the

first act, but for its implications concerning the nature of Prometheus's and the world's eventual release from slavery. If his reformation consists of a unique and decisive moral conversion, a turning from hatred to forgiveness, a consequence is that his redemption will likewise involve a decisive break in history, and the world's final conversion from hatred to love. If, on the other hand, his main achievement in Act I is a strengthening, if also a purifying, of his will to resist, rather than a fundamental change of moral perspective, there is no intrinsic reason why it should result in his complete and lasting emancipation; rather, it implies that, as Demogorgon indicates at the end of the play, tyranny is never finally defeated, and the cycles of history never certainly concluded. In the following discussion it will be argued that there is a validity in both these views of Prometheus's moral reform, but that Act I can be read in a way that accommodates both, despite their apparent irreconcilability.

The Promethean virtues are accurately summarised by Demogorgon at the very end of the play:

To suffer woes which 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, 570-78)

What is immediately striking here is the contrast between the exhortations to forgive and defy, to love and not repent. These attitudes, however, are not

absolutely incompatible, and in the course of Act I Prometheus does in fact practise them all. For Shelley this involves bringing together the literary models for Prometheus in such a way as to retain and enhance what he regards as their admirable qualities, while progressively discarding their reprehensible ones. Thus the vengeful pride which accompanies Satan's 'firm and patient opposition' to tyranny in Paradise Lost is corrected in Shelley's Titan by qualities of self-knowledge and penitence taken from Milton's Samson, and by the charity and championship of humankind that belong to Prometheus in Hesiod, Aeschylus and Byron, and to the Bible's and Milton's Christ.⁴⁶ At the same time, the willingness of Prometheus to compromise with Zeus in Aeschylus's version of the myth is replaced in Shelley's by an unyielding resistance to his tormentor that is shared by all his other major exemplars, the biblical Jesus excepted. In Act I Prometheus undergoes two ordeals by which the reproachable elements of his character are purged: first, through the re-enactment of his curse against Jupiter he sheds his Satanic hatred and pride; and second, by withstanding the temptations and torments inflicted on him by Mercury and the Furies he strengthens his resolve to resist any concession to tyranny.

Despite this process of purification, however, the conflict between his tendencies to defiance and forbearance is not truly resolved, for he oscillates between them rather than combines them, and he does so from the opening of the act to the close. During the act he addresses two speeches to Jupiter, one at the very beginning (I, 1-59), and another immediately after being tortured by the Furies (I, 634-45). Although the later one is much shorter, the two speeches are remarkably similar, both in tone and process of thought. The second speech even begins with a refrain which is familiar from the first:

Ah woe!

Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, forever!
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
Thy works within my woe-illumed mind,
Thou subtle Tyrant!...Peace is in the grave--
The grave hides all things beautiful and good--
I am a God and cannot find it there,
Nor would I seek it: for, though dread revenge,
This is defeat, fierce King, not victory.
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, 635-645)

In Prometheus's opening speech one can trace the same succession of thoughts: tortured vituperation of Jupiter, despair of release, then willing endurance of pain in the knowledge that the reign of Jupiter will eventually end. Like Byron's Prometheus, Shelley's Titan struggles 'Between the suffering and the will,/ Which torture where they cannot kill' ('Prometheus', 16-17), but unlike Byron's Prometheus, he looks forward to ultimate emancipation. Yet what his two speeches to Jupiter also suggest is that this expectation is less a reliable prophecy of escape from the oscillation between the suffering and the will than a component element within that oscillation, for it is too closely bound up with both to be a credible means of breaking the cycle in which they are involved. If his own prophecy of his eventual triumph is thus cast into doubt, so also is that of the Chorus of Spirits, who say to Prometheus,

Though Ruin now Love's shadow be,
Following him destroyingly
On Death's white and winged steed,
...
Thou shalt quell this Horseman grim,
Woundless though in heart and limb. (I, 780-88)

Prometheus's conquest of love's shadow, ruin, is unlikely to be conclusive if ruin is 'Woundless', and if love is his only weapon, as he states a few lines further on: 'Most vain all hope but love' (I, 808)--especially as love, as the Sixth Spirit has just made clear, bears so close a relation to desolation. | ?

The unresolved tension between defiance and forgiveness in Prometheus and the doubt which hangs over his foretelling of release from the cycles of pain in which this tension meshes him are correlative to one of Act I's other main themes: the supreme difficulty and inevitable counter-productiveness of attempting to achieve lasting political progress. The cycles of hate and love are there equally ineluctable. The act does, however, offer another perspective on these dilemmas. Although there appears to be no prospect of ever escaping the wheel of pain for either Prometheus or the human race, it is his recognition and acceptance of this situation that ultimately become a source of hope. Similarly, although in one sense Prometheus makes practically no progress in virtue in the act, there is another in which he does undergo a fundamental moral reform. The key to his regeneration is his repentance, though it is not of the kind that derives from a knowledge that Jupiter's days are numbered, nor is it like the submission that enables the Titan of Aeschylus to treat with the oppressor of mankind. It is closer to the self-sacrifice of Jesus, whose crucified form, presented to him by the Furies, tortures mainly because it is his own likeness. Even Jesus fails, for his name has 'become a curse' (I, 604), but this same failure Prometheus eventually accepts for himself, recognizing that there is no alternative in a world 'where the most admirable tendencies to happiness and preservation are forever baffled by misery and decay'.⁴⁷

Prometheus is brought to this point of resignation mainly through the complex moral and psychological struggle that is involved in the 'recall' (I, 59) of his own curse. To a large extent this struggle is conveyed in terms of

his relationship with external nature. Not only are the effects of the curse described largely in terms of the natural world's response to it, but the Earth and her children, the Mountains, Springs, Air and Whirlwinds, are said to retain the curse in their keeping, and it is they upon whom Prometheus initially calls for its repetition. The passage in which he does so offers the first indication of the nature of the curse:

Ye Mountains,

Whose many-voiced Echoes, through the mist
Of cataracts, flung the thunder of that spell!
Ye icy Springs, stagnant with wrinkling frost,
Which vibrated to hear me, and then crept
Shuddering through India! Thou serenest Air,
Through which the Sun walks burning without beams!
And ye swift Whirlwinds, who on poised wings
Hung mute and moveless o'er yon hushed abyss,
As thunder louder than your own made rock
The orbed world! If then my words had power
--Though I am changed so that aught evil wish
Is dead within, although no memory be
Of what is hate--let them not lose it now!
What was that curse? for ye all heard me speak. (I, 59-73)

Whatever the negative aspects of the curse, the main reason Prometheus wants to hear his words again is to recover their 'power'--power as it is experienced by the mind in dynamic interaction with the external world, and which is analogous to the 'electric life' of poetry as the forms of nature are analogous to the forms of language.⁴⁸ Each of the phenomena of nature addressed is linked with an image of this power: the echoes and thunder among the mountains; the thawing of the frozen springs; the air transmitting the sun's invisible rays; and the whirlwinds poised over an abyss, like Milton's

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muse, the Holy Spirit. The Earth testifies to the liberating force of the
curse when she speaks of Prometheus arising 'like a cloud/ Of glory,...a
spirit of keen joy', at whose voice her 'pining sons uplifted their prostrate
brows' (I, 157-60). On the other hand, the images of volcanic thunder, which
'made rock/ The orb'd world'--punning on the monarchical orb, as well as on
'rock'--indicates the correlation of the curse to Jovian oppressive power. 50
As the words eventually uttered by the Phantasm of Jupiter demonstrate
clearly, Prometheus's hate-filled curse constitutes the very evil which it
imprecates. The Voices of nature to whom Prometheus addresses his appeal
flatly contradict the Earth's claim that they 'meditate/ In secret joy and
hope those dreadful words' (184-5), for they respond by making clear that they
prefer a stable tyranny to the earth-shattering violence of revolutionary
change.

The dual aspect of the curse and of the power associated with it underlies
the ambiguity of Prometheus's wish to 'recall' his words, and suggests that
the two possible meanings of remembering and revoking are in fact inseparable.
He does in fact wish to do both, and it is the tension between the contrary
attitudes associated with these desires that racks him so painfully in his
opening speech, and causes his abrupt changes and conflicts of mood. The
Satanic defiance of the first 23 lines perpetuates even while it opposes the
dualism that the projection of his own mind as Jupiter represents. Hence, his
hatred is baffled by Jupiter's remote sublimity as the eagle is baffled by the
mountain. But a further effect of his dualism, as Lloyd Abbey notes, is his
complete alienation from the external world. 51 The baffled eagle, therefore,
is also an image of how, as in 'Mont Blanc', the apprehending mind and senses
are repelled by the landscape, here represented by the 'Black, wintry, dead,
unmeasured' (I, 21-22) precipice on which Prometheus hangs. 52

At this point there is a change of tone as he ceases to address Jupiter and

appeals instead to the natural elements:

No change, no pause, no hope!--Yet I endure.
I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt?
I ask yon Heaven--the all-beholding Sun,
Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm,
Heaven's ever-changing Shadow, spread below--
Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?
Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, forever! (I, 24-30)

The lines echo the despairing grief both of Prometheus's opening words calling on the forces of nature in Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound and of Milton's questioning of the winds in Lycidas.⁵³ In doing so they replace the intellectually abstract and 'eyeless' (9) hatred of the opening lines with a sense of a broken human relationship with the external world, one which depends on the sensual faculties of feeling, seeing and hearing. They thus express a desire such as we feel, according to 'On Love', 'when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves' (R&P, 473). It is therefore fitting that the lines should also remind us of the final question of 'Mont Blanc': 'And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,/ If to the human mind's imaginings/ Silence and solitude were vacancy?' Just as in that poem interrelationship and power, the ravine and the mountain, are dialectically related, so are the mutually engendering and mutually frustrating tendencies to love and hatred shown by Prometheus in his opening speech.

It is in the context of this moral and emotional entrapment that we should see Prometheus's wish to have his curse recalled, a wish which, while it evinces his desire for escape, only succeeds in miring him further. Although

he claims that 'pity', 'grief' and 'misery' have driven out 'Disdain', 'exultation' and 'hate' (53-8), the sudden conversion is neither psychologically convincing nor borne out by the rest of the act. In an important sense what makes his curse a curse, rather than the liberating act that Prometheus and the Earth both remember, is precisely his desire for its recall. His state of mind at the beginning of Act I is therefore comparable, as G. Kim Blank has observed, to that of the Poet in Alastor, whose attempt to rediscover the primal unity symbolised by the 'veiled maid' turns her memory into a 'blighting curse' (679).⁵⁴ And just as nature for the Poet becomes remote and unresponsive, so here it fails to respond to Prometheus's demand for the repetition of his words. Moreover, the association of Coleridge with 'the false earth's inconstancy' in 'Oh! there are spirits of the air' in the Alastor volume is repeated here, for the First and Second Voices, representing the mountains and the springs, are clearly reminiscent of his poems.⁵⁵

Despite his complaint against the Voices' political infidelity, however, Prometheus (again like the Alastor Poet) shares the dualism of Wordsworth and Coleridge that enables them to enlist nature in the conservative cause by seeing in the external world the symbols of an original unity. His response to the Voices begins: 'I hear a sound of voices--not the voice/ Which I gave forth' (I, 112-3), which introduces the dualist distinction between the languages of the living and the dead, and recalls the difference defined in the Defence between the 'original conception' and the 'composition' of poetry.⁵⁶ He then upbraids the natural world as follows:

Mother, thy sons and thou
 Scorn him, without whose all-enduring will
 Beneath the fierce omnipotence of Jove
 Both they and thou had vanished like thin mist
 Unrolled on the morning wind! (I, 113-7)

These lines echo Aeschylus's account of Jupiter's intention to eradicate the human race, but in their Shelleyan context their main significance is epistemological.⁵⁷ Prometheus believes that Jupiter threatens the existence of the external world, but rather it is the creative and destructive activity of his own curse which, by assimilating, transforming and finally alienating its materials, constitutes a tyranny over nature, depriving it of its stable otherness. If his defiance of Jupiter is one product of his forgotten curse, another is his memory of the exiled Asia, and their former unity. The intense nostalgia with which he looks down on 'rock-embosomed lawns and snow-fed streams/...,/ Through whose o'er-shadowing woods I wandered once/ With Asia' (120-3), is thus a condition of his enslavement, not a means to his release.

Only when he eventually establishes communication with the Earth does an escape from his impasse begin to become possible. Their communication, however, does not imply the unitive sympathy with external nature that Prometheus has been seeking, but rather brings painful self-knowledge: hence, though he feels 'like one mingled in entwining love,/ Yet 'tis not pleasure' (I, 143-4). As the physical earth and a deity who is the mother of Prometheus, the Earth straddles the divine and human worlds, and in effect interprets the language of the dead for her son. But just as the Chorus in Samson Agonistes, on whom her function is partly based, affects Samson differently than it intends, so the Earth misjudges the effect of her words on Prometheus. Unlike the Voices of nature, she distinguishes between his curse and Jupiter's violent reaction to it, but by her use of volcanic imagery to describe both she inadvertently reveals the close connection between them. Moreover, in speaking of the curse as a 'treasured spell' (I, 184) which her children dare not utter, she shows how through a want of courage they allow it to justify the perpetuation of tyranny. Prometheus at last begins to understand the true effect of his curse.

His response is of great significance for what it implies about the change overtaking him:

Venerable mother!

All else who live and suffer take from thee
Some comfort; flowers and fruits and happy sounds
And love, though fleeting; these may not be mine.
But mine own words, I pray, deny me not. (I, 186-90)

Having been seeking since almost the start of the play to establish communion with nature through the mediation of the senses, he now renounces all that nature offers, even love; and although he once again asks for the curse to be repeated he does so without the earlier straining urgency of tone. In effect, he gives up his resistance to the dualisms of mind and nature, thought and language, into which his curse has betrayed him, and implicitly acknowledges the futility and harm of nostalgically nursing a 'treasured spell' of love and hatred. Once again he asks that his curse be repeated, but he seeks no longer to remember its unitive or revoke its disunitive power, but rather to abandon its power altogether. As a result, his words can at last be uttered. 'They shall be told' (I, 191), the Earth promptly replies; and because the Phantasm's 'empty voice' is uninformed by 'thought' (I, 249), it is the words alone, divested of their power, that he repeats. In a different sense from that originally intended, Prometheus does succeed in both remembering and revoking his curse, thus confirming the correlation between them.

Prometheus's ascetic self-renunciation is confirmed at the end of the act when he abandons himself to his destiny. Although it is the means by which he breaks the love-hate stalemate, and leads eventually to his release, we are constantly reminded in Act I of the other perspective on human history which

sees nothing but defeats, and which therefore ensures his act of conversion cannot be final. Even in Act I it is not the only occasion of his willing acceptance of suffering. For example, each utterance of his refrain, 'alas, pain, pain ever, forever' (I, 23, 30, 635), is accompanied by a determination to endure indefinitely, and then followed, against apparent logic, by a recovery of hope that his pain is of limited duration. Thus the dialectic in which he is involved is fuelled by the contrary notions of perpetual process and teleology. Paradoxically, he escapes the process of history by yielding himself to it, and ensures that process continues by breaking out of its cycles.

The dualism of the Earth's 'two worlds of life and death' (I, 195) corresponds to both the subject-object and metaphysical dualisms that Prometheus has been attempting to collapse. A cancelled line in the manuscript referring to these two worlds--'Which thou henceforth art doomed to interweave'--is suggestive of the cycles of creation and destruction, unity and disunity, which Prometheus is indeed destined to pursue, and may have been deleted because it contradicts his absolute release from this process in Act III.⁵⁸ In fact the most important lesson he learns in Act I is that the process is irresistible, and that the desire to reverse it or end it in order to recover a lost unity is self-defeating. It remains to Asia to capitalize on this discovery and to demonstrate how the same cycles of change can be turned to good.

iv

Since in Act I Prometheus achieves the reformation which makes possible his release in Act III, the purpose of Act II, whose action lies outside the Promethean myth as Shelley inherits it, is not immediately apparent. The most important truth Asia learns from Demogorgon--that 'eternal Love' (II, iv, 120)

is subject to none--has, after all, already been acknowledged, if less portentously, in Prometheus's remark, 'Most vain all hope but love'. However, if the play's main achievement--as regards both itself as a text and the action it represents--is the realization of that love, then Act II must be seen as central. Indeed, from this point of view, it usurps the function of Act III, where the unbinding of Prometheus and the inauguration of a new age are more obvious expressions of love's realization. Yet there is little sense that any of the events of Act III constitutes the play's moment of climax, which seems already to have passed; and conversely, although the release of Prometheus is held in anticipation throughout Act II, the impression is nevertheless also conveyed that his hour is already come. 'This is the season, this the day, the hour' (II, i, 13), Asia proclaims at the beginning of the act, and the spring and dawn she announces are fitting emblems of the promise which is also a fulfilment. Similarly, the arrival of the Spirits of the Hour and the transfiguration of Asia at the end of the act effectively forestall the supposedly more important events they adumbrate.

Like his reformation, Prometheus's redemption is not so easily pinned down to a particular moment as the play's outward plotting seems to suggest. In fact both are to be defined in terms of a continuing process as much as a single event. In Act II Asia's role is to enact the process which, merely in leading towards, itself becomes the realization of freedom and love. Thus desire and its fulfilment are dialectically related in the same way that despair and hope are for Prometheus. Indeed he and she are caught in the same cycle, but their attitudes towards it are quite different. Prometheus initially is paralysed by a retrospective regret, an intense desire to 'recall' the half-remembered reality of power which the temporal cycle has left behind, and his main achievement is to abandon that regret. Asia picks up where he leaves off: in her journey to the cave of Demogorgon she looks always

ahead (in truth, more a 'forethinker' than he is), and repeatedly re-enacts his abandonment of the spent images of power and self in pursuit of new ones, her own self-projected echoes, which in turn are allowed to die, 'As dew-stars glisten/ Then fade away' (II, i, 167-8). Thus, whereas he, with the help of Jupiter's Phantasm, remembers his curse in order to forget it, she constantly forgets in order to remember. In Plato's Symposium Diotima, in a speech that was clearly of particular importance to Shelley, describes a similar mental process as follows:

Manners, morals, opinions, desires, pleasures, sorrows, fears; none of these ever remain unchanged in the same persons; but some die away, and others are produced. And, what is yet more strange is, that not only does some knowledge spring up, and another decay, and that we are never the same with respect to our knowledge, but that each several object of our thoughts suffers the same revolution. That which is called meditation, or the exercise of memory, is the science of the escape or departure of knowledge; for forgetfulness is the going out of knowledge; and meditation, calling up a new memory in the place of that which has departed, preserves knowledge; so that, though forever displaced and restored, it seems to be the same. In this manner every thing mortal is preserved: not that it is constant and eternal, like that which is divine; but that in the place of what has grown old and is departed, it leaves another new like that which it was itself. By this contrivance, O Socrates, does what is mortal, the body and all other things, partake of immortality; that which is immortal, is immortal in another manner. Wonder not, if everything by nature cherishes that which was produced from itself, for this earnest Love is a tendency towards eternity.⁵⁹

As usual in his adaptation of Plato, Shelley pushes his idea that the mortal participates in the immortal towards a full dialectic in which neither takes precedence, but otherwise Diotima's speech comes close to describing Shelley's poetic practice generally, and is particularly influential on his conception

of Asia's role in Prometheus Unbound Act II.

In the first scene she sets in motion the process of remembering and forgetting by her response to Panthea's and her own dreams. Panthea's first dream, envisioning the transfiguration of Prometheus, is significantly different in various ways from the other two, suggesting a distinction like that between the fading 'white star' and eclipsing 'roseate sunlight' (II, 17, 25) in Asia's opening speech. First, Panthea's dream of Prometheus has a unity and coherence, making it readily understood as a prophecy of his release, whereas the others seem incomplete, reaching beyond themselves with the words 'follow, follow' (II, i, 132, 153-62). Secondly, despite its sensual imagery, the first dream represents an experience of unity that is essentially suprasensual, as Panthea's words make clear: 'I saw not--heard not--moved not--only felt/ His presence flow and mingle through my blood' (II, i, 79-80); the subsequent ones, in contrast, belong to the realm of nature and time, and have a historical reference. Thirdly, while the first dream is transmitted from one sister to the other by means of the eyes, the latter two are conveyed verbally. These various differences suggest that whereas Panthea's dream of Prometheus represents an unmediated apprehension of power, the later two dreams, which complement each other, belong to that dialogic, rotational process that can recover power only by relinquishing successively its every formulation. Her dream of Prometheus troubles Panthea with vague longings, but it has no such effect on Asia, who, having interpreted it to mean 'we shall meet again' (II, i, 124), merely says, 'The dream is told'. Like Prometheus's curse, it is recalled in order to be set aside, and thereby ultimately to be realized as the fulfilment of its prophecy. Thus Asia initiates the process that will bring this end about. Accordingly, Panthea's other dream immediately appears, at first only as the embodiment of movement, a shape whose 'rude hair/ Roughens the wind that lifts it' (II, i, 127-8), and which thus images

the reciprocal action which motivates Asia's quest. This dream and Asia's dream are then fully called to mind through the echoic effect of the sisters' dialogue, and provide brief allegories of the French Revolution and its aftermath.⁶⁰ But they give promise of a recovery of the hopes that have been lost through the repeated, 'follow, follow', a refrain which sings in the pines like 'the farewell of ghosts' (II, i, 158)--or like the departure of dead memories that must be abandoned in order that new life can be breathed into them.

The lyrical elements in the act draw attention to various aspects of the process by which Asia is drawn towards the throne of Demogorgon, and in this way serve as a gloss on the dramatic action conducted in blank verse. The dialectical nature of her progress is particularly apparent in the Song of the Spirits in Scene iii, where it is likened to the downward spiralling motion (as in Alastor's whirlpools) produced by the polar forces of attraction and repulsion:

While the sound, whirls around,
 Down down!
As the fawn draws the hound,
As the lightning the vapour
As a weak moth the taper;
Death, Despair; Love, Sorrow;
Time both; to-day, to-morrow;
As steel obeys the Spirit of the stone,
 Down, down! (II, iii, 63-71)

Here rhythm and rhyme emphasize the reciprocating action of binary opposites. In most of these either one of each pair might be said to 'draw' the other, as Frederick Burwick has pointed out.⁶¹ This ambiguity underlies another: on the one hand, Asia's forward motion in pursuit of her own echoes sustains itself

by projecting a goal that always lies ahead; on the other, she is not the author of her own progress but is subject to an external force driving her towards her final destination. In fact Act II gives no priority to either of these explanations of her quest: rather, her progress and her goal are interdependent, and attract, repel, create and displace each other much as the various polarities do in the Song of the Spirits. Thus Asia's journey images a world in which 'mind produces motion' and 'motion produces mind' (R&P, p. 478) in equal measure, and 'Demogorgon's mighty law' (II, ii, 43), often interpreted as the rule of necessity, is more accurately understood as the interaction between the equal forces of desire and destiny.

A corollary of this dialectical interdependence is that the unity to which polar forces tend, and which is the promised reward of Asia and Prometheus, is both a means and an end of progress. Such images of mental self-containment as the 'fountain-lighted caves' (II, i, 184) and 'interwoven bowers' (II, ii, 6) through which Asia passes are auguries of her eventual reunion with Prometheus and of the cave in which they live, with its fountain and curtaining vegetation, but they also represent states of transition within a larger revolving world outside them--just as the bubbles, bells of flowers and drops of dew, inhabited, according to the Fauns, by spirits, are microcosms that have only a brief existence within the subsuming cycles of nature. Thus the 'ideal life', the perfect harmony of mind and nature, which Shelley admires in Greek art, is never statically realized in his own work, but only seen as a phase in a continuing oscillation between coalescence and dissolution.

The cyclical nature of Asia's mental progress--involving, as it does, a constant repetition of loss and gain--lends to Act II a pervasive emotional tone of intermingled sadness and joy. Hence spring comes 'as the memory of a dream/ Which now is sad because it hath been sweet' (II, i, 8-9), and the rise and fall of the nightingales' song (enacting the 'cyclic poem' mentioned in

the Defence, R&P p. 482) is 'So sweet that joy is almost pain' (II, ii, 40). The same pathos is captured in the image of 'unbemoaning flowers' (II, iv, 16), a negative formation that keeps us aware of the positive it denies--that flowers have reason to bewail because of their brevity.⁶² Significantly, the 'autumnal tone' of Shelley's west wind is also 'Sweet though in sadness' ('Ode to the West Wind', 60-1), indicating the close relation between spring and autumn, death and rebirth. An extension of this emotional quality is an emphasis on weakness, or willing submission to the dialectical process and an acceptance of loss: 'Resist not the weakness--/ Such strength is in meekness' (II, iii, 93-4), the Spirits tell Asia.

Geoffrey Matthews has demonstrated the importance of volcanic imagery in Act II, and suggested that the landscape through which the Oceanids are led owes much to Shelley's visit to the volcanic terrain around Naples in late 1818 and early 1819.⁶³ However, although he points out the destructive and preservative effects of volcanoes, by concentrating his attention on the second act, and therefore on the revolutionary associations of Shelley's interest in vulcanism, he omits to note the continuity of the volcanic theme between Acts I and II, and the link it establishes between revolution and tyranny. This connection is implied by the Echoes when they urge Asia to follow them

Through the many-folded mountains,
To the rents and gulphs and chasms
Where the Earth reposed from spasms
On the day when He and thou
Parted--to commingle now. (II, i, 201-05)

Volcanic action, evidently, was instrumental in separating Prometheus and

Asia, just as it will be in reuniting them. As we have seen in Act I, the Voices of the elements and the Earth reveal the close similarity between tyrannical and revolutionary seismic activity (I, 38). The volcanic peak of which the crater is Demogorgon's cave can consequently be seen to counterpoint the mountain on which Prometheus hangs. Similarly, the 'deep intoxication' of those who drink its 'oracular vapour' and their 'voice which is contagion to the world' (II, iii, 4-10) represent only an alternative aspect of Prometheus's curse and its 'contagion' (I, 178) of hate. Asia describes the scene as 'weak yet beautiful', a description which in a certain sense applies to herself, just as the bleak precipice in Act I is a reflection of the unregenerate Prometheus. As in the 1816 odes, Shelley thus suggests the mutuality of beauty and sublimity.

In Asia's description of the mountain Shelley responds, as he has previously done in 'Mont Blanc', to Coleridge's 'Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni', though he does so now in a quite different way. Asia replicates Coleridge's attitude of worship, but the power she venerates is revolutionary rather than monarchical: her mountains are defiantly 'sky-cleaving' (II, iii, 28), whereas his are subordinately 'sky-pointing' (70); and while the avalanche she describes is noisily revolutionary, the one in Coleridge's poem is more like a silent gesture of divine authority. Nevertheless, the nature-worship that they share reveals an important relationship between their opposing religious and political attitudes. The weakness of the earth she worships and of its creator Spirit may suggest the wise weakness recommended by the Song of Spirits, but it is also an 'evil stain' (II, iii, 15). The nature and origin of this evil become plainer in the next scene when she asks Demogorgon,

And who made terror, madness, crime, remorse,
Which from the links of the great chain of things
To every thought within the mind of man
Sway and drag heavily...? (II, iv, 19-22)

Demogorgon's answer--'He reigns' (II, iv, 28)--is implicit in the question: the hierarchical view of nature represented by the chain of being (as described, for example, by Dante, Milton and Pope),⁶⁴ and endorsed by the nature-worship of both Coleridge and Asia, is itself responsible for the evils she speaks of. Yet only through her subjection to the mountain's intoxicating vapour can Asia descend to Demogorgon's cave to release his revolutionary power.

The paradoxes of Act II are summed up in the figure of Demogorgon. In his long literary ancestry he displays somewhat conflicting characteristics: on the one hand, he is the father of the gods, and creator of the world, like the Demiurge in Plato's Timaeus; on the other, he is a dark and terrible chthonic god, often associated with chaos, as in Lucan, Spenser and Milton.⁶⁵ In Boccaccio's De genealogia deorum (1494), an important source for Shelley,⁶⁶ both these sides to his nature are described, and Shelley draws on both to convey the creative and destructive potentialities of his own Demogorgon, a power who is the same time power's antithesis--'a mighty Darkness/ Filling the seat of power' (II, iv, 2-3). In the Song of Spirits he is described in a way that justifies Mary Shelley's definition of him as 'the Primal Power of the world': he is the 'One alone', 'the Eternal, the Immortal' (II, iii, 79, 95), by whose irresistible will the Promethean age approaches.⁶⁷ He speaks, however, not as a god but as an oracle, whose riddling, parrying answers to Asia's questions put in doubt the very idea of a supreme power. Whereas she was told earlier that she would awaken 'a voice unspoken' (II, i, 190), he now

tells her that 'a voice/ Is wanting' (II, iv, 115-6).

The speech in which he does so, however, marks a subtle turn in their dialogue. Answering her question, 'Who is the master of the slave?' (II, iv, 114), Demogorgon becomes suddenly less enigmatic and evasive:

--If the Abyss

Could vomit forth its secrets:--but a voice
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
On the revolving world? what to bid speak
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these
All things are subject but eternal Love. (II, iv, 114-20)

Roland Duerksen suggests that an identity is implied here between 'eternal Love' and the imageless 'deep truth'--an inference that the Platonic concept of 'eternal Love' certainly invites. ⁶⁸ But this raises the question of how the idealism of the one notion is to be reconciled with the scepticism of the other. More precisely, what is the nature of this 'eternal Love' which neither is subject to the temporality of the 'revolving world', nor (since 'the deep truth is imageless') can be claimed to transcend it; which, in short, is neither slave nor master? An answer is suggested in the scene's subsequent action. Asia's next question flows from the answer she has just received, for in asking 'When shall the destined hour arrive?' (II, iv, 128) she is in effect asking when 'eternal Love' will be made manifest. Demogorgon, in response, not only announces the hour's immediate arrival, but also issues forth from his cave as a volcanic eruption, the 'terrible shadow [that] floats/ Up from its throne' (II, iv, 150-51). Thus he re-assumes his role as power as well as oracle. And thus, after all, the abyss does 'vomit forth its secrets' in a very literal way, and a 'voice' is very far from 'wanting'.

Demogorgon himself is those secrets, that voice, and ('Ungazed upon and shapeless' (II, iv, 5) as he is) the imageless deep truth. A further inference to be drawn is that he is also 'eternal Love'--not love as it is exercised and felt, and is embodied in Asia--but love as a moral force in the world, whose eruptive power the Earth is later to describe arising 'Out of the lampless caves of unimagined being,/ With earthquake shock and swiftness' (IV, 378-79). Like love, he is both power and the process which creates and destroys it, both end and means, and therefore neither slave nor master. Appropriately, his symbol is the 'ouroboros', the 'snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne' (II, iii, 97), whose tail-biting circle represents the interdependence of time and eternity.

Whereas Act 2 Scene 4 dramatizes the moral and intellectual basis of love's release into the world, the transfiguration of Asia in Scene 5 represents its emotional realization. It thus forms the play's emotional climax, even though it is tangential to the main action. The reason it can serve this function, while the events of Act 3 cannot, is that the longed-for moment of Prometheus's unbinding still lies ahead, even if it is now an imminent certainty. In fact Asia's transfiguration expresses and depends on this close yet incomplete convergence of desire and its fulfilment. In the manuscript there is an additional passage after the 'Life of Life' lyric in which Panthea claims that, although her voice uttered it, Prometheus speaks through her.⁶⁹ It seems that Shelley wanted him to be both present and absent--a state that would well reflect the scene's emotional tenor, for in the alternation between desire and its fulfilment they are here held finely and temporarily in balance. On the one hand, love as desire takes the form of a mutual and equal relationship between subject and object. Thus 'all love is sweet,/ Given or returned'; it 'Makes the reptile equal to the God' (II, v, 39-43); and while Asia, in the guise of Venus, radiates her love to the whole world, all things

seek her sympathy in turn. On the other hand, as the fulfilment of this desire love is represented as a metaphysical transforming power, of which Asia is conceived as the source, a role which the 'Life of Life' lyric and her portrayal as Venus emphasize. This supramundane love grows out of mutual love but ultimately overwhelms it:

Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness
Till they fail, as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost...yet unbewailing! (II, v, 66-71)

Thus the outward 'shapes' and the inward 'souls' are transformed but finally 'fail' to sustain the love which in its earthly form is an expression of their interrelation. The implications of such failure are not pursued here: hence the Voice which sings these words remains 'unbewailing'.

For the moment the critical turn of the cycle is delayed. Asia's final lyric reaffirms the mutuality of love, telling the previous singer that he is the helmsman of the 'enchanted Boat' (II, v, 72) of her soul. But although Asia is content to 'float ever--forever' (II, v, 78) upon the waves of the other's singing, 'Without a course--without a star' (II, v, 89), her voyage is not wholly directionless. In the first stanza her boat is borne downstream upon a 'many winding River/ Between mountains, woods, abysses,/ A Paradise of wildernesses' to the ocean. In the last she seems to make a return voyage, for not only does she travel backwards in time through 'Age', 'Manhood', 'Youth' and 'Infancy', but the landscape she ends up in is very like the river where she started: 'A Paradise of vaulted bowers/...And watery paths that wind between/ Wildernesses calm and green' (II, v, 104-7). The outward and return

parts of her voyage are in some sense concurrent: she flees 'Through Death and Birth to a diviner day' (II, v, 103) as if crossing both of life's limits at the same time. In fact Asia's boat, in sailing from paradise to paradise and taking in a 'happy Heaven', 'Elysian garden islets' and 'Realms where the air we breathe is Love' (II, v, 87, 91, 97) on the way, carries her to a destination that she never actually leaves. Thus the final lyric of the act weds being and becoming, the past, present and future, love as a divine power and love as an interactive process as closely as they can be.

v

Act III, written in the spring of 1819, and Act IV, written mainly in the autumn, represent two quite different but in some ways complementary attempts to describe the dawn of the Promethean era, and thereby to bring the drama to a close. ⁷⁰ Act III externalises the transformed world in dramatic blank verse, and in language which is essentially allegorical; Act IV, on the other hand, attempts its imaginative realisation through a predominantly lyrical and symbolic mode. The problem that both acts face, however, is that the successful accomplishment of revolution cannot be conceived separately from the revolutionary process that brings it about; and this process involves, at the rhetorical level, a mutual dependence and frustration of the objective and subjective apprehensions of meaning that the two acts respectively exemplify. Thus both depictions of the achievement of freedom run counter to the dialectical means by which it has been won in the previous two acts. The only fitting conclusion to the labours of Prometheus and Asia has already been provided in the last scene of Act II, where drama and lyric, allegory and symbol, are held in mutually sustaining equipoise. Although Acts III and IV are therefore inevitably a cause of weakness and disjunction in the play, they are, however, in large part redeemed not only by some of Shelley's very finest

poetry but by their own awareness of the difficulties they create and the strategies they adopt to mitigate them. Both resist the closure implied by the finality of Jupiter's defeat, and find ways to extend and elaborate the interrelational process perfected by Asia in the previous act.

In Act III one of the main hazards of attempting to describe the attainment of the 'far goal of Time' (III, iv, 174) is that of anticlimax.⁷⁰ But here Shelley exploits the act's 'rhetoric of temporality' (to use de Man's phrase)⁷¹ to avoid describing the present instant of mankind's liberation: in the first three scenes, before Prometheus has taken up residence in his cave, this event still belongs to the future; in the last, it is reported in the past tense by the Spirit of the Earth and the Spirit of the Hour. Moreover, despite Jupiter's fall, it is admitted that 'Heaven' remains 'unascended' (III, iv, 203). The possibility of anticlimax is further offset by a pervasive Shakespearian tone of pathos. At his release, Prometheus expresses no exultation but, describing to Asia the life that awaits them in the cave, sounds like King Lear speaking to Cordelia as they are led away to captivity, and his mingling of joy and sadness is also a prolongation of the emotional tone of Act II:⁷²

And if ye sigh, then I will smile, and thou
Ione, shall chant fragments of sea-music,
Until I weep, when ye shall smile away
The tears she brought, which yet were sweet to shed. (III, iii, 26-9)

The cave is a retreat from the world just as Lear imagines his prison to be, but, as Jacobs points out, not only is there a constant exchange between its occupants, and a searching 'For hidden thoughts each lovelier than the last' (III, iii, 35), like the seeking of images in 'Mont Blanc''s 'cave of

the witch Poesy', but they also enjoy an 'unremitting interchange' with the outside world.⁷⁴ The 'echoes of the human world' come like bees--frequently for Shelley the intermediaries between nature and mind; and once again love is 'Given and returned' (III, iii, 60) between the gods and humankind. The full complexity of the interrelationship between inner and outer, the divine and the human, is reflected in the following lines:

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 origin of the thought here is Diotima's definition of love as 'the desire of generation in the beautiful' in Plato's Symposium.⁷⁵ As part of her argument about love being a desire for 'something immortal in mortality', she explains that souls, like bodies, seek an intercourse with beauty from a desire of the progeny it will bring forth, and that thus they repeatedly replace the old with the new to achieve a kind of permanence.⁷⁶ Through the deliberate ambiguity of his language, however, Shelley once again breaks down Plato's hierarchical distinction between the temporal and eternal. The ontological status of 'apparitions', 'beauty', 'forms', 'phantoms' and 'reality' is undefined, and the word 'Of' in line 55, leaves uncertain whether the 'apparitions'--the 'progeny immortal'--are the same as or derive from the arts of painting, sculpture and poetry. Art, therefore, can be seen not merely as a product of but as a component within the mind-beauty interchange--as both

reality and image; and the 'gathered rays' cast a supernal light only as they also represent the mutual illumination of all the entities involved.

In another and more ominous way the cave resists the stasis and closure its retreat seems to imply. It has at least an implicit identity with Demogorgon's cave and (as Cronin notes) the abyss into which Jupiter is hurled.⁷⁶ All are volcanic craters which can erupt at any time. Moreover, the volcanic relation between Promethean love and Jovian power is underlined yet further by the Earth's account of how the cavern's volcanic vapours, which were once inflaming in their effect, have become purifying.⁷⁷ Stage directions state that the action of Act III Scene iv and of the whole of Act IV, where the dawning of the new era is described, takes place with the cave in the background. So while the last two acts tend to 'take for granted that the ideological battle has been won', as O'Neill puts it, the presence of the cave⁷⁸ serves as a reminder of the potential instability of the victory. Demogorgon's intervention at the end of the play, which does in fact take the form of a volcanic eruption, explicitly warns of the possible recommencement of the former cycles of destruction, and asserts the continuing need for the moral virtues exercised by Prometheus in Act I.

Despite the doubts which hang over the Promethean triumph, Act IV does successfully provide the kind of ecstatic finale--clearly lacking in Act III--that the mood of joyous expectation at the end of Act II requires. Moreover, in several ways the last act fittingly celebrates the liberation of Prometheus as the achievement of a new attitude to change rather than the transcendence of change. The flight of the past Hours 'To the dark, to the past, to the dead' (IV, 39) and the withdrawal of 'the figured curtain of sleep' (IV, 58) from the present Hours are equivalent to the process of forgetting and remembering, revoking and restoring, begun by Prometheus and continued by Asia. The replacement of the Hours' nostalgic lament for 'the Father of many a

cancelled year' (IV, 11) by the Spirits' self-abandonment to time's 'dance and song/ By the whirlwind of gladness borne along' (IV, 85) reflects an essential aspect of the psychic revolution accomplished in the first two acts. In particular, the whirling dance of the Spirits and Hours, and then of the Earth and Moon, reproduces the revolving interrelationship of contrary forces that is the impetus of Asia's quest in Act II.

The pairing of the Moon and Earth, while not exactly parallel to that of Prometheus and Asia, nevertheless reproduces several of the interacting attributes of mind that they represent. On the one hand, Ione's vision of the Moon, suggests the faculty of conscious, rational objectivity: its 'dusk aery veil' has a distancing effect on the external world of 'hills and woods' (IV, 211-12), and the child within, gleaming with the white light of reason and eternity, wakefully guides its chariot's progress. Panthea's vision of the Earth, on the other hand, with its sleeping child, whose murmuring, Ione tells us, mocks the harmony of the many-coloured spheres revolving around it, suggests the unconscious, subjective imagination, and the principle of energy and change.⁷⁹ Linked by forces of attraction and repulsion, the two spheres are like 'two runnels of a rivulet/.../ Turning their dear disunion to an isle/ Of lovely grief' (IV, 196-201)--again combining joy and sadness--and eventually circle around each other in a 'polar Paradise' (IV, 465) of love.

Just as the two visions emanate from a single source--perhaps reflecting Erasmus Darwin's theory that earth and moon were once one planet--so, as Hogle points out, Shelley's descriptions of both of them draw on chariots described by Ezekiel, Dante and Milton.⁸⁰ Differences, accordingly, are predicated upon certain similarities. The Moon is subject to 'interlunar dreams' (IV, 209) and therefore not a figure of complete objectivity and fixity. Its eyes of 'liquid darkness' pouring 'fire that is not brightness' (IV, 226, 230)--reminiscent, as Grabo notes, of Demogorgon's 'mighty Darkness' and 'rays of gloom' (II, iv,

2-3)--suggest unknowable volcanic depths which contrast sharply with its cold,
white radiance.⁸¹ Conversely, the Spirit of the Earth demonstrates a capacity
for selfconsciousness when its 'swords of azure fire' (IV, 271)--corresponding
to the Moon's 'quivering moonbeam' (IV, 231)--'Make bare the secrets of the
Earth's deep heart' (IV, 279). As an image of mind, the 'self-destroying' (IV,
249) activity of the concentric spheres (IV, 238) also implies an exercise of
selfconscious thought as well as unselfconscious feeling. One of the ways in
which the mind spins with 'self-destroying swiftness' is demonstrated by
Asia's revolving oscillation between sensation and reflection on her way to
Demogorgon's cave. But the concentric spheres also recall the lines in 'Mont
Blanc' where the poet, hovering between trance and wakefulness, asks:

do I lie

In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessibly
Its circles? (54-7)

These circles too might be regarded as 'self-destroying' in that the interplay
of objective and subjective faculties produces an ever-expanding and hence
self-cancelling series of circles in the mind's attempt to grasp the infinite.

In Prometheus Unbound such 'imagery...drawn from the operations of the
human mind' also draws heavily on the operations of the natural world as these
were understood by contemporary science.⁸² As in Queen Mab, Erasmus Darwin is
a primary influence upon Shelley's analogising of the human and natural
spheres. Both poets, for example, equate human love with the cohesive forces
of gravitation, electricity and magnetism which bind the elements of the
universe.⁸³ Darwin's description in The Botanic Garden (1789-91) of the newly
created universe, in which 'Orbs wheel in orbs, round centres centres roll,/'

And form, self-balanced, one revolving whole' (I, i, 111-12), is probably a source for Panthea's vision of the Earth; and his understanding of the circulation of matter, whereby 'Organic forms with chemic changes strive, / Live but to die, and die but to revive' (The Temple of Nature, ii, 41-2), seems to inform her description of the revolving and 'self-destroying' spheres. As a number of commentators have pointed out, her vision also reflects current theories about the constitution of matter, particularly as formulated by Sir Humphry Davy, who not only speculates that molecular particles perpetually rotate around each other, but argues, like Darwin, that through a process of 'solution and consolidation, decay and revolution' matter constantly assumes new forms to maintain a systematic harmony. ⁸⁵

Although reminiscent of Queen Mab in its assumption that nature and mind share similar structures, Prometheus Unbound Act 4 shows a much deeper understanding of the complexity of the relationship between them. The earlier poem's incipient sense that natural processes are not only identical to mental ones but also reflect the attracting, repelling, and revolving interaction of subject and object is now fully developed. As William H. Hildebrand has observed, this interaction bears quite a close resemblance to Coleridge's 'law of polarity', as expounded in Biographia Literaria. ⁸⁶ Operating throughout the realms of nature and mind, this law manifests itself to the transcendental philosopher, according to Coleridge, as the counteraction and interpenetration of subjective and objective forces, 'the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity....In the existence, in the reconciling, and the recurrence of this contradiction consists the process and mystery of production and life'. ⁸⁷ In an important respect, however, the process dramatised in Prometheus is different from the law of polarity as explained in the Biographia. For although Shelley's understanding of the interaction of contrary forces is very

similar to Coleridge's, he has far less confidence in the stability and primacy of the 'tertium aliud', the 'one power', which is both the product of their conjunction and their original union; and in consequence he has a stronger sense of a continuing cyclic and 'self-destroying' process.⁸⁷ This aspect of Shelley's thought is most clearly demonstrated by the figure of Demogorgon, the embodiment of self-destroying power. Born of Jupiter's rape of Thetis--a parody of the relationship between Prometheus and Asia--he too is the product of two conflicting forces, when 'Two mighty spirits, mingling,⁸⁸ made a third/ Mightier than either' (III, i, 43-4).

Demogorgon is also in a sense the offspring of Prometheus and Asia for it is through their endeavours to be reunited that his power is reactivated. However, owing to the inevitable tendency of love to become reified as power, their reunion also conflicts with the revolutionary principle that Demogorgon represents. Therefore, although Act IV is in some ways faithful to the dialectical process by which Prometheus is freed, it also evinces tendencies that are opposed to it. Most obviously, these are revealed in certain expressions of dominance. For example, the Chorus of Spirits of the human mind, having joined the Hours in dance, sings a lyric which begins as follows:

Our spoil is won,
Our task is done,
We are free to dive or soar or run...
Beyond and around
Or within the bound
Which clips the world with darkness round. (IV, 135-40)

As a celebration of the mind's freedom, these lines are nevertheless also expressive of a degree of dominance and transcendence of the external world which contradicts the reciprocal relationship between the Spirits and Hours.

The first two lines are couched in terms of military triumph. The remaining four, as Grabo and Cameron note, reflect Sir William Herschel's theory that the universe is finite.⁸⁹ Shelley may or may not have known that Herschel had abandoned the theory in 1818, but he uses it here as an expression of the mind's capacity to comprehend and consequently transcend the universe.⁹⁰ A different form of dominance is exercised by the 'multitudinous Orb' (IV, 253), which, with something of the destructive power of the 'chariot of Paternal Deity' in Paradise Lost (IV, 750), 'knead[s]' the phenomenal world outside it 'into one aerial mass' (IV, 260), just as Jupiter threatens to 'knead' Earth's children 'to one void mass' (IV, 342-3). Finally, in the Earth's long speech in praise of love the tyranny of love is explicit: it rules 'As the Sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze' (IV, 397); it gives dominion to language over thought, and to the human mind over the physical universe. It thus confers the same power as Prometheus originally gave to man, enabling him to look 'on his creation like a God', but ultimately leaving him the 'wreck of his own will, the scorn of Earth' (II, iv, 102-4).

Hughes considers that Act IV expresses the liberation of mankind from 'the ontological tyranny of the phenomenal'.⁹¹ In a similar vein, Hogle suggests that the transferential qualities of Panthea's vision of the Earth are intended to critique the cold fixities of the Moon.⁹² These views are not difficult to justify, for clearly the Spirits of the human mind do celebrate the power of thought to build a 'new world of man' (IV, 157), and under the influence of the Earth the Moon sheds its 'shadow of white Death' (IV, 424) to become warm, and put forth green vegetation. Thus the act is consonant with the unbinding of Prometheus as an emblem of the mind's dissolution of all forms of static, external constraint. Yet it also tacitly gives warning of a potential reversion to Jovian rule through the mind's mastery of the external world. Such dangers, however, it cannot admit to openly without souring the

celebrations of Prometheus's freedom and marriage to Asia. Even Demogorgon, who earlier unloosed the 'snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne' (II, iii, 88), now advises that 'the pit over Destruction's strength' should be barred and its 'serpent' (IV, 564, 567) contained. In other words, in recommending resistance to the cycles of change and the dialectic of subject and object which destroy in order to preserve, he opposes the very means by which Prometheus has gained his hard-won release.

The corruption of love into power has its parallel in the figural operations of Act IV. Shelley sustains its lyrical symbolic mode through dialogue and dance, through a forward cyclic motion that repeatedly breaks up and eclipses the tendency of language to harden into allegory. And yet, just as the interrelation of subject and object itself becomes an object prior to both, and reciprocal love turns into unitary power, so the act of representation ultimately gives priority to the objectivity of allegory over the subjectivity of symbol. As Ulmer writes, 'whenever these figurative modes occur together (and they always do) allegory necessarily prevails.'⁹³ The only way Shelley knows of defeating this curse is through the poet's committal of himself through poetry to some unknown and infinite beyond, whether of transcendence or of death and oblivion. Prometheus at the end of Act I and Asia at the end of Act II both demonstrate this course, as even more clearly do the speakers of 'Ode to the West Wind' and Adonais. Such an option, however, is not available to Shelley in the final act of Prometheus, where apocalypse no longer lies ahead but belongs to the present. The act, it is true, does illustrate a recuperative self-immolation: Panthea, for example, describes how the inhabitants of Earth were obliterated when 'some God/ Whose throne was in a Comet, past, and cried--/ "Be not!"--and like my words they were no more' (IV, 316-18), at which point the Earth bursts into song: 'The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness' (IV, 319); and at the final

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volcanic uprising of Demogorgon, the Earth cries, 'I hear--I am a drop of dew that dies!' (IV, 523). Yet Demogorgon's last words do not actually 'waken Oblivion' (IV, 543); they pour a little cold water on the celebrations of Act IV, but do not commit them to extinction.

Ultimately the play founders on the sheer difficulty of conceiving a political idealism which is thoroughly revolutionary--one, that is, which sustains itself by perpetually destroying itself. The conflict between Promethean idealism and Promethean resistance to all formulations of the ideal--essentially the same conflict of love and defiance that remains unresolved in Act I--is both the foundation of the liberation the play proclaims, and also its frustration. Only through its own knowledge of its inevitable self-defeat can the play, paradoxically, escape that destiny--as Prometheus does in Act I--but this knowledge is not consistently applied, particularly in the last two acts. The myth of Prometheus's final unchaining runs contrary, even while it is necessary, to the notion of freedom as a process of continuing struggle, and through its inability openly to admit this positive contradiction the play falls into negative contradiction. Yet ultimately it is difficult to maintain the distinction between the two, and to argue that the play betrays its own fundamental principles. Given its commitment to the realization of freedom, both in its own poetry and in the world at large, hope must in the end outweigh hope's wreck, which can therefore never be total. Even Prometheus towards the close of Act I does not wholly despair of human love. The poem's conceptual incoherence is therefore inseparable from its redemptive project. Moreover, the play always retains some awareness of its contradictions, and to the extent that it does so it turns them to creative account. As we have seen, the last two acts do implicitly recognize the potentially tyrannous implications of the new dawn they dramatise, and through a subtle and sceptical self-awareness at least

partially succeed in reclaiming a process of becoming from an assertion of being. Thus, if the poem fails to fulfil its highest aspirations, it also rescues itself from complete self-defeat. But Shelley never again attempts to embody in verse the triumph of revolutionary idealism, and in future tempers his optimism to a severer sense of poetic and political possibilities.

Notes

1. Preface to The Revolt of Islam, Hutchinson, p. 34.
2. Concerning the influence of Godwin's gradualism on The Revolt of Islam, see Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator, p. 68; and Pamela Clemit, 'Shelley's Godwin, 1812-17', Durham University Journal, n.s. 54 (1993), 189-201 (pp. 197-98).
3. For Shelley's high estimation of Prometheus Unbound, see Jones, II, 70, 94, 116, 123, 127, 153, 164, 174, 181, 200. Although somewhat dismissive of The Revolt of Islam (Jones, II, 96), he nevertheless continues to find some value in the poem, since in 1821 he proposes publication of a revised second edition (Jones, II, 263, 354).
4. Concerning Shelley's scientific sources for this theory, see above, chapter 2, note 18. In a Note on the final Chorus of Hellas he mentions Isaiah (see ch. LXV) and Virgil (see Eclogue IV) as his millenarian authorities, R&P, p. 438.
5. The Romantic Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 121-2.
6. R&P, p. 135; Bowra, p. 123.
7. Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, pp. 32, 113.
8. See Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, pp. 12-118. Kelvin Everest argues on the other hand that the poem's composition over an extended period and in

different places gives rise to serious organisational and thematic discontinuities, '"Mechanism of a Kind Yet Unattempted": The Dramatic Action of Prometheus Unbound', Durham University Journal, n.s. 54 (1993), 237-245. Cf. Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator, pp. 109-10.

9. Baker writes that The Revolt of Islam offers 'only the shreds and patches of what might have been a closely woven allegorical fabric', Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 83. James Lynn Ruff suggests that the poem fails to dramatize in narrative form the internal spiritual change of Laon and Cythna, Shelley's The Revolt of Islam, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Romantic Reassessment, No. 10 (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1972), p. 115. Woodman notes the poem's failure to bring together narrative and myth in a sustained way, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley, p. 102. Tetreault sees the poem's fault as a failure to integrate life and art, this-life and the beyond, and considers that the poem's epic form is at odds with its ideology, The Poetry of Life, pp. 111, 119. Curran likewise observes a conflict between epic, martial values and fraternal pacific ones, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, p. 29. Shelley's quoted remark comes from a letter to a publisher, 13 October 1817 (Jones, I, 563).
10. This tension in Prometheus is commented on by Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, pp. 117-18; Leighton, Shelley and the Sublime, pp. 75-6; Tilottama Rajan, 'Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley's Prometheus Unbound', SiR, 23 (1984), 317-38 (p. 319); and Ross G. Woodman, 'Metaphor & Allegory in Prometheus Unbound', in G. Kim Blank, The New Shelley, pp. 166-83 (p. 175).
11. Mary Shelley, 'Note on Prometheus Unbound', Hutchinson, p. 268; Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), pp. 299-307. Cf. William Rossetti, 'Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Study of its Meaning and Personages' (1886), The Shelley Society's Papers, ser. 1, no. 1, pt. 1 (London: Reeves and Turner, 1888), pp. 50-72.
12. 'Image and Imagelessness: A Limited Reading of Prometheus Unbound', in The Permanent Pleasure: Essays on Classics of Romanticism (Athens, Ga.:

- University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 71.
13. For example, Harold Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking (1959; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 46-64, 91-147; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 255-373; Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 475-564; Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, pp. 33-118.
 14. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 271; Curran, pp. 33-94; Jones, II, 271.
 15. Grabo, Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 198; Lewis, The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake and Shelley (Columbia, Miss.: University of Missouri Press, 1992), p. 182.
 16. 'Potentiality in Prometheus Unbound', SiR, 2 (1963), pp. 107-126; rpt. in R&P, pp. 603-620.
 17. For example, Jean Hall, The Transforming Image: A Study of Shelley's Major Poetry (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 68-101; Susan Hawk Brisman, '"Unsayings His High Language": The Problem of Voice in Prometheus Unbound', SiR, 16 (1977), pp. 51-86; Geoffrey Ward, 'Transforming Presence: Poetic Idealism in Prometheus Unbound and Epipsychidion', in Essays on Shelley, ed. Miriam Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), pp. 191-212; Tetreault, The Poetry of Life, pp. 169-96; Carol Jacobs, Uncontainable Romanticism: Shelley, Bronte Kleist (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 19-57.
 18. Hogle, Shelley's Process, pp. 167-72.
 19. 'Deconstruction and Reconstruction: Reading Shelley's Prometheus Unbound', SiR, 23 (1984), 317-38 (p. 338).
 20. Language as Living Form in Nineteenth Century Poetry (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 113-40.
 21. I&P, VII, 46.

22. See Prometheus Unbound, I, 772-79; Shelley's translation of Plato's Symposium, Notopoulos, p. 435; and Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood, p. 117.
23. Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 209. Like Duff, Donna Richardson finds a principle of coherence in the poem by seeing 'the growth and progress of individual mind' as its subsuming theme, "'The Dark Idolatry of Self": The Dialectic of Imagination in Shelley's Revolt of Islam', KSJ, 40 (1991), 73-98. This, it seems to me, is to overlook the unresolved conflicts between the political and personal interest.
24. For recent analyses of how the Romantics turned nature into a vehicle for a conservative ideology, see Jerome J. McGann, The Romantic Ideology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 66-71; and Christopher Hampton, The Ideology of the Text (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), pp. 68-84.
25. Cf. Edward W. Said's description of orientalism in Orientalism (1978; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).
26. I take 'hers' to mean Nature's, not Art's, as suggested by R&P, p. 235 n.
27. Cronin writes that in his best poetry Shelley achieves 'an awareness of the conservative force of language and engages in a self-conscious struggle against it', Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, p. 8. Dawson argues that Shelley distinguishes between the 'false rule' of kings and a 'true rule' exercised by individuals over their anarchic passions, The Unacknowledged Legislator, pp. 89-92. Ulmer's view that Shelley's 'metaphorical idealism...operates a mode of power in the service of power's eradication' comes closest to my own, Shelleyan Eros, p. 102. See also Hogle's contention that 'For Shelley the will to power...is virtually synonymous with the will to knowledge', Shelley's Process, pp. 107-12 (p. 107). My quotation is from 'On the Devil and Devils', I&P, VII, 89.
28. See Shelley's translation of the Symposium, Notopoulos, pp. 447-50.
29. Trans. John Black (1815), rev. A.J.W. Morrison (London: Henry G. Bohm,

- 1846), p. 66. Mary Shelley records that Shelley was reading this work on 16, 20 and 21 March 1818, The Journals of Mary Shelley, I, 198-99.
30. Schlegel, p. 66.
31. For Shelley's reading of this work, see The Journals of Mary Shelley, I, 246-47, 253 (entries for 24-31 December 1818 and 3 January 1819).
32. Trans. anon. (Glasgow, 1766), pp. 35-7.
33. 'Note on Prometheus Unbound', Hutchinson, p. 270.
34. Letter to Peacock, 20 April 1818, Jones, II, 7.
35. Letter to Peacock, 23-24 January 1819, Jones, II, 74-75.
36. Letter to Peacock, 17 or 18 November 1818, Jones, II, 59.
37. Letter to Peacock, 23-24 January 1819, Jones, II, 74-75.
38. The Poetry of Life, p. 172.
39. A Defence of Poetry, R&P, p. 482.
40. The Human Mind's Imaginings, p. 44.
41. This association has been disputed by Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 276 n.; and Hogle, Shelley's Process, p. 182.
42. Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 46-7. Cf. Nathaniel Brown's description of Asia as 'nature's life principle', Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 61.
43. R&P, p. 133. Cf. Shelley's description of the Baths of Caracalla in his letter to Peacock, 23 March 1819, Jones, II, 84-85.
44. Brisman remarks that Prometheus's change of heart is more gradual than is generally supposed, and cites the views of a number of other critics on

the question of where in the act his reform can be deemed to have been completed; e.g., Frederick A. Pottle thinks he achieves repentance in the first speech, 'The Role of Asia in the Dramatic Action of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound', in Shelley: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. George M. Ridenour, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 137; as does Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, p. 97; for Baker his change of heart is not complete until I, 303-5, Shelley's Major Poetry, p. 97; James Rieger believes it has taken place before the play begins, The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley (New York: George Braziller, 1967), p. 105.

45. See G.M. Matthews 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley' (1957), rpt. in Shelley: Modern Judgements (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 192; and Philip Drew, The Meaning of Freedom (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982), pp. 173-183.
46. See Milton, Samson Agonistes (1671); Hesiod, Theogony; Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound; Byron, 'Prometheus' (1817). Shelley's Prometheus is indebted to Milton's portrayal of Christ in both Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained (1671).
47. 'On the Devil and Devils', I&P, VII, 89.
48. A Defence of Poetry, R&P, p. 508.
49. Paradise Lost, I, 17-22.
50. R&P point out the pun on 'rock', p. 138 n.
51. Abbey, p. 56.
52. This precipice was suggested to Shelley by the mountain of Les Echelles in Savoy, which he saw en route to Italy; see The Journals of Mary Shelley, I, 200, and The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, I, 357.
53. See Prometheus Bound, 85-9; Lycidas, 91-5.
54. Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley, p. 148.

55. The First Voice's 'Thrice three hundred thousand years' (I, 74), closely echoes line 23 in Coleridge's 'Fire, Famine, and Slaughter' (1798); the Springs of the Second Voice (I, 78-81) call to mind the river Alph in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'; and its second speech (I, 93-98) recalls 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', 593-4. See Lawrence John Zillman, Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum Edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), pp. 352-4. There may also be an association of Wordsworth, pre-eminently for Shelley the poet of mountains, with the Voice 'from the mountains'.
56. R&P, p. 504. Leighton invokes this distinction from the Defence to explain a difference between spoken and unspoken thought in Act I, Shelley and the Sublime, p. 82.
57. Prometheus Bound, ll. 233-37.
58. See Zillman, p. 143.
59. Shelley's translation, Notopoulos, p. 446.
60. Cameron comments on the political significance of the dreams, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 516.
61. 'The Language of Causality in Prometheus Unbound', KSJ, 31 (1982), 136-158). Sperry comments on these lines to similar effect, Shelley's Major Verse, pp. 100-01.
62. Cf. discussions of Shelley's use of negatives in Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator, pp. 119-21, and Timothy Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in Prometheus Unbound', in Shelley Revalued, ed. Everest, pp. 37-62.
63. 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley', pp. 173-191.
64. See Paradiso (passim); Paradise Lost, V, 469-500; An Essay on Man, I, 207-32.

65. See Timaeus, 28-40; Lucan, Pharsalia, VI, 496-99, 744-48; Spenser, The Faerie Queene, I, i, 37; I, v, 22; IV, ii, 44; Milton, Paradise Lost, V, 964-65. Zillman lists further possible sources for, and interpretations of, Demogorgon, pp. 313-320. Lewis summarizes more recent interpretations, pp. 186-7.
66. The importance of Boccaccio as a source for Shelley's Demogorgon has been argued by Henry G. Lotspeich, 'Shelley's "Eternity" and Demogorgon', Philological Quarterly, 13 (1934), 309-11. See also Zillman, pp. 314-15.
67. 'Note on Prometheus Unbound', Hutchinson, p. 272.
68. 'Shelley's "Deep Truth" Reconsidered', English Language Notes, 13 (1975), 25-7.
69. See Zillman, pp. 221-22.
70. Neil Fraistat shows that, although Shelley may not have worked in earnest on Act IV until October 1819 after his arrival in Florence, it is likely that the act was conceived and in part written earlier in the year, The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts, IX, ed. Fraistat (1991), pp. lxx-lxiii.
71. Cronin, pp. 158-61, faults the act on this basis. A similar criticism that the act passes over the process of transformation to present a merely narrated description of the new world has been made by Edward E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 193-95, and Jean Hall, pp. 90-91.
72. 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in Blindness and Insight (1971; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187-228.
73. Shakespeare, King Lear, V, iii, 7-19.
74. Jacobs, pp. 260-3.
75. Shelley's translation, Notopoulos, p. 445.

76. Shelley's translation, Notopoulos, p. 445.
77. Cronin, p. 156.
78. The opposing destructive and beneficial aspects of volcanoes are discussed by Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, p. 185; Matthews, pp. 190-91; and Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Study, pp. 338-45.
79. The Human Mind's Imaginings, p. 119.
80. Comparable interpretations of the Moon and Earth are offered by William H. Hildebrand, Shelley's Polar Paradise: A Reading of 'Prometheus Unbound', Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Romantic Reassessment (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1976), p. 238; Jean Hall, pp. 95-6; Cronin, p. 164.
81. See Darwin, The Botanic Garden, I, ii, 73-82; Hogle, Shelley's Process, p. 198.
82. Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, pp. 150-1.
83. Preface to Prometheus Unbound, R&P, p. 133. Critics who have given particular attention to Shelley's deployment of scientific knowledge in Prometheus Unbound include Grabo, A Newton Among Poets and Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation; Desmond King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 200-207; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 225-373; and Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 526-64.
84. See esp. Darwin, The Temple of Nature, Canto I, with its invocation to 'Immortal Love' (ll. 15-32) and account of creation.
85. Davy's Elements of Chemical Philosophy (1812) is quoted to demonstrate his theory of the motion of atoms by Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, p. 142, and Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 549. The words I cite are from Davy's Elements of Agricultural Philosophy (1813), quoted by Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood, p. 253.

86. Hildebrand, pp. 136, 237-43. See Biographia Literaria, in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, gen. ed. K. Coburn, Bollingen Series 75, 16 vols in progress (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969-), VII, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (1983), 232-306 (Chapters 12 and 13). This work is mentioned in Mary Shelley's reading list for 1817, The Journals of Mary Shelley, p. 102. Coleridge's 'law of polarity' is also expounded in 'Essays on the Principles of Method' in The Friend (1818; 3-vol edn), in Coburn, IV, 479.
87. Biographia, Coburn, VII, 297, 280-81.
88. Biographia, Coburn, VII, 299-300.
89. Jupiter's rape of Thetis as a parody of Prometheus's union with Asia is commented on by Hildebrand, p. 129, and Duerksen, Shelley's Poetry of Involvement, p. 112.
90. Grabo, A Newton Among Poets, pp. 80-88; Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 656 n. 35.
91. Cameron notes that Shelley follows Herschel's later theory of the infiniteness of the universe in 'On the Devils, and Devils', written in 1820-21, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 656 n. 35; but he also seems to do so in 'Ode to Heaven', written in 1819.
92. 'Potentiality in Prometheus Unbound', R&P, p. 605.
93. Hogle, Shelley's Process, p. 199.
94. Ulmer, p. 78.

Adonais: 'The Painted Veil'

That an attitude of sceptical idealism informs Shelley's thinking throughout his adult life is nowhere more evident than in the consistency of his attitude towards the notion of a life after death. A number of his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener in 1811 which touch on this issue show him to be torn between his reason and his feelings. In one he says, 'I have considered it in every possible light & reason tells me that death is the boundary of the life of man. Yet I feel, I believe the direct contrary.'¹ Although Shelley's utterances on the subject are not always so even-handed, and in his prose are predominantly sceptical,² the tension between rational doubt and imaginative desire concerning a future state persists through his career, remaining essentially unaffected by the different philosophical influences he submits to, whether materialist, empirical or Platonic. Thus, almost exactly ten years after the letter to Hitchener, he writes in a very similar vein in a note to Hellas: 'Until better arguments can be produced than sophisms which disgrace the cause, this desire [for immortality]...must remain the only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being' (Hutchinson, pp. 478-9).

Adonais, the elegy Shelley wrote for Keats in the summer of 1821, and his most extended meditation on the subject of death, presents his opposing views in a particularly stark form. The poem, indeed, is structured upon them. The first thirty-seven stanzas, drawing on the Greek pastoral elegaic conventions of Bion and Moschus (parts of whose elegies Shelley translated), express grief at the finality of Adonais's death. The remaining eighteen stanzas,

conversely, follow the Christian inheritors of the classical tradition, particularly Spenser's 'Astrophel' (1586) and Milton's 'Lycidas' (1638), in declaring that the departed one 'is not dead'.³ This apparent affirmation of a life beyond the grave makes the conclusion of the poem, in Curran's words, 'in some sense the exemplary crux of Shelley's poetry',⁴ for it forces the question of how we are to interpret his expressions of transcendentalism. Until quite recently it was usual to take the poem's Platonic and eschatological language at face value. In this tradition of criticism Woodman considers that Shelley commits 'psychic suicide' in his pursuit of postmortal fulfilment in the poem.⁵ Without going so far, Wasserman also offers a dualist reading, arguing, despite an awareness of Shelley's deep-seated scepticism, that at the end of the poem the mortal principle is breached by a transcendent One.⁶ Similarly, Leighton, borrowing terms from Derrida and A Defence of Poetry, sees the poem as expressing a dualism of voice and text, composition and inspiration.⁷ However, for those critics who consider Shelley to be consistently anti-metaphysical, his dualist terminology in Adonais is purely figurative. For example, Cameron and Dawson, with an emphasis on Shelley's social concerns, interpret the poem in moral and psychological terms, while Wright, Tetreault and Hogle all in various ways find its meaning to be constituted of a deconstructive interplay of its metaphors.⁸ In this chapter I shall attempt to mediate between literal and figurative approaches to Shelley's language in Adonais by concentrating on the notion of death in Adonais, and on how this in turn depends on its understanding of the relations between nature and mind.

Like Epipsychidion, written earlier the same year, Adonais ends by launching the poet forward into an unknown future. Less obviously than that poem it also involves a reconsideration of his past, though a past which is as much literary and intellectual as it is personal and emotional. It is as if at

this period, when many of his private and political hopes have been disappointed, Shelley reassesses former achievements and failures in an attempt to recover and redefine a basis for future hope. In Adonais he returns particularly to earlier thoughts on death, a subject which has concerned him philosophically and poetically, but also more directly through the experience of bereavement. The immediate occasion for the poem is not only the death of Keats but, as Cameron has made clear, Shelley's bitter quarrel with Robert Southey.⁹ It is in the context of an assessment of Keats's work and of the background to this quarrel, we shall find, that Shelley readdresses a subject that has long perplexed him and always unsettled the idealist aspirations of his poetry.

i

Adonais is first of all Keats but he is also in a sense Shelley himself, 'Who in another's fate now wept his own' (300), and in rekindling the dead poet's 'fading melodies' (16) the poem recalls both Keats's and Shelley's earlier poetry, as Abbey observes.¹⁰ Ultimately, the assurance that Adonais lives is an assurance that both through their poetry have overcome death. 'The breath whose might I have invoked in song' (487) in the last stanza, is the 'breath' of Adonais which hitherto the poet has invoked in vain (57, 101, 173, 219, 450), but it is also a reference to the 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1820), in which Keats calls on death to 'Take into the air my quiet breath' (54), and (as Bloom points out)¹¹ to the breath which Shelley invokes in 'Ode to the West Wind'. Adonais, Shelley suggests, both draws life from and gives life to the two poets' earlier 'fading melodies'. His resuscitation of Keats's poems, however, also involves revision. There is, it is true, a sense in which Shelley revises all his poetic models, from Bion to Milton, but the nature of his response to Keats shows him to be re-engaging with this poet in a

particularly careful and critical way. And in doing so he also reconsiders his own poems in which he has previously dealt with the subject of death.

Although in certain poems we find that Keats's view of death is similar to Shelley's in Adonais, in others it is almost the reverse, and Shelley's comment on these helps to define his own intentions. The main basis of his critique is that some of Keats's poems quite deliberately 'adorned and hid the coming bulk of death' (18) by using language and imagination to obscure rather than to encounter its destructive reality. Thus, in the 'Ode to a Nightingale', the poet is drawn towards another realm of death and imagination, but allows himself finally to be tolled back from what he calls the 'deceiving elf' (72) of fancy, with the result that his vision 'fades' (75). This drawing back to the 'sole self' (72) is the very opposite of the poet's self-immolation through poetry at the end of Adonais. It is therefore not without significance that in echoing Keats's line, 'I have been half in love with easeful Death' (52), Shelley's reference in the Preface to his poem to being 'in love with death' omits the 'half'. Keats's Isabella (1820) also reveals a fascinated revulsion from death on the part of its narrator, who prefers 'The simple plaining of a minstrel's song' to the 'wormy circumstance' (385-8) of Lorenzo's death. Shelley therefore uses the heroine's basil growing in a pot containing her lover's skull as the source of a simile describing Adonais, who was 'Like a pale flower by some sad maiden cherished' (48); from which we may infer that, like the basil, Keats adorns and hides but does not overcome death. Other such flowers in Adonais are 'Like incarnations of the stars' (174), symbols of immortality through their very transience. Likewise, the immortality envisaged in Shelley's pastoral elegy could hardly be more different from the silent stasis of the urn's 'Cold Pastoral' (45) in Keats's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' (1820).

However, a number of poems by Keats accept submission to death as the means

to renewed life, and therefore come closer to Shelley's intentions in Adonais. They include 'To Autumn' (1820), which suggests a reciprocity between spring and autumn, and the 'Ode on Melancholy' (1820), in which melancholy is dialectically related to 'Beauty that must die;/ And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips/ Bidding adieu' (21-23). But closer still is Hyperion, the poem which Shelley singles out for praise in the Preface to Adonais.¹² In its account of the fall of the Titans and the subsequent deification of the young Apollo the cycles of death and rebirth are one of its major themes. Oceanus advises his fallen fellow gods that they are 'not the beginning and the end' and that 'another race may drive/ Our conquerors to mourn as we do now' (II, 190; 230-1). Of the song Clymene heard prophesying Apollo's succession she says 'A living death was in each gush of sounds' (II, 281), and by his deification he does as it were 'Die into life' (III, 130). In Adonais, which ends with the poet undergoing a comparable process of transformation, there is an equally close interrelationship between concepts of living and dying.

In returning to his own earlier poetry, Shelley readdresses a problem which he defines in Alastor and has subsequently been unable to resolve satisfactorily. In that poem the death of the protagonist, who is recalled by the portrait of the 'frail Form' (271) in Adonais, holds no promise of renewed life. Moreover, his death is emblematic of the fruitless death which poetry itself suffers in failing to recall the unity of its origin. Although in Prometheus Unbound Shelley elaborates a dialectical process of thought by which the recovery of hope is predicated upon its loss, there is a limit to how far the poem pursues its own logic. In particular, it fails to encompass within that logic the ultimate loss of death. It does so firstly in the sense that in Act III the Promethean revolution has no answer to 'chance and death and mutability' (II, iv, 201) in the human sphere, thus allowing a rift to open between immortal mind and mortal nature. Secondly, in Act IV, as we have

seen, the drama is ultimately unwilling to contemplate its own death, and the abandonment of the unity, symbolized by the reunion of Prometheus and Asia, on which its optimism rests. The play thus also adorns and hides death. But while in both Alastor and Prometheus death functions as a cause or emblem of disunity, the two poems also suggest that death can represent a form of unity. In Alastor the Poet seeks nature's 'cradle, and his sepulchre' (430) in pursuit of the unified origin he has lost, and, according to the Earth in Prometheus Unbound, death unites the 'two worlds of life and death' (I, 195). In Adonais Shelley corrects both the failure of hope in the earlier poem and the uncertain basis of hope in the later; and he does so by juxtaposing the contrasting conceptions of disunitive death-in-life and unitive life-in-death in such a way as to address the meaning of death more directly than he has ever done previously.

ii

The relation between the different conceptions of life and death in Adonais has a significant connection with another aspect of Shelley's retrospection in the poem--that which concerns his earlier relations with Southey. An early draft of the Preface mentions Southey by name as the critic whose harsh criticism caused Keats's death, though whether Shelley truly believed Southey to be responsible may be in doubt.¹³ Cameron has argued at length that the poem is addressed quite specifically to Southey, first as an attack on his political volte-face and his religion, and second as a response to his accusations, made the previous year in the course of a particularly rancorous correspondence, about Shelley's treatment of his first wife, Harriet.¹⁴ While Cameron may overstate the importance of Southey as the poem's addressee, it is arguable that Shelley's earlier dealings with him have an even broader relevance to Adonais than Cameron describes.

There are two periods prior to their quarrel by correspondence in 1820 when Shelley's career intersected with Southey's. The first of these occurred in the winter of 1811 and 1812, when Shelley visited Southey in Keswick and had a number of conversations with him. The second followed the publication in 1817 of Shelley's Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote, which Southey reviewed, attacking its author on both political and personal grounds, and causing a resentment in Shelley which, as Cameron relates, became almost obsessive and led him to assume Southey to be the author of other anonymous hostile reviews.¹⁵ These two periods happen to be associated with the inception or composition of Shelley's two most Southeyan poems: Queen Mab, begun in 1812, and The Revolt of Islam, written in 1817. The verse form of the former, the narrative structure of the latter, and the use of supernatural machinery in both clearly owe much to the writer of Thalaba the Destroyer (1801) and The Curse of Kehama (1810). At the same time, however, Shelley's two poems are direct assaults on the political and religious views of which he regarded Southey to be one of the prime representatives. In attacking Southey more personally in Adonais, Shelley also looks back on the periods during which the earlier two poems were written to re-examine metaphysical ideas concerning death with which he had then been preoccupied and had in part defined in response to Southey.

As Queen Mab shows, one of the spurs to Shelley's philosophical speculations at the time it was written was a concern about the possibility of an afterlife. This is also a recurring topic in his letters to Hogg and Hitchener in 1811-12. Writing to Hogg on 3 January 1811, he postulates the existence of a universal mind of which each individual is a part, and without which 'the strongest argument in support of the existence of a future state instantly becomes annihilated' (Jones, I, 35). Yet even in 1811 Shelley is conscious that such a belief tends to dualism, for in the same letter he

writes, 'but can we suppose this reward will arise spontaneously... without a cause, a First Cause, a God...?' (Jones, I, 35). In a letter to Hitchener of 20 June 1811, he tries very hard to reconcile hope in an afterlife with a materialist philosophy:

one of the properties of animal soul is consciousness of identity--if this is destroyed, in consequence the soul whose essence this is, must perish; but as I conceive, & as is certainly capable of demonstration that nothing can be annihilated, but that everything appertaining to nature, consisting of constituent parts infinitely divisible, is in continual change, then do I suppose, & I think I have a right to draw this inference, that neither will soul perish; that in a future state it will lose all consciousness of having formerly lived elsewhere, will begin life anew, possibly under a shape of which we have no idea....I flatter myself that I have kept clear of supposition-- (Jones, I, 110)

Here Shelley attempts to combine a natural and cyclical idea of death, which involves the loss of conscious identity, with the 'supposition' (which he clearly suspects it must be) that the individual soul survives. This view of life as infinite animation may obviate the need for a first cause but in doing so it radically alters the nature of a possible afterlife, which can only be considered to exist within the natural world. Such questions were the subject of his talks with Southey at Keswick, according to Shelley's letter to Hitchener on 2 January 1812:

I tell him I believe that God is another signification for the Universe.--I then explain--'I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion that life is infinite...that every thing is animation...and in consequence being infinite we can never arrive at its termination. How, on this hypothesis are we to arrive at a first cause?

--Southey admits and believes this.--Can he be a Christian? Can God be three; Southey agrees in my idea of Deity, the mass of infinite intelligence. I, you, & he are constituent parts of this immeasurable whole. (Jones, I, 215).

Southey's account of their conversations is, needless to say, rather different. Of Shelley he writes, 'At present he has got to the Pantheistic stage of philosophy, and, in the course of a week, I expect he will be a Berkeleyan, for I have put him upon a course of Berkeley' (Jones, I, 219 n.). This remark, though patronising, is an accurate indication of the way in which Shelley is pulled between monistic and dualistic views of the world. He recognizes that the soul must perish without its 'consciousness of identity', but continues to hope that the human mind will be renewed like the rest of nature; and although he acknowledges that a future state requires a transcendent God, he tries to avoid such a belief through an idea of infinite animation.

As if in Adonais Shelley were resuming the debate he held with Southey ten years previously, he addresses the same issues concerning death and the relationship of mind and nature. In the poem he proposes various conceptions of postmortality which reflect the very same ambiguities that he shows in the early letters. First, the poet laments that, while nature renews itself cyclically, Adonais 'will awake no more' (90). Next we are told that 'He is made one with Nature' of which he has become a 'portion' contributing to its 'successions' of change (370-383). Finally, he is located in 'Heaven, /...the abode where the Eternal are' (493-95). These three conceptions of death also correspond, if in a slightly different order, to the three movements which Wasserman identifies in the poem, each of which proposes a hypothesis concerning nature and death which supersedes that of the immediately preceding movement. Thus, in his view, the first movement (sts. 1-17) implies a

'materialistic monism' in which 'everything is nature, man as well as other forms of organized matter, and that all nature moves in time to its own annihilation'; the second (sts. 18-37) distinguishes between physical nature, which renews itself cyclically, and the human mind, which dies once and for all; and the third (sts. 38-55), in which Shelley's scepticism evolves 'into a kind of poetics of assertion', postulates the eternal survival of spirit after death in a realm transcending nature. ¹⁶ Although these are useful distinctions which can be discerned in the poem, they are not as sharply defined as Wasserman suggests, and nor is there a clear linear development by which the poem shifts from one to another. From the very beginning, for example, a future existence is envisaged for Adonais. In the first stanza we read that his 'fate and fame shall be/ An echo and a light unto eternity!' (3-9), and, in stanza 7, that he 'bought, with price of purest breath,/ A grave among the eternal' (57-8). Conversely, in the final section of the poem there are traces of monism in the centre and circumference metaphor (418-20), and, as we have seen, in the idea that Adonais 'is made one with Nature'. Moreover, Wasserman's argument that the recurrent images in the poem, such as those involving flowers and stars, are successively reinterpreted to show how their values are revised, can easily be reversed to demonstrate that these motifs point up connections rather than differences. ¹⁷

Although there is no clear development in the poem's philosophical understanding of death, there is a decisive change in the speaker's attitude towards it. The catalyst of this change is the curse delivered in stanza 37 against the reviewer, assumed to be Southey, who was supposedly responsible for Keats's death. This curse leads us to a consideration of the second previous period of Shelley's dealings with Southey. In 1817 his preoccupation with the subject of death had gained a new impetus as a result of the suicides of Fanny Godwin and Harriet Shelley in October and November respectively of

the previous year. To judge by a number of short poems and fragments written about this time Shelley felt some responsibility for both of these deaths.¹⁸ Southey's attack on what he calls Shelley's 'act of moral suicide' in the review of 1817, and his more explicit accusation in the correspondence of 1820 that Shelley had caused his first wife's death, are therefore likely to have been particularly wounding.¹⁹ In Adonais, consequently, it is hardly coincidental that in charging Southey with the death of Keats he echoes Southey's charge against himself regarding the death of Harriet Shelley, and that the 'Remorse', 'Self-contempt' and 'Shame' (331-2) that Shelley wishes upon Southey are comparable to what Southey urged on him. These similarities are confirmed by the fact that it is not only the hostile critic, Southey, who is likened to Cain, but also the 'frail Form', Shelley's self-representation, whose 'branded and ensanguined brow, /...was like Cain's or Christ's' (305-6). The reference to Christ is a further reference to their quarrel, for it was partly with their rival views of Christianity that they belaboured each other in their letters of 1820. The curse also links the two poets: its injunction, 'Live! fear no heavier chastisement from me' (326), recalls the curse laid on Ladurlad in Southey's The Curse of Kehama (1810), as well as that pronounced on Ahasuerus, who in other poems by Shelley has affinities with both Cain and Christ.²⁰

The most important precedent for the curse, however, is in Prometheus Unbound, where, again, it draws attention to the close relationship between good and evil, the cursed and the cursing. In both poems it is the occasion for contrition as well as vituperation, and the poet's admission in Adonais that 'we keep/ With phantoms an unprofitable strife' (345-46) is comparable to Prometheus's retraction of his curse.²¹ Moreover, the self-knowledge which the two speakers gain through their curse is the means by which a backward-looking regret is eventually replaced by forward-looking desire, and a resistance to

change by a willing submission to it. Thus the poet in Adonais achieves a suddenly altered perception of death. Adonais 'is not dead', he realizes, 'tis Death is dead, not he' (342, 361). As a consequence of his recognition of the futility of his curse, death as a remote, inexorable otherness is in effect dethroned and seen instead as belonging to the realm of the living: 'We decay/ Like corpses in a charnel' (348-9). Yet, although this realization marks the point at which the poet overcomes his grief and fear of death, it represents no simple philosophical reversal. The same ambiguity as to whether death belongs inside or outside nature continues, and the poem ends with the poet seeking the very death whose defeat he just announced. Shelley, in fact, apparently remains in the same uncertainty regarding the nature of death as he was at the time of his acquaintance with Southey in 1811-12.

iii

The poem's view of death is crucial to the question of how we are to understand its expressions of transcendentalism. For, clearly, only if death is conceived as having a reality beyond nature can the notion of an eternal 'One' which is experienced in death have anything more than a figurative value. A prima facie reason for rejecting a dualist interpretation of the poem is that it flies in the face of all we know of his sceptical resistance to ideas of transcendence. As Cameron bluntly says of the famous stanza 52, 'Shelley could not have been referring to the Platonic "One" or to a supernatural "Heaven" or "eternity", because he had no belief in any of them'.²² Shelley's own remark in a letter to Horace Smith that 'I am glad you like 'Adonais', and, particularly that you do not find it metaphysical, which I was afraid it was', would seem to confirm Cameron's opinion, while recognizing that the poem might be open to misunderstanding.²³ He makes the same point in writing to John and Maria Gisborne during the course of

composition: 'very few persons...will...understand it.--It is a highly wrought piece of art'.²⁴ This is an apt description of the poem, which is indeed remarkable for the control and complexity with which it manipulates its models, imagery and ideas. Moreover, Shelley appears to be emphasizing that, far from being an expression of the inadequacy of language to reflect 'Heaven's light' (461), the poem represents an increased commitment to his art.

Yet there are objections to an insistence on the total metaphoricity of all the poem's expressions of transcendence. What above all makes such a reading problematic is the manner in which a Platonic or Christian dualism is closely linked--to the point of being identified--with an irreducible opposition in the poem between life and death. This distinction critics like Tetreault and Hogle seek to elide by arguing that there is no otherness beyond language and life, though they do so at the cost of a certain inconsistency. Thus, while arguing that the poem seeks no reality beyond the play of its own signifiers, Tetreault nevertheless finds it fundamentally flawed by a 'total blindness to the autonomy of literary language' and an assumption that the potential of poetry depends on the presence of the poet.²⁵ Hogle, who believes Shelley's 'One' is not the centred concept it seems but rather metaphorical transference, appears to acknowledge that the idea of death is both necessary to transference and an example of it when he says, 'an image is a death, the disappearance of its referent, quite as much as death is always an image'.²⁶ However, by privileging the transferential image in his interpretation of the poem he disregards this equivalence and consequently fails to recognize that death is more than metaphor just as transference involves more than loss. For the post-structuralist critic, the demise of the authorial poet may hold no terrors. If at the end of Adonais Shelley overcomes his own fears, the reasons for his reassurance are somewhat different, for death and the poet remain for

him realities beyond the text. This is not, however, to say that he relies on the notion of a self-subsisting originary presence. Rather, we find that he conceives of life and death, poem and poet as linked together in a dynamic and complex mutual dependence.

One manifestation of this duality is that the poem is conceived as an intricate blend of reality and fiction. In this respect Shelley is to a certain extent only following a pastoral elegiac tradition of using certain stylized conventions not only to lament the death of an actual person but to mask a personal utterance of the poet. But he exploits this characteristic of the genre in such a way as both to emphasize and confuse the differences between the real and the fictive. He links the poem firmly to external time and place with references not only to the circumstances of Keats's death, but to his own griefs and disappointments, to his dispute with Southey, and to the living people who are portrayed in the poem as mourners, and he uses the Preface to elaborate further on the occasion of the poem's composition. Consequently, when the poem begins 'I weep for Adonais--he is dead', which is a close transliteration of the first line of Bion's 'Lament for Adonis', an immediate tension is felt between the fictive and the real identities of mourner and mourned. This ambiguity between the extra-textual and the textual is maintained throughout the poem, and relates directly to the uncertain metaphoricity of its transcendental language. Thus the allusion in stanza 51 to the fresh graves of Keats and Shelley's son William in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome involves the poem in a complex interplay between these real mortalities outside the poem and the immortality of Adonais within it, and between the sentiments of the actual Shelley and those of his poem's speaker.

While introducing such personal references Shelley also, as various critics have noted, draws attention to the artifice and conventionality of its own metaphors.²⁷ The disjunction of which Samuel Johnson complains, in writing

about 'Lycidas', between the standard formulas of elegy and the spontaneous expression of grief is used by Shelley to emphasize the failure of poetry to bring the dead back to life or to recover a lost unity of meaning.²⁸ His style--'the high, marmoreal style of a public monument', as Richard Holmes calls it²⁹ --is conspicuously poetic, and rife with echoes of others' poetry as well as his own. The 'Dreams' and 'Splendours', respectively recalling Keats and Dante, and other elaborate personifications of poetry fail to revive Adonais, and fade away without him, while Urania, Milton's muse, can produce in his dead body only a fleeting illusion of life.³⁰ The failure of Echo to reverberate 'amid the voiceless mountains' (127) recalls Prometheus Unbound Act I, where the elements refuse to repeat the Titan's curse, but in this context it is also a rather worn and self-conscious poeticism from the pastoral elegiac tradition, as also are nature's lament for the dead poet, and the contrast of its seasonal renewal with his irreversible death.

An important aspect of all these well-used images, however, is that, as Hogle recognizes, they themselves have suffered a death, and thus become the cold memorials of a life as much as the mourning survivors of a death. In stanza 39 the poet's realization that this is so, that it is not Adonais but the living who experience death, causes him to turn from a lamentation to a celebration of death. Yet death is never wholly subsumed by life in the poem. Instead, leaving Greek pastoral conventions behind, the poem proceeds to explore a number of different formulations of immortality and of the relationship between life and death. In doing so it makes use of an intrinsic ambiguity in the term death, which can imply both the experience or process of dying and the state of being dead or the realm which the dead inhabit. These two quite different aspects of death, one of which is known to the living and belongs within nature while the other does not, are from now on in the poem variously conceived as converging, separating and becoming interchangeable.

Something of the complexity of the poem's view of death and afterlife is suggested by the name Adonais, which, as Wasserman and Hogle have shown, is a formation from different Greek and possibly Hebrew words.³¹ Adonis, whose name is the main root of Shelley's title, is associated with a purely natural view of death, whether he is considered as the subject of Bion's lament, or whether his myth is seen (as it was by Erasmus Darwin and various contemporary mythographers)³² as a symbol of nature's powers of self-regeneration. To explain the additional 'a' in the name, Wasserman suggests that Shelley is referring to the term 'Adonai', which is an alternative to Adonis, but carries, he argues, connotations of lordship and godhead appropriate to the immortalization of the deceased poet. Hogle believes that Shelley is also thinking of the 'Adonias', Greek mourning ceremonies or festivals devoted to the slain Adonis, a reference which he thinks accords with the poem's view of death as a metaphorical memorialization rather than an objective reality. These suggested sources and their meanings for Shelley are somewhat speculative, but, taken together, they do indicate some important ways in which he conceives of death in Adonais. Death has both a natural and a supernatural aspect, is both a process and a state. Moreover, in each of these senses death can serve as a metaphor for the other, resulting in a constant uncertainty as to which is the image and which the reality.

iv

Some of the tensions between concepts of life and death are clearly revealed in stanza 47. Here the poet sets out to argue that, because life and death are one, Adonais must be considered as inhabiting the same realm as the living, yet his words tend to the contrary effect:

Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth
 Fond wretch! and know thyself and him aright.
 Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth;
 As from a centre, dart thy spirit's light
 Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
 Satiates the void circumference: then shrink
 Even to a point within our day and night;
 And keep thy heart light lest it make thee sink
 When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink. (415-23)

The poet tells the mourner that he can know himself and the dead Adonais in the same way, for both the living and the dead are included within the circumference of knowledge which is life. In contrast with the centre, which, as in the Ptolemaic scheme, is here identified with the Earth, the circumference is dark (needing to be lit by 'thy spirit's light'), 'beyond all worlds' and 'void', and thus includes death in its embrace. Yet the light of life cannot entirely banish the darkness, for although it may fill the void, the darkness of death is still present within the alternation of 'day and night', a phrase suggestive of the cycles of life and death within time. Thus the centre-circumference image of unity is, as ever, riven with duality. But not only is it divided within, but the circle is not all-embracing either: once the 'void circumference' is satiated with light, death it would seem still lies beyond its ambit, beyond the 'brink' to which the 'kindled hope' of unity inevitably leads. This stanza echoes a stanza from Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (III, xiv), which ends with the lines,

this clay will sink
 [The spirit's] spark immortal, envying it the light
 To which it mounts as if to break the link
 That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink. (123-6)

At first Shelley seems to revise Byron's dualism, and yet the final effect of his stanza is to confirm it.

A further insight into stanza 47 and the relationship of life and death in the poem is offered by 'On Life'. Here Shelley explains that the reason he abandoned his early materialism was that he realized it was incompatible with a hope in a future life:

I was discontented with such a view of things as it afforded; man is a being of high aspirations 'looking both before and after,' whose 'thoughts that wander through eternity,' disclaim alliance with transience and decay, incapable of imagining to himself annihilation, existing but in the future and in the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution (change and extinction). This is the character of all life and being.--Each is at once the centre and the circumference; the point to which all things are referred, and the line in which all things are contained.--Such contemplations as these materialism and the popular philosophy of mind and matter, alike forbid; they are consistent only with the intellectual system. (R&P, p. 476)

Shelley's claim that the 'intellectual system' is 'consistent' with a desire for immortality is a startling one--and for two reasons. First, Sir William Drummond's Academical Questions, from which this system derives, can hardly be said to 'conduct inevitably' (R&P, p. 477) to such a conclusion, as Shelley asserts, even though it does not absolutely 'deny the existence of divine and intelligible ideas'.³³ Secondly, Shelley's suggestion that the hope of immortality might have a philosophical basis is quite exceptional in his mature prose. It is unfortunate, and perhaps detracts from the high claims he makes for his new philosophy, that in the rest of the essay he makes little attempt to explain how the 'intellectual system' satisfies the 'high aspirations' that he speaks of. Nevertheless, from what the essay does say it

is possible to make some deductions about the way Shelley envisaged his concept of life to embrace even death.

Implicit in the essay are three distinct ways of conceiving 'life'. First, it is synonymous with nature, the world outside mind, such as Shelley imagines an artist creating 'in words or upon canvas'; second, it is the subjective unity of nature and mind, experienced in 'the state called reverie'; and third, it is a projection of that unity, or the 'one mind' of which individual minds are only 'modifications' or 'portions' (R&P, p. 474-78). These distinctions correspond closely to the different views of the relationship between nature and mind and the associated conceptions of life and death to be found in Adonais. These, as we have seen, are, first, a mind-nature dualism in which nature perpetually renews itself while mind does not; second, a unity of nature and mind, in which life and death converge, and Adonais is 'made one with Nature'; and third, a transcendental projection of this immortal unity beyond the realm of nature. What is revealed by a comparison of these different metaphysical positions in Adonais with the essay's corresponding conceptions of life is that the latter can equally be regarded as definitions of death. 'On Life' does therefore implicitly include death within its definition of life, and so offer some security against 'nothingness and dissolution'. Similarly, when the Earth in Prometheus Unbound says, 'Death is the veil which those who live call life' (III, iii, 113), it remains wholly ambiguous in which of their various senses the words life and death are used, but again the two are identified.

The cardinal concept in both 'On Life' and Adonais is that of unity, which both represent as a circle with mind as its centre and nature as its circumference. The two works also imply that this circle embraces both life and death as well. However, they both show a recognition that this notion of unity is ultimately beyond knowledge and expression. 'It is well', Shelley

writes in 'On Life', 'that we are...shielded by the familiarity of what is at once so certain and so unfathomable from an astonishment which would otherwise absorb and overawe the functions of that which is [its] object' (R&P, p. 475). Unconsciousness, even death, he seems to be saying, would be the paradoxical accompaniment of a full apprehension of the unity of life. Thus the 'intellectual philosophy' leads to 'that verge where words abandon us and...we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of--how little we know' (R&P, p. 478). Similarly, in stanza 47 of Adonais, he speaks of the 'brink' to which one is lured when 'hope has kindled hope' (423)--by which we can interpret him to mean that any hope of conceiving an all-inclusive unity is ultimately defeated by the unknowable otherness of death.

The idea of unity is therefore inherently unstable, and without ever being fully comprehended, serves as a transition between a dualism of subject and object and an ontological dualism of an eternal oneness and a temporal many. In Adonais the unitive awareness is not subjectively conveyed as a visionary experience as it is, for example, in the description of the dream of the 'veiled maid' in Alastor, or in the poet's apprehension of 'Power' in 'Mont Blanc''s Ravine of Arve. Instead, like 'On Life', the poem describes it objectively, and thus emphasizes its character as incomplete and transitional rather than culminatory and epiphanic. Hence the description of Adonais's oneness with nature in stanzas 42 and 43, like the centre and circumference image in stanza 47, is as suggestive of duality as it is of unity:

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move

Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there,
All new successions to the forms they wear;
Torturing th'unwilling dross that checks its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
And bursting in its beauty and its might
From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light. (370-387)

As in Queen Mab, 'Power' and 'Spirit' hover between personified abstraction and pantheistic identity with nature, though 'Power' is located primarily 'beneath' and 'above' the natural world, recalling the remote power of 'Mont Blanc', whereas the 'Spirit', like the immanent 'Spirit of Beauty' in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', operates dynamically 'through' nature. The two stanzas are primarily an expression of the interaction between these notions of the here and the beyond, and between various other contraries with which they correspond--above all between the rival conceptions of death as metaphor and as reality, as a living process and as a hidden but destructive power. The 'one Spirit's plastic stress' is therefore a revision of Coleridge's 'Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze' in 'The Eolian Harp' (written in 1795): while Shelley does not wholly dispense with the transcendental oneness that this phrase represents, he sets it in dialectical opposition to the 'organic harps...of animated nature' (44-45) in Coleridge's poem and to the 'trees and beasts and men' (387) in his own. The 'Spirit' may torture 'th'unwilling dross.../To its own likeness', but only through this likeness does it acquire 'its beauty and its might' (381-86). And between the dead poet and the living

world there is a similar interdependence, for Adonais 'is a portion of the loveliness/ Which once he made more lovely'. We are reminded here of Keats's 'Ode' (1820), which begins and ends with the refrain,

Bards of Passion and of Mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Have ye souls in heaven too,
Double lived in regions new?

Like Adonais, 'the souls ye left behind you/ Teach us here the way to find you' (25-26) through nature's 'voices thund'rous' (8) and the nightingale's song. Shelley, however, more anxious than Keats to close the gap between life and death, past reality and present image, finds a more intricate connection between the departed poet and his 'fading melodies'.

It is in the light of this interaction between the poem's various conceptualizations of life-in-death and death-in-life that we should see the poet's desire for death in the final stanzas. In stanza 47 the focus of attention shifts away from Adonais to the mourner, assumed at first to be the reader, but turning out in stanza 51 to be mainly the poet himself. It is a shift, in other words, from objectivity to subjectivity, a shrinking 'to a point within our day and night', which leads to Rome, to the Protestant Cemetery, and finally to the graves of Keats and William Shelley. In each of these locations new life springs out of death--in the vegetation clothing the wrecks of Rome, the flowers in the graveyard, and the 'grey walls' mouldering like 'slow fire upon a hoary brand' (442-43); and in contemplating the graves the poet begins to wish for his own death and resurrection: 'What Adonais is, why fear we to become?' (459). It might seem inconsistent that he should want to join Adonais in death, having just declared that 'Death is dead' and argued

so forcibly that the exemplary dead survive among the living. But from a subjective point of view the logic of his argument does require that he, like nature, poetry and Adonais, should die in order to live, and die by submitting to the oneness that lies always beyond the circles and cycles of consciousness. Stanza 52, which some have found incongruous on account of its Platonic and Christian terminology,³⁴ is in fact perfectly accordant with this developing train of thought:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.--Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all has fled!--Rome's azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak. (460-8)

There are two manifestations of death in this stanza, one operating within life--'the many change and pass', 'Earth's shadows fly', the other destroying life, trampling it to fragments; and the same two are found in the line 'No more let Life divide what Death can join together' (477), where what 'Death' unites is life and death, in the same way that it unites the 'two worlds of life and death' in Prometheus Unbound Act 1. One thread of the poem's logic therefore demands that it now dismiss its own weak metaphors, along with all nature and art, as inadequate expressions of that oneness beyond the grave and beyond the text whose loss has been the subject of mourning from the poem's beginning. The poet accordingly urges himself on to share the fate of those whose graves he has mentioned: 'Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my

Heart?' (469). This line recalls but also reverses the import of Keats's 'Why linger at the yawning tomb so long?' in Isabella, and thus rejects the narrator's preference in this poem for the anodyne 'simple plaining of a minstrel's song' to the 'wormy circumstance' of death (385-88)—for, in other words, the metaphors of poetry to the reality beyond it.

Yet Shelley's dying into life at the end of Adonais is a more complex process than this apparent rejection of the world of appearances implies. For while in one sense the death and rebirth he invokes await him beyond language and life, beaconing from afar like the soul of Adonais, in another they are experienced metaphorically within the text. 'Love', he says, 'now beams on me,/ Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality', resulting in his inspiration by the 'breath whose might I have invoked in song' (481-87). In the last four stanzas these alternative ideas of life-in-death and death-in-life are held in dialectical equipoise. Stanza 52 in various ways disrupts its overt dualism and its identification of death with oneness and of life with the many. The 'dome' of life, though 'many-coloured', is also a kind of unity, which death fragments, and it 'Stains' the otherwise invisible 'white radiance of Eternity', just as 'Rome's azure sky,/ Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words...transfuse' a glory even though they cannot fittingly speak it. The stanza thus implicitly questions the idea of death as a unified origin and end. At the same time, the poet repeatedly addresses himself, in this stanza and the next, in the second person, as if he himself were divided between selves which pull in different directions. Indeed, the tension between the subject-self seeking unity and the object-self resisting it is directly related to the parallel polarities of the many and the one, and of life and death. The outer world 'Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither' (472-4), tending at once towards unity and separation, towards annihilation and alienation of the self. In stanza 54 the 'Light' 'Beauty', 'Benediction' and

'Love' which shine on the world are, like the 'Power' and 'Spirit' earlier, both within and without, lighting and lit by, the physical universe. The 'shore' the poet leaves behind in the final stanza may, as Leighton suggests, represent 'both his life and his poem, both of which must be ended if he is to reach "Eternity"',³⁵ but he also relies on the 'breath', the 'bark', and the 'tempest' (487-90)--all emblems of poetry and life--to take him there. Thus, if there is a strain of morbid self-destructiveness at the end of Adonais, it is turned to creative hope, and the poem successfully marries 'exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change'.³⁶

Shortly after its completion Shelley writes of Adonais that it is 'perhaps the least imperfect of my compositions'.³⁷ One might speculate about which specific imperfections of his earlier poems he has in mind, but it is possible that he refers to a failure of integrity and coherence, particularly in the longer poems of idealist optimism such as The Revolt of Islam and Prometheus Unbound. Despite the contradictory twists and turns of its thought, and its sudden departure from its pastoral elegiac models after the utterance of the curse, Adonais achieves an uncharacteristic compositional unity. Yet this unity is not the expression of closure, of a claim to unity of meaning. On the contrary, unlike the Revolt and Prometheus, which do attempt to embody as well as to predict the achievement of perfection in the reunion of their protagonists, Shelley's elegy expressly defers the experience of oneness to a point beyond the end of the poem and the end of life. On the other hand, its poetic synthesis is not founded on a Platonic otherworldliness either, as Edwin B. Silverman has thought.³⁸ Rather, like Asia in the final scene of Prometheus Unbound Act 2, Shelley in Adonais achieves a perfect balance between future hope and present realization, and between power, which is remote, and spirit, which is its manifestation as continual process in the present. Through the mutual denial and affirmation of these contraries the

poem bursts beyond the closure that each implies. Its final abandonment of all assertions about death make it the supreme expression of Shelley's sceptical idealism, and also his most effective poetic defence of the 'poetry of life'.³⁹

Notes

1. 16 October 1811, Jones, I, 150.
2. See esp. 'On a Future State', dated September to December 1818 by Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator, p. 283.
3. 'Astrophel', 67; 'Lycidas', 164; Adonais, 343.
4. 'Adonais in Context', in Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference, ed. Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp. 165-81 (p. 166).
5. The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley, pp. 159-79 (p. 159).
6. Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 462-502.
7. Shelley and the Sublime, pp. 125-149.
8. John W. Wright, Shelley's Myth of Metaphor, pp. 62-73; Tetreault, The Poetry of Life, pp. 221-34; Hogle, Shelley's Process, pp. 294-319; Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 422-44; Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator, pp. 250-58.
9. Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 422-44.
10. Abbey, p. 112.
11. Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (London, Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 341.

12. Shelley repeatedly speaks of Hyperion with praise in his letters; see Jones, II, 239, 244, 252, 262, 284, 290. The importance to Adonais of this poem, and its theme of growth through submission to change, is discussed by Curran, '"Adonais" in Context', in Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference, ed. Everest, pp. 165-81; and Hogle, Shelley's Process, pp. 314-15.

13. The relevant parts of the discarded draft of the Preface occur in the Bodleian Notebook e.20, fols. 5r, 8r and 9r. James A.W. Heffernan suggests that Shelley fabricates the link between Southey's criticism and Keats's death so that he can play the role of Keats's champion in Adonais, 'Adonais: Shelley's Consumption of Keats', SiR, 23 (1984), 295-315.

14. Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 422-44. For the 1820 letters between Shelley and Southey, see Jones, II, 203-5, 230-5.

15. Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 428-31. Southey's review appeared in the Quarterly Review, XVI (January 1817), 538-41.

16. Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 465, 471, 474-5.

17. Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 477-95.

18. See 'Her voice did quiver as we parted', 'To [] Nov. 5 1815, Nov. 5 1817', 'They die--the dead return not', and 'Maiden/ Thy delightful eyne'. See M&E, pp. 550-57 and 562, for a discussion of the occasion and precise dating of these poems.

19. Cameron quotes Southey's review, Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 428. For Southey's remarks about Shelley's treatment of Harriet Shelley, see Jones, II, 232 n.

20. See The Curse of Kehama, II, xiv, 144-69. Ahasuerus appears in 'The Wandering Jew; or the Victim of the Eternal Avenger' (composed 1809-10); Queen Mab, VII, 68-275; Alastor, 675-681; 'The Assassins', chs. III-IV, I&P, VI, 165-71; and Hellas, 738-861.

21. Although, as Woodman writes, the poet does not repent in quite the same

way as Prometheus, there is nevertheless a closer similarity between the functions of the two curses than Woodman recognizes, The Apocalyptic Vision, p. 172.

22. Shelley: The Golden Years, p. 442.
23. 14 September 1821, Jones, II, 349.
24. 5 June 1821, Jones, II, 294.
25. The Poetry of Life, pp. 229-30.
26. Shelley's Process, p. 306.
27. See Leighton, pp. 125-49; Cronin, pp. 182-3; Tetreault, The Poetry of Life, p. 225.
28. 'Milton', in Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), I, 163.
29. Shelley: The Pursuit (1974; London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 657.
30. See Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale', st. 7; Dante, Paradiso, XXIII, 82; Milton, Paradise Lost, VII, 1-39.
31. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 464-5; Hogle, Shelley's Process, p. 302.
32. See Darwin, The Temple of Nature, II, 47-8, and Note; and The Botanic Garden, II, 571-4, and Note. Wasserman considers the interest of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mythographers in the myth of Adonis, Shelley: A Critical Reading, p. 464.
33. Drummond, p. xiv. Pulos, p. 40, discusses this positive aspect of Drummond's scepticism.
34. The apparent incongruity of this stanza is discussed by Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading, pp. 485-8, and Cronin, pp. 196-7.

35. Leighton, p. 149.
36. The Defence of Poetry, R&P, p. 505.
37. Letter to Charles Ollier, 11 June 1821, Jones, II, 299.
38. Poetic Synthesis in Shelley's Adonais (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 46-64, 106-11.
39. The Defence of Poetry, R&P, p. 502.

The Triumph of Life: 'Actors or Spectators'

Adonais and The Triumph of Life have often been thought to express almost opposite metaphysical attitudes. More than any other of his poems, Adonais has been adduced to support a view of Shelley as a transcendental dualist, seeking an eternal oneness beyond the world of fleeting appearances. The Triumph of Life, on the other hand, is usually regarded as the severest expression of his scepticism regarding the existence of any reality beyond the world's 'false and fragile glass' (247). Thus we find that while the dualist readings of Shelley by Wilson and Wasserman have little to say about the Triumph, it is this poem in particular that has attracted the attentions of deconstructionists such as Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller.¹ Many other critics to a greater or lesser degree fall in with both these approaches by regarding the Triumph as a sceptical repudiation of the idealism of Adonais.² It is my intention to show that this view exaggerates the philosophical divergence between the two poems, and that, even though markedly different in mood, they share a common substructure of thought. Consequently it will be found that, just as the elegy's apparent dualism has been often misread, Shelley's final unfinished poem is less unreservedly pessimistic than has sometimes been thought. I begin by looking at the two poems in the light of remarks about the latter made by De Man, the chief exponent of the view of the poem as a palinode, for within his analysis he identifies the particular issue I mean to address.

The idealist and sceptical interpretations of Shelley that Adonais and The Triumph of Life have respectively called forth have a certain similarity in that both find in his poetry a degree of pessimism--admittedly of a very different kind in each case--about the possible attainment in life or through language of any desired good. De Man's argument that the Triumph allegorizes the way in which language posits meaning only to erase it is in its end result not unlike the view that finds a Platonist disparagement of poetic fictions in Adonais. The philosophical underpinnings of the two views are to all appearances directly contrary, one denying the possibility of hermeneutical completion, the other depending on it. Even here, however, the difference may not be all it seems. De Man has characterized the need for such completion in terms of a tendency to dispose of writers' dead bodies by burying them 'in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves.'³ This almost literally describes the way Adonais has been turned into an elegy for Shelley himself--for example, by Mary Shelley in her Notes to her 1839 edition of the poems--and has been used as his epitaph on monumental statuary.⁴ The poem particularly lends itself to such treatment, not only because its last stanza is strangely prophetic of Shelley's own death, but because it has proved itself susceptible of the kind of closed reading that is more obviously resisted by his other work. But de Man refers specifically to the way in which The Triumph of Life, which is incomplete even in a formal sense, has as it were been rendered whole by the interpretations of its readers. For him the death of Shelley, in cutting the poem short, acquires significance as an ultimate disfiguring event which supersedes yet confirms the succession of symbolic disfigurations within the poem. Yet it might be questioned whether his treatment of Shelley's death really differs from Mary Shelley's in her view of Adonais. He admits that every reading is a 'monumentalization', but

claims it is not necessarily 'naive or evasive', or a 'repression of self-threatening knowledge'.⁵ His own is saved, he believes, by a knowledge--which he argues is also Shelley's in the Triumph--of the endless process of erasure and repetition that reading involves. He writes:

No degree of knowledge can ever stop this madness, for it is the madness of words. What would be naive is to believe that this strategy, which is not our strategy as subjects, since we are its product rather than its agent, can be a source of value and has to be celebrated or denounced accordingly.⁶

Here de Man sounds like the narrator in the Triumph, standing aloof from the procession of life, finding all 'amiss' (179), and declining to 'worship' (246) or find value in any of the figures that pass before him. But there is a contradiction in this attitude, for both assume an artificially detached position from which to observe that humankind is blindly involved in a meaningless process over which it has no power of control or judgement. This is de Man's 'self-threatening knowledge', which Shelley's Rousseau seems to share, when he tells us that the sages chained to the car of life had not learned 'to know themselves' (212). Yet if the subject-self rather than the object-self is considered, then it can also be argued that such knowledge, far from threatening the self, actually preserves it intact from the disfiguration that assails everything the self perceives. Ultimately, for all the subtlety of his analysis, de Man buries Shelley in the Triumph as surely as Mary Shelley buries him in Adonais; and both thereby, in the manner of Frankenstein, restore to life and wholeness the poet and his work. But while the contradiction of de Man is shared by Shelley's narrator and Rousseau, in the poem, I shall argue, it is consciously confronted and becomes an essential

element within its structure and meaning.

Unlike de Man, most readers are prepared to speculate on how the truncated poem might have continued. The fragment certainly ends tantalizingly. The narrator asks, "'Then, what is Life?'" (544), and Rousseau begins to reply as the car of life rolls away from them. It appears that the poem at this point is about to turn in a new direction. The narrator's question, however, occurs somewhat unexpectedly, for while watching the triumphal procession earlier he has asked, "'And what is this?/ Whose shape is that within the car? & why?'" (177-8), and has received from Rousseau the answer (apparently to all three questions), "'Life'" (180). It is by no means obvious what further information or what alternative view of life he could now be given. Some critics have conjectured that the poem would have ended optimistically.⁷ For example, Abrams considers that the completed Triumph would probably have finally won hope from despair in the manner of some of Shelley's earlier long poems and Dante's Divina Commedia.⁸ In this case the fluid term 'Life' would presumably have been redefined, in accordance with 'On Life', as the unity of subject and object, mind and nature. But this notion of unity, always implicitly questioned by Shelley even when outwardly proclaimed, is what the Triumph unflinchingly reveals as a delusion. Moreover, although the poem offers a tribute to Dante, it also quite consciously revises his account of a heavenward ascent towards the source of love.

However, as I shall argue, we are not forced to make a choice between a transcendental oneness and a decentring, disfiguring process, between the 'native noon' of the 'sacred few' (131, 128) and the car of life. In this respect the Triumph shows a continuity with Shelley's earlier poems which is at least as important as its correction of them. Indeed, the aspect of the poem which I propose to consider in the remainder of this chapter finds a brief but striking anticipation in Adonais, the poem of which the Triumph is

so often thought to represent a reversal. Here the elegist, in despair at the fact of mortality, asks, 'Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene/ The actors or spectators?' (184-5). Questions of whence and why remain as unanswered in this poem as in the later one, but the reference to actors and spectators hints at the means to a resolution of the poet's grief, for, as suggested in the previous chapter, it is the complex interplay of subjective and objective experience that eventually forms the basis of the poem's concluding optimism. In the Triumph, when the dreamer asks similar questions Rousseau urges him that to gain answers he should 'from spectator turn/ Actor or victim' (305-6). Here Shelley's Rousseau is echoing the real Rousseau, in whose Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse St Preux writes, 'I find it is a folly to think to study mankind in the quality of a simple spectator....We can have the opportunity of seeing others act, in proportion as we act with them', and Wolmar similarly says, 'I made myself an actor, to qualify myself for a spectator'.⁹ In his discussion of the Triumph, Miller has described how the reader too is a spectator who must turn actor, since 'to understand the work at all it is necessary to enter into it, to abandon oneself to the itinerary traced out by the text'.¹⁰ It is possible that if the poem had been finished the dreamer would have followed the advice he is given by becoming an actor in his own dream, thus learning, as Rousseau says, 'what thou wouldst be taught' (307). But as Miller adds, the reader who becomes an actor also becomes a victim of the poem, which 'means experiencing the impossibility of ever unravelling all its threads.'¹¹ Similarly, what the dreamer who had turned actor in the completed poem might possibly have gained is not any objective knowledge but rather a kind of unknowing, or a venturing upon the unknown, as the voyage into death is for the poet of Adonais. Whether this is the way the poem would actually have developed, however, is less important than the fact that the potentiality for it is there in the fragment that we have, not only

in the words of Rousseau to the narrator, but in a latent dialectical tension throughout between acting and spectating--a tension in which the spectator's view apparently prevails but only by a repeated renewal of the actor's involvement.

De Man insists that we are the 'product' not the 'agent' of language, and he believes that The Triumph of Life bears him out. However, there is an important sense in which by making this point he contradicts it, and so saves himself from the powerlessness he claims. He seems almost to acknowledge this problem, on Shelley's account if not on his own, when he says that 'The poem is sheltered from the performance of disfiguration by the power of its negative knowledge'.¹² But in thus enforcing a strict separation between the concepts of 'product' and 'agent', de Man's reading of the poem becomes as closed and as self-protective as those it is intended to correct. For Shelley there is in fact a constant interplay between products and agents, actors and spectators, and upon this interrelation poem and self are perpetually and hazardously 'Borne onward' (460). The death of the poet and the truncation of his poem are hardly necessary to bring home their vulnerability to the process they describe.

ii

Like the prefaces and opening sections of a number of Shelley's poems, the forty-line proem to The Triumph of Life provides an important elucidatory comment on the ensuing narrative. Moreover, like other poetic introductions (for example, the invocation in Alastor, and the Dedication and first canto of The Revolt of Islam), it does so by placing the poet or narrator both inside and outside his own poem, thus spanning the divide between reality and fiction. In the Triumph this ambiguous vantage-point of the narrator is clearly a reflection of the concern within the poem with the interrelation

between objective and subjective ways of seeing. One of the ways in which the intricacies of this interrelationship are most clearly revealed is in the expression of attitudes towards the natural world. In the proem the narrator introduces the theme entirely in these terms.

The scene which he depicts itself hovers between the real and the imagined. As Melian Stawell has observed, it resembles the coastline near Spezia where the poem was written, and it might be conjectured that the narrator's sense of alienation from the natural harmony he describes reflects Shelley's own feelings in Lerici, from where he writes to Byron on the 3rd May 1822: 'Nature here is as vivid and joyous as we are dismal'.¹³ But the landscape of the poem has a rich literary origin as well as an actual one. It recalls first of all Petrarch's Trionfi, the work on which Shelley's Triumph is most obviously modelled, and which begins with a description of a spring scene in a valley where the poet lies down to dream. The 'old chestnut' (25) sounds like an Italian version of the 'dark sycamore' under which Wordsworth reclines in Tintern Abbey (10), and of the 'lofty elms' whose cool the narrator seeks at the beginning of The Excursion (I, 29), and of countless other trees lending shade to bucolic poets.¹⁴ The narrator's description (26-8) of his situation on a westward facing slope overlooking the sea is an adaptation of two lines from Goethe's Faust: 'The day ahead of me, night left behind,/ The waves below, and overhead the sky' (1087-8).¹⁵ We are also reminded of Rousseau's accounts of his enjoyment of the dawn in his Confessions, particularly of one where he describes his custom at Les Charmettes of rising early in order to offer praise to the Creator of nature.¹⁶ What links all these literary references together is that they have, or in Shelley's hands they acquire, a connection with memory and forgetting, whose intertwinings form one of the poem's major themes. Petrarch's grief and dream are caused by the season 'stirring the memory of that day/ Whereon my love and suffering began' ('The

Triumph of Love', 2-3); 'Tintern Abbey' and the first book of The Excursion are both about memories of a lost past; the lines from Faust, as Robinson has noted, are adapted to make the narrator look west towards the retreating night with its 'thoughts which must remain untold' (21), not east towards the coming day; and memory and its failings are a recurrent concern of Rousseau as he casts his mind back in writing The Confessions.¹⁷ For both Wordsworth and Shelley memory involves detachment and hence a kind of oblivion: as a form of the objectifying self-consciousness, it not only stands in the way of an immediate enjoyment of the present scene but is unable to resurrect such enjoyment from the past. Consequently, in much the same way that Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey' and the 'Immortality' ode admits he cannot recover his boyhood delight in nature, Shelley's night thoughts 'must remain untold'.

The narrator's feelings of remoteness from his surroundings are due not only to his lack of sympathy for nature's worship of the sun but to the 'strange trance' which drops a transparent shade like 'a veil of light' (29, 32) over the scene. This veil causes him a sensation of 'déjà vu', an experience which itself can perhaps be explained as an interaction of short-term remembering and forgetting. An explanation of this kind is to be found in Shelley's fragment entitled 'Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind', where he speaks of the stream of thought as a 'passage from sensation to reflection'. Here 'reflection' is in effect the memory of a forgotten 'sensation', but as I have suggested previously, what makes the passage 'so dizzying and so tumultuous' is that it is really more like an oscillation. We can thus begin to see a resemblance between the narrator's 'strange trance' in the Triumph and the 'trance sublime and strange' of the poet in 'Mont Blanc', where, musing on his 'own separate fantasy', he holds an 'unremitting interchange' with 'the clear universe of things' (35-40). An effect of this 'interchange' is that, as it 'renders' 'reflection' and 'receives' 'sensation', the feelings

of both immediacy and separateness are intensified. Such would also appear to be the effect of the narrator's trance in the Triumph,

for the shade it spread

Was so transparent that the scene came through
As clear as when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills they glimmer. (30-3)

The 'veil' thus distances and clarifies, reminding us of the concealing and revealing effect of the veil of poetry as described in the Defence (R&P, p. 505).

The rapid interchange of sensation and reflection during intense thought, however, is always in danger of being brought to a halt by one particular reflection--a consciousness, such as occurs in both 'Mont Blanc' and the Defence, that the source of thought and the 'original conception' of poetry are forever inaccessible. Reflection always in the end as it were lies uppermost once it recognizes its inability to recover original sensation. It is a reflection of this nature that occupies Wordsworth in the 'Immortality' ode and Coleridge in the 'Dejection' ode (1802), and it is the dominant perspective in The Triumph of Life. Shelley's poem, moreover, follows Wordsworth and Coleridge in expressing the sense of what has been lost as a former responsiveness to nature. Just as Coleridge can only 'see, not feel' the beauty of the external world ('Dejection', 38), so in the Triumph nature is remembered as having been felt by all the senses, not only sight. Hence the narrator says:

I knew

That I had felt the freshness of that dawn,
Bathed in the same cold dew my brow and hair
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn

Under the self same bough, and heard as there
The birds, the fountains and the Ocean hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air. (33-9)

The recollection of nature's music is a particular feature of such nostalgia, whereas light, as in the 'veil of light', becomes a pervasive symbol of the objective vision which always falls between the viewer and his memory.

Two other poems to which the proem of the Triumph refers, unlike those so far considered, are unreservedly joyous celebrations of landscape--though the landscape in each case is far removed from the Mediterranean coast. One is Coleridge's 'Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni', a poem which seems to have left a lasting impression on Shelley since he wrote 'Mont Blanc'. Its Alpine peaks and final apostrophe to Mont Blanc--'and tell yon rising sun/ Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God' (84-5)--are recalled by the 'mountain snows' and nature's adoration of the sun in the Triumph. Another Romantic aubade to which we find a number of verbal references in Shelley's poem is Wordsworth's sonnet 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802' (1807). Wordsworth's 'smokeless air' (8) becomes Shelley's 'smokeless altars' (5) and 'smiling air' (14); the City is said to 'wear/ The beauty of the morning' (4-5) just as in the Triumph things 'wear/ The form and character of mortal mould' (16-17); and both poets proclaim the 'splendour' of the rising sun ('Westminster Bridge', 10; Triumph, 3). Shelley's narrator, however, for reasons that become clearer in the course of his vision but are

partly indicated here, dissociates himself from the attitude of worship which nature shares with Coleridge and Wordsworth. He does so partly because his sudden entrance into the poem with 'But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold' (21) introduces a self-awareness that conflicts with an inclination to worship. But he does not merely find himself unable to respond with the same transports as Wordsworth and Coleridge; he also actively rejects the object of that worship, the sun, and turns away from the approaching day to lie down and rest. Thus, although he shares their nostalgia, he remains deeply sceptical of any formulation of what that nostalgia might be for, preferring his unspecified 'thoughts which must remain untold'.

At the very beginning of the poem the sun's uprise is represented as an event of great fulfilment:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth
Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask

Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth. (1-4)

Explicitly emblematic 'Of glory and of good', the sun is also 'Swift as a spirit', a phrase which recalls not only 'A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift' in Adonais (280) but more significantly the language of Prometheus Unbound Act II, where the Spirit of the Hour, 'On the brink of the night and the morning', flies 'swifter than fire' to inaugurate the new age of Prometheus, the 'sun' who 'is yet unrisen' (II, v, 1,5,9). In describing the sunrise as he does at the beginning of the Triumph it is as if Shelley returns to the narrative of Prometheus at the end of Act II in order to correct the anomalies of Act III. For he goes on to show how the beneficent power of the rising sun becomes an object of worship and a tyrannizing father, as all

things 'Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear/ Their portion of the toil which he of old/ Took as his own and then imposed on them' (18-20). To free Prometheus, in other words, is to install another Jupiter. Punning on the word 'Sun', as he does in Prometheus, Shelley at the same time expresses his view of Christianity as an oppressive perversion of the doctrines of Christ, whose redemptive toil takes on a resemblance to God's creative toil in Genesis in becoming an imposition on mankind. The 'Sun'/Son thus becomes or engenders the father, just as Wordsworth's 'Child is father of the Man'.¹⁸ As spirit, son and father Shelley's sun can be seen to represent a kind of heterodox trinity, whose three elements are analogous to the main components of that process of thought which Shelley develops and describes in Prometheus Unbound. Here they roughly correspond to the three main characters, Asia representing dynamic and relational spirit, Prometheus its putative realization in unity, and Jupiter the projection of unity as oppressive power. What the Triumph acknowledges, as the play does not (or does so only implicitly), is the objectifying and disfiguring effect of its own representation. Tilottama Rajan writes that Prometheus

affirms that it can enact a work identical with itself. For in making his text into a play, Shelley allegorizes reading as performance rather than interpretation, a discourse that legitimizes itself by doing what it says rather than by conveying an anterior and provable truth.¹⁹

Whereas Prometheus, as a play, assumes meaning to be created through 'performance' (or acting), the Triumph, Rajan argues, following de Man, accepts that it is dependent on 'interpretation' (or spectating), which finds language always 'unable either to state or to perform anything that is not already different from itself'.²⁰ The proem bears out this view. The sun's

rapid transformation from beneficent spirit to tyrannical projection is echoed by the effect of the narrator's 'strange trance' which projects the scene around him beyond the immediate present. Although he thus recognizes himself as the 'actor or victim' of the process he describes, a further result of this process is to turn the actor into a spectator who is perpetually removed from the objects he contemplates. This indeed is the state of Prometheus in the first act of the play, where he appeals in vain for a response from the elements of nature. The difference in the Triumph is that the narrator accepts the role of spectator both as a necessity and by choice: he neither worships nor abhors the sun, but instead stretches his 'faint limbs' in weariness, and so escapes Prometheus's bitter sense of alienation. To this extent his stance is in line with de Man's: the onward career of language is irresistible, and all one can do is acknowledge one is within its power.

This position, however, is modified by the narrator's wakefulness at night, which, as he explains, is the cause of his present weariness:

But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold

Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
The cone of night, now they were laid asleep,
Stretched my faint limbs. (21-4)

The narrator's detachment from the day is thus weighed against a converse attachment to night, to the thoughts of night which in remaining 'untold' avoid the disfiguring objectifications of day, and to the stars, perennially for Shelley symbols of desire. There is a further reminiscence here of the 'Dejection' ode, in which Coleridge, keeping midnight vigil, regains an inward imaginative strength that the external things of day deny him. The link between the night/day and thought/language oppositions may also have been

suggested by Psalm 19, which is mentioned by Reiman as a possible analogue of the proem, and whose second verse runs, 'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge'.²¹ Certainly we are reminded of Shelley's own 'To Night' (1821), the opening of which is verbally similar to the Triumph's, though in one sense opposite in intent: 'Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,/ Spirit of Night!'. In that night here weaves 'dreams of joy and fear' (5) and also wields an 'opiate wand' (13) blotting out the concerns of day it is again the repository of 'thoughts which must remain untold' in daytime. The poem's emphatic preference for the potentialities of night over the realizations of day is muted but unmistakably present in the Triumph's proem, where it implicitly contradicts the initial joyful announcement that with the sunrise 'the mask/ Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth'. The narrator's untold thoughts of night in the Triumph also recall the regrets and desires of Prometheus and Asia in Prometheus Unbound before the sun's rising at the end of Act II, even though his weariness of the day is quite unlike their view of the new dawn. In fact Rajan's above-quoted remarks about the play are much more accurately applied to its final two acts, where it does attempt to perform the dawning of the Promethean era, than they are to the first two, where this is still an unrealized dream. In speaking therefore of the Triumph as a correction of Prometheus it is necessary to bear in mind that the play's main point of weakness--the enactment of Prometheus's freedom--is in some ways less the fulfilment than the negation or disfigurement of the achievement of Act 2, just as the risen sun in the Triumph negates and blots out the stars of desire that heralded its approach.

iii

The despotism of objective vision is as much a theme of the narrator's dream as it is of the proem. Even critics who have differed widely in their

interpretations of the poem have often concurred in viewing the captivity of the followers of the triumphal procession as emblematic of their submission to some kind of externalizing tendency in themselves. For example, in Reiman's dualist, moral and tentatively optimistic reading the tyrannizing power of 'Life' is 'mere reason' or 'the distorted vision of the outward eye', while for the deconstructive, determinist de Man it is the arbitrary and 'endless prosopopoeia' of language.²² The poem, however, contains crucial ambivalences which undermine both of these positions, and while it affirms life's triumphal progress to be nothing less than all-subsuming and irresistible, it also allows room for a view of life as less remotely and inhumanly external.

The chariot's function as a symbol of objectification is indicated by its 'cold glare' (77), which obscures 'The Sun as he the stars' (79), a succession of three forms of light corresponding to the three manifestations of the sun in the poem as father, son and spirit. The 'owl-winged faculty of calculation' of the Defence (R&P, p. 503) may indeed be suggested by this eclipsing cold light, which in forbidding 'Shadow to fall from leaf or stone' (445) seems to oppose the imaginative transformation of the natural world. But the chariot's significance cannot be so narrowly or univocally defined; for it allegorizes less the static power of reason than a continuing process in which reason and imagination are closely intertwined. Indeed, its motion relies on those very transformations which it apparently resists, and which appear in the poem as the various shadow-chasing and phantom-forming pursuits of its followers and captives. Among these is Rousseau's own vision of the 'shape all light' (352), who, borne of reflected sunlight on water, is manifestly an imaginative recreation of external nature. But the projection of such phantoms entails their inevitable deformation: they are 'distorted' and 'wrought' by the 'car's creative ray' (531-4) in a process which exhausts and disfigures those whose self-expressive masks they are. All creative thought, the poem

suggests, involves a form of externalization in which the subject is defeated by the object.

This deconstructive aspect of the triumphal procession is very clearly demonstrated in two parallel passages occurring respectively in the narratives of the narrator and Rousseau. The narrator describes how 'Maidens and youths.../Like moths by light attracted and repelled' (149, 153) are caught in a whirling dance, an image of the 'unremitting interchange' and the mutual push and pull of subject and object, sensation and reflection, sign and referent. Finally the dancers are drawn together but at the moment of union fall senseless:

Yet ere I can say where the chariot hath
Past over them; nor other trace I find
But as of foam after the Ocean's wrath

Is spent upon the desert shore. (161-4)

Thus the desired unity is aborted, leaving only a lifeless externalized trace like the 'wrinkled sand' in the Defence (R&P, p. 504). The same images of sexual desire and of traces left on the shore occur in the passage where Rousseau asks the 'shape all light' to 'Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why' (398). Such questions can only be answered by that unitive experience sought by the dancers. In asking them Rousseau is suspended 'between desire and shame' (394), as if aware that what he seeks is prohibited. His feelings are similar to Dante's on his first meeting with Beatrice in the Purgatorio, and to Faust's in the episodes with Margaret, and are also reminiscent of the mingled fear and desire which Saint-Preux experiences at the thought of Julie's kisses, and which in the Confessions Rousseau describes as his own

before his sexual initiation with Mme de Warens. Moreover, both Saint-Preux and Rousseau relate how the anticipated pleasure finally eludes them; and likewise, when the 'shape all light', in answer to Rousseau in the Triumph, offers him the cup of nepenthe he

Touched with faint lips the cup she raised,
And suddenly my brain became as sand

Where the first wave had more than half erased
The track of deer on desert Labrador,
Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled amazed

Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore
Until the second bursts. (404-410)

Critics have differed about whether Rousseau actually drinks the nepenthe, but the point is that to drink is already to have passed beyond the moment of an impossible unity.²⁴ Significantly, we are told that the 'first wave had more than half erased/ The track of deer'. The deer and the wolf, as Clark suggests, represent the self-conflict of the mind, which flees and pursues itself simultaneously, and the wave that comes between them therefore divides the mind from its own knowledge of itself.²⁵ With the bursting of the second wave and the appearance in a 'new Vision' (410 and 434) of the triumphal car, Rousseau's wolfish desire is in turn objectified and superseded, and he is 'delayed not long' (461) even by the memory of the 'shape' from entering the procession. Here he joins those who, projecting 'Shadows of shadows' (488), are involved in the creative-destructive cycle of the car's progress, until falling 'by the wayside' (541) he becomes the spectator who can act as the narrator's guide.

The narrator, maintaining the same detachment he displays in the proem, is also a spectator, like his literary forbears, the dreamer in Petrarch's Trionfi and the fictional Dante who is led by Virgil through Hell and Purgatory. His objective standpoint has a significance beyond theirs, however, in being thematically related to the content of his narrative, which is so much concerned with the inevitability of objective vision. Both the narrator and Rousseau, commenting on the pageant of life from the outside, do so with great scepticism and consequently thus play no small part in representing the chariot as a deconstructive symbol. Unlike those within the procession they show no straining after absolutes; ²⁶ the narrator has no 'desire to worship those who drew/ New figures on...[the world's] false and fragile glass' (246-7); and Rousseau draws no moral distinctions between 'The Wise,/ The great, the unforgotten' (208-9) who are chained to the car, even though Plato and Napoleon are among their number.

But since there is so clear a correspondence between the objectifying vision that the car represents and the objective view that they take of it, the narrator and Rousseau are only artificially relieved of an active participation in the triumphal procession. A similar anomaly occurs in the speech from Calderon's La Vida es Sueño which is found translated in one of Shelley's notebooks in Edward Williams's hand. ²⁷ The theme of the passage, which is very close to that of The Triumph of Life, is summed up in the last two lines of the translation thus: 'All life and being are but dreams and dreams/ Themselves are but the memory of other dreams.' The problem with such a statement is that if it is true the speaker cannot know it to be true. Similarly, in the Triumph the narrator's position is undermined by his own narrative, for if the car of life represents the inevitable disfigurement of all representation, then neither his dream nor the poem escapes its influence. De Man, as we have seen, elides this difficulty by suggesting that the poem is

sheltered by its own 'negative knowledge'. On the contrary, the Triumph, unlike the short passage from Calderon, actually draws attention to its own self-reference. The narrator's vision is, after all, the product of a 'strange trance', and is a 'waking dream' (42), as Rousseau's vision is like a 'day appearing dream' (427). In occupying a middle ground between waking and sleeping, both characters hover between consciousness and oblivion of their present involvement in their own narratives. Shelley thus complicates Wordsworth's description in his 'Immortality' ode of life as 'but a sleep and a forgetting' (58). An index of his deliberate ambiguity is that Rousseau's phrase, 'I found myself asleep' (311), is substituted in the manuscript for the initial Wordsworthian 'I was laid asleep'.²⁸ The change is significant in suggesting some degree of self-consciousness on Rousseau's part, and in creating an uncertainty whether his new awareness constitutes waking or sleeping. This confusion generates a number of further contradictions relating to an interplay of the spectating and acting roles of the two narrative voices.

Although the narrator and Rousseau speak with the sceptical knowingness of those who stand outside the dance, neither is completely detached from the spectacle he sees. The narrator repeatedly expresses his deep dismay: he is 'aghast' (107), is 'Struck to the heart' (177), feels his 'cheek/ Alter' (224-5), 'grieved' (228), experiences 'despair' (231), and his 'eyes' and 'heart' 'are sick' (298-9). Moreover, despite a certain disdain for the multitude who follow the car, he also shares some of their assumptions. For example, while he tells how some vainly pursued 'birds within the noonday ether lost' (64), which seems to describe eagles (or possibly skylarks) soaring beyond visible range, he also speaks of the 'sacred few' (128) who 'Fled back like eagles to their native noon' (131). His belief that it is possible to escape the procession is again revealed when he relates how those on the 'path where

flowers never grew' (65)

Heard not the fountains whose melodious dew

Out of their mossy cells forever burst
Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told
Of grassy paths, and wood lawns interspersed

With overarching elms and caverns cold,
And violet banks where sweet dreams brood. (67-72)

This natural description has the flavour of a Keatsian landscape such as we find in Endymion, and (in the last line particularly) of the woodland setting of A Midsummer Night's Dream.²⁹ The escapist quality in these reminiscences tends to subvert the narrator's Rousseauian belief that the solitudes of nature provide a genuine alternative to the dusty path of life in society. At the same time, the description's appeal to other senses than the visual reminds us of the proem where the landscape as objectively seen evokes the memory of it as immediately felt. It thus expresses the narrator's nostalgia for the lost origins of poetic creativity, as do the familiar symbols of 'fountains' and 'caverns'. His emotional involvement in the scene before him and his search for origins are most clearly revealed, however, in the urgent questions of why, whence and whither that he puts first about the car (177-8) and then about Rousseau (296-7)--questions which immediately ally him with those who are in the procession, none of whom 'seemed to know/ Whither he went, or whence he came, or why' (47-8). His despair is summed up in his complaint that 'God made irreconcilable/ Good and the means of good' (230-1), which is a succinct formulation of a problem which has preoccupied Shelley throughout his career. 'God', 'Good' and 'the means of good' make another of

those triads on the Jupiter-Prometheus-Asia model, 'God' as the projection and perversion of a unity which now presides over the disunity of various dualities, such as the ideal and the real, subject and object, sign and referent. That the narrator should regret, instead of simply accepting, the continuance of this disunity is further evidence that he is actually an actor in life's pageant despite his special status in the poem as spectator.

Rousseau, too, is not as deadened to the procession as his resemblance to an 'old root' (182) suggests. As Rajan and others have argued, his repudiation of his former career is far from clear-cut.³⁰ Also, there is a contradiction in his comments on the sages chained to the car: he speaks with scepticism of the 'morn of truth they feigned' because 'their lore/ Taught them not this--to know themselves' (211-4), yet his own encounter with the 'shape all light' teaches that the goal of self-knowledge is itself an illusion, relying as it does on the unattainable unity of mind as subject and mind as object. Shelley would appear to be again subverting the actual Rousseau, who in the Reveries of the Solitary Walker makes the Delphic dictum, 'Know thyself', his own.³¹ His assumption that self-knowledge is possible is akin to his belief that

if the spark with which Heaven lit my spirit
Earth had with purer nutriment supplied

Corruption would not now thus much inherit
Of what was once Rousseau. (201-4)

Like the narrator, he has not come to terms with the irreconcilability of 'Good and the means of good', and his regret that he has not lived up to the heavenly 'spark' within himself offers further demonstration that he too has not truly opted out of 'Life'. His suggestion that the narrator will gain the

knowledge he seeks by turning 'Actor or victim in this wretchedness' (306)-- knowledge which he admits eluded himself--is one more inconsistency in his attitude to the triumphal procession. In one sense these contradictions indicate that Rousseau and the narrator are deluding themselves in imagining that they have not succumbed to life, but in another sense, paradoxically, they suggest quite the opposite, for in revealing that these figures are already actors as well as spectators in life's triumph, the poem raises a doubt about the dominance of the subject by the object. In subtle and necessarily unremarked ways a form of life as immediate experience survives even while it furthers the advance of the juggernaut of life as objective thought.

iv

The same contradictions are to be found in Rousseau's account of the events that have led him to his present position, though here again the disfiguring power of thought and language appears to prevail. In describing the spring landscape in which he initially finds himself, the feminine 'shape' he meets there, and his ensuing vision of the triumphal car, Shelley draws heavily on Dante's description of his encounter with the 'bella donna' in Eden and the appearance of the pageant of divine revelation in Cantos 28-31 of the Purgatorio.³² These scenes from Dante, however, are wrested to an almost contrary purpose, and lead Rousseau not towards divine illumination but progressively further away from what he doubtfully calls 'The Heaven which I imagine' (333). Various elements in the 'oblivious valley' (539) have their analogues in Canto 28, which Shelley translated.³³ For example, the hill of Purgatory, from which Dante and Beatrice ascend to the heavens, becomes 'a mountain, which from unknown time/ Had yawned into a cavern high and deep' (313). Bearing testimony to former seismic activity, such caverns for Shelley

represent the traces of a forgotten act of creation.³⁴ From it, therefore, with the musical sound of poetry, flows the 'gentle rivulet' (314), which in its description resembles the Lethe of the Purgatorio, but in its power to cause forgetfulness is closer to the Lethe of Virgil's Aeneid than to Dante's river of absolution.

There are two kinds of forgetfulness that Rousseau describes in his account of his experiences in the 'oblivious valley', though at times these become almost indistinguishable. On the one hand, there is the self-forgetfulness which is the accompaniment of a heightened awareness, and which is marked here and elsewhere in the poem by synaesthetic imagery, and 'melody, confusing sense' (340). On the other hand, forgetting has a directly opposite origin in the tendency of self-conscious thought to externalize and hence always to lose an immediate knowledge of its objects. The close relation between the two kinds of oblivion is evident in the following passage in which Rousseau describes the obliterating effect of the 'shape all light':

And still her feet, no less than the sweet tune
To which they moved, seemed as they moved, to blot
The thoughts of him who gazed on them, and soon

All that was seemed as if it had been not,
As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath
Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought,

Trampled its fires into the dust of death,
As Day upon the threshold of the east
Treads out the lamps of night, until the breath

Of darkness reillumines even the least
Of heaven's living eyes--like day she came,
Making the night a dream. (382-93)

Initially the blotting of disfiguring 'thoughts' is apparently the effect of an all-consuming rapture on the part of the 'gazer', a term implying rapt contemplation. The words, 'and soon/ All that was seemed as if it had been not', at first seem to confirm the impression of the preceding stanza, but the tenses used introduce a temporal and progressive element (reinforced by 'and soon') that runs counter to an ecstatic disregard of time. The 'shape''s metrical feet, which emphasize the temporal element in poetry, then become as destructive as they have just been creative, extinguishing the mind 'thought by thought'--these thoughts being both the instruments and the objects of her trampling progress. Subtly one kind of oblivion has superseded the other, as if indeed the original blotting 'seemed as if it had been not'. The same process can be observed in those passages, already considered, likening the mind's erasure to the action of waves on the shore, where again the experience of unity implies its simultaneous dissipation. It is also to be found in the succession of different forms of light, as when the car's 'cold glare, intenser than the noon/ But icy cold, obscured with [] light/ The Sun as he the stars' (77-79). Intermediate between the light of the stars and the light of the car, the sun, as in the proem and as in the passage quoted above, has an ambiguous significance, and in suggesting both forms of blotting, demonstrates that the apprehension of oneness is never secure from the perpetual self-division of thought.

This repeated movement from subjective to objective experience suggests a certain correlation between the 'shape all light' and the 'Shape' (87) in the car of life. Some critics, however, in arguing that the former represents an imaginative principle which counteracts the dead hand of the latter, assume that there is no inevitable connection between them.³⁵ Duffy, for example, believes that in the 'shape all light' the poem vindicates the ecstatic and

self-effacing strain in the thought of the real Rousseau, and distinguishes it from his Enlightenment rationalism which is symbolised by the car of life.³⁶ He suggests that the state in which Shelley's Rousseau experiences his vision is equivalent to the 'reverie' described in the Reveries of the Solitary Walker.³⁷ Here Rousseau speaks of a sense of being 'fused as it were with the great system of beings and identifying myself with the whole of nature', and of transcending every 'other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence'.³⁸ This certainly resembles the 'sweet and deep...oblivious spell' (331) in the Triumph, in which one forgets 'All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love' (319). The experience of oneness with nature mentioned by Rousseau also brings to mind Shelley's description of reverie in 'On Life', which, as Duffy again remarks, may also be indebted to Rousseau's Reveries.³⁹ In this essay, however, a distinction needs to be made between the kind of reverie which it suggests is within the reach of human experience, and the complete but unattainable knowledge of unity from which 'It is well that we are...shielded' (R&P, p. 475). The former is closer to the 'rapture' described in 'On Love', which involves the projection of the self as 'a soul within our soul' or as an 'antitype', which 'is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends' (R&P, p. 474). Rousseau's reverie in the Triumph, in which he pursues his antitype in the 'shape all light', is clearly more like this state, while the images of the cavern and the stream suggest an originary unity lost in 'unknown time' (312). The 'shape', whose light is the dawn sun reflected on water, transcendental and temporal symbols respectively, is an image of that unity projected on nature;⁴⁰ hence she moves to 'the ceaseless song/ Of leaves and winds and waves and birds and bees' (375-6). This again reminds us of 'On Love', where Shelley speaks of finding in nature a suitable mirror of the mind when human sympathy is wanting: 'Hence in solitude...we love the flowers, the

grass and the waters and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring in the blue air there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart' (R&P, p. 474). Rousseau's experience of the 'shape all light' in the Triumph, however, reveals the instability of this 'secret correspondence', showing how it fluctuates between subjectivity and objectivity, and is ultimately destroyed by the latter: neither 'flowers' nor 'solitude' nor the 'phantom' of his vision (461-64) can long delay him from joining the procession. In her own way, therefore, the 'shape' heralds the approach of the triumphal car as Matilda does in the Purgatorio, and her evanition, no less than that of the 'veiled maid' in Alastor, signals the inevitable defeat of solitary idealism. Thus the poem makes no final distinction between the poet and the thinker in Rousseau, as Duffy argues, but rather shows his ideals of reverie and retreat into nature to be symptoms of, not antidotes to, the 'contagion' (277) of life.

Hogle's view that the poem offers the reader a choice between 'repressed and accepted transference', respectively represented by the visions of the narrator and Rousseau, opens itself to a similar objection: in a word, there is no transference that does not involve the projection of disfiguring phantoms.⁴¹ As Miller says, in the end there is no difference between those who succumb to life and those who do not, just as in Alastor it is hinted that a similar fate awaits the 'luminaries of the world' and the 'meaner spirits'.⁴² Nevertheless, Hogle rightly argues that the deconstructive chariot in the Triumph is itself shown to be susceptible to deconstruction, even if not in quite the way he suggests.⁴³ Although there is no escape from life's triumphal march, or from the concepts of unity and power upon which its progress depends (of which, arguably, transference is one), Rousseau's advice to the narrator to join the dance suggests that we can at least choose how willingly we participate. Moreover, by recommending that he freely submit to

the gyrations of subject and object, and plunge into the 'living storm' (465) as he did, Rousseau indicates how the mind's objectifying tendency might be, not defeated exactly, but subsumed within a continuing process of renewal and liberation. To act is to spectate, and vice versa, and the interaction between the two activities is what may constitute an emancipatory rather than a repressive view of life. Rousseau cannot state such a conclusion without negating it, but the poem does leave it open to be understood.

The car only half erases the thoughts it rides over, and similarly, although the 'shape' tramples out the mind's 'embers', Shelley's poem confirms the suggestion of the 'Immortality' ode 'that in our embers/ Is something that doth live' (133-4). 'Day.../Treads out the lamps of night', but night remains as a 'dream' and will return. Memory, in crossing time, may be a form of forgetting, since it cannot recover immediate experience, but forgetfulness, where erasure is not total, also proves to be a way of remembering. This is the same paradox of Prometheus Unbound Act 2, Scene 1, where a readiness to forget enables Asia and Panthea to fill 'forgotten sleep/ With shapes' (142-3), which lead them forward on their quest. In the Triumph the paradox repeatedly finds expression in the ambiguities associated with the images of day and night, sun and stars, waking, sleeping and dreaming. Whatever the poem's pessimism, it never loses hope to the extent of ceasing to weigh the forgotten against the remembered, the potential against the realized, and night, stars, sleep and dreams against day, the sun and wakefulness. Unlike Wordsworth in the 'Immortality' ode, however, Shelley does not find in 'shadowy recollections' ('Immortality' ode, 153) consolation for the irretrievable loss of a transcendent origin. In the Triumph, memory and forgetfulness, like sleep and waking, alternate by creating and destroying each other. As Abbey has observed, natural images such as the sun which threaten to break free of their cycles and become symbols of transcendence are

repeatedly 'pulled back from static centre to turning circumference'.⁴⁴ At the same time, what makes the circumference turn, and what gives the car of life its motion, is the projection of those very symbols it dismantles.⁴⁵

However accidental it may be, it is highly appropriate that the fragment should end with the unanswered question, 'Then, what is Life?' To ask this perfectly expresses what it is to remember and to forget, and to be both actor and spectator in life's procession. Coming as it does at the end of Rousseau's account of his life and at the end too, it would seem, of the chariot's involvement in the narrator's dream, his question also serves as a reminder that he remains in ignorance, despite all he has learned. Thus scepticism ultimately mitigates the pessimism which it causes. Finally, and perhaps most appropriately of all, the question leaves us in doubt as to whether Shelley would have offered a different kind of answer from that already given. Such an answer may be difficult to conceive, but the question suggests the possibility is there.

Notes

1. Wilson, Shelley's Later Poetry; Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading; de Man, 'Shelley Disfigured', in Harold Bloom et al., Deconstruction and Criticism (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 39-74; Miller, The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 114-179.
2. Critics who speak of the Triumph as a repudiation of Adonais include: Abbey, pp. 127-43; Dawson, p. 281; John A. Hodgson, 'The World's Mysterious Doom: Shelley's The Triumph of Life', ELH, 42 (1975), 595-622; Leighton, pp. 150-75; Rajan, Dark Interpreter, pp. 58-96.
3. 'Shelley Disfigured', p. 67.
4. Mary Shelley's Notes, Hutchinson, pp. 663, 679-80. See also her remark in

a letter to Maria Gisborne, 22 August 1822: 'Is not Adonais his own Elegy', Bennett, I, 254. Both the monument to Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley in Christchurch Priory by Henry Weekes, and the Shelley Memorial in University College, Oxford, by Basil Champneys and Edward Onslow Ford, are inscribed with Adonais, stanza 40.

5. 'Shelley Disfigured', p. 68.
6. 'Shelley Disfigured', p. 68.
7. See, for example, Reiman, Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', pp. 19-86, and Fred L. Milne, 'The Eclipsed Imagination in Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"', Studies in English Literature, 21 (1981), 681-702.
8. Abrams's headnote to The Triumph of Life, in The Norton Anthology to English Literature, 4th edn., ed. M.H. Abrams et al., 2 vols (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), II, 764.
9. Eloisa, or a series of original letters, II, 71; III, 169. Reiman discusses the importance of this work to The Triumph of Life in 'Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": The Biographical Problem', PMLA, 78 (1963), 536-550, and Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', pp. 19-86.
10. Miller, p. 176.
11. Miller, p. 177.
12. 'Shelley Disfigured', p. 66.
13. Stawell, 'Shelley's "Triumph of Life"', Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 5 (1914), 104-31; Jones, II, 415.
14. Reiman draws attention to the similarity of the proem's setting with that of 'Tintern Abbey', Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', p. 26.
15. Faust: A Tragedy, trans. Walter Arendt, ed. Cyrus Hamlin (New York: Norton, 1976), ll. 1087-88.

16. For passages from which Shelley may have had in mind while writing the proem to the Triumph, see The Confessions, trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 132 and 225.
17. I quote Petrarch's 'The Triumph of Love', 2-3, The Triumphs of Petrarch, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1962). See Robinson, p. 222.
18. The quotation is from the epigraph which Wordsworth added in 1815 to his 'Immortality' ode.
19. The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 323.
20. The Supplement of Reading, p. 326.
21. Reiman, Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', p. 22.
22. Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', pp. 31 and 47; 'Shelley Disfigured', p. 68. Milne and Duffy, pp. 106-51, follow Reiman in regarding the car as a symbol of the reasoning faculty. David Quint sees it as representing the surrender to ideological abstractions, 'Representation and Ideology in The Triumph of Life', Studies in English Literature, 18 (1978), 639-57. Hogle follows de Man and Miller in interpreting its motion as the process of mental and linguistic substitution, though with the important difference that he regards this process as potentially liberating, Shelley's Process, pp. 319-42. A number of critics consider 'Life' to be external everyday life in one or another of its aspects, e.g. Baker, pp. 255-75; Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, pp. 220-72; Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 445-74; Leighton, pp. 150-75. Duffy's and Hogle's interpretations are considered below.
23. See the Purgatorio, Cantos 30 and 31; Faust, 2605-3834; Eloisa, I, 96-99; The Confessions, pp. 171-214.
24. The question is discussed, with differing conclusions, by Baker, p. 267; Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 271; and Hogle, Shelley's Process, pp. 329-30.

25. Clark, Embodying Revolution, p. 254.
26. Bernard Beatty remarks this lack of straining after absolutes as a characteristic of the poem as a whole, 'Repetition's Music: The Triumph of Life', in Essays and Studies 1992: Percy Bysshe Shelley Bicentenary Essays, ed. Kelvin Everest (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), p. 100.
27. Timothy Webb conjectures that the translation, which he quotes in full, is Shelley's, The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), p. 221.
28. See Reiman, Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', p. 179. The phrase 'laid asleep' occurs in 'Tintern Abbey', 45, and The Excursion, I, 786.
29. See esp. Endymion I, 63-88 and A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 249-50.
30. Rajan, The Supplement of Reading, pp. 343-4. Shelley's ambivalent attitude towards the historical Rousseau is also discussed by Bloom, Shelley's Myth-Making, pp. 252-64; Reiman, Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', pp. 48, 55-56, 58-61; Edward Duffy, Rousseau in England: The Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 106-51; and Christine Gallant, Shelley's Ambivalence (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 154-181.
31. Reveries, trans. Peter France (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 63. For further references to the pursuit of self-knowledge in this work, see pp. 48 and 51.
32. For Shelley's debt to Dante in this section of the poem, see A.C. Bradley, in 'Notes on Shelley's "Triumph of Life"', MLR, 9 (1914), 441-56; Stawell, 'Shelley's "Triumph of Life"'; and Ralph Pite, The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 161-98.
33. Concerning the doubtful dating of Shelley's translation of this canto, see Webb, The Violet in the Crucible, p. 314 n.
34. Cf., for example, Cythna's cave in The Revolt of Islam VII, xiii, 2938-

2946, and Prometheus Unbound IV, 332-5.

35. See, for example, Baker, pp. 255-75, and Milne, 681-702. The poem is understood to represent the triumph of everyday life over Rousseauian spirit and love of nature, by Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, pp. 220-72, and John A. Hodgson, 'The World's Mysterious Doom: Shelley's The Triumph of Life', English Literary History, 42 (1975), 595-622.
36. Duffy, p. 106-51.
37. Duffy, pp. 109-10.
38. Reveries, pp. 88, 111.
39. Duffy, p. 109.
40. This symbolism is noted by R&P, p. 465 n., and Ulmer, 168-9.
41. Shelley's Process, p. 474.
42. Miller, pp. 123-24.
43. Shelley's Process, p. 334.
44. Abbey, p. 133.
45. This paradoxical aspect of the poem has been variously described by commentators. Cronin writes, 'The ideal is defined by its absence: it can only exist when it is "unseen"' (p. 219); Leighton observes that 'although the origin is always forgotten, that moment of oblivion is also, subtly, a way of saving what is lost' (p. 173); Ulmer describes the Shelleyan origin as 'intrinsically vacuous but structurally functional' (p. 164). None of these critics, however, draws attention to the dialectical interrelation in the poem between what is remembered and what is forgotten, between the seen and the unseen.

Conclusion

In the forgoing chapters I have argued that a dialectical structure of thought informs the content and style of Shelley's poetry at a fundamental level. Reduced to its simplest elements, this dialectic consists of a competitive but interdependent relationship of subject and object. Oscillating between convergence and separation, and constantly making and remaking each other, subject and object vie for dominance, without either ever achieving a total ascendancy. This basic pattern of thought underlies the relation between numerous other polarities in his poetry, such as the concepts of necessity and freedom, tyranny and love, creation and destruction, permanence and change, the one and the many; it governs various aspects of his poetic mode--the relationship between sign and referent, fiction and reality, language and thought; and it informs his understanding of the relationship between the poet and his age, the poet and his poems, and the poems and the reader. Moreover, it accounts for Shelley's habitual philosophical attitude of sceptical idealism, in which contrary strains of thought only find their full scope through their interaction with each other. To see his work as thus constituted of a dynamic and creative interplay of contraries is in effect to view Shelley as the practitioner of a form of Romantic irony similar to that defined by Friedrich Schlegel. It is also a way of 'harmonizing the contending creeds'¹ that belong to Shelley criticism, for it shows that the opposing emphases on his scepticism and his idealism, and on the political and private aspirations of his poetry, need not be considered as mutually exclusive.

Shelley never expounds with any complexity in his prose the dialectic which

underpins his poetry, yet nor should we expect him to, for it is in his poetry that we look for his most original and profound philosophy. In practice, if not always in theory, he confirms the Coleridgean view of the subservience of philosophy to poetry, and illustrates Hartman's remark that 'the art of the Romantics...is often in advance of even their best thoughts'². Yet the dialectical pattern of his thought revealed in his poetry clearly grows out of his interest in philosophical and scientific subjects, and is fully explicable[?] in terms that he and other authors use in writing about them. His poetic preoccupation with the relationship of mind and nature, the question of which is prior, and its implications regarding a metaphysical origin, is heavily dependent on the investigations into these topics by both French and British philosophy of the eighteenth century. The natural sciences, too, provided him with many of the ideas which became essential components of his philosophical outlook: contemporary theories of the constitution and circulation of matter, of electricity, meteorology, geology and astronomy all involved the notion of cycles of growth and decay arising from the conflict of opposing forces. Although Shelley abandoned his materialism early in his career, the idea that mental and political processes are extensions of natural ones remained with him, and became entwined with idealist conceptions of the mind-nature relationship belonging to the 'intellectual philosophy' and also encountered in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry and fiction. In view of the intellectual context in which Shelley was writing, it is not surprising that he should evolve a dialectical mental framework independently of his contemporaries, Blake, Hegel and Marx, who did so more explicitly.³

Although the interrelationship of subject and object is present in all the major aspects of his thought, it is most obviously expressed and explored in his poetry through his treatment of external nature. Indeed, Shelley only finds his voice as a poet once he sheds his early rationalist disdain for the

'sickly sensibility' which takes delight in nature, and begins to view nature as an object worthy of emotional regard himself. Moreover, the most formative period of his poetic development, from 1815 to 1819, is one in which, owing to his extensive travels in Britain and on the Continent, he was exposed to a wide variety of natural scenery. The three works of this period which I have examined clearly reflect his responses to landscapes he has recently seen: Alastor makes particular use of river journeys he made on the Continent in 1814 and up the Thames in 1815; 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' are a record of his encounter with the scenery of Switzerland in 1816; and Prometheus Unbound draws heavily on his experience of the landscape of Italy through which he travelled in 1818 and 1819. The importance of these experiences to his poetic development is difficult to quantify with any precision, but there is little doubt that it was considerable. Mary Shelley does not exaggerate excessively in saying that 'every page of his poetry is associated...with the loveliest scenes of the countries which he visited'.⁴ Shelley, likewise, needs to be taken seriously when, in the Preface to The Revolt of Islam, he puts nature alongside literature as the two principal components of his education as a poet.

From 1815 onwards Shelley displays a remarkable consistency in his view of the relationship between mind and the external world. Although there are variations in the relative weighting he gives to subjective and objective points of view, and hence in his idealism and scepticism, his optimism and pessimism, these are predicated upon a constant idea of their dialectical interdependence. The development of his career therefore consists mainly in exploring the possibilities and implications of a structure of thought which remains essentially unchanged. Even in Queen Mab it is possible to detect beneath the poem's somewhat fissile monism the emergence of a mind-nature relationship of attraction and repulsion. Shelley at this time was already

being influenced by various forms of idealism, encountered, for example, in the empirical philosophers, the poetry of Wordsworth, and the fictions of Goethe, Godwin and Owenson. Holbach's rationalist and impersonal conception of nature accordingly shows signs of giving way to one in which the senses and feelings are involved. While Queen Mab confidently proclaims the unity of mind and matter, Alastor finally despairs at the way in which an idealist desire to recover a unity of subject and object is persistently thwarted. The Poet's journey by boat does, however, anticipate later such Shelleyan voyages which show how the same process of thought which constantly separates the mind from its objects can reverse this effect to bring them back into relation. In the two odes of 1816 he substantially achieves this reversal for the first time. In these poems it is discovered that the river-like motion of thought which seems always to flow away from its source in an 'unseen Power' can nevertheless gain an apprehension of power as a process of 'unremitting interchange' between mind and nature; and between the two conceptions of power, one representing permanence and the other change, there is also a mutual dependence and interaction. 'Mont Blanc' is Shelley's most dispassionate poetic analysis of the relationship of mind and nature, according them an almost equal influence, though it ends with a tentative affirmation of the power of the 'human mind's imaginings' to internalise and humanise the remote otherness of the external world. In 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' the 'Spirit of BEAUTY', like power in 'Mont Blanc', is both a principle of relationship and flux, and a supramundane essence, but the poem finally privileges the latter and consequently falls into contradiction. In Prometheus Unbound Shelley considerably broadens the application of the dialectic elaborated in the 1816 odes, above all by emphasizing its political and moral implications. Thus the emancipation of Prometheus can be seen as a corollary of the self-abandoning relationship with the external world which he

initiates and Asia continues. Act II is Shelley's completest demonstration of the creative and liberating potential of the interrelationship between subject and object (enacted by Asia) and between ordinary power and revolutionary process (both embodied in Demogorgon). However, the equality between these contraries is not indefinitely sustainable, and Prometheus eventually belies its egalitarian logic when, in Acts III and IV, the process which dethrones Jupiter itself threatens to become a form of dominance, in the same way that the 'Spirit' does in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. Yet the play cannot do otherwise, given its commitment to political perfectibility, which, however much it may rely on an interplay of subjective idealism and objective scepticism, must finally give priority to the former. After Prometheus, Shelley is always more conscious of the self-defeating tendencies of the dialectical process which the drama celebrates. Adonais manages to reiterate the recovery of hope from despair, but it does so by going beyond Prometheus to address the nature of death, a question which is the cause of some awkwardness in the play. Death is the ultimate, indefeasible form of otherness in the poem, and in attempting to bring it within the poem's imaginative circle by relating it dialectically with life, Shelley presses his poetry to the very limits of its power to redeem life and meaning from decay. He can pursue his idealist quest no further than this, and although a few months later, in one of his 'few moments of enthusiasm', he returns to the theme of political progress in Hellas, his expectations of what can be achieved in either politics or poetry have evidently passed their high-water mark.⁵ In its disillusioned recognition of the unavoidable division between subject and object, it is possible to see The Triumph of Life as the logical outcome of his career. The car of 'Life' is related to the chariot that bore Asia into the Promethean age, and is an emblem of the same inevitable process of history, but it is seen, not from the subjective vantage point of one who is

carried, but with the objectivity of a spectator. The possibility of renewed hope is not utterly excluded--and not only because the poem remains incomplete--but that Shelley should re-enact the redemption of Prometheus, whose myth of liberation he consciously revises, is scarcely conceivable.

There is therefore some justification for Bloom's view that Shelley's final poem completes a cycle of rise and fall in his career, which takes him from the impasse of Alastor, through the celebratory high point of Prometheus Unbound, to the increasing despondency of his last years, and final admission of poetic defeat.⁶ Viewed thus, his career fulfils a cycle resembling the cycles which are so recurrent a feature of his poems. Yet, as Tetreault points out, there is no evidence that the composition of The Triumph of Life and the storm in which Shelley was drowned were anything other than coincidental, and we should be wary of interpreting the poem as the terminus of his life's work.⁷ Shelley's career consequently presents us with the same dilemma that his poems so often do. It engages us in the process of recreating meaning, of seeking a pattern in its continually evolving form, but by ending with uncertainty and irresolution, it also prevents us from ever completing this process. Resembling what he calls in the Defence 'the chaos of a cyclic poem' (R&P, p. 482), it thus draws us, his readers, into continuing the revolving activity of decreating and recreating which has constantly been his own.

Some of Shelley's early statements about the laws of nature remain of continuing relevance to his poetic technique. 'Do we not see that the laws of nature perpetually act by disorganization and reproduction, each alternately becoming cause and effect'?, he writes in 1812, and in 1814 he supplements this by saying: 'The laws of attraction and repulsion, desire and aversion, suffice to account for every phenomenon of the moral and physical world.'⁸ To study his poetic treatment of nature throughout his career is to be constantly reminded of these principles, and also to find them applicable to almost every

aspect of his thought. Any just appraisal of his work therefore requires that we acknowledge the full importance of its contrary impulses, their creative-destructive interdependency, and their equality.

It is in meeting this demand that Shelley criticism, throughout its history, has largely been wanting. For almost a century and a half after his death the main emphasis was upon his visionary idealism, his emotionalism, his love of nature and solitude. The revolution in Shelley studies which finally corrected this view has resulted in an immeasurably deeper understanding and appreciation of his writing, yet it has not been without its own imbalances. In giving a central place to his political concerns, a number of critics have found ways of reinterpreting those aspects of his poetry which earlier gave substance to the myth of his unworldliness.⁹ Yet the dilemma of involvement or retreat is a real one for Shelley, and in so far as he solves it, he does so by linking the opposing tendencies in a creative dialectic rather than by subordinating one to the other. The current emphasis on his philosophical scepticism has also led to one-sidedness through a depreciation of his idealism. Shelley does not merely admit an element of idealism through certain loopholes in his prevailing scepticism, as some have suggested.¹⁰ Nor does his scepticism persistently undermine his idealism--as post-structuralist critics tend to argue--without a corresponding countermining from the other direction. Both de Man and Hogle can be charged with exempting themselves from the scepticism which they so rigorously apply. Shelley, with greater self-awareness, recognizes that the attitude of scepticism can itself be deconstructed, and that language is inseparable from a degree of logocentrism. Hence, although his ideal imaginings are constantly put into question, they are as essential to the revolutionary process of his poetry as his rational doubt. In short, Shelley is equally a maker and an unmaker of myths, and we in turn should recognize that in dismantling earlier myths about him we cloak him

in myth once again. As spectators of the Shelleyan pageant we are inevitably actors as well.

Notes

1. I borrow the phrase from Shelley's letter to Peacock, 23-24 January 1819 (Jones, II, 71).
2. Hartman, 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness' (1962), in Romanticism, Longman Critical Reader, ed. Cynthia Chase (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 43-54 (p. 47).
3. Bloom draws a comparison between Blake's and Shelley's dialectic, particularly in relation to Prometheus Unbound, Shelley's Mythmaking, pp. 46-140. Shelley's understanding of a dialectical relationship between creative intellect and social movement is thought to prefigure Marx by Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years, pp. 131-34, and Everest, 'Shelley's Doubles: An Approach to "Julian and Maddalo"', in Shelley Revalued: Essays From the Gregynog Conference, ed. Everest, pp. 69-71. Hoagwood thinks Shelley shows a relationship with the sceptical tradition of dialectical thought that lies behind Hegel, Marx and Engels, Skepticism and Ideology, p. xx.
4. Preface to Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1824), in Hutchinson, p. xxvi.
5. Letter to John Gisborne, 10 April 1822, Jones, II, 406.
6. The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 353. See also Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, pp. 117, 220.
7. The Poetry of Life, p. 248.
8. Murray, pp. 53, 115. See also above, pp. 51-52.

9. See above, pp. 20-21, 30 n. 39.
10. See, for example, Pulos, passim; Reiman, Shelley's "The Triumph of Life", pp. 3-18; Wasserman, pp. 131-53.

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