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**“All that Faith Creates, or Love Desires”: Shelley’s Poetic Vision of
Being**

**A thesis submitted in March 1999 for the degree of PhD
to the University of Durham**

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24 AUG 1999

Abstract

This thesis explores the nature of creativity in the poetic vision of Percy Bysshe Shelley. "Poetic vision" is chosen for its complex connotations, which include creative imaginings, dreams and intimations of futurity. I examine questions that Shelley raises concerning perception, existence and the fabric of reality. To develop a conceptual framework that has an ontological basis, I draw on the theories of two twentieth-century non-dualist thinkers: David Bohm, who combines science, philosophy and art, and the existential thought of Martin Heidegger. I also investigate ways in which literary expression and life become interwoven and suggest that this reciprocity is explicable through a dynamically creative vision of existence.

In Chapter One Shelley's reflections on the creative capacity of poetic visions to influence states of being, and his holistic apprehension of existence in On Life, provide the thesis with a conceptual paradigm which is in contradistinction to the Cartesian schism between mind and matter. A Defence of Poetry is contrasted with Peacock's The Four Ages of Poetry to show that the contention between the two writers' visions springs from questions relating to being. Shelley's declaration that the poetic impulse is central to life is examined in the light of Heidegger's notion of the poetic as disclosing being and Bohm's quantum concepts of creativity.

In Chapter Two Alastor is interpreted as a poem which raises questions about existence and I provide a counter-approach to critical positions of scepticism. Heidegger's concepts of "Being-in-the-world" and "Being-towards-death" provide the basis for an existential analysis of the Poet's impassioned quest. A comparison between the Poet's dream of his feminine counterpart and Shelley's own vision of his ideal beloved reveals connections between artistic vision and human experience.

In Chapter Three on Laon and Cythna, poetic vision is shown to operate from a metaphysical basis of thought, passion, and the human will to enact a radical transformation in consciousness. The poem's investigation of freedom is linked to Heidegger's concept of being absorbed in the "they." Chapter Four continues my extended reading of Laon and Cythna. Shelley's notion of creativity collapses the demarcations between imaginative vision and the physical world. Here his view of reality is contrasted with the psychological investigations of Jean Piaget. The poem's vision of human empowerment is compared with Peacock's fatalism in Ahrimanes.

Chapter Five investigates challenges to Shelley's optimism. Julian and Maddalo is the major poem interpreted in a chapter where the keynote is the contention between theories about the nature of reality and their validity to human life. Shelley's anxiety about communicating visions of despair is analyzed with regard to the Maniac's tragic predicament.

Chapter Six interprets Prometheus Unbound as a dramatic engagement with the spiritual, imaginative, emotional and sensuous planes of being. Existence is seen to be poised on a mobile nexus of thought and emotions. Asia has a dynamic role and, through consideration of her journey with Panthea to Demogorgon, I examine Shelley's complex negotiation between free will and determinism. Spinoza's monism is discussed in relation to "Love's Philosophy."

In Chapter Seven on Hellas, "Thought", "Passion", "Will", "Reason" and the "Imagination" are shown to have creative powers which determine futurity. Questions about the structure of reality are explored in the drama's dynamic interchange between the magician-like Ahasuerus and the Turkish tyrant Mahmud. Dreams are given significance as avenues of perception to realms beyond conscious experience and in relation to unfolding the future.

Finally, in Chapter Eight Shelley's ideas about poetic creativity are explored through his poems to Jane Williams. Whilst composing these lyrics Shelley used the figure of Rousseau, in the Triumph of Life, to suggest a reciprocity between art and life. I examine the similarities between Rousseau's fictional creation of Julie in La Nouvelle Héloïse and his subsequent love for Sophie d'Houdetot. Shelley's lyrics to Jane Williams communicate desire at different levels of conscious awareness, from trance-like mesmerism to overt invitation.

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the University of Durham for granting me a two year Research Award. My research has been thoughtfully supervised by Professor Michael O'Neill whose depth of knowledge, dedication to Shelleyan scholarship and interest in new critical perspectives are exemplary. Michael's inspiration, encouragement and guidance have had an incalculable influence on my PhD. More specifically, I owe Michael my gratitude for his care and patience in reading the final drafts of this thesis. In the Philosophy department I am thankful to Professor David Cooper who has advised me on the complexities of Heidegger's existentialism and other philosophical perspectives. In our meetings David's philosophical reflections and friendship make days at Durham enjoyable. I would also like to thank Professor David Knight for his animated insights into the life and work of Humphry Davy and nineteenth-century science. In relation to English, I thank Dr. Hugh Haughton at York University for his thoughts on Romantic autobiography. I also thank Simon Kilner whose help with quantum holistic processes of spirit, mind and body have been both therapeutic and insightful. I extend my thanks to Maggie Sparke whose spiritual guidance has given me hope in difficult days. I am extremely grateful to James Morris who has continued to support me financially throughout this thesis. Most importantly I thank my beloved daughter Sarah who has lived with the presiding spirit of Shelley for the last ten years and is soon to follow her interest in chemistry with a bilingual MChem in Sheffield and France.

List of Abbreviations

Works by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

- BSM I** The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. I. "Peter Bell the Third" and "The Triumph of Life." MSS. Shelley adds. c. 5 and adds. c. 4. Ed. Donald H. Reiman. New York: Garland, 1986.
- BSM IV** The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. IV. MS. Shelley d.1. Ed. E. B. Murray. New York: Garland, 1988.
- BSM XIII** The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. XIII. Drafts for "Laon and Cythna." MSS. Shelley adds. e. 14. And adds. e. 19. Ed. Tatsuo Tokoo. New York: Garland, 1992.
- BSM XVII** The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. XVII. Drafts for "Laon and Cythna." MS. Shelley adds. e. 10. Ed. Steven E. Jones. New York: Garland, 1994.
- CP** The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Vol. II. Ed. Neville Rogers. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975. All citations refer to line numbers unless otherwise indicated.
- HN** The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. XVI. The "Hellas" Notebook. MS. Shelley adds. e. 7. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Michael J. Neth. New York: Garland, 1994.

- JMN The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. XV. The "Julian and Maddalo" Draft Notebook. MS. Shelley adds. e. 11. Ed. Steven E. Jones. New York: Garland, 1990.
- Julian The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. Julian Edition. 10 vols. 1926-30. London: Gordian, 1965.
- LS The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley. 2 vols. Ed. Frederick L. Jones. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.
- MYR Fair-Copy Manuscripts of Shelley's Poems in European and American Libraries. The Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics: Shelley, vol. VIII. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Michael O'Neill. New York: Garland, 1997.
- PN The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. IX. The "Prometheus Unbound" Notebooks. MSS. Shelley e. 1, e. 2, and e. 3. Ed. Neil Fraistat. New York: Garland, 1991.
- PP Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts. Norton Critical Edition Ser. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977. All quotations refer to line numbers from this edition unless otherwise indicated.
- PW Shelley Poetical Works. Rev. ed. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corr. G. M. Matthews. London: Oxford UP, 1970.

PWS The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Vol 1. Ed. E. B. Murray. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

SC Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822. Vols. i-iv ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron, vols v-viii ed. Donald H. Reiman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1961-86.

Works by, Written with, or Relating to, David Bohm:

OC David Bohm, On Creativity. Ed. Lee Nichol. London: Routledge, 1998.

QI B. J. Hiley and F. David Peat, ed. Quantum Implications: Essays in Honour of David Bohm. 1987. London: Routledge, 1991.

SOC David Bohm and F. David Peat, Science, Order and Creativity. 1987. London: Routledge, 1989.

UM David Bohm, Unfolding Meaning: A Weekend of Dialogue with David Bohm. 1985. London: Ark-Routledge, 1994.

UU David Bohm and B. J. Hiley, The Undivided Universe: An Ontological Interpretation of Quantum Theory. London: Routledge, 1993.

WIO David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order. 1980. London: Routledge, 1995.

Works by Martin Heidegger:

- BT Being and Time. Trans. J. Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- BW Basic Writings. Ed. D. F. Krell. London: Routledge, 1978.
- PLT Poetry, Language, Thought. Trans. and introd. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper, 1975.

Abbreviations of Critical Works Arranged Alphabetically by Title:

- AQ Sir William Drummond, Academical Questions. (1805). A Photoreproduction. Introd. Terence Allan Hoagwood. Delmar, NY: Scholars, 1984.
- BP Lord Byron, The Complete Poetical Works. 7 Vols. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980-93.
- C Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Confessions. Trans. and introd. J. M. Cohen. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953.
- CCW Jean Piaget, The Child's Conception of the World. London: Kegan Paul, 1929.
- FAP H. F. B. Brett-Smith, ed. Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley. Oxford: Blackwell, 1921.

- H David E. Cooper, Heidegger. Thinkers of Our Time Ser. London: Claridge, 1996.
- HMI Michael O'Neill, The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.
- LL Michael O'Neill, Percy Bysshe Shelley : A Literary Life. Macmillan Literary Lives Ser. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- PS James A. Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1949.
- RSW Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Reveries of the Solitary Walker. Trans. and introd. Peter France. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.
- SAM Stuart Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision. San Marino, CA: Huntington, 1975.
- SB Charles E. Robinson, Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.
- SCR Earl R. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading. 1971. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1977.
- SGY Kenneth Neill Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1974.

- SMA Carl G. Jung, The Spirit of Man in Art and Literature. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. 1967. London: Ark-Routledge, 1989.
- SP Richard Holmes, Shelley: The Pursuit. 1974. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.
- SPR Jerrold E. Hogle, Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- SS William Keach, Shelley's Style. New York: Methuen, 1984.
- QS Danah Zohar, The Quantum Self. 1990. London: Flamingo-Harper, 1991.
- QSO Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall, The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision. 1993. London: Flamingo-Harper, 1994.

Academic Journals:

- KSJ Keats-Shelley Journal.
- KSR Keats-Shelley Review.
- SIR Studies in Romanticism.

Preface

This thesis explores the nature of creativity in the poetic vision of Percy Bysshe Shelley. "Poetic vision" is chosen to connote a dynamic multiplicity of meanings: creative imaginings, dreams, and intimations of futurity. Questions concerning perception, existence and the structure of reality have a significant role in this thesis. Shelley's reflections on the nature of poetic creativity and its power to affect human existence in A Defence of Poetry have, I shall argue, a daring originality it is important not to underestimate. Crucially Shelley affirms that poetry "creates for us a being within our being" (PP, 505). I investigate the far-reaching implications of this statement by focusing on the nature of "being", that is, questions of ontological significance. Central to Shelley's apprehension of existence is the premise that "The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy, is that of unity" (PP, 477). This interconnected "view of life" provides the thesis with a key conceptual paradigm of existence. Here my interpretation is in contradistinction to the Cartesian schism between mind and matter, and the sense of alienation from the world that this dualism generates. Discussions about the philosophical foundations of dualism and holism are offered in Chapters One and Two.

For Shelley, imaginative visions are the very basis of existence. In Prometheus Unbound the Earth speaks of a post-mortal realm in which exist "Dreams and the light imaginings of men / And all that faith creates, or love desires," (I. 200-1). These "imaginings" generate forms that are "Terrible, strange, sublime and beautiful" (I. 202). I pursue Shelley's emphasis on the way imaginative visions are energised through human emotion by considering theories on the frontiers between quantum physics, philosophy and psychology; theories which are yielding a deeper understanding of human creativity. Given the wealth of holistic theories now emerging about the nature of existence,¹ the late twentieth century is a time "when our

conscious development has reached a higher level from which the poet can tell us something new" (SMA, 77).

The critic of Shelley approaches his work through a dominant inheritance of scepticism,² which derives its assumptions from an epistemological basis. Of canonical status is Earl Wasserman's Shelley: A Critical Reading which stresses the "skeptical quality" in the poems.³ Scepticism focuses on the uncertainty of knowing, and this emphasis detracts from investigating the questions that Shelley raises about the nature of existence, "the wonder of our being" (PP, 505). Consequently some of the poetry's most challenging insights into being are evaded when interpreted from a sceptical perspective. For instance, Ahasuerus' declaration in Hellas, "Nought is but that which feels itself to be" (785), demands, but has rarely received, analysis of its daring ontological assertion. Drawing on the theories of two twentieth-century non-dualist thinkers, David Bohm and Martin Heidegger, my conceptual framework is based on ontological enquiry. Shelley's engagement with the nature of being and his imaginative speculations on life are shown, in a detailed analysis in Chapter One, to anticipate some of the implications now arising from Bohm's quantum theories.

It is rewarding to re-evaluate Shelley's ideas about thought, imagination and passion in the light of a creative thinker such as David Bohm who combines science, philosophy and art in his apprehensions of existence. For Bohm, human consciousness is involved in a fundamental participation with the universe. The affinities between Bohm's conceptions and Shelley's speculations are striking. For instance, in Bohm's understanding "thought is real",⁴ an implicit part of reality with manifold consequences.⁵ Similarly for Shelley thoughts have an ontological status as seen in Laon and Cythna, "Thoughts have gone forth whose powers can sleep no more!" (CP, 2260). Using Bohm's "implicate" and "explicate" models of reality, outlined in Chapter One, I analyse Shelley's fascination with "the human mind's imaginings"⁶ in relation to the creation of futurity. Here Bohm's hypotheses give cogency to Shelley's deepest intuitions of regeneration through a radical transformation in consciousness. To

achieve this regeneration, poems such as Prometheus Unbound depict conflicting tensions: good and evil; love and hate; optimism and despair.

Shelley's poetic vision concentrates on restructuring the latent thoughts and emotions which underlie the manifestation of form and events. By focusing on love as the most potent power of transformation, rather than envisioning the destruction of the existing order, Shelley expresses his hope of attaining freedom without violence. In works like Prometheus Unbound, creation through love is presented as the only tenable choice, however abject the circumstances. Perhaps what is most compelling in Shelley's vision is his analysis of human nature when besieged by circumstances which confront the bounds of human endurance. In the preface to The Cenci Shelley explains that

the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance,
and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love.

Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. (PP, 240)

Yet in the drama the ideals of "peace and love" falter under the intensity of Beatrice's degradation by Count Cenci. The Shelleyan reader is left to reflect on an irresolvable chasm between an "eminently fearful and monstrous" (PP, 239) story and the human limits of "kindness and forbearance." Shelley is able, however, in his greatest work "to hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates" (Prometheus Unbound, IV. 573-4). This thesis does not provide an interpretation of The Cenci, as it has been my aim to limit Shelley's darker vision of being to a single chapter in which Julian and Maddalo was chosen in preference to this drama. Other omissions of Shelley's major works, largely occasioned by the constraints of space, include Adonais and the Triumph of Life. However some of Shelley's ideas about death in the former composition, and creativity in the latter work, are examined in the final chapter.

Reading Shelley's prose and poetry in the light of recent insights from quantum physics presents an academically adventurous challenge since physics and literature are mainly viewed as intellectual disciplines which are diametrically opposed.⁷ But such a fragmentary approach to thought did not exist in the early nineteenth century; Shelley's contemporaries freely pursued eclectic ideas. The work of Humphry Davy, for instance, "straddled any boundaries between physical science, physiology and psychology, and literature."⁸ In a similar spirit Shelley's interest in contemporary scientific discoveries infiltrated his consciousness and imaginatively shaped his poetic vision.⁹ An interdisciplinary approach is germane when all branches of knowledge are pursued for a common aim: a deeper understanding of the nature of existence. A division between physics and philosophy has not always existed in western thought; the early Greek philosophers, who questioned the nature of the universe, "were regarded primarily as 'physicists.'"¹⁰ And this interdependence is evident in the thought of David Bohm who "was never able to see any inherent separation between science and philosophy" (SOC, 3).

Philosophical speculation, which is central to Shelley's ideas about creativity, is the common ground which unites different disciplines. In this thesis Shelley's pursuit into questions about the nature of existence is also read in the context of Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy. Why choose the ideas of an existentialist philosopher to elucidate Shelley's poetic vision of being? A full discussion of the significance of Heidegger's ideas must be deferred until the main body of the thesis, but it is germane at this point to mention two of his inimitable phrases. Like Shelley, Heidegger focused on the entirety of existence, designated by his terms "Being-in-the-world" (BT, 78) and "Being-a-whole" (BT, 425). Moreover his concern with an existential quest into the nature of freedom is of specific relevance to Shelley's ideas. Heideggerian thought has been influential in critical discourse, notably with Derrida's theory of deconstruction. But my analysis of Heidegger's ideas is not concerned with their appropriation by critical theorists, but seeks to ascertain what insights they might yield into Shelley's speculations concerning the nature of existence.

In relation to creativity I investigate ways in which literary expression and life become interwoven and mutually enriching. My MA dissertation on Epipsychidion posited that “Structuring and self-consciously exploring personal experience through a succession of literary discourses, confuses the aesthetic distance between art and life; personal consciousness and literary consciousness become interlaced.”¹¹ The present thesis traces these interconnections and suggests that the degrees of reciprocity become explicable through an holistic and creative vision of existence. The relationship between text and subsequent experiences was cogently outlined by Shelley following Peacock’s marriage:

It is altogether extremely like the denouement of one of your own novels, and as such serves to a theory I once imagined, that in everything any man ever wrote, spoke, acted, or imagined, is contained, as it were, an allegorical idea of his own future life, as the acorn contains the oak. (LS II, 192)

These “allegorical” ideas represent unstructured potentiality, and the conditions necessary for these acorns to mature into oak trees, that is become part of life’s actual experiences, is investigated in this study. Significantly, Shelley not only outlines a parity between Peacock’s fiction and his life, he also implies that the creative act is not confined to the artist but applies to “any man.”¹² In this way all aspects of life, writing, speaking, acting and imagining, have a generative possibility, that if sufficiently empowered, could determine one’s experience of reality.¹³ In this study I examine Shelley’s belief that his imaginative visions are a potent force on the spirit of futurity, “The trumpet of a prophecy!”¹⁴ Shelley’s concept of “prophecy” is defined towards the end of A Defence of Poetry: “Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present” (PP, 508). Shelley’s poems realistically acknowledge the opposition between the contemporary socio-political milieu and his egalitarian ideals of freedom; the tension between

these polarities is skilfully manipulated so that his visionary aims are given greater clarity. With the emphasis on the dynamic nature of vision as the source of continual creativity, my interpretation offers a counter proposition to accounts of Shelley's poetics as ineffectual utopianism.¹⁵ I explore how Shelley synthesizes the metaphysical elements of imagination, thought, passion and the human will into a vision that provides a paradigm for transforming the world.

Chapter One formulates the theoretical foundations of the thesis and presents an holistic, interconnected vision of existence. Shelley's conception of unity in On Life is compared with Bohm's perceptual orders of reality which originate from an interrelated totality. A close textual reading of A Defence of Poetry, incorporating drafts from the Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts, suggests contrasts with Peacock's The Four Ages of Poetry. Here I argue that the major contention between their visions is not one of knowing, Peacock's Enlightenment emphasis on reason versus Shelley's exaltation of the imagination; more fundamentally, it springs from their differences over the nature of being. To confirm Shelley's declaration that the poetic impulse is central to human life, I examine Heidegger's notion of the poetic as disclosing being and Bohm's quantum metaphorical concepts of creativity, both of which claim that poetry renders the deepest insights into existence. In this chapter, and throughout the thesis, I examine Shelley's affirmation that poetry restructures our existing apprehensions of reality into a new perceptual order: "It creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration" (PP, 505-6). Accordingly, Shelley's poetic vision is seen as conveying insights for the regeneration of humanity since "A Poet . . . is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory" (PP, 506).

Having established a "Poetics of Being," in Chapter Two I investigate Alastor's philosophical "questionings" as a primordial concern with the parameters of being, "Nature's vast frame, the web of human things, / Birth and the grave" (719-20). By focusing on questions of existence, my interpretation offers a counter-approach to the view of Alastor as a poem

implicated in scepticism. In my reading Alastor's ontological priorities are interpreted in relation to Heideggerian concepts such as "Being-in-the-world" and "Being-towards-death." Intense passion fuels the Poet's quest and is central to Shelley's creative vision. William Drummond's Academical Questions, which Shelley acclaims highly in On Life (PP, 476), explores how powerful emotions influence the state of being. Finally, a comparative analysis of the Poet's dream of his feminine counterpart and Shelley's vision of his ideal beloved and sequential meeting with Mary Shelley is shown to yield fascinating interconnections between artistic vision and lived experiences.

In Chapters Three and Four I provide an extensive reading of a much neglected work, Laon and Cythna. In this poem Shelley's epic portrayal of freedom is interpreted as a notable precursor to Prometheus Unbound. Poetic vision operates from a metaphysical basis and works with thoughts, passion, and the indefatigable human will to enact a radical transformation in consciousness. Internal mental and emotional changes are shown to precipitate external transformations. In Chapter Three Laon and Cythna's investigation of freedom is linked to Heidegger's existential concepts of "authenticity" and being inauthentically absorbed in the "they." Women champion Shelley's ideals: the anonymous Woman of Canto 1 and Cythna both impart the poem's wisdom which is conceived and relayed with love. In Chapter Four the very fabric of reality is questioned as Shelley collapses demarcations between imaginative vision and the physical world. This philosophical position of unity is explored through the poem's presentation of childlike modes of apprehension. Shelley's view of oneness, as the primary mode of existence, is contrasted with the psychological approach in Jean Piaget's The Child's Conception of the World. Finally Shelley's vision of self-determination and human empowerment is compared with Peacock's fatalism in Ahrimanes.

Chapter Five investigates the challenges to Shelley's optimism and its vision borders on despair. A reading of "Stanzas written in Dejection", with its theme of death as the poet's desired destination, opens the chapter. The keynote in this chapter is the contention between

theories about the nature of reality and their validity to human life. Here Julian and Maddalo is the major poem interpreted, and Shelley's drafting of his essay "On Love" elucidates some of the conflicts between freedom and possessiveness in his vision of love. The question of inter-involvement and individuality in relationships is metaphorically addressed through the conceptual paradigm of the wave-particle duality in modern physics. Shelley's anxiety about communicating visions of despair and the consequences of this negativity on the field of consciousness receives a detailed analysis in relation to the Maniac's abject predicament.

Chapter Six interprets Prometheus Unbound as a dramatic engagement with the spiritual, imaginative, emotional and sensuous planes of being. Existence is seen by the work as poised on a mobile nexus of thought and emotions. Shelley uproots Aeschylus' myth in the reader's consciousness by re-imagining Prometheus' suffering and redemption with an intensity that awakens deeper insights. Under the duress of Jupiter's torture, Prometheus experiences an internal transformation at the core of his being. Emotions have ontological repercussions and Prometheus' compassion is the necessary prerequisite for his subsequent physical release by Hercules. Archetypally, Prometheus symbolizes creative fire, but it is his feminine counterpart, Asia, who has the drama's most dynamic role. Prior to Prometheus' release, Asia and Panthea's journey to Demogorgon demonstrates Shelley's complex negotiation between free will and determinism. Asia's compliance with both her inner nature and external forces suggests a vision of co-creation; free choice is trustingly submitted to the cosmic power which brings its desires to fruition. The influence of Spinoza's monism on Shelley's poetic vision is examined, and his appropriation of pantheism is discussed with reference to "Love's Philosophy." Love permeates existence in the rejuvenated Promethean world; the ecstatic paradisaical vision of Act IV is animated "by the love that moves the sun and the other stars."¹⁶

In Chapter Seven, on Hellas, the freedom of Greece is at stake and for its defence Shelley formulates his most persuasive discussion of the power of "Thought," "Will," "Passion," "Reason," and the "Imagination" to decide futurity. I cite textual evidence from The "Hellas"

Notebook to show the numerous revisions that Shelley made to perfect this vision. Fundamental questions about the structure of reality are explored in the drama's dynamic interchange between the metaphysician Ahasuerus and the Turkish tyrant Mahmud. With regard to the creation of futurity, the drama presents a psychological battle where Mahmud's understanding of existence is effectively overthrown, thus ensuring Turkish defeat. Shelley's portrayal of the spectral Ahasuerus is interdependent with the natural world, and this creative interchange yields magician-like powers for his protagonist. Dreams are given significance as avenues of perception to realms beyond conscious experience, and in relaying prescience of futurity. Hellas reveals Shelley's understanding of the creative power of thought when animated by intense passion.

Finally in Chapter Eight Shelley's ideas about poetic creativity are explored through his love lyrics to Jane Williams. Whilst composing these lyrics Shelley used the figure of Rousseau, in his draft of the Triumph of Life, to suggest an interrelationship between writing and life's experiences. In relation to the nature of creativity, I examine how Rousseau's imaginative visions dominate his perception of reality and are fervently channelled into literary expression. La Nouvelle Héloïse and the Confessions are interpreted to reveal fascinating similarities between Rousseau's fictional creation of Julie and his subsequent love for Sophie d'Houdetot. A ménage à trois is a significant trait in Rousseau's romantic leanings and equally implicit in Shelley's emotional psychology. Shelley's desire for Jane Williams generates some of his finest lyrics. I interpret the poems in the context of their accompanying missives and as gifts showing deep affection for Jane. Most intriguingly, the lyrics communicate desire at different levels of consciousness, from the trance-like mesmerism of "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient" to the overt enticement in "To Jane. The Invitation."

¹ In On Creativity, David Bohm cautions that in any theory about the nature of existence “It’s not enough to have holism, it must also be coherent”, 111. For Bohm the central elements which constitute coherence and define the deep relationship between science and art are “beauty” and “truth”, OC, 30-3.

² For a critical summary see “Shelley’s Scepticism: From the History of Ideas to Deconstruction,” Jerrold E. Hogle, “Percy Bysshe Shelley” in Literature of the Romantic Period: A Bibliographical Guide, ed. Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 126-8.

³ Earl Wasserman suggests that “nearly all the poems become richer when we recognize in them their related but variant strategies for embodying or surmounting Shelley’s skepticism”, SCR, ix.

⁴ Bohm states that thought’s “reality can in fact be demonstrated by instruments such as the encephalograph” which registers “electrical and chemical changes, muscular tensions and so forth”, OC, 64.

⁵ In Louwrien Wijers’ interview with David Bohm, “Art, Dialogue, and the Implicate Order,” Bohm contends that “thought is participatory, that thought has produced everything we see here in our society.” Moreover in his holistic view of existence thought has an ontological validity: “thought is part of this reality and that we are not merely thinking about it, but that we are thinking it”, OC, 115.

⁶ “Mont Blanc”, 143.

⁷ There is a new wave of interpretations coming from America engaging with the metaphorical analogies between quantum concepts and poetic vision: Arkady Plotnitsky’s “All Shapes of Light: The Quantum Mechanical Shelley” in Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), (see Chapter One, n. 38); Hugh Roberts’ Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997), (see Chapter Two, Alastor, n. 36); Daniel

Albright's Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

⁸ David Knight, Humphry Davy: Science and Power (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 31; hereafter referred to as Knight, 1992.

⁹ Kenneth Cameron gives a detailed discussion of Shelley's creative appropriation of contemporary scientific ideas in his reading of Prometheus Unbound SGY, 542-60.

¹⁰ Jonathan Barnes, trans. Early Greek Philosophy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 13.

¹¹ Lorraine Morris, "'Antique Verse and High Romance': Myth, Genre, Gender and Culture in Epipsychidion", MA Diss. York U, 1992, iv; hereafter referred to as Morris, MA Diss.

¹² See Shelley creatively visualizing his feminine ideal, Chapter Two, 62-64.

¹³ For an analysis of empowering imaginative visions, see Chapter Seven on Hellas.

¹⁴ "Ode to the West Wind", 69.

¹⁵ In Chapter Seven (n. 19) I argue against Jerome McGann's position of Shelley's futurism as a strategy of displacement.

¹⁶ Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy vol. III Paradise, trans. and introd., Mark Musa (1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), xxxiii, 145; hereafter referred to as Musa, Paradise.

Chapter 1

Shelley's "Poetry of Life": Encountering a Poetics of Being

*I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
 To muse on my own separate phantasy,
 My own, my human mind, which passively
 Now renders and receives fast influencings,
 Holding an unremitting interchange
 With the clear universe of things around.*

("Mont Blanc", 35-40)

I

My opening chapter explores Shelley's holistic conception of being in On Life and the dynamic interchange of self and world that arises from this vision. Of central importance is A Defence of Poetry in which Shelley declares that poetry has a creative influence on the nature of being: "the poetical faculty . . . creates new materials of knowledge, and power and pleasure" (PP, 503). Working with concepts from David Bohm's quantum theories and Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy, I take an anti-epistemological stance in order to construct a poetics that has the question of being at its core.¹ In this theory the fundamental principle is one of holism in which the mental, emotional and physical planes of existence are understood to be intimately inter-involved. My analysis of Shelley's idea of unity is shaped by Bohm's understanding of reality where he envisages "the unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders" (WIO, 172). This notion of

interrelatedness is in contradistinction to Descartes' dualistic philosophy.² There are conceptual inadequacies in the Cartesian position, namely that "The link between the mechanistic events in the body and the spiritual events in the soul was something Descartes was never able to explain satisfactorily."³ Bohm and Hiley present a view of existence which addresses this Cartesian dilemma; they surmise that in the underlying level of reality from which all manifest existence emanates "there is no real division between mind and matter, psyche and soma."⁴ The fundamental concept which resonates through Bohm's work is that of wholeness: "both observer and observed are merging and interpenetrating aspects of one whole reality, which is indivisible and unanalysable" (WIO, 9).

David Bohm's scientific speculations are not the only viewpoint from which I interpret Shelley's "poetry of life" (PP, 502). Philosophical insight into his assertion that the imagination is "the principle of synthesis, and has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself . . ." (PP, 480) is explored through Martin Heidegger's existential quest to "raise anew the question of the meaning of Being" (BT, 1). Like Bohm and Hiley's holistic conception of an "undivided universe", Heidegger's ontology is also founded on the premise of oneness. However Heidegger's understanding of wholeness is construed with the notion of disclosure or unconcealment. Such a notion differs from Bohm's fundamental emphasis on continual creativity. Heidegger encapsulates a sense of interconnection in his hyphenated designation of "Being-in-the-world" which "stands for a unitary phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole" (BT, 78). Both Bohm and Heidegger share a common aim to dislodge the influence of Cartesianism on the western spirit of humanity. In the twentieth century science has radically challenged its assumptions about the structure of reality. Bohm writes "that both in relativity and in quantum theory the Cartesian order is leading to serious contradictions and confusion" (WIO, xv). Heidegger had earlier stated that "The relativity theory of physics arises from the tendency to exhibit the interconnectedness of Nature as it is 'in itself'" (BT, 30). Foregrounding the nature of being as an interrelated field

demands a transformation in thinking in which a divisive Cartesian world-view becomes unsustainable.⁵ Bohm's scientific speculations and Heidegger's philosophical theories give credence to Shelley's holistic understanding of existence in On Life: "The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy, is that of unity" (PP, 477). To engage in an interplay with the thoughts of a poet, a scientist and a philosopher, concerning the structure of reality, is to be aware that a constant negotiation is needed between similarity and diversity in all approaches. Nevertheless the argument of this thesis focuses on the underlying common ground from which these theories originate: the primacy of being involved in a participatory engagement within the world.

Bohm's work opens up new frontiers for research; he suggests ways in which inferences from quantum theory can elucidate a deeper understanding of human creativity.⁶ Like Shelley pondering "the dark abyss of— how little we know" (PP, 478), Bohm also stresses the provisional nature of his speculations; his insights do not specify a definitive explanation, but the nearest approximation that can be attained "in our present phase of unfoldment of consciousness" (WIO, 212). At times Bohm's work takes imaginative leaps beyond what is scientifically proven; but these leaps are necessary to further our understanding of the dynamics of life: a vision of existence which is depicted by Shelley as being "so miraculous" yet "so certain and so unfathomable" (PP, 475). William Blake envisaged that imaginative cognition is essential for the advancement of knowledge: There is No Natural Religion [First Series] concludes with the declaration that,

If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again.⁷

That Bohm's quantum suppositions should be metaphorically applied to Shelley's work is appropriate given Shelley's continued fascination with science.⁸ The relationship between poetry and science is outlined in A Defence of Poetry and poetry is accorded the pre-eminent position: "Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred" (PP, 503). Shelley's conception of "science" is probably employed here in the broader context of knowledge, particularly in relation to the originality of new thoughts, rather than the constraint of a single discipline. To support this suggestion an earlier cancelled draft shows Shelley reconsidering his ideas on knowledge:

loftiest power: that is they
 teach ~~number~~ unfold the secretest things
 Of moral & intellectual science knowledge;
 The philosophy of
~~The two former~~ Dante, & ~~still more perhaps~~
 Milton. . . . (BSM IV, f. 71r rev, 708-13)

The finalised version, which appears in A Defence of Poetry, accentuates philosophy: "Shakespeare, Dante and Milton . . . are philosophers of the very loftiest power" (PP, 485). Nevertheless it is evident from the composition of this statement that Shelley's estimation of their ability to "unfold the secretest things" comprehensively includes different branches of knowledge. A further relevant illustration of Shelley's understanding of science appears in the drafting of the following sentence: "All the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors" (PP, 485). Originally Shelley wrote "science" (BSM IV, f. 71v rev, 670) and later changed the word to "opinion." When searching for a term that

encompasses the originality of new ideas, poetry, philosophy, and science sometimes occupy a similar lexical space in Shelley's consciousness.

Before interpreting Shelley's understanding of poetic creativity further, it is helpful to outline Bohm's conceptual models of reality which lend credence to Shelley's ideas about unity. In his perceptions of existence, Bohm differentiates between two orders of reality. The "implicate order" is "one unbroken whole, including the entire universe with all its 'fields' and 'particles'" (WIO, 189). Significantly in this order time and space have a more intimate relationship than the human mind is able to conceive of in a conscious waking state. The apparent linear progression of past, present and future, perceived in a conscious waking state, betrays the underlying simultaneity which exists: the "implicate order" is "a multidimensional reality that cannot be comprehended fully in terms of any time order, or set of such orders" (WIO, 211). The second category, the "explicate order", can be defined succinctly as the manifest world, and this order "dominates ordinary 'common sense' experience" (UU, 382). An indivisible relationship between the "implicate" and "explicate" levels of existence is a basic premise: "in consciousness, as in quantum theory, the explicate order emerges from the implicate order as a relatively stable and self-determined domain and ultimately flows back into the implicate order" (UU, 383). Contrary to the prevalent Cartesian paradigm of dualism, Bohm's theories confer a validity on Shelley's vision of existence in which all-encompassing unity is the primary actuality.

The metaphorical analogies of Bohm's "implicate" model of reality render more explicit Shelley's quasi-mystical apprehension of poetic experience in A Defence of Poetry. For Shelley, a poet

not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time.

Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events: . . . A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. (PP, 482-3)

Here “participates” is in accord with Bohm’s quantum idea of a creative involvement with the world. “The eternal, the infinite, and the one”, commonly interpreted as Plato’s ideal reality, can also be seen to represent the intrinsic totality from which all manifest existence arises. Significantly Bohm deduces that “not just the content of thought”, but also “the actual structure, function and activity of thought is in the implicate order” (WIO, 204). But within this “implicate order” thought does not permeate the innermost level. Bohm suggests that there is “a deeper level of enfolded activity — very subtle — which is intelligent, and has energy and passion” (UM, 48). Poetic conception participates in this deepest generative order of reality because it goes beyond existent thought-forms, and consequentially poetry is vitally creative.

Shelley’s attraction to Plato’s world of ideas takes on a new dimension when juxtaposed with Bohm’s “implicate order.” In Plato’s paradigm the primary level of reality is similarly not that which is manifestly existent, but “a reality without colour or shape, intangible but utterly real, apprehensible only by the intellect which is the pilot of the soul.”⁹ However, a fundamental difference occurs in their understanding of the primary actuality: for Plato “the abode of the reality with which true knowledge is concerned” is apprehended solely through the “intellect”;¹⁰ Bohm conceives that the deepest level of reality “is intelligent, and has energy and passion.” Here Bohm’s insights are more in accord with Shelley’s vision in which passion conveys a creative potential.¹¹ In A Defence of Poetry to “foreknow the spirit of events” implies that the poet has prescience of the underlying energy patterns which precede the manifestation of form. But prescience is not a passive viewing of futurity. The dynamic impact

of thought on the material world is evident since the poet's "thoughts are the germs of the flower and" generate "the fruit of latest time." Poets are not "prophets in the gross sense of the word, or . . . can foretell the form" because the future emerges from varying possibilities; this is analogous to the idea that precognition could not be absolute, or perhaps even possible, given the quantum concept of indeterminism.¹² Bohm surmises that "a great deal of the future may be enfolded in the present as a potentiality, or a likely possibility, but still be changeable" (UM, 132).

In A Defence of Poetry Shelley states that poetry "acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness" (PP, 486). This suggests some collective source of consciousness, exceeding individuality. As Shelley later explains, poets are "compelled to serve, the Power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul" (PP, 508). In their compositions poets "measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit . . . it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age" (PP, 508). This notion of interrelationship had earlier been established with Shelley's reference to the "mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds" (PP, 485). In relation to this interconnection of consciousness, Bohm's theories gesture towards an unknowable infinity; he surmises that our "participation" in the universe "goes on to a greater collective mind, and perhaps ultimately to some yet more comprehensive mind in principle capable of going indefinitely beyond the human species as a whole" (UU, 386).

The implications arising from a participatory nature of existence are immense and fundamental to Shelley's exposition of the "one mind" in On Life. Here Shelley rejects the separatism inherent in the notion of finite autonomous individuals and embraces a more inclusive definition of existence:

the existence of distinct individual minds similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion . . . The words I, and

you and they are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. It is difficult to find terms adequately to express so subtle a conception as that to which the intellectual philosophy has conducted us. (PP, 478)

Wasserman deduces that "This 'one mind' is neither an artificial abstraction nor a deity, but is Existence itself" (SCR, 146). Here Shelley's expression of "so subtle a conception" has remarkable similarities with Bohm's supposition that it is

ultimately misleading and indeed wrong to suppose . . . that each human being is an independent actuality who interacts with other human beings and with nature.

Rather, all these are projections of a single totality. (WIO, 210)

Open communion and communication are possible when we transcend the finite notion of a spectatorial self and perceive the nature of being as an interpenetrating field. A creative dialogue with others, in Bohmian terms "participating in a dance of the mind" (UM, vii), educes a deeper understanding of life. Perceived from within the "implicate order" of reality, Bohm views human interaction as a "social meditation" in which mutual reciprocity develops because "what I am is enfolded in you, and what you are is enfolded in me" (UM, 111). For Shelley the notion of a communion between minds, to elicit insights into existence, also has a retrospective orientation in a solitary, but equally creative, engagement with the immortal literary and philosophical conceptions that are imprinted upon the world. Shelley, as a visionary poet, participates in "the episodes of the cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men. The Past, like an inspired rhapsodist, fills the theatre of everlasting generations with their harmony" (PP, 494-5).

On Life addresses major philosophical questions about the nature of existence; the contentions it raises in relation to being, mind and perception deserve serious consideration. However, the essay is limited in scope as it is bounded by the constraints of logical disquisition and does not fully realize Shelley's deepest intuitions. Shelley presents a reasoned acceptance and rejection of various philosophies: he assimilates Berkeley's subjective idealism where "Nothing exists but as it is perceived" (PP, 477) and rejects "materialism" as "a seducing system to young and superficial minds" (PP, 476). There is a tone of reservation which confines Shelley's speculations on mind to the known boundaries of human experience: "Mind, as far as we have any experience of its properties, and beyond that experience how vain is argument, cannot create, it can only perceive" (PP, 478). Although Shelley denies the possibility of achieving certitude about the nature of existence, some of his speculations are worth investigating in relation to Bohm's ideas.

Shelley proposes that "It is infinitely improbable that the cause of mind, that is, of existence, is similar to mind" (PP, 478). This suggestion coincides with Bohm's assumption "that the more comprehensive, deeper, and more inward actuality is neither mind nor body but rather a yet higher-dimensional actuality, which is their common ground and which is of a nature beyond both" (WIO, 209). Kenneth Cameron rightly perceives that "Shelley's empirical and scientific attitude" (SGY, 154) is inherent in his investigation of mind and particularly evident in On Life. To employ "refined abstractions of logic" (PP, 476) to penetrate into the mystery of being was later recognized by Shelley as partially self-defeating. Consequently A Defence of Poetry is "devoid of the formality of a polemical reply" (PP, 507). In this essay Shelley cogently expresses the limitations of reason and accentuates the vital nature of imaginative perception:

Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole.

Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things.
Reason is to Imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit,
as the shadow to the substance. (PP, 480)

Although prose is not the most appropriate medium for eliciting visionary aspirations, Shelley's A Defence of Poetry is clearly an exception; it is "possibly the finest, certainly the most radiant, prose written by any poet in the language."¹³ Peacock's provocative "Essay against the cultivation of poetry" (LS II, 244) is undoubtedly a decisive factor in stimulating Shelley to write his lengthy retort as "an antidote" (LS II, 275) to the Four Ages of Poetry. Shelley's impassioned vindication of "the insulted Muses" is fuelled by his "sacred rage" (LS II, 261) at Peacock's censure of poetry.

Although theoretically presented, On Life is also an ardent investigation which revels in "the wonder of our being" (PP, 475). Shelley's philosophical pursuit into the nature of existence is presented in thought-provoking rhetoric. The exclamatory style and repetitive syntactical patterning emphasize Shelley's sense of wonder at "Life, the great miracle":

what is the birth and the extinction of religions and of political systems to life?
What are the revolutions of the globe which we inhabit, and the operations of the
elements of which it is composed, compared with life? What is the universe of
stars and suns [of] which this inhabited earth is one and their motions and their
destiny compared with life? (PP, 475)

The above citation can misleadingly suggest that Shelley's view of existence is one of division in which life is somehow distinct from the universe. But the triad of sentences where "life" is the final utterance is shrewdly constructed; "life" is always followed by the question mark and enhances Shelley's sense of mystery. Moreover emphasis is placed on "life" as signifying the

entirety from which all distinct existence emerges. Shelley's impassioned questioning receives greater clarification a few paragraphs later; here he offers a compelling statement on the indivisibility of human existence and the material world. The interrelationship of consciousness and matter is perceived as an holistic state of participation which is experienced naturally in childhood¹⁴ and can still be intuitively felt by transcending received ideas of conscious awareness:

We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt from ourselves. They seemed as it were to constitute one mass. There are some persons who in this respect are always children. Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction. (PP, 477)

To be "conscious of no distinction" between self and world is a state of innocent perception; the world is experienced without any superimposed structures determining what we expect to see. "One mass" connotes a holism that is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian division of mind and matter and can be supported by Bohm's supposition "that the mental and the material are two sides of one reality" (UM, 20). This radical way of perceiving reality penetrates "The mist of familiarity [which] obscures from us the wonder of our being" (PP, 474-5). Bohm's theories deduce that children experience life more dynamically in accord with the wholeness implicit in the implicate order of reality; it is only through habit that "an illusion may arise in which the manifest static and fragmented content of consciousness is experienced as the very basis of reality" (WIO, 206).¹⁵ Shelley likewise asserts that "in living we lose the apprehension of life" (PP, 475) as we are inculcated by repetition into a restrictive vision of existence: "As men grow up, this power commonly decays, and they become mechanical and habitual agents" (PP, 477).

Originality is lost because humanity merely follow existing perceptions and do not participate in the deepest “implicate order” of creativity. Human life becomes a quasi-automated state of existence as “Their feelings and their reasonings are the combined result of a multitude of entangled thoughts, of a series of what are called impressions, planted by reiteration” (PP, 477).

On Life opens with an immaterialist apprehension of the nature of life, prosaically depicting existence as subjective experience: “Life, and the world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing” (PP, 474). Here, the remarkable assertion that being and feeling are the totality of existence is impaired by the syntactical arrangement: greater prominence is given to “Life and the world” which dominate the sentence as expansive subjects and connote multiple associations within the reader’s mind. Linguistically the world is separated from life and Shelley does not achieve the integration between intuition and expression inherent in his poetic evocations. A sense of fragmentation is especially apparent when the above citation is juxtaposed with Ahasuerus’ insight in Hellas: “Nought is but that which feels itself to be” (785). Here the simplicity of the almost monosyllabic diction belies the integration of meaning which entices the reader to pause thoughtfully over the significance. In a single line Shelley brilliantly unifies being with feeling: syntactically “feels” appears between the present tense and the infinitive of the verb “to be,” conveying an intimacy between form and meaning. “Nought” effectively eradicates any notion of existence beyond this sphere.

Shelley’s poetic apprehensions of life are melded through his divine afflatus which “bring [s] light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar” (PP, 503). Bohm’s attempts to convey movement and overcome the discreteness inherent in language, which suggests a detached subject who is only contingently related to the world, are discussed in his chapter The rhemode — an experiment with language and thought (WIO, 27-47).¹⁶ In his speculations, Bohm outlines the necessity for a different grammatical “structure in which the verb has a primary function” (WIO, 30). This

innovation would more accurately represent his conception of existence as “Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement” (WIO, 11). Two inter-related precepts link Shelley’s and Bohm’s ideas in relation to language: the world is experienced without any sense of division in childhood; the acquisition of language creates a perceptual barrier by originating a sense of fragmentation between self and world. Shelley succinctly encapsulates his ideas thus:

We are born, and our birth is unremembered and our infancy remembered but in fragments. We live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life. How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being. (PP, 475)

On Life is a text of varying achievement in which Shelley does not always successfully realize his contentions. Confusion sometimes arises as to his precise meaning: for instance, the negative and speculative way in which some opinions are formulated undermines Shelley’s conviction in his assumptions. This is evident in the following admission: “I confess that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers, who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived” (PP, 476). This convoluted expression partly reveals Shelley grappling to ascertain philosophical insight, but also suggests a tone of constraint in expressing a view which he finds “startling to the apprehension” (PP, 476). The philosophical ideas in On Life are enhanced and further substantiated by the essay’s intertextuality. Shelley’s conclusion that “nothing exists but as it is perceived” (PP, 476) gains greater significance by the Shakespearian contextualization: “the solid universe of external things is ‘such stuff as dreams are made of’” (PP, 476). But although Shelley appropriates poetic allusions to elucidate his assertions, his vision has not the sustained penetration into being that is evident in poems such as Prometheus Unbound, discussed in Chapter Six. The contrasting achievements of On Life and A Defence of Poetry are evident in the differing contextualizations of the Tasso’s aphorism: “Non merita nome di creatore, sennon Iddio ed il

Poeta” (PP, 475). In On Life the citation appears towards the end of a speculative paragraph imbued with reservation that opens, “If any artist (I do not say had executed) but had merely conceived in his mind the system of the sun and stars and planets ” (PP, 475). Conversely in A Defence of Poetry the quotation is the affirmative culmination of an inspired passage, which convincingly asserts divine claims for the creative power of poetry:

It creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies that bold and true word of Tasso— Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta. (PP, 505-6 and n. 7)

Perhaps the later composition of A Defence of Poetry accounts for a more authoritative tone in Shelley’s maturing vision. But of greater interest is the emphasis on “creates” which suggests a comprehensive reconception of our existing apprehensions of reality. The “nome di creatore”, or appellation of creator, is given full significance, denoting a divine act of origination.

A Defence of Poetry was initially conceived as a counter-force to Peacock’s assault on the supremacy of poetry: “poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists” (PP, 500). Ironically Shelley may have fuelled Peacock’s denunciation of poetry. In his letter of 24 January 1819 Shelley wrote

— I consider Poetry very subordinate to moral & political science, & if I were well, certainly I should aspire to the latter; for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, & harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. (LS II, 71)

In his introduction, Brett-Smith has cogently remarked that Peacock's "essay has at any rate one great merit, it stimulates thought" (FAP, viii). And certainly when juxtaposed with Shelley's response in A Defence of Poetry, "the two essays by Peacock and Shelley make a philosophic dialogue."¹⁷ Within this "dialogue" the philosophical difference first appears to be an argument between opposing views about the nature of knowledge: Peacock, in the Enlightenment tradition, declares the superiority of "Pure reason and dispassionate truth" (FAP, 9); Shelley elevates imaginative perception, "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination" (PP, 488), and claims that "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively" (PP, 487-8). However the division between reason and imagination is more fundamental than an epistemological investigation can reveal. For Shelley there are deeper questions at issue than ways of knowing; his "Defence" is driven by an ontological imperative that delves into the vital impact of poetry on human existence. Accordingly, I read Shelley's poetic treatise, written with the intent of being "favourable to the cause of truth" (PP, 507), as a philosophical inquiry into the interrelationship between poetic expression and the essential nature of our being. Shelley declares that poetry shapes our very existence: it "creates for us a being within our being" (PP, 505). Poetry elicits an interactive engagement by rekindling hidden feelings:

a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past. (PP, 505)

Shelley expresses how poetry yields an ontological significance: "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (PP, 485). "The very image of life" suggests limitless human potentiality because poetry "is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature"

(PP, 485). The effect of the poetic impulse on the state of being is an expansive experience that negates subjectivity: poetry engenders “the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own” (PP, 504). Accordingly this encounter calls forth the most exalted human emotions, “The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship” (PP, 505). Here Shelley delineates a heightened awareness similar “to the state called reverie” (PP, 477) in On Life. Under this expansive apprehension there is a sense of oneness in which the “self appears as what it is, an atom to a Universe” (PP, 505).

II

The integral relationship of poetry to being is found in Heideggerian thought, but whereas Shelley accentuates the creative force, Heidegger foregrounds the notion of revelation: “The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings” (PLT, 39). How does Heidegger understand “Being?” This question is difficult to answer, given Heidegger’s outpouring of ideas about Being; it could easily generate a thesis in itself. Perhaps one of Heidegger’s simplest definitions of Being appears in his “Letter on Humanism” when he declares, “Yet Being—what is Being? It is It itself. The thinking that is to come must learn to experience that and to say it” (BW, 234). But as so often in Heidegger, his qualifying statements result in clarity receding into a perplexing enigma, as the following citation shows:

‘Being’—that is not God and not a cosmic ground. Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from man. (BW, 234)

Heidegger's play upon "nearest" and "farthest" defies logical explication, somewhat resembling a Zen paradox. But quasi-mystical insights into the nature of being are essential to present a radically new way of perceiving existence. For Shelley innovative perception is necessary to appreciate our gift of existence: "Life, the great miracle, we admire not, because it is so miraculous" (PP, 475). In his study of Heidegger's "ontology, of his poetics of thought" George Steiner points out that Heidegger's ideas "cannot, finally, be reconciled to the manner of ratiocination and linear argument which has governed Western official consciousness after Plato." Accordingly he suggests that "To 'understand' Heidegger is to accept entry into an alternative order or space of meaning and of being."¹⁸

Heidegger's thoughts about the interrelationship between poetry and being are found in his discussion of the original meaning of the Greek word "physis." He defines "physis" as embracing both being and becoming; it is "self-blossoming emergence" which the Greeks apprehended "through a fundamental poetic and intellectual experience of being."¹⁹ This comprehensive understanding of being has a direct relevance to Shelley's ideas about Greek drama; audiences are able to experience an identification that is in accord with their inner nature and also the qualities to which they aspire:

The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stript of all but that ideal perfection and energy which every one feels to be the internal type of all that he loves, admires, and would become. (PP, 490)

An aspiration towards "perfection" is a recurrent ideal in A Defence of Poetry: "Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world" (PP, 505). Shelley's most extravagant expression deems that "Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed" (PP, 505).

Encapsulating exalted universal qualities is the ultimate poetic achievement. In direct contrast, Shelley unequivocally condemns poets who inscribe their personal code of ethics into their compositions: "A Poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither" (PP, 488). Notwithstanding this censure of moral principles, Shelley's own value-judgments are evident in his reproach of the depiction of theological tyranny: "The distorted notions of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealized" (PP, 498). An acute problem for Shelley was their endorsement of the Christian doctrines of hell and damnation. As Shelley remarks, "Dante and Milton were both deeply penetrated with the antient religion of the civilized world" (PP, 499). Shelley attributes the imperfections in Dante's and Milton's visions as necessary for their contemporary milieu, such distortions being "merely the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised" (PP, 498). He painstakingly attempts to differentiate between the sublime conceptions of the poets and popular beliefs: "It is a difficult question to determine how far they were conscious of the distinction which must have subsisted in their minds between their own creeds and that of the people" (PP, 498). But Shelley's shrewd reasoning in A Defence of Poetry belies his sense of immense disquiet. An undercurrent can be detected in drafting his argument:

~~those monstrous conceptions which Dante~~
~~& Milton have, [defiled]; [idealized]; [& have]~~
 discussion
 but Let us refrain from an inquiry into
 opinions
 the origin of those ~~con~~ monstrous ~~con~~ceptions
 which Dante & Milton have idealized,

? even which
 & which involv[ing]es no less than an inquiry
 into the origin of evil. — It is enough
 to know that a Poet inasmuch as
 he is a poet, can in no manner
 express what is evil. . . . (BSM IV, f. 50v rev, 1938-50)

Twice Shelley chooses the phrase “monstrous conceptions” and although he asserts that a poet “can in no manner express what is evil”, suggesting that the act of composition mediates evil, doubt inevitably arises in the reader’s mind. However an evaluation of good and evil is not what is at issue in this thesis. My central concern is with the creative impetus of poetic articulation and its effects on the nature of being. Given Shelley’s creative dictum, according to which impassioned thoughts have a generative impact on futurity, one must ask what might be the consequences of portraying negative experiences. In his analysis of Athenian drama Shelley explains that

The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror and sorrow; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life; even crime is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable agencies of nature; error is thus divested of its wilfulness; men can no longer cherish it as the creation of their choice. In a drama of the highest order there is little food for censure or hatred; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect. (PP, 490)

Shelley's point is that "pity, indignation, terror and sorrow" not only produce the cathartic effect of emotional release, but also, by the law of contrast, intensify the desire for exalted emotions like love. Perhaps Shelley's most cogent insight is that the Greek portrayal was in a universal, rather than an individual, context and hence appeared mysteriously "as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable agencies of nature." Consequently there is a sense of personal detachment as humanity's capacity to create, or their culpability in inflicting grief is not an issue and "error is thus divested of its wilfulness." Although Shelley's argument is skillfully constructed and has a degree of veracity, in view of his belief that all thoughts and intense emotions influence the state of being, the portrayal of abhorrent experiences would still have some repercussions. The extent of these reverberations is explored in Chapter Six with Jupiter's oppression affecting the whole interconnected field of being.

Shelley traces the source of the poetic impulse to the creation of humanity: "poetry is connate with the origin of man" (PP, 480). In a witty but mocking statement Peacock had earlier conceded that poetry kindled intelligence: "Poetry was the mental rattle that awakened the attention of the intellect in the infancy of civil society" (FAP, 18). However, Peacock places historical limitations on poetry which is soon surpassed by other branches of knowledge: "Poetry cannot travel out of the regions of its birth, the uncultivated lands of semi-civilized men" (FAP, 15). Consequently he considers that poetic achievement declined with the irretrievable loss of the golden Homeric age. Shelley's antithetical position claims that poetry has a universal significance. In a draft letter to Charles Ollier, he denounces Peacock's assault on the imagination because this assault annihilates the principle of life and threatens the fabric of human existence:

It is an

~~impious daring attempt to extinguish [the] Imagination~~

~~which is the Sun of life, Impious, attempt~~

~~parricidal & self murdering attempt.~~

(BSM IV, f. 80v rev, 6-9)

In a second, less emotive, re-working of these ideas Shelley further develops his cosmic paradigm of “the Sun of life” to differentiate the various qualities of imagination and reason:

He would extinguish Imagination which
 is the Sun of life, & grope his way by
 & borrowed
 the cold & uncertain ^ light of ~~that~~
 which he calls
~~what is called th [at]e moon~~ ^ Reason, —
 over ?-fells
 stumbling ~~through~~ the interlunar ~~night~~
 chasms
~~without~~ of life time where She deserts us.

(BSM IV, f. 80v rev, 13-22)

Although this passage lacks the clarity of a final composition, Shelley’s metaphorical analogy between the “Imagination” as the “Sun of life” and “Reason” as being “~~without~~ of life” shows his perception working at the primary level of being. Clarification of Shelley’s thoughts about existence arise in his finished composition. His concern is with the “unchangeable forms of human nature” (PP, 485). The imagination is perceived to possess a unifying quality that penetrates to the source of life: the imagination is “the principle of synthesis, and has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself” (emphasis added, PP, 480). Moreover the embodiment of imaginative apprehension is poetic: “Poetry, in

a general sense, may be defined to be ‘the expression of the Imagination’” (PP, 480). What Shelley intends by the “general sense” of poetry becomes clearer as the essay progresses when he states that “the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy” (PP, 484). Moreover “The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error” (PP, 484). Clearly for Shelley the poetic is often implicit in language, irrespective of being arranged in metrical form:

The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem. A single sentence may be considered as a whole though it be found in a series of unassimilated portions; a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought. (PP, 485-6)

Shelley is defending poetry as having a ubiquitous and creative presence in human life. To elucidate the fundamental significance of poetry on the nature of being, from a different perspective, Heidegger’s later thinking is appropriate.

In Heideggerian thought, after Being and Time, “it is art rather than more utilitarian pursuits which plays the crucial role in disclosing” being (H, 70). Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” ascribes a primal significance to poetry in uncovering the world: “Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is” (PLT, 74). Shelley’s own position with regard to the degrees of concealment and disclosure of existence, arising from poetic expression, is more ambiguous: “whether it [poetry] spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life’s dark veil before the scene of things” (PP, 505). In an endlessly seductive account of revelation Shelley states that “Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed” (PP, 500). Yet, equally, ultimate disclosure seems an achievable ideal as poetry “strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms” (PP, 505). Quantum resonances of

unstructured potentiality are latent in Shelley's assertion that: "All high poetry is infinite; it is the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially" (PP, 500).²⁰

Heidegger explores the nature of poetic being in ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .", an essay inspired by Hölderlin in which Heidegger proposes "that our unpoetic dwelling . . . derives from a curious excess of frantic measuring and calculating" (PLT, 228). Heidegger's stated intent is to eschew moral deliberation. For Shelley, the ethical consequences of unrestricted reasoning are at issue; he states that social inequality "must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" (PP, 501). In Heidegger's view "Poetry is what really lets us dwell" and he criticizes its devaluation.²¹

Poetry is either rejected as a frivolous mooning and vaporizing into the unknown, and a flight into dreamland, or is counted as a part of literature. And the validity of literature is assessed by the latest prevailing standard. (PLT, 213)

Heidegger's critique of the marginalization of poetry has not only a retrospective relevance in undermining Peacock's position, but also serves to counteract some of the late twentieth-century trends where literary criticism overshadows the poetry it purports to illuminate. Being in thrall to "the latest prevailing standard" is an issue which Paul Fry addresses in his A Defense of Poetry; an interpretation underpinned by the valid assumption that poetry "is both perennial and pancultural" and clearly is "a need not a commodity."²² Paralleling Shelley's rejection of Peacock's attack on poetry, Fry mounts a similar challenge in a work that is critically alert to the strategic vulnerability of adopting a defensive position.²³ With a stated intellectual "orientation toward historicism and formalism."²⁴ Fry contends that it is possible to have a "meaning-free" (this does not signify "meaningless"), preconceptual encounter with the world: "Ostension . . . is that indicative gesture toward reality which precedes and underlies the construction of meaning."²⁵ A "meaning-free" reality, or even "a temporary release from

significance"²⁶ is implausible in Heideggerian thought since understanding is a fundamental existential principle of human existence. But understanding is not necessarily an intellectual conceptualizing enterprise, but more a primordial sense of "encounters" or "dealings" in the world. Heidegger explains that "The kind of dealing which is closest to us is . . . not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use . . ." (BT, 95). Although this early Heideggerian view states that "dealing" is pragmatic, his emphasis on a concerned engagement of being, rather than abstract perceptual knowledge, is germane to Shelley's poetics of being.

In further contradistinction to Fry's proposal "that existence can be meaning-free",²⁷ Bohm's teleological quantum view posits that life is inherently purposeful. With Bohm's conception of "Meaning as being", an understanding of life that is elicited in a dialogue with Renée Weber, he affirms that meaning is not ascribed to a pre-existing reality, but implicit in all creation.²⁸

Meaning infuses and informs energy, giving it shape and form. Now a certain form is matter, which is energy which has stabilized into a regular form, . . . with some independence. But there must be a meaning that is behind it.²⁹

For Bohm meaning has hierarchical gradations of significance; nevertheless it is implicit in all existence. Weber appropriately comments on Bohm's understanding that meaning "is not reserved for what is self-reflective and self-conscious in a human sense" (QI, 439). With a conceptual basis where "meaning is the essence of reality" (QI, 441), existence is perceived as unfolding towards a significant goal. Bohm makes several speculations concerning this destination in which he suggests, yet also undercuts, the notion of finality: the goal might be "love", "order", "harmony", or even "the process itself" (QI, 447). How can Bohm's insights elucidate Shelley's ideas about creativity? Significantly both Bohm and Shelley give pre-

eminence to the implicit thoughts and emotions which precede the manifestation of form. Moreover they both consider that human consciousness is in a fundamental creative participation with the world.³⁰ One of Bohm's suggestions, that creation may unfold towards "love", has an affinity with Shelley's ideas in On Love in which love implicitly permeates existence: "the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists" (PP, 473). Certainly Bohm's ideas on creation affirm that "Creativity is not possible out of fear"; indeed, "true creativity . . . would only be possible with love" (UM, 115, 117).

In A Defence of Poetry love is the ultimate ideal: "The great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own" (PP, 487). As in other exalted Shelleyan states, such as "reverie" in On Life (PP, 477), the notion of self is subsumed in a comprehensive experience of interrelationship. Shelley celebrates the epoch when "The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love. Love became a religion" (PP, 496-7). "Religion" epitomizes a sacred wholeness and cleverly subverts the Christian paradigm founded on the Platonic duality of body and soul. Consequently the poetic expression of love engenders a paradisaal state of harmony:

The familiar appearance and proceedings of life became wonderful and heavenly; and a paradise was created as-out of the wrecks of Eden. And as this creation itself is poetry, so its creators were poets; and language was the instrument of their art. (PP, 497)

Here "the wrecks of Eden" symbolizes the collapse of dualism and "paradise" connotes a sense of oneness with a unifying presence that is melded through the poetic vision. For Shelley "this creation itself is poetry", a view which calls into question Fry's notion that "the world, . . . will

rarely if ever find solutions in poetry and might as well not befuddle itself with false consciousness in pursuit of them there.”³¹ Contrary to Fry’s contention, I suggest that Shelley, Bohm and Heidegger consider that poetry is the most appropriate medium to yield a greater insight into the fabric of reality. First, an inquiry into a deeper understanding of human existence was the lifelong poetical quest that Shelley died whilst still pursuing; poignantly in The Triumph of Life he leaves the irresolvable question, “Then, what is Life?” (544). Secondly, Heidegger’s mature thought was based on a highly poetic explication of being, whereby he affirmed that “The poetic is the basic capacity for human dwelling” (PLT, 228). Thirdly, it is Bohm’s belief that “an art form, like poetry” (WIO, 55) communicates the most comprehensive insights about the nature of reality.

III

From a philosophical perspective “Peacock puts the genuine utilitarian case — though it is in a deliberately provocative and extreme form. . . .”³² Particularly derogatory in Peacock’s argument is his dismissal of contemporary poetry as unrefined and unintellectual:

A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. (FAP, 16)

Peacock values abstract knowledge of an independent reality, grasped through analytical reasoning. His perception of reality consists of solid evidence, objective truth: “with the progress of reason and civilization, facts become more interesting than fiction” (FAP, 8). With a mind dominated by reason, Peacock views the earliest poets as “historians and chroniclers of their time” and their poetic insights are depicted as being acquired by a cerebral detachment

from the world, through “observing and thinking” (FAP, 5). As society progresses, “Men also live more in the light of truth and within the interchange of observation” (FAP, 6). History, with its factual basis, is an intellectual pursuit singled out by Peacock to supersede poetry: “the maturity of poetry may be considered the infancy of history” (FAP, 8). In drafting his “Defence” Shelley considered that history had a vitiating effect on the portrayal of life:

Poetry is

as ?new

a mirror which makes beautiful that

which is distorted: history is as a

mirror which distorts that which ?should

be beautiful. – ~~History & Poetry, are however~~

inwoven

so [~~entangled~~] as not to be separated without destroying

the texture of the _____ in which they exist.

(BSM IV, f. 69v rev, 771-9)

Significantly the cancelled lines acknowledge an inseparable bond between history and poetry, highlighted by “inwoven” and “entangled.” Heidegger’s expression of the way in which history and poetry are indivisible is of relevance: “Art is historical, and as historical it is the creative preserving of truth in the work. Art happens as poetry . . . Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history” (PLT, 77). In revision Shelley refined his idea of the representation that deforms perfection; he substituted the term “history” with the phrase “The story of particular facts” (PP, 485). Clearly Shelley’s intention was not to reject history per se, but more to replace a fragmentary approach to reality with a poetic vision of harmony. Evidence of

Shelley's concern with unity, and the way in which it is disrupted by historical representation, is found on the following page of the Bodleian Shelley Manuscript :

For History or the
transitory
catalogue of isolated facts differs from
Poetry or the exhibition of eternal
thoughts: the former has no bond of common.

(BSM IV, f. 69r rev, 814-8)

Although the lack of clarity in Shelley's writing leads Murray to question "bond" and "common", from the facsimile it appears that he has made the most likely choice: an assumption which is supported by the finalized essay: "a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other bond of connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect" (PP, 485). This version of reality is restrictive as it "is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur" (PP, 485). But in "Poetry" the progression of time presents ceaseless interconnections "and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains" (PP, 485).

Throughout The Four Ages of Poetry Peacock equates truth with historical or philosophical advancement. He dissociates the emotional responses of "being charmed, moved, excited, affected, and exalted" from "the desire of valuable knowledge" (FAP, 18). His indictment of a passionate poetic impulse is contemptuously expressed:

The highest inspirations of poetry are resolvable into three ingredients: the rant of unregulated passion, the whining of exaggerated feeling, and the cant of factitious sentiment: and can therefore only serve to ripen a splendid lunatic like

Alexander, a puling driveller like Werter, or a morbid dreamer like Wordsworth.

(FAP, 17).

Conversely, for Shelley “the highest inspirations of poetry” emanate from a deep emotional involvement. Passion is the power that can instigate regeneration. In a revolutionary era poetry foreshadows “a beneficial change in opinion or institution” through “an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature” (PP, 508). Shelley praises the Athenians for their “representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power” (PP, 489). Peacock censures emotive feelings as a self-centred mental chaos that sabotages intellectual aims: “passion, . . . is the commotion of a weak and selfish mind” (FAP, 18). Passion for Shelley arises from the depths of our inner being and is the generative force that empowers imaginative visions.³³ But passion must be mediated through the imagination. In his critique of “the classical and domestic drama” Shelley condemns unimaginative emotionalism: “sentiment and passion: which, divested of imagination, are other names for caprice and appetite” (PP, 491). Within Shelley’s vision knowing has an integral relationship with being; it emanates from and re-defines the poet’s sense of being. Great poetry synthesizes the internal and external into an all-embracing harmony: “An equal sensibility to the influence of the senses and the affections” is sought “in the presence of those thoughts which belong to the inner faculties of our nature, not in the absence of those which are connected with the external; their incomparable perfection consists in an harmony of the union of all” (PP, 492).

Determined to ridicule the mythical elements in life, Peacock’s pragmatic literalness denies the validity of the supernatural: “We know too that there are no Dryads in Hyde-park nor Naiads in the Regent’s-canal. But barbaric manners and supernatural interventions are essential to poetry” (FAP, 15). Peacock’s understanding of intellectual activity accentuates a methodology based on observation:

The philosophic mental tranquillity which looks round with an equal eye on all external things, collects a store of ideas, discriminates their relative value, assigns to all their proper place, and from the materials of useful knowledge thus collected, appreciated, and arranged, forms new combinations that impress the stamp of their power and utility on the real business of life, is diametrically the reverse of that frame of mind which poetry inspires, or from which poetry can emanate. (FAP, 16-17)

Clearly Peacock's assumptions about the nature of reality are influenced by the Cartesian legacy of dualism; his ideal thinker is a detached spectator contemplating an objective world of "external things." His stress on knowledge being "collected" conveys a fragmentary approach to reality; such a divisive view can be discredited by Heidegger's censure of the mistaken preoccupation with epistemology: "the perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's booty to the 'cabinet' of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped it . . ." (BT, 89). The classic Romantic opposition to the Cartesian tradition is epitomized in Wordsworth's "spiritual autobiography", The Prelude (1805).³⁴

But who shall parcel out
 His intellect by geometric rules,
 Split like a province into round and square?
 Who knows the individual hour in which
 His habits were first sown even as a seed,
 Who that shall point as with a wand, and say
 'This portion of the river of my mind
 Came from yon fountain'? Thou, my friend, art one
 More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee

Science appears but what in truth she is,
 Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
 But as a succedaneum, and a prop
 To our infirmity. Thou art no slave
 Of that false secondary power by which
 In weakness we create distinctions, then
 Deem that our puny boundaries are things
 Which we perceive, and not which we have made.
 To thee, unblinded by these outward shows,
 The unity of all has been revealed.³⁵

These lines render a compelling statement about "The unity of all." Although poetic in composition, Wordsworth advocates that his insights are not portrayed "in a mystical and idle sense", but cogently presented "in the words of reason deeply weighed."³⁶ Outward fragmentary appearances are self-created and not the primary reality because "we create distinctions, then / Deem that our puny boundaries are things / Which we perceive, and not which we have made." The dichotomy between a semblance of discreteness and yet a tacit interconnectedness is outlined by Heidegger when he proposes that "No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the 'whole,' if only in a shadowy way" (BW, 99). With the Heideggerian concept of "Being-in-the-world" as context and intimate involvement, and Bohm's quantum theories of holism, there are no disengaged observers, only participators in reality. As Arkady Plotnitsky points out "Quantum physics was to deconstruct causality³⁷ and, by implication, subjectivity even more radically."³⁸

With a dispiriting logic, based on utilitarianism, Peacock consigns contemporary poetry to aesthetics: "But though not useful, it may be said it is highly ornamental, and deserves to be

cultivated for the pleasure it yields.”³⁹ Most reprehensibly, Peacock relegates poetry from the mainstream of intellectual pursuit:

the progress of useful art and science, and of moral and political knowledge, will continue more and more to withdraw attention from frivolous and uncondusive, to solid and conducive studies: that therefore the poetical audience will not only continually diminish in the proportion of its number to that of the rest of the reading public, but will also sink lower and lower in the comparison of intellectual acquirement. (FAP, 19)

In his devaluation of poetry Peacock instigates a divisive, hierarchical approach to knowledge. For Heidegger the poetic is fundamental to existence and he criticizes aesthetics because “aesthetics is in thrall to the metaphysical tendency to consider everything as an object producing experiences in us subjects” (H, 68). Peacock’s reasoning concerning “useful art and science” is specious because he takes knowing, rather than being, as his point of departure. Consequently his apprehensions are of a secondary nature in that they do not reach the source of human creativity. The way in which knowing is subordinate when divorced from being becomes apparent with Shelley’s ideas on creativity: to be of significance, knowledge must not be apprehended purely intellectually, but continually rewoven through the poet’s being:

We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. (PP, 502)

With “the poetry of life” cognition is re-rooted through experience to achieve a sense of reintegration and more intense awareness of being. For example “The Provençal Trouveurs” elicit an emotional cognition that has a quasi-mesmeric effect: their “verses are as spells, which unseal the inmost enchanted fountains of the delight which is in the grief of Love. It is impossible to feel them without becoming a portion of that beauty which we contemplate” (PP, 497). Here the individuality of one’s being merges into a self-abandoned surrender to this influence. Such a state of oneness is ennobling: “the gentleness and the elevation of mind connected with these sacred emotions can render men more amiable, more generous, and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self” (PP, 497). An intimate involvement where “Being and knowing are inseparable” (QL, 443) is central to Bohm’s quantum understanding of existence. Also following this same contention, in Heideggerian thought there is a rejection of “the pale and empty dichotomy of ‘being and thinking.’”⁴⁰ Heidegger maintains the notion of interconnectedness with his articulation of a cognitive engagement in which “man’s being is determined by the essential belonging-together of being and apprehension.”⁴¹

In drafting his conception of “the creative faculty” as “the basis of all knowledge” (PP, 503), Shelley twice attempted to incorporate the word “realize”:

For, since

~~the { } powers of man, We want the~~
~~generous spirit which [will] should realize~~
~~what we have imagined; & which we want~~
~~the will [? strength] faculty to build [of] a Paradise~~
~~creative spirit to imagine that which~~
~~we know: we want the generous spirit~~
 act

to realise that which we imagine

we want the poetry of life. . . .

(BSM IV, f. 44v rev, 2304-13)

“Realize” in this context designates the act of bringing into being. Although in revision Shelley discarded the “~~powers of man~~” this statement combined with the frequent reiteration of “we” highlights how it is humanity’s capacity to create that is implicit in A Defence of Poetry. As Wasserman points out “the mind that ‘feeds this verse’ is the human mind” (SCR, 205). In a penetrating assessment of Shelley’s creative theories, Wasserman states how metaphysical elements predominate: “awareness, not matter, is the stuff of which existences are formed, and their radical base is self-consciousness” (SCR, 139). Shelley’s final decision of the “generous impulse” (PP, 502) originated as “the generous spirit” and when interpreted with “realize” it indicates that Shelley conceives of the imagination as a generative force. The above cited lines regarding the “creative faculty” are later re-worked into a more ardent declaration: poetry “compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know” (PP, 505).

Contrary to Peacock’s devaluation of poetic knowledge, Shelley deems that poetry has a primal, all-embracing significance to life: poetry is “the root and blossom of all other systems of thought: it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all” (PP, 503). Such a universal claim is not simply over-zealous enthusiasm, but a cognizance that poetry is the only form of expression able to convey a deep understanding of life. In Bohm’s understanding

thought with totality as its content has to be considered as an art form, like poetry, whose function is primarily to give rise to a new perception, and to action that is implicit in this perception, rather than to communicate reflective knowledge of ‘how everything is’. This implies that there can no more be an ultimate form of

such thought than there could be an ultimate poem (that would make all further poems unnecessary). (WIO, 63)

In Bohm's paradigm poetry does not mimetically represent a static external reality "of 'how everything is'", but creates a new perceptual order. With ceaseless movement as the sine qua non of Bohmian thought there can be no notion of finality. Poetic vision, in Shelleyan terms, deconstructs our fabricated representations of reality: poetry "defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions" and "makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos" (PP, 505). Interpreted from a quantum viewpoint, an ordered and fragmented Newtonian universe is dismantled so that the chaotic realm of infinite potentiality can be restructured and given new form through human consciousness. This intense apprehension of "the wonder of our being" (PP, 505) is consonant with Shelley's earlier declaration in On Life. Hence the "poetical faculty creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure" (PP, 503). Conceptually there is a direct analogy between Bohm's paradigm of manifest existence unfolding from the underlying "implicate order" and Shelley's idea that the "elements and principles" of poetry have "a common source with all other forms of order and of beauty according to which the materials of human life are susceptible of being arranged, and which is poetry in a universal sense" (PP, 507). In opposition to Peacock's denunciation of poetry, Shelley's A Defence of Poetry, Bohm's scientific theories, and Heidegger's philosophical reflections all bestow preeminence on poetic articulation as revealing a more cogent portrayal of existence. For Heidegger poetry discloses the truth of Being: he declares that "The nature of art is poetry. The nature of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth" (PLT, 75). Determining what constitutes the truth of human existence is a goal that inevitably yields only provisional results. However, a poetics of being suggests that the most profound insights into the nature of reality are generated through poetic discourse.

In conclusion, then, this chapter has explored how poetic vision yields a more inclusive picture of reality. Following Whitehead's idea that "nature is a structure of evolving processes. The reality is the process",⁴² Bohm's view of existence suggests that knowledge is elicited from an interpenetrating field of creativity: "any describable event, object, entity, etc., is an abstraction from an unknown and undefinable totality of flowing movement" (WIO, 49). Consequently, contrary to Peacock's assertion, "the empire of thought is" not "withdrawn from poetry, as the empire of facts had been before" (FAP, 9); indeed the conveyance of original thought-forms is dependent on poetic encapsulation. For Heidegger poetry unveils a primordial encounter with Being. In "The Thinker as Poet" he advocates a constitutive role for poetry: "poetry that thinks is in truth / the topology of Being" (PLT, 12) An organic reciprocity between human thought and expression is accentuated as "Singing and thinking are the stems / neighbor to poetry. / They grow out of Being and reach into / its truth" (PLT, 13). Finally, in Shelley's words, poetry "is ever still the light of life" (PP, 493).

¹ Craig Robinson employs certain Heideggerian concepts to elucidate his understanding of Ted Hughes' poems. His following statement encapsulates my own sense of Heidegger's appropriateness to Shelley's ideas: "Because Being is the ultimate foundation, the deepest layer of reality, it encompasses and underpins even all deviations from itself and can never be defeated by rational-technological thinking", Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being (New York: St Martin's, 1989), 8.

² In his "Sixth Meditation", which is subtitled "The existence of material things, and the real distinction between mind and body", Descartes outlines how the mind and body are fundamentally distinct substances and are only contingently connected. René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies, rev., trans. and ed. John Cottingham (1986; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 50-62; hereafter referred to as Descartes.

³ Anthony Kenny, Descartes: A Study of his Philosophy (New York: Random, 1968), 222.

⁴ UU, 386. Bohm and Hiley also suggest that "the deeper reality is something beyond either mind or matter, both of which are only aspects that serve as terms for analysis", UU, 387.

⁵ David Cooper encapsulates the disquieting divisiveness in Descartes' philosophy: "What is really disturbing in Descartes' 'methodological doubt' . . . is not the worry that perhaps there really is no world, but the sense that I am a self-enclosed realm, 'cut off' in logical isolation from the world", Existentialism: A Reconstruction (1990: Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 23; hereafter referred to as Cooper, Existentialism.

⁶ Bohm's collaboration with Hiley in The Undivided Universe transcends established intellectual boundaries and presents a holistic approach to knowledge by combining theoretical physics with "intuitive and imaginative" speculations, UU, 4.

⁷ William Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (1957; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 97; hereafter referred to as Blake.

⁸ See my analysis of Shelley and contemporary science in Chapter Six, Prometheus Unbound, n. 28 and n. 55.

⁹ Plato, Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII, trans. Walter Hamilton (1973; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), 52; hereafter referred to as Plato, Phaedrus.

¹⁰ Plato, Phaedrus, 52.

¹¹ For a detailed account of the creative potential of passion in Shelley's vision, see in particular my discussion of Hellas in Chapter Seven.

¹² Here it is necessary to point out a major difference between quantum theorists. The generally held scientific view, which arises from the "Copenhagen" version, is that "physical processes at the most fundamental level are seen as being irreducibly and ineliminably indeterministic" (2). This view is still the dominant position, even though David Bohm proposed "a deterministic theory, accounting for all the phenomena of nonrelativistic quantum mechanics", (1), James T. Cushing, Arthur Fine and Sheldon Goldstein, eds., Bohmian Mechanics and Quantum Theory: An Appraisal (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996). In his analysis of causality and chance in classical and quantum physics, Bohm makes a persuasive argument that negotiates the concepts of determinism and indeterminism. Bohm concludes that in quantum theory "we are not led to the point of view of complete relativity. For such a point of view implies that there is no objective content to our knowledge at all . . . there still exists an absolute, unique, and objective reality", Causality and Chance in Modern Physics, foreword Louis De Boglie (1957; London: Routledge, 1997), 170.

¹³ Michael O'Neill, ed., The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts Vol. XX. MSS. Shelley e.6 and adds. d.8 (New York: Garland, 1994), 3.

¹⁴ For a discussion of childlike modes of perception in Shelley's poetic vision, see my discussion of Jean Piaget's psychological research in Chapter Four, Laon and Cythna, 113-17.

¹⁵ Bohm defines the "creative state of mind" as "one whose interest in what is being done is wholehearted and total, like that of a young child. With this spirit, it is always open to learning

what is new, to perceiving new differences and new similarities, leading to new orders and structures, rather than always tending to impose familiar orders and structures in the field of what is seen", OC, 17.

¹⁶ Bohm often defines the origins of words as they have a relevance to his conceptions. He states that "(‘rheo’ is from the Greek verb, meaning ‘to flow’)", WIO, 31.

¹⁷ Marilyn Butler, Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context (London: Routledge, 1979), 293; hereafter referred to as Butler.

¹⁸ George Steiner, Heidegger (Glasgow: Fontana, 1978), 18.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959), 14; hereafter referred to as Heidegger, Metaphysics.

²⁰ The concept of potentiality in Shelley’s vision has been discussed by D. J. Hughes in his essay on "Potentiality in Prometheus Unbound", PP, 603-20, see Chapter Six, n. 40; hereafter referred to as Hughes, PP.

²¹ Heidegger points out that "When Hölderlin speaks of dwelling, he has before his eyes the basic character of human existence", PLT, 215.

²² Paul H. Fry, A Defense of Poetry: Reflections on the Occasion of Writing (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 2; hereafter referred to as Fry.

²³ See in particular Fry’s introduction, 1-8.

²⁴ Fry, 5.

²⁵ Fry, 13.

²⁶ Fry, 204.

²⁷ Fry, 13.

²⁸ The question of meaning invites philosophical speculation and some clarification of David Bohm’s understanding is helpful. In his analysis of thought Bohm cites three definitions of "meaning": "One of them is ‘significance’; it’s like a ‘sign’ that points to something. Another

is 'value.' And there is 'purpose' or 'intention.' These are connected", Thought as a System (London: Routledge, 1997), 194; hereafter referred to as Bohm, Thought as a System.

²⁹ "Meaning as Being in the Implicate Order Philosophy of David Bohm: a Conversation", QI, 445; hereafter cited in the text QI.

³⁰ For Shelley's ideas on the power of human consciousness to enact a transformation, see in particular Chapters Three and Four, Laon and Cythna and Chapter Seven, Hellas.

³¹ Fry, 4.

³² Butler, 290.

³³ See in particular Chapter Seven, Hellas.

³⁴ William Wordsworth, The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), ix; hereafter referred to as Wordsworth, Prelude (1805).

³⁵ Wordsworth, Prelude (1805), Book Second, 208-26.

³⁶ Wordsworth, Prelude (1805), Book Second, 234, 235.

³⁷ For Bohm's position on quantum theory and causality see n. 12.

³⁸ Plotnitsky interprets Shelley's The Triumph of Life in the light of Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity in quantum mechanics, Arkady Plotnitsky, "All Shapes of Light: The Quantum Mechanical Shelley", Shelley: Poet and Legistator of the World, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 267. In my analysis I examine David Bohm's quantum ideas as metaphors of human potentiality for understanding the nature of existence. I explore the deep affinities between Bohm's idea that thought is an implicit part of reality and Shelley's view that human consciousness plays a central role in transforming the world. Bohm states that both himself and Einstein "felt that the key question was: 'What is the nature of reality?'" In Bohm's opinion this ontological fascination yields more penetrating insights into the fabric of existence than Niels Bohr's epistemological suppositions. Bohm

states that “Bohr’s view is based on epistemology, on saying that all we can discuss is our knowledge of reality”, OC, 103.

³⁹ Peacock subsequently undercuts even this faint praise with his pejorative comment that “Even if this be granted, it does not follow that a writer of poetry in the present state of society is not a waster of his own time, and a robber of that of others”, FAP, 17.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, Metaphysics, 141.

⁴¹ Heidegger, Metaphysics, 140.

⁴² A. N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (London: Cambridge UP, 1933), 90. Bohm cautions that “to identify certain views concerning the totality as belonging to Whitehead, or to someone else, is to interfere with treating knowledge consistently as an integral part of an overall process. Indeed, whoever takes up Whitehead’s views is actually taking these as a point of departure, in a further process of the becoming of knowledge”, WIO, 63.

Chapter 2

Alastor: Philosophical “Questionings” and Self-Consuming Passion

*She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
To comprehend the universe. . . .*¹

(Byron)

*Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
Solution sweet. . . .*²

(Keats)

I

In the Inferno³ the Pilgrim questions the damned Francesca da Rimini to ascertain “the very root of such a love”⁴ which engulfed her and Paolo: “how, and by what signs, did love allow you / to recognize your dubious desires?”⁵ In relation to Alastor the theme of concealed passion is particularly germane to the Poet: “Life, and the lustre that consumed it, shone / As in a furnace burning secretly / From his dark eyes alone” (252-4). Compassion for the afflicted lovers is the tone that resonates from Dante’s poem with “painful tears of pity.”⁶ In a similar vein Alastor can be construed as a moving requiem to “The unheeded tribute of a broken heart” (624). A significant resemblance between the source of passion in Dante and the creative inspiration for Alastor is that the “dubious desires” are instigated by literary or

intellectual pursuit. When Dante's lovers read of Lancelot's love for the Queen, "Time and again our eyes were brought together / by the book we read; our faces flushed and paled."⁷ Likewise Shelley's poet is incited to passion when "the solemn mood / Of her pure mind kindled through all her frame / A permeating fire" (161-3).

My interpretation of Alastor emanates from and is indivisibly re-linked to an understanding that Shelley's turbulent emotional life fuelled his creative impetus.⁸ Shelley emotively resituated his experiences in a poetic context rendering Alastor a "dynamic, and unstable, mental topography"⁹ of his psychological state. Shelley privately appropriated literary allusions to communicate his deepest feelings, as evidenced in his disintegrating marriage to Harriet. Perceiving his situation through Dante's discourse of damnation, Shelley cites the epitaph over the gate of Hell as personally relevant: "Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate!", "All hope abandon, ye who enter here" (LS I, 402 and n. 3). An autobiographical approach to Shelley's work has incited critical censure and requires sensitive mediation.¹⁰ My counter-argument to this opposition elucidates a major tenet which informs this thesis. I contend that in Shelley's writing there is evidence to show that the creative process exacts a reciprocal re-definition between art and life; not only is experience transmuted into art, but once artistic imaginings have been passionately woven into Shelley's consciousness they were entangled with his perceptions and radically affected his life. In my analysis I agree with Stuart Sperry's suggestion that "Alastor takes its origins from some of the most deeply felt and intimate experiences of Shelley's life",¹¹ but I go further into investigating how this is a dual process, in which art and life become mutually interwoven. It is implausible to offer a causal explanation between poetic composition and sequential life experiences; the interweaving processes hermeneutically form a creative dialogue which has no distinct point of origination or closure. Richard Holmes contends that "Shelley wrote the poem precisely in order to distance himself from his own lived experience" (SP, 305). Certainly the idea of distancing oneself is a credible motive, but the creative process is more involved than

one of simple release. Moreover Alastor concludes with little solace and turns against creativity; there is no faith expressed in the redeeming power of art:

In the frail pauses of this simple strain,
 Let not high verse, mourning the memory
 Of that which is no more, or painting's woe
 Or sculpture, speak in feeble imagery
 Their own cold powers. Art and eloquence,
 And all the shews o' the world are frail and vain
 To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade. (706-12)

Much disputation emanates from the interpretation of the relationship between the narrator, the Poet and Shelley.¹² Earl Wasserman proposes “the likelihood that Narrator and Visionary represent Shelley’s polarized impulses” (SCR, 11). Since Wasserman’s reading many subtly complex variations have emerged. Frederick Kirchhoff alerts the reader to the textual distortion arising “Once the intellectual contradictions in Alastor have been reified into dramatis personae.”¹³ For William Keach the Poet may function as “the projection of a submerged impulse in the narrator’s own mind . . . the narrator’s deeper self projected as spectral other . . .” (SS, 87). Tilottama Rajan rightly discerns a congruity between their roles: “the Poet is not the narrator’s opposite, but his epipsyche”, hence they are “essentially similar beings.”¹⁴ Certainly the narrator’s privileged access to the Poet’s interiority, the impulses that drive him, precludes the possibility that he is a detached, or mere witnessing consciousness. My reading of their relationship concurs most with Michael O’Neill’s suggestion of a reflexive, quasi-indivisible trinity: “ultimately both figures are barely separable from Shelley’s self-examining imagination” (HMI, 16).

Shelley's prefatory explanation that "'ALASTOR,' may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind", directs attention to the epistemic¹⁵ dilemma arising from "The Poet's self-centred seclusion" (PP, 69). His insatiable quest for wisdom, where "He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge" (PP, 69), instigates a sense of mental dissociation and his subsequent departure: "he left / His cold fireside and alienated home / To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands" (75-7). A brief summary of contemporary theoretical approaches illustrates how interpretations of *Alastor*'s exploration of "The fountains of divine philosophy" (71) give unquestioned pre-eminence to epistemological considerations. Pulos's "The Role of Scepticism in Shelley's Thought" examines Shelley's complex appropriation of philosophical ideas and concludes that he is "a consistent Platonist in the sceptical tradition."¹⁶ For Pulos there is consistency in Shelley's system of thought, even though he points out a major contention "between his empiricism and his Platonism."¹⁷ Deeply influenced by Pulos, Wasserman similarly presupposes the importance of an epistemological foundation; he sees *Alastor* as illustrating "The Poetry of Skepticism" and defines Shelley's position in the *Alastor* volume as "a skeptical empiricism that will evolve ultimately into the idealism that he was to call the 'intellectual philosophy'" (SCR, 7). Rajan's theoretically sophisticated interpretation, based on German Romantic theories of the imagination, aims to validate a "'deconstruction' of the official Romantic metaphysic of the imagination",¹⁸ although she disagrees with the most radical deconstructive claims "that Romanticism is, from its inception, a movement of self-demystification."¹⁹ Her critical perspective is one of alternating idealism and skepticism; Rajan surmises that Shelley's "desire to hypostatize vision by transferring it to the external world relies on a confusion rather than a cooperation of epistemological theories."²⁰

This brief overview shows that an analysis of Shelley's scepticism is an entrenched feature of critical practice; however this position is not unassailable. A counter-possibility arises if one regards the dominant theme in *Alastor* as a more primordial concern with the

nature of existence, and views the poem as one in which Shelley explores core issues relating to the utmost limits of being: "Nature's vast frame, the web of human things, / Birth and the grave" (719-20).

To comprehend Alastor's insistent engagement with the nature of being, in the poem's "contemplation of the universe" (PP, 69), requires a cogent ontological basis. An explication of the primary significance of being occurs in the writings of Martin Heidegger which determine that "Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. Being is the transcendens pure and simple" (BT, 62). Reading an early nineteenth-century text in the light of Heidegger's existential views is not only a challenging enterprise, but may seem inapt given the wealth of philosophical theories that Shelley himself appropriated. But perhaps the reason why Shelley was so resourceful is because the influence of the all-pervasive nature of knowing, as a way of understanding life, inevitably created a perceptual barrier to his ideas on existence. On Life crystallizes Shelley's fascination with "the wonder of our being" (PP, 475) which he conceived as an holistic field. In relation to philosophical inquiry, Heidegger censures the scandalous "unquestioned centrality and sovereignty of epistemology" as these investigations obscure the primary question of being.²¹ Pivotal to Heidegger's formulation of an ontological argument is a collapse of the dualistic Cartesian legacy with its inherent notion of a contemplative subject divorced from the world. Descartes' conceptual scheme, which distinguishes mind and matter, is clarified in his "Sixth Meditation": "my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing."²² This supposition allows Descartes to deduce that "it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it."²³ In Heidegger's view it is vacuous to present knowing from the perspective of a detached subject and object; his vision of unity is encapsulated in the idea that "the self is characterized as a 'movement' or a 'happening' in a 'life-context.'"²⁴ This nondualist conception is signified in Being and Time by Heidegger's "compound expression 'Being-in-the-world'", which "stands for a unitary phenomenon" (BT,

78). Heidegger's term "Dasein"²⁵ denotes a sense of intimate involvement, an "understanding of the self as inextricably woven into the wider context of a community and a cosmos."²⁶ The importance of Heidegger's conception of holism is affirmed in the view that: "Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is always 'contextualized.'"²⁷ By drawing on a number of Heideggerian tenets in Being and Time and other works, particularly the presumption that "Being-in-the-world is a basic state of Dasein" (BT, 86), my interpretation examines the ontological implications inherent in the Poet's quest. This focus on the nature of being is in accord with the poem's "obstinate questionings" (26) which delve into the "deep mysteries" (23) "of this unfathomable world!" (18). These "questionings" are more fundamental than the possibility and extent of knowing; they are primarily involved with being, in an attempt "to render up the tale / Of what we are" (28-9) and search for "the true law / Of this so lovely world!" (685-6). Shelley's endeavour to conceive a "true law" is, at this stage of his intellectual development, somewhat nebulous. Nevertheless certain analogies with Heidegger's existential ideas yield insights into how an examination of the nature of being is crucial to the progress of Shelleyan thought.

In Alastor human creativity is central to a consideration of being; poetic expression emanates from and becomes entwined with the very fabric of cosmic creation:

I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
 May modulate with murmurs of the air,
 And motions of the forests and the sea,
 And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
 Of night and day, and the deep heart of man. (45-9)

These "woven hymns" mark the culmination of a frenzied search to elicit the principles of creativity; the narrator recites his ardent quest for esoteric knowledge: "Like an inspired and

desperate alchemist / Staking his very life on some dark hope" (31-2). Immediately these lines confront the perilous nature of this venture, by insinuating a willingness to wager personal sacrifice. Timothy Clark's account of "Destructive Creativity" in *Alastor* senses, in the invocation, "overtone of rape and violence in accordance with the violent workings of the mysterious active Power in the rest of the poem."²⁸ Delving into the essential nature of life is presented as an act of necromancy, rather than philosophy, "by forcing some lone ghost" (27) and passionately conjuring "Such magic as compels the charmed night / To render up thy charge" (36-7). Depictions of sorcerous exploits frame the narration of the Poet's life, occurring in both the prologue and epilogue to his experiences. However the rejuvenating power of "Medea's wondrous alchemy" (672), although desperately sought, remains elusively beyond human scope, residing in the mythical realms:

O, that the dream
 Of dark magician in his visioned cave,
 Raking the cinders of a crucible
 For life and power, even when his feeble hand
 Shakes in its last decay, were the true law
 Of this so lovely world! . . . (681-6)

The allure of sorcery, as a means for intervening with and attaining knowledge of "life and power", has a ubiquitous presence in Shelley's poetry. But even though Shelley invokes supernatural powers and alchemy, he develops a persuasive philosophical vision to underpin these magical allusions. The magus-like Ahasuerus, condemned to the "blighting curse" (679) of immortality with a fate "Lone as incarnate death!" (681), is a figure that haunted Shelley's consciousness. After Ahasuerus' appearance in *Queen Mab*, Shelley made significant revisions to this character in line with the evolving sophistication of his philosophical thought.

Ahasuerus' most dynamic portrayal occurs in Hellas; he overthrows Turkish tyranny by manipulating Mahmud's apprehension of reality through dreams and the metaphysical elements of "Thought", "Will", "Passion", "Reason" and "Imagination."²⁹ Here Shelley deploys Ahasuerus as a catalyst to effect a dramatic change in Mahmud's consciousness and thereby expedite Greek liberation. Even more diaphanous and cunning than the spectral Ahasuerus is his female counterpart, "the wizard lady" (385) of The Witch of Atlas; she is mischievously intent on interfering with humanity by exerting the power of "her own thoughts" (210) "To work whatever purposes might come / Into her mind" (213-4). These ethereal figures enact Shelley's philosophical creed where emotive thoughts generate physical transformations.

In Alastor the Poet interacts meaningfully with the phenomenal world: "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" (PP, 69). For Kirchoff this unity is problematical; he perceives that the Poet's progression is hindered by "the fear of passing from an archaic psychic state in which the world is undifferentiated from the self to a mature state in which the self is able to recognize and cope with the alien nature of its field of self-objects. . . ." ³⁰ Kirchoff's anthropocentric paradigm has an inherent objectifying tendency, which underestimates the presentation of oneness in Alastor. With a cosmic energy pulsating through the core of his being, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that the Poet is merely contingently related to nature: "the Poet's blood" (651) is said to "ever beat in mystic sympathy / With nature's ebb and flow" (652-3). Undoubtedly the Poet is intrinsically connected to the cosmos.³¹ This inter-involvement can be elucidated by the Heideggerian notion "that 'being-in' is not a spatial relationship . . . It is a matter of engagement, not location" (H, 23). Shelley's "minute analysis of Nature conducted with vividly human metaphor"³² renders the Poet's state of being as unequivocally engaged with the natural world, where "Every sight / And sound from the vast earth and ambient air, / Sent to his heart its

choicest impulses" (68-70). Furthermore he intuitively experiences an innate sense of belonging: "he would linger long / In lonesome vales, making the wild his home" (98-9). Being guided by nature's "choicest impulses" suggests a precedence from the poem's Rousseauian heritage: "nature is likened to a voice within. Conscience, our inner guide, 'speaks to us in the language of nature.'"³³ The *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* (1776-8), which appears in Shelley's reading list for 1815 (*LS* II, 483), relates Rousseau's unshakable belief in "the close relation I perceive between my immortal nature and the constitution of the world, the physical order I see all around me" (*RSW*, 56). Shelley's conception of this interrelationship appears in *On Love* when human solitude induces a search for reciprocity in nature:

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. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind and a melody in the flowing of brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul, awaken the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture. (*PP*, 474)

How the Poet's developing relationship with the phenomenal world is interpreted is of philosophical significance. The following polarizations define extreme positions: Keach's explanation of the Poet / narrator as being narcissistically estranged from the world, "a disillusioned pantheist whose alienation from natural life becomes increasingly solipsistic, and finally self-annihilating" (*SS*, 87); or an interpretation that views the Poet's gradual emaciation into a "frail and wasted human form" (350) as a disembodiment which metaphorically prefigures his final absorption into nature, wherein "He sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank, / Her cradle, and his sepulchre" (429-30). Textual evidence strongly supports the latter claim of an integration with nature; the Poet sinks into an

untimely tomb

No human hands with pious reverence reared,
 But the charmed eddies of autumnal winds
 Built o'er his mouldering bones a pyramid
 Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness:— (50-4)

But the Poet's natural grave, devoutly moulded by "the charmed eddies of autumnal winds", connotes a tone of disquiet with "untimely" and "waste." Nevertheless the Poet knowingly surrenders his being to cosmic forces. His death, although poignantly evoked, precludes sentimentality as his expiration is depicted as a final, albeit feeble, cosmic interaction:

He did place

His pale lean hand upon the rugged trunk
 Of the old pine. Upon an ivied stone
 Reclined his languid head, his limbs did rest
 Diffused and motionless, on the smooth brink
 Of that obscurest chasm; —and thus he lay,
 Surrendering to their final impulses
 The hovering powers of life. . . . (632-9)

It has been suggested that in Alastor "Shelley's pantheism is more gesture than substance" (HMI, 14), but this underplays the philosophical foundation of the Poet's search into "Nature's most secret steps" (81) which "He like her shadow has pursued" (82). The narrator's own dealings with nature are conveyed in a tone of loving reverence evocative of a mystical consanguinity: "If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast / I consciously have injured, but still loved / And cherished these my kindred" (13-15). This principle of honouring, rather

than violating, natural laws allows him to enjoy a “wonted favour” (17), even though he is denied innermost knowledge “Of thy deep mysteries” (23). Likewise the Poet’s vegetarianism, echoing that of his creator, in which “the doves and squirrels would partake / From his innocuous hand his bloodless food” (100-1), emanates from a considered eco-spiritual view.³⁴ Implicit throughout *Alastor* is “the Romantic notion of a purpose or life coursing through nature.”³⁵ Earlier, in *Queen Mab*, Shelley had delineated the permeating presence of “Nature’s soul” (IV. 89) which is inherent in every atom of creation: “And filled the meanest worm that crawls in dust / With spirit, thought, and love” (IV, 96-7).

Utilizing the fluidity of water as a metaphor for consciousness, the Poet searches the depths of his being for an intimation of his unknown destination:

“O Stream!

Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
 Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
 Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
 Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulphs,
 Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
 Have each their type in me. . . . (502-8)

More consequentially the Poet’s impassioned invocation recognizes a degree of simultaneity between his essential composition and that of the “mysterious waters.” The rhetorical questioning and emotive articulation of his own “invisible course” are reverently addressed to an elemental creative force; most appropriate considering that the Poet’s skeletal appearance had earlier been likened to “the Spirit of wind” (259) and a divine cosmic power: “As if that frail and wasted human form, / Had been an elemental god” (350-1). The degree of inter-involvement between the Poet and natural forces is strongly conveyed in the repeated

alliteration: "his scattered hair / Sered by the autumn of strange suffering / Sung dirges in the wind" (248-50). Timothy Clark is rightly persuaded by the claim that "the voyage represents the poet's state of mind after the dream" but alerts the reader to "not overlook the extraordinary viciousness and destructiveness being described."³⁶ It is precisely this violent, erotic imagery which affirms a complete interpenetration; nature is literally impregnated by the Poet's unconsummated passion. Throughout the Poet's obsessive compulsion to be reunited with "the light / Of those beloved eyes" (331-2) he is impelled by an instinctual impetus: "A strong impulse urged / His steps to the sea-shore" (274-5) and "A restless impulse urged him to embark" (304) on his sea voyage. Whether the Poet's "dark obliterating course" (329) is a creation of "his own deep mind" (298), or arises from an external agency, guided by ministering "genii" (330), remains inconclusive. Certainly the most persuasive implication is an idea of a creative interchange, possibly below the threshold of conscious awareness:

If we think of nature as a force, an élan running through the world, which emerges in our own inner impulses, if these impulses are an indispensable part of our access to this force, then we can only know what it is by articulating what these impulses impel us to.³⁷

Remarkably the Poet conveys a quiescent acceptance of his fate, even during the most tempestuous storm: "Calm and rejoicing in the fearful war / Of-wave running on wave, and blast on blast / Descending, and black flood on whirlpool driven" (326-8). Surrounded by this turbulence he still retains a sense of control "the Poet sate / Holding the steady helm" (332-3); his resolution is unequivocal, "Calm, he still pursued / The stream" (539-40). Perhaps the reason for this steadfast course is a subliminal compliance with some higher force. Spaced throughout the narrative is the Poet's tripartite vow to metaphysical forces: "Obedient to high thoughts" (107); "Obedient to the sweep of odorous winds" (317); "Obedient to the light / That

shone within his soul, he went, pursuing" (492-3). The repetition of "calm" and the parallel syntax in these phrases connote a disturbing sense of subconscious enthrallment. But whether the Poet's path to follow "Vision and Love!" (366) is swept along by an internal or external momentum is indeterminate. The intimation of an inescapable destiny distinctly suggests the idea of necessity, a doctrine of ultimate causality dramatically evoked by Shelley in Queen Mab: "Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power, / Necessity! thou mother of the world!" (VI.197-8). In this scheme of reality

No atom of this turbulence fulfils
 A vague and unnecessitated task,
 Or acts but as it must and ought to act.
 Even the minutest molecule of light,
 That in an April sunbeam's fleeting glow
 Fulfils its destined, though invisible work,
 The universal Spirit guides. . . . (VI.171-7)

Recalling that Alastor opens with the narrator's supplication to the "Mother of this unfathomable world!" (18) and that the Poet's course appears inexorably driven, it might seem that necessity is the dominant creed in Alastor. The loving filial relationship sustained in the narrative indicates a significant degree of ontological intimacy:

Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood!
 If our great Mother has imbued my soul
 With aught of natural piety to feel
 Your love, and recompense the boon with mine. (1-4)

But at times the Poet's life seems to be subjected to random natural forces, such as in the climactic tension in when he is saved by "A wandering stream of wind" (397). But before the Poet's destiny is divulged, the reader is confronted by an unresolved dilemma about the fundamental nature of reality: whether the boat is guided by the "universal Spirit" of necessity, or whether "All seems unlinked contingency and chance" (Queen Mab VI. 177, 170).³⁸

the boat paused shuddering.— Shall it sink
 Down the abyss? Shall the reverting stress
 Of that resistless gulph embosom it?
 Now shall it fall?—A wandering stream of wind,
 Breathed from the west, has caught the expanded sail,
 And lo! with gentle motion, between banks
 Of mossy slope, and on a placid stream,
 Beneath a woven grove it sails. . . . (394-401)

This fluctuation and irresolution between "necessity" and "chance" is indicative of a transition in Shelley's thought, a movement away from the impartial force of "necessity" towards finding a more self-determining view of life.

II

There is an elegiac consonance between the Poet's restless yearning to "meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste" (305) and Shelley pondering his own dissolution, prior to the composition of Alastor. Mary Shelley's "Note on Alastor" observes how Shelley's emotive meditations on the possibility of dying proved to be an elevating experience which inspired his creativity:

The death which he had often contemplated during the last months as certain and near, he here represented in such colours as had, in his lonely musings, soothed his soul to peace. The versification sustains the solemn spirit which breathes throughout; it is peculiarly melodious. The poem ought rather to be considered didactic than narrative: it was the out-pouring of his own emotions, embodied in the purest form he could conceive, painted in the ideal hues which his brilliant imagination inspired, and softened by the recent anticipation of death.

(Julian I, 198)

Whereas Alastor elegizes the individual death of the Poet, the far-reaching implications of his dissolution are situated within a universal frame of reference:

It is a woe too "deep for tears," when all
 Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
 Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
 Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,
 The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
 But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
 Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
 Birth and the grave, that are not as they were. (713-20)

For Shelley, reflecting on death becomes an imperative philosophical inquiry, as it promises a revelation into the nature and origins of existence. Whilst the Alastor volume is pervaded by Shelley's inimitable fascination with educing "The secret things of the grave",³⁹ it concedes that death is an unfathomable mystery. Significantly this fixation with death appears to augur an insight into the determination of futurity. In "On Death" the repetition of an anonymous

persona and archaic verb forms evoke connotations of a mystical figure who might “untie the hopes of what shall be” (PW, 29). Shelley’s juxtaposition of death with the possibility of unveiling the future is a recurrent theme in his poetry: “Who telleth a tale of unspeaking death? / Who lifteth the veil of what is to come?” (PW, 25-6).

The final stanza of “A Summer Evening Churchyard, Lechlade, Gloucestershire” can be construed as a dignified exemplification of the way in which Shelley poetically explored and attempted to quell fear about death:

Thus solemnized and softened, death is mild
 And terrorless as this serenest night:
 Here could I hope, like some inquiring child
 Sporting on graves, that death did hide from human sight
 Sweet secrets, or beside its breathless sleep
 That loveliest dreams perpetual watch did keep. (PW, 25-30)

Yearningly lured by the “Sweet secrets” of death, these lines suggest yet undercut anxiety, finally inducing Shelley into a state which “soothed his soul to peace” (Julian I, 198). No such quiescent conciliation is found in Alastor; the poem ambivalently uncovers a turbulent emotional debate, born in the rhetoric of uncertainty: “Does the dark gate of death / Conduct to thy mysterious paradise, / O Sleep?” (211-13). But far from being denigrated as morbid pessimism, the Poet’s anxious confrontation of impending death can be understood as an “authentic” state of existence; a mode of being defined in the Heideggerian concept of “Being-towards-death.” Living with this apprehensive awareness encourages a realization of the fullness of being: “an impassioned freedom towards death — a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious” (BT, 311).⁴⁰ To understand Heidegger’s principle of “authenticity” the following citation, in

meticulously detailed Heideggerese, explores how “Being-towards-death” concentrates on individuality and in so doing enhances the life-force:

With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being

If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been fully assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one. (BT, 294)

Does Shelley present a coherent view of existence in Alastor? Notwithstanding the complex ambivalences in the poem, Alastor can be interpreted as having a unifying theme if the essential principle is understood as “authenticity”, where the Poet’s life is aligned to his innermost being. This is evident in that the Poet’s desire to fulfill his “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” arises from his perilous journey, fearlessly undertaken in accordance with his own inner wisdom: “Obedient to the light / That shone within his soul” (492-3). But the Poet’s uncompromising choice between extremes, love or death, is contentious. For Heidegger, “Being-towards-death” is “a basic state-of-mind of Dasein . . . Being towards its end” and not intended as an event because “Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (BT, 294). In Alastor the Poet’s solitariness, his “ownmost non-relational possibility”, where “He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude” (60), provokes a major critical issue.

Alienated, self-absorbed figures populate the Romantic landscape, perhaps none more so than Rousseau, who confesses a “total renunciation of the world and the great love of solitude” (RSW, 52). For Rousseau detachment from humanity is a resourceful practice, a means to know oneself more fully and pursue his “inner enlightenment” (RSW, 49). His “own experience that the source of true happiness is within us” (RSW, 36) originates from a point of desolation: “losing all hope for this life and finding no food left on earth for my soul, I gradually learnt to feed it on its own substance and seek all its nourishment within myself”

(RSW, 35). But in Alastor Shelley eschews condoning, or offering an easy solution to, the Poet's desperately experienced isolation. The moment of crisis occurs when the Poet questions whether there is anything to anchor him to the physical world and is tempted by the "shadowy lure" (294) of death:

And what am I that I should linger here,
 With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes,
 Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
 To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
 In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heaven
 That echoes not my thoughts?" . . . (285-90)

In a devastating, but temporary, aberration the Poet loses his sense of connection to the world. Sentient consciousness is graphically withdrawn from nature "In the deaf air, to the blind earth" and an unresponsively perceived "heaven / That echoes not my thoughts." This crisis occurs when a soaring swan foregrounds the Poet's sense of estrangement: "Thou hast a home, / Beautiful bird; thou voyagest to thine home" (280-1). To Heidegger "Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of Being. Because of it the truth of Being remains unthought" (BW, 242). But this is barely applicable to the Poet's soul-searching to find his true essence: "And what am I" (285)? Shelley investigated the nature of existence with relentless interest. An insight into why the Poet feels alienated is offered in Charles Robinson's reading which examines Alastor's influences on Byron's Manfred. Robinson contends that "the Poet and Manfred soon realized that the Tree of Knowledge was not the Tree of Life, for they became aware of their own psychological inadequacy" (SB, 49). Here is the essential point in the Ovidian myth: Tiresias's prophesy enigmatically states that Narcissus will only grow old "if he does not come to know himself."⁴¹ But what might knowing oneself mean? Conceivably

what the Poet experiences in Alastor is a paradoxical apprehension of love that was to tantalize Shelley endlessly: the dichotomy between spiritual and sensual love.

A dominant theme that strives for, but resists, resolution in Alastor is the tension concerning the nature of relationship, enacted both on cosmic and human levels. Conceivably it is the Poet's failure to establish meaningful interpersonal bonds, such as with the "Arab maiden" (129), that precipitates his dream: "The spirit of sweet human love has sent / A vision to the sleep of him who spurned / Her choicest gifts" (203-5). Although the Poet's complicity in the generation of his vision renders it a "demon of his own creation" (SAM, 21), the reasons why "He eagerly pursues / Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade" (205-6) are more subtly complex than those advanced by Stuart Curran: a "wrongheaded intensity" culminating in a "narcissistic solipsism" (SAM, 21). A more conciliatory interpretation of the Poet's self-imposed isolation suggests an inadvertent and "innocent neglect of a vital part of the human soul."⁴² The Preface overtly details the spiritual need for loving relationships and condemns those who augment the "loneliness of the world":

Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt. (PP, 70)

The subtle manoeuvrings of the Preface, constructed through a series of negatives, complicate the didactic comments and discussion concerning relationship. However, even though the Poet rejects the "youthful maidens, taught / By nature" (266-7), it can be ascertained that he is not one of the "selfish, blind, and torpid," of the "unforeseeing multitudes . . . who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave" (PP, 70).⁴³ From the poem's depiction it must be assumed that the Poet is one of "the pure and tender-hearted" (PP, 70) whose mission, to realize a relationship

with mutual empathy, allows no compromise. Consequently, true to his elevated nature, the Poet eschews a path of mediocrity, recognizing as “false names / Brother, and friend” (268-9) and leaving those who are only able to “interpret half the woe / That wasted him” (267-8). Central to Heidegger’s expression of “authenticity” is his declaration that “Conscience summons Dasein’s Self from its lostness in the ‘they’” (BT, 319). By listening to such a call of “conscience” the Poet retains his authenticity by resisting, rather than surrendering to, the maidens’ emotive pleas, who “would press his pallid hand / At parting, and watch, dim through tears, the path / Of his departure from their father’s door” (269-71).

The prefatory epigraph from St. Augustine’s Confessions playfully renders explicit the centrality of love to the soul’s needs: “Not yet did I love, yet I was in love with loving; . . . I sought what I might love, loving to love” (PP, 70 n. 1). Perhaps what most intrigued Shelley about St. Augustine was an enduring dichotomy between his aspiration to divine love mingled with a proclivity to sexual temptation. St. Augustine readily confesses his own culpability for sensuously pursuing spiritual love and his yearning for fulfilment :

To love and to have my love returned was my heart’s desire, and it would be all the sweeter if I could also enjoy the body of the one who loved me . . . I also fell in love, which was a snare of my own choosing.⁴⁴

At a literary level Shelley’s consciousness was saturated with the idea of love as the *sine qua non* of being. In his utopian vision of “The Assassins” (1814-15), Shelley delineated the “happy enthusiast” as the precursor of the Alastorian Poet: “To love, to be beloved suddenly became an insatiable famine of his nature which the wide circle of the universe . . . appeared too narrow and confined to satiate” (PWS, 129). Love is accorded an ontological status in Shelley’s intellectual system with a unifying significance. He later defines love as “the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists”

(PP, 473). In Heidegger's existential philosophy his distinct notion of "care" has a similar pervasive presence because "Being-in-the-world is essentially care" (BT, 237). As with many Heideggerian concepts "care" (from the German "Sorge") is given a complex inflection and conveys an all-embracing significance to being.⁴⁵

The antecedent principle to *Alastor's* poetic quest to concretize an imaginative image of the beloved, is rooted in Shelley's personal experiences during the spring of 1814: he likewise "thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to" (PP, 69) himself and "speedily conceived an ardent passion to possess" (LS I, 403) Mary Godwin. In this respect the letter to Hogg, 4 October 1814, demands attention as one of the most intriguing revelations of Shelley creatively visualizing his future: in true Alastorian spirit he "images to himself the Being whom he loves" (PP, 69). Shelley's letter reads as a lucid account of his creative abilities; he deftly defines the interweaving of his conscious and sub-conscious processes which renders him in a state of semi-entrancement:

Manifestations of my approaching change tinged my waking thoughts, & afforded inexhaustible subject for the visions of my sleep . . . A train of visionary events arranged themselves in my imagination until ideas almost acquired the intensity of sensations. Already I had met the female [Mary Godwin] who was destined to be mine, already had she replied to my exulting recognition, already were the difficulties surmounted that opposed an entire union. I had even proceeded so far as to compose a letter to Harriet on the subject of my passion for another.

(LS I, 402)

Here Shelley totally re-envisions his current situation; not as some future oriented goal conditional on probability, but in a tone that resonates with finality. The repetition of "already" combined with the pluperfect tense "had met" and "had she replied" effectively

historicizes this “approaching change” as an accomplished fact. Although this letter is a retrospective account of Shelley’s actual experience, which occurred approximately six months previously, it nevertheless conveys an authenticity which is “passionately convincing.”⁴⁶ Credence as to the veracity of Shelley’s personal recollection, and the correlation with his poetic expression, arises from a statement that later forms the basis of one of his most significant theories concerning the nature of creativity: “ideas almost acquired the intensity of sensations.” To Shelley it is the coagulation of thoughts and emotions into deeply ingrained impressions which transforms the state of being and becomes the central tenet of his creative theories. If, as Shelley affirms in On Life, “that the solid universe of external things is ‘such stuff as dreams are made of’” (PP, 476), might the implicit significance of this statement be that Shelley conceived it was possible to dream or envision events into existence? Certainly dreams as the basis of reality is a conception that Shelley believed and did not advocate lightly: “It is a decision against which all our persuasions struggle, and we must be long convicted, before we can be convinced” (PP, 476). Perhaps the reason for this belief originates from his artistic integrity; Shelley’s own life validated his conviction about the power to transform life through emotively charged thought forms.

That the “train of visionary events” seemed involuntary to Shelley and not consciously manipulated, can be traced to the empirical influence of William Drummond:

Our passions are not the children of our choice. We neither feel, nor cease to feel according to any supposed power of the will. What, indeed, is the will, but the sentiment of desire, which prevails in our minds? (AQ, 20)

But what seemed like a spontaneous production of the psyche had hitherto been inspired by his absorbing passion for love. In relation to Shelley’s ideas on love Alastor exemplifies a pivotal development in his vision. As a poet he synthesizes the following attributes into “a single

image" of the imagined beloved: "The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of the sense" (PP, 69). On a personal level, Shelley had seemed content to have separate relationships before meeting Mary Godwin: a marital relationship with Harriet, and Elizabeth Hitchener whom Shelley initially acknowledged as "the sister of my soul" (LS I, 151), before he later became extremely disillusioned with her. The impetus towards a poetic unification produces an increasingly sophisticated and unattainable ideal of the beloved: in Epipsychidion Emily is paradoxically venerated as "Spouse! Sister! Angel!" (PP, 130).

To what extent might Shelley have been aware of meaningful connections between his poetic expression and his particular circumstances? Did Shelley consciously draw on his own physical experiences and exploit passion to create a tenable metaphysical theory? Certainly the antithetical denouements, resulting from Shelley's individual creative envisioning and the Poet's erotic vision, exemplify a certain artistic distance: Shelley blissfully enthuses to Hogg about his successfully created "new state of being" (LS I, 403) which is entwined with Mary Godwin's, "so intimately are our natures now united" (LS I, 402); the poet of Alastor is unable to materialize his vision: "He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave" (PP, 69). However the underlying principle demonstrates a remarkable degree of similarity. Indeed the dominant quest in Alastor is to find a physical embodiment of the poet's psychic projection of his soul's "prototype." This relentless pursuit is initiated when the poet dreams of "a veiled maid" (151) who is empathetically compliant with his innermost-being: "Her voice was like the voice of his own soul / Heard in the calm of thought" (153-4). Instantaneously the Poet becomes cognizant of his soul's needs. It is this loss of vision which precipitates a spiritual and erotic epiphany instigating an unquenchable desire. Indeed the Poet's conception of the "veiled maid" (151) is such an intense psycho-emotional experience that, once apprehended, the vision functions autonomously and is rekindled at the loss of conscious awareness:

At night the passion came,
 Like the fierce fiend of a distempered dream,
 And shook him from his rest, and led him forth
 Into the darkness.— (224-7)

Divisively the alternation of conscious and subconscious processes sunders his being: “While day-light held / The sky, the Poet kept mute conference / With his still soul. At night the passion came” (222-4). In Shelley’s vision intense passions are a powerful generative source symbolized by the element of fire, “a potency missing from the opening invocation to its three brother elements”,⁴⁷ “Earth, ocean, air” (1). Kirchhoff deduces that the narrator “himself is the fourth element—fire”, but he finds “the sexuality of Shelley’s imagery” surprising.⁴⁸ In relation to Shelley’s thought, the Poet’s quest symbolizes the acquisition of the creative Promethean fire; an element not stolen from the Gods, but intellectually discovered and mystically experienced during the Poet’s quest. Although “the furies of an irresistible passion” (PP, 69) are an uncontrollable force that is ultimately destructive in *Alastor*, they vitally mark the inception of passion’s pre-eminent role in Shelley’s mature ideas. Passion becomes governable in Shelley’s vision and the potential for transformation through intellectual refinement: *Hellas* is a notable example where passion’s creative capacities are carefully tempered by other constituents such as “reason” and “imagination.” What is uniquely Shelleyan, and becomes more pronounced in his poetry, is the notion that passion emanates from intellectual communion with the “pure mind” of the beloved:

Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,
 And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
 Thoughts the most dear to him, and poesy,
 Herself a poet. Soon the solemn mood

Of her pure mind kindled through all her frame

A permeating fire. . . . (158-63)

Shelley's correspondence of 1814 details instances of him being inspired by the idea of cultivated women: "The contemplation of female excellence is the favorite food of my imagination" (LS I, 401). To Shelley it was essential that his wife shared his intellectual life, although his determined efforts to educate Harriet failed as they were contrary to her own inclinations: "I would have superintended the progress of your mind, & have assisted you in cultivating an elevated philosophy" (LS I, 399). Conversely in Mary Godwin Shelley found his desired creative muse: "Your thoughts alone can waken mine to energy. My mind without yours is dead & cold" (LS I, 414). Shelley and Mary communicated quasi-telepathically when parted: "Your goodnight my own love came most welcomly. I did not forget to kiss your εἰδωλον κενον [unsubstantial image] before I slept" (LS I, 420). A few days earlier Shelley closed his letter to Mary with the comments: "Adieu remember love at vespers—before sleep. I do not omit my prayers" (LS I, 413). Quite possibly Shelley's personal imaginative play with the intensity of sexual desire, virtually to render the absent Mary present, inspired the scene which almost concretizes the "veiled maid" (151):

Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil

Of woven wind, her outspread arms now bare,

Her dark locks floating in the breath of night,

Her beamy bending eyes, her parted lips

Outstretched, and pale, and quivering eagerly.

His strong heart sunk and sickened with the excess

Of love. . . . (176-82)

William Drummond's Academical Questions (1805) examines the way in which passionate sensations influence the human mind. It is not Drummond's position of classical scepticism, but his empiricism that most insistently resonates in Shelley's work and is pivotal to Alastor. Hence as Hoffman argues "the clues to both preface and poem lie in the psychology of sensation and in a system of philosophy founded upon it."⁴⁹ An overt example of a "psychology of sensation" occurs with the Poet's acquisition of wisdom:

The fountains of divine philosophy
 Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great
 Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
 In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
 And knew. . . . (71-5)

Not surprisingly, in a poem exploring the depths of human sentiments, this passage concedes that the primary mode of enlightenment is feeling; inner emotional cognition precipitates a sense of knowing. An interconnection between knowing and being, outlined by Heidegger, is relevant here: "in knowing, Dasein achieves a new status of Being [Seinsstand]" (BT, 90).⁵⁰ Throughout Alastor the reader is aware that acquiring knowledge initiates a process where the Poet's being is in a state of continual re-definition.

Knowledge is attained by the Poet through esoteric, quasi-mystical experiences, rendering his apprehension and experience of life decidedly metaphysical: "By solemn vision, and bright silver dream, / His infancy was nurtured" (67-8). In this he shares a consensual perception of reality with the narrator who is similarly initiated, although with less yielding experiences, "from incommunicable dream, / And twilight phantasms, and deep noonday thought" (39-40). Although the narrator is like a "lyre" (42), suggesting a poetic consciousness, he is denied

access to the “inmost sanctuary” (38) of knowledge. Wandering through “The awful ruins of the days of old” (108), the Poet experiences an imaginative transportation:

He lingered, poring on memorials
 Of the world's youth, through the long burning day
 Gazed on those speechless shapes, nor, when the moon
 Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades
 Suspended he that task, but ever gazed
 And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
 Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
 The thrilling secrets of the birth of time. (121-8)

Here “the strained, hypnotic quality of the syntax”⁵¹ mesmerically depicts the Poet's gradual self-entrancement; he slowly activates his subconscious perceptual resources and regresses to an atemporal perspective: he beholds “The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.” It seems plausible to suggest that these “thrilling secrets” are in some way connected with an initiation into a sense of duality; “the birth of time” actuates temporality. Emptied of its conscious contents, the Poet's “vacant mind” becomes a channel for the retrieval of wisdom from ancient civilizations. Possible elucidations of the Poet's psychic link with antiquity have been offered by Stuart Sperry as: “an act of archaeological reconstruction”, “autosuggestion” or imaginative invention.⁵² The most penetrating exposition of why the Poet visits the sites of ancient civilizations “Of the world's youth” (122) is derived from examining Shelley's absorbing interest in the nature of creativity.

Alastor is dominated by a backward orientation in time. This regression, commencing with Shelley's most revered culture, that of “Athens” (109), facilitates the Poet's immersion into his cultural inheritance. In Heidegger's conception of Dasein's “Being-a-whole”, which explores

the parameters of existence, the “‘authentically historical’ person who ‘takes over’ his heritage will draw these possibilities precisely from that heritage” (H, 45). The Poet, who is rarely located as living in the present moment, decides to “resign his high and holy soul / To images of the majestic past” (628-9). In relation to the progression of Shelley’s thought, once “images of the majestic past” have been fully assimilated into his consciousness, Shelley focuses on creatively conjecturing futurity.

Alastor recounts the Poet’s initiation into love through unleashing “an irresistible passion” (PP, 69) where uncontrollable feelings are the motivating force. That the Poet’s fate is, perhaps, inexorable, sealed by the recurrent “fierce fiend of a distempered dream” (225), can be ascertained from Drummond’s empiricism: once intense passions have been evoked “There is no power, by which men can create, or destroy their feelings. Sensation alone overcomes sensation” (AQ, 21). Consequently only a more powerfully energized feeling could supplant the “insatiate hope” (221) awakened by the Poet’s vision and arrest his resolution to seek a path that he knows will result in his self-destruction:

A restless impulse urged him to embark
 And meet lone Death on the drear ocean’s waste;
 For well he knew that mighty Shadow loves
 The slimy caverns of the populous deep. (304-7)

Interpreted in this light, the Poet inspires admiration as he pursues a courageous course, “Following his eager soul” (311). His mission is necessarily solitary as it is in accord with his own innermost nature; yet mysteriously driven by an unknown force: “the Poet’s path, as led / By love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death” (427-8). Shelley bestowed exceptional qualities on his protagonist, delineating him as “The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful, / The child of grace and genius” (689-90). In distinct Wordsworthian spirit, the Poet has an elevated

nature, possessing a "high and holy soul" (628), which naturally sets him apart from humanity.

The predominance of passionate feelings in Alastor is not derived from pure emotional excess, but ineluctably linked to the poem's exploration into the nature of being. Drummond's empirical affirmation confirms what was most undeniably an accurate insight for Shelley: "The state of our feelings is in fact the state of our soul" (AQ, 18). Mary Shelley's "Note on Alastor" explains Shelley's introspective predisposition "to brood over the thoughts and emotions of his own soul" and how Alastor typifies "the broodings of a poet's heart in solitude" (Julian 1, 198). Shelley's own thoughts on love are similarly awakened by nature; he "never had before felt so intensely the subduing voluptuousness of the impulses of Spring" (LS I, 402). The poeticization of this experience occurs in a tone of heightened eroticism: "spring's voluptuous pantings when she breathes / Her first sweet kisses, have been dear to me" (11-12).

Comparisons between Shelley's personal correspondence and his intellectual ideas in Alastor proliferate. Accordingly it is my contention that Alastor does not present some untenable theory about the extent of the imaginative powers, but can be termed experiential: Shelley successfully mastered Alastor's poetic quest to manifest vision and subsequently entered into a mutually creative relationship with Mary Godwin; a liaison in which he perceived himself attaining oneness: "to consider myself as an whole accurately united rather than an assemblage of inconsistent & discordant portions" (LS I, 403). Here what Hoffman terms Shelley's inherent "nympholeptic tendency"⁵³ proves to be an imaginative projection that is tangibly realized.

Alastor raises questions about the power of the imagination to influence the nature of being, a premise that becomes pivotal to Shelley's poetic vision. Shelley's open appraisal of mortality heightens his own sense of existence and generates a creative freedom to explore more fully the parameters of human existence: "Birth and the grave" (720).

¹ Manfred, BP IV, II. ii. 109-11.

² Keats, The Eve of St. Agnes, The Poems of John Keats, ed. Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), 320-22; hereafter referred to as Keats, Poems.

³ Richard Holmes discusses the literary allusions that inspired Alastor. Of particular relevance is that "In the first few pages of a notebook dating from this period" Shelley "copied out the section of Dante's Inferno, Canto v, in which Paulo and Francesca fall violently in love", SP, 227.

⁴ Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy vol. 1 Inferno, trans. and introd., Mark Musa (1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), v. 125; hereafter referred to as Musa, Inferno.

⁵ Musa, Inferno, v. 119-20. Sinclair's prose translation incorporates the Italian text and, like Mark Musa, he recognizes the moral dubiety in "dubbiosi disiri" with his translation of "uncertain desires", Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy vol. 1 Inferno, trans. John D. Sinclair (1939; New York: Oxford UP, 1961), v. 120.

⁶ Musa, Inferno, v. 117.

⁷ Musa, Inferno, v. 130-1.

⁸ For the biographical background see Richard Holmes' account in SP, 226- 234.

⁹ Vincent Newey, "Shelley's 'Dream of Youth': Alastor, 'Selving' and the Psychic Realm", Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Readings, ed. Kelvin Everest. Essays and Studies 45 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 3.

¹⁰ Wasserman, for instance, criticizes "a critical penchant for finding Shelley's autobiography in everything he wrote", SCR, 11.

¹¹ Stuart Sperry, Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988), 23; hereafter referred to as Sperry.

¹² See, for instance, Christopher Heppner's article "Alastor: The Poet and the Narrator Reconsidered", K S J xxxvii (1988), 91-109.

¹³ Frederick Kirchhoff, "Shelley's Alastor: The Poet Who Refuses to Write Language", KSJ xxxii (1983), 109; hereafter referred to as Kirchhoff.

¹⁴ Tilottama Rajan, Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1980), 76; hereafter referred to as Rajan.

¹⁵ Epistemic is used here, prior to Foucault's coinage, in the classical Aristotelean sense meaning relating to knowledge.

¹⁶ C. E. Pulos, "The Role of Scepticism in Shelley's Thought", PP, 522; hereafter referred to as Pulos.

¹⁷ Pulos, 524.

¹⁸ Rajan, 21.

¹⁹ Rajan, 20.

²⁰ Rajan, 79.

²¹ Charles B. Guignon, Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge (Indiana: Hackett, 1983), 13; hereafter referred to as Guignon.

²² Descartes, 54.

²³ In this citation the "I" is glossed, according to the French version, thus: "that is, my soul, by which I am what I am", Descartes, 54 n. 3.

²⁴ Guignon, 88.

²⁵ In John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's translation "Dasein" is left in the original German. They explain its complicated inflection in which Heidegger develops the common meaning of "Dasein" as "the kind of being that belongs to persons", BT, 27 n.1. In Heidegger's discussion of Dasein he states that "in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it." Conclusively, therefore "Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being", BT, 32.

²⁶ Guignon, 19.

²⁷ Guignon, 147.

²⁸ Timothy Clark, "Destructive Creativity: Alastor (1815)", Shelley: A Longman Critical Reader, ed. Michael O'Neill (London: Longman, 1993), 35; hereafter referred to as Clark.

²⁹ See in particular Ahasuerus' speeches in Hellas, 762-785 and 792-806.

³⁰ Kirchoff, 120.

³¹ There is significant difference between Shelley's concept of unity and the Heideggerian view in Being and Time. Heidegger was against the scientific or naturalistic idea of a permeating cosmic power. His early views were decidedly pragmatic: "natural things, like the south wind, are only 'disclosed' in relation to practices, such as farming", H, 70. However in Heidegger's later works his pragmatism fades in favour of a more Romantic and mysterious apprehension of existence, strongly influenced by the poetry of Hölderlin.

³² Desmond King-Hele, Shelley: His Thought and Work (London: Macmillan, 1960), 60.

³³ Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 357-8; hereafter referred to as Taylor.

³⁴ For Shelley's Vegetarianism see Chapter Three, Laon and Cythna, 103-4.

³⁵ Taylor, 380.

³⁶ Clark, 31.

³⁷ Taylor, 373.

³⁸ In Hugh Roberts' interpretation of Alastor, based on the notions of "indeterminacy" and "sheer contingency", "The Poet is always on the edge of chaos." He states that "we feel the perversity of his quest after the Absolute in a world where life hangs upon 'a wandering stream of wind'", Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997), 380-1.

³⁹ "On Death" PW, 19.

⁴⁰ In Heidegger's terminology being absorbed in the "the 'they' [das Man]" occurs as average "everydayness", from "Being-with-one-another" and this leads to a loss of individuality through

an “inconspicuous domination by Others.” One consequence is mediocrity, a “‘levelling down’ [Einebnung] of all possibilities of Being”, BT, 164-5. See also Chapter Three, 86.

⁴¹ Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 83; hereafter referred to as Ovid.

⁴² Evan K. Gibson, “Alastor: A Reinterpretation”, PP, 551.

⁴³ Michael O’Neill points out that “it is hard for the reader to feel that the poem is preaching ‘rejection of the way of solitude for the poet’ as Marilyn Butler has it”, LL, 33.

⁴⁴ Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 55.

⁴⁵ For a lucid discussion of Heidegger’s concept of “care” see Michael Inwood, Heidegger, Past Masters Ser. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 51-2.

⁴⁶ Muriel Spark, Mary Shelley (London: Constable, 1988), 20.

⁴⁷ Sperry, 29.

⁴⁸ Kirchhoff, 114.

⁴⁹ Harold Leroy Hoffman, An Odyssey of the Soul: Shelley’s Alastor (New York: Columbia UP, 1933), 12; hereafter referred to as Hoffman.

⁵⁰ It must be noted that in Being and Time Heidegger stated that ontologically “anything which is given through the senses” is unimportant because “The senses do not enable us to cognize any entity in its Being”, BT, 129. However in Heidegger’s later views, philosophy is reconceived as “thinking” which is an opening to experience.

⁵¹ Sperry, 28.

⁵² Sperry, 28.

⁵³ Hoffman, 4.

Chapter 3

“Immortal Hopes”: Laon and Cythna’s Epic Vision of Freedom

*My soul spurned the chains of its dismay,
And in the rapid plumes of song
Clothed itself, sublime and strong.*

(“Ode to Liberty”, 5-7)

I

My interpretation of Laon and Cythna focuses on the poem’s epic adventure into the limitless potential of human consciousness as a force for transforming society: “A tale of human power — despair not — list and learn!” (CP, 648).¹ Priority is given to philosophical discussion in a poem which has justly been designated an “invaluable storehouse of Shelley’s ideas” (SGY, 311), and “was planned by him as a considered statement of his comprehensive vision.”² However, the poem’s philosophical significance has often been neglected and critical appreciation has been far from unanimous. Whilst The Examiner praised the depth of Shelley’s thought, finding that “the object of the work is decidedly philosophical”³, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine censured Shelley’s theoretical speculations: “As a philosopher, our author is weak and worthless.”⁴ More recently in Shelley’s Mythmaking Harold Bloom denounced Laon and Cythna as “an abortive allegorical epic.”⁵ Conversely, I interpret Shelley’s “first serious appeal to the Public” (CP, p. 104) as a studied attempt to develop a convincing theory about the nature of existence from which to effect “a great and important change in the spirit which animates the social institutions of mankind” (CP, p. 106).

Shelley remarked on his gradual assimilation of philosophical ideas: "And, although the mere composition occupied no more than six months, the thoughts thus arranged were slowly gathered in as many years" (CP, p. 105).

In Laon and Cythna mental strength is crucial if human beings are to "shake the Anarch Custom's reign" (CP, 86) and realize a greater degree of autonomy. Cythna's rousing speech to the mariners declares that the mind determines the individual's experience of reality: "Look on your mind—it is the book of fate—" (CP, 3372). Through conquering personal adversity, Cythna's experience verifies this axiom: "We live in our own world, and mine was made / From glorious fantasies of hope departed" (CP, 3091-2). However, the extent to which Shelley envisaged a creative capacity for the mind in his overall vision is contestable. In On Life Shelley declared that the "Mind, as far as we have any experience of its properties, . . . cannot create, it can only perceive" (PP, 478). But this prose denial is incompatible with Shelley's poetic conception; thoughts, in conjunction with intense emotions, fuel revolutions. Shelley maintained that "The French Revolution may be considered as one of those manifestations of a general state of feeling among civilized mankind" (CP, p. 101). Accordingly he strives to "awaken the feelings" of his readers with "a story of human passion in its most universal character" (CP, p. 100).

In the opening canto a radical transformation in the state of being is outlined as a precondition for emancipation: evil was vanquished and Greece's glory emerged when "earth's immense and trampled multitude / In hope on their own powers began to look" (CP, 403-4). It is my contention that Shelley's plan for liberating humanity emanates from a deep understanding of the effects of thoughts and emotions on the state of being and presents a vision of freedom which has an enduring psychological relevance. To elucidate Shelley's attack on the pervasive influence of mental enslavement Heidegger's existential concepts, particularly his differentiation between "authentic" existence and "inauthentic" existence under the "dictatorship of the 'they'" (BT, 164), are discussed. Heidegger's ideas have a

specific relevance to Laon and Cythna with their “blending of large philosophical issues with cultural critique.”⁶ My interpretation of Laon and Cythna is based on questions of ontological significance, since Shelley’s fundamental concern is with eliciting insight into the origins of existence. Poetically he encapsulates being driven by this aim: “’Twas many years ago, / Since first my thirsting soul aspired to know / The secrets of this wondrous world” (CP, 436-8). Here a Heideggerian approach is particularly germane: “every question of philosophy ‘recoils upon existence’” (BW, 245).

Shelley explores the nature of human consciousness and its effects on life to formulate a theoretical paradigm which could liberate the masses by “the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors” (CP, p. 100). Sweeping reforms are envisaged to overthrow entrenched power relations; the offensive is against “Priests and Kings, / Custom, domestic sway, ay, all that brings / Man’s freeborn soul beneath the oppressor’s heel” (CP, 3256-8). Although Shelley’s reformatory aims are radical, they benefit from “the lesson which experience teaches now” (CP, p. 101) about the French Revolution; he therefore advocates a gradual transition by “resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long-suffering and long-believing courage, and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue” (CP, 101). Significantly the real combat, fought against “Fear, Hatred, Faith, and Tyranny, who spread / Those subtle nets which snare the living and the dead” (CP, 386-7), occurs below the level of tangible reality in a “war of earthly minds” (CP, 3134). It is the mental clash between competing value systems that empowers Cythna’s creative visions, generating “The power which has been mine to frame their thoughts anew” (CP, 3135). Here Shelley presents a cogent hypothesis about the nature of human creativity; he demonstrates how emotively charged thoughts instigate the destruction of tyranny and the creation of a new egalitarian order. Accordingly Laon and Cythna primarily delineates a metaphysical battle; human thoughts reinvigorate values, such as “Justice and truth”, which contend with reified social systems in a continual contest to re-shape the world’s destiny:

when free thoughts, like lightnings, are alive,
 And in each bosom of the multitude
 Justice and truth with Custom's hydra brood
 Wage silent war; when Priests and Kings dissemble
 In smiles or frowns their fierce disquietude,
 When round pure hearts a host of hopes assemble,
 The Snake and Eagle meet—the world's foundations tremble!

(CP, 417-23)

These lines metaphorically imply that conflicting mental and emotional states precipitate cataclysmic reverberations in the cosmos. On a physical level the French Revolution literally shook "the world's foundations." Shelley interpreted this political upheaval as being instigated by a communication of acutely focused emotions: "The year 1788 may be assumed as the epoch of one of the most important crises produced by this feeling. The sympathies connected with that event extended to every bosom" (CP, p. 101). With the predominant emphasis on thoughts and emotions, Laon and Cythna confronts the reader's assumptions about the structure of reality; the phenomenal world appears precariously unstable once exposed to humanity's "unconquerable will" (CP, 3531). In Cythna's speech to the mariners she declares that "Dungeons and palaces are transitory — / High temples fade like vapour—Man alone / Remains, whose will has power when all beside is gone" (CP, 3340-2). Shelley's focus on the power of the human will is sustained throughout the epic. Relying on "rapid and subtle transitions of human passion" (CP, p. 99), Shelley skilfully manipulates perceptions of reality to undermine the aggressors' apprehension of victory:

A band of brothers gathering round me, made,
 Although unarmed, a steadfast front, and still

Retreating, with stern looks beneath the shade
 Of gathered eyebrows, did the victors fill
 With doubt even in success; deliberate will
 Inspired our growing troop. . . . (CP, 2407-12)

Raising “doubt even in success” is a psychological strategy that is even more successfully deployed in Hellas (1821). In the later poem, discussed in Chapter Seven, Shelley’s metaphysical campaign is philosophically complex; he subtly combines “Thought”, “Will”, “Passion”, “Reason” and “Imagination” to undermine the Turkish conquest of Greece. In Laon and Cythna the “band of brothers” are empowered by “deliberate will” and it is on the wielding of this revolutionary power that Shelley relentlessly focuses his attention: “the millennium could happen if there is a rapid transformation of social consciousness . . . but even if it does not occur, the philosopher-poet has to act in a millennial way.”⁷ As Michael O’Neill observes, the poem’s “affirmation of hope and idealism in the face of political defeat sets The Revolt of Islam apart from other works of the day” (LL, 52). That a millennial awakening will ensue seems inevitable considering that “the Spirit of evil” (CP, 361) has an empire which is only “as firm / As its foundations” (CP, 397-8) and, being built on destruction is inevitably doomed: “His triumph dearly won, which soon will lend / An impulse swift and sure to his approaching end” (CP, 431-2). However a new age founded upon freedom must be imaginatively constructed by the poetic consciousness before it can become an actuality. Paradoxically despair initiates new visions of hope:

WHEN the last hope of trampled France had failed
 Like a brief dream of unremaining glory,
 From visions of despair I rose, and scaled
 The peak of an aëreal promontory,

Whose caverned base with the vexed surge was hoary;
 And saw the golden dawn break forth, and waken
 Each cloud, and every wave:— . . . (CP, 127-33).

Pivotal to the poem's revolutionary metaphysics is the construction of a myth of origination that, to the twentieth-century reader, can be seen to anticipate the Big Bang theory. Shelley depicts a cosmic explosion in which being bodies forth from the void: "when life and thought/ Sprang forth, they burst the womb of inessential Nought" (CP, 350-1). Implicit in this "awful tale" (CP, 334) of creation is that thought is a divine permeating force sharing an ontological primacy with being:

Know then that from the depth of ages old
 Two Powers o'er mortal things dominion hold
 Ruling the world with a divided lot,
 Immortal, all-pervading, manifold,
 Twin Genii, equal Gods—when life and thought
 Sprang forth, they burst the womb of inessential Nought.
 (CP, 346-51)

Ostensibly this passage appears to delineate a dualistic-Cartesian framework emphasized by "Two", "divided" and "Twin." But a closer examination undermines this assumption; "all-pervading" evokes an underlying notion of interrelationship, a conception of existence that becomes more prominent as the poem progresses. Once there is a human being to perceive and interrelate with the universe, Shelley creates a Manichean scheme from opposing cosmic forces:

'The earliest dweller of the world, alone,
 Stood on the verge of chaos. Lo! afar
 O'er the wide wild abyss two meteors shone,
 Sprung from the depth of its tempestuous jar:
 A blood-red Comet and the Morning Star
 Mingling their beams in combat. As he stood,
 All thoughts within his mind waged mutual war,
 In dreadful sympathy. . . . (CP, 352-59)

Significantly the site of interaction, between evil and good, transpires and is synthesized within the human mind: "All thoughts within his mind waged mutual war, / In dreadful sympathy." This statement exemplifies Shelley's idea that human minds participate in restructuring reality. Indeed the earlier symbolic drama, between "An Eagle and a Serpent wreathed in fight" (CP, 193), conveys the impression of being imaginatively conjured. Contending elemental forces create an "irresistible storm" (CP, 154) in which the protagonist is overcome by "a fascination" and compelled to engage with the scene, "I could not choose but gaze" (CP, 172). "Gaze" is underlined in the draft (BSM XIII, E. 19, p.12, 2), stressing a sense of captivation. Magnetized by the "moon, and sky, and clouds" (CP, 173), in anticipation of some momentous event, the narrator discerns the "heaven so blue, / Suddenly stained with shadow" (CP, 176-7) which unfolds into "A speck, a cloud, a shape" (CP, 178). Searchingly, through simile he tries to ascribe form to vision: "Like a great ship" (CP, 179); "Even like a bark" (CP, 181). Shelley delineates the spectacle like a chiaroscurist, in a succession of collapsing and regrouping energy patterns: "So, from that chasm of light a wingèd Form / On all the winds of heaven approaching ever / Floated, dilating as it came" (CP, 186-8). Unequivocally the narrator is not presented as a detached observer, but implicated in configuring "the event / Of that portentous fight" (CP, 245-6). The phrase "drew / My fancy

thither" (CP, 173-4) artfully suggests a creative contribution, which can be substantiated by Shelley's prefatorial comment of engaging "the ethereal combinations of the fancy" (CP, p. 99). Momentarily, before the vision is finally stabilized into form, "A course precipitous, of dizzy speed, / Suspending thought and breath" (CP, 190-1) evokes the notion of a dramatic shift in consciousness. The inversion of syntax "For in the air do I behold indeed" (CP, 192) affirms, yet delicately questions whether the "monstrous sight!" (CP, 191) is real or imagined. The scene is invoked from an "aëreal rock" (CP, 195) which further interweaves the ethereal with the tangible.

What credence might the reader give to a narrative that is not presented as a cogent philosophical view, but by an anonymous Woman who professes esoteric knowledge and a prophetic ability to delve into "the dark Future's ever-flowing urn" (CP, 345)? Perhaps Shelley is exploiting his personal fascination with the supernatural in an attempt to engage his reader's emotive involvement: "the power of awakening in others sensations like those which animate my own bosom" (CP, p. 103). "'Twas midnight" (CP, 337) evokes the witching hour and the tale is presented in an air of mysterious intrigue: "Much must remain unthought, and more untold" (CP, 344). Certainly the Woman appears like an enchantress; her "majestic theme" (CP, 338) unfolds "like such mysterious dream / As makes the slumberer's cheek with wonder pale!" (CP, 335-6). At a deeper level these lines simultaneously evoke and undermine the archetypal image of woman as temptress. Indeed Shelley subverts the biblical myth of Eve's temptation; he rewrites the role of woman so that knowledge is not acquired at the expense of man's fall, but utilized as wisdom to instigate his regeneration. Far from being tempted, the Woman willingly embraces experience, and controls the Serpent: "the Serpent did obey / Her voice, and, coiled in rest in her embrace it lay" (CP, 305-6). The Woman presents an intriguing invitation: "if thou dost dare / With me and with this Serpent, o'er the deep, / A voyage divine and strange, companionship to keep" (CP, 313-5). The "voyage divine" intimates that paradise will be regained, rather than lost, by her intuitions. Later, in Canto IV

it is evident that the "Serpent" signifies wisdom, which is paradoxically melded with innocence in Cythna's smile; she is appropriately

veiled

In virtue's adamantine eloquence,

'Gainst scorn, and death and pain thus trebly mailed,

And blending, in the smiles of that defence,

The Serpent and the Dove, Wisdom and Innocence.

(CP, 1580-4)

However the poem's shifting semantics undermines consistency of meaning and the "serpent" can equally denote evil. In Canto X the "Christian Priest" (CP, 4072) expounds an evil creed: "for in his breast / Did hate and guile lie watchful, intertwined, / Twin serpents in one deep and winding nest" (CP, 4076-8). But in relation to Cythna, unquestionably the most faithful devotee of Shelley's belief in transformation through love, the Serpent symbolizes a radiating beneficence that is paradisaic: "She turned to me and smiled—that smile was Paradise!" (CP, 3792).

Shelley's sustained exploration of the relationship between imaginative vision and empirical reality proposes an eternally creative role for human thought and emotions in the nature of existence:

'Our many thoughts and deeds, our life and love,

Our happiness, and all that we have been,

Immortally must live, and burn and move,

When we shall be no more . . . (CP, 3730-3)

Throughout his epic, Shelley conceives of a role for human consciousness which has a generative impetus; it is more fundamentally creative than simply consciousness-raising: "the vital words and deeds / Of minds whom neither time nor change can tame" (CP, 681-2). Accordingly, in the war against tyranny "Perchance blood need not flow" (CP, 1567) because it is fought beneath the threshold of manifest reality:

—Oh, what a might

Of human thought was cradled in that night!

How many hearts impenetrably veiled

Beat underneath its shade! What secret fight

Evil and good, in woven passions mailed,

Waged through that silent throng—a war that never failed!

(CP, 1732-7)

A philosophical, quasi-magical apprehension of being is a dominant theme in Laon and Cythna: poet and poetic personae unite in a mutual enterprise "to know / The secrets of this wondrous world" (CP, 437-8).⁸ Indeed, Shelley, the Woman of Canto 1, Laon, Cythna, and the Hermit all proffer theories concerning the principles that constitute physical reality, albeit with varying degrees of success. Shelley's autobiographical opening stanzas "To Mary [Wollstonecraft] [Shelley]" show how his compassion for human subjection, where "The selfish and the strong still tyrannize / Without reproach or check" (CP, 34-5), provoked a Faustian-like quest. However, contrary to Faust's overweening personal ambition, Shelley's appropriation of arcane wisdom is not sought for self-gratification, but "devoted to the love of mankind" (CP, p. 100):

And from that hour did I with earnest thought

Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,
 Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
 I cared to learn, but from that secret store
 Wrought linkèd armour for my soul, before
 It might walk forth to war among mankind;
 Thus power and hope were strengthened more and more
 Within me. . . . (CP, 37-44)

Shelley carefully revised this passage, rejecting phrases which conveyed a sense of personal power; for instance he discarded the following: "my powers and hopes"; "And thus ~~my powers~~ were strengthened more & more" (BSM XIII, E. 14, p.15, 25, 28-9). Although the omission of the personal pronoun may appear a minor nuance, its importance arises as the source of power is left deliberately opaque. The idea of a personal vacancy in the face of external forces is a concept which Shelley continually refined. In relation to "the rejected Introduction" Wasserman discusses Shelley's notion of a "transcendent Spirit": "Man is a passive instrument on which the Spirit . . . performs its hymns" (SCR, 188). This notion raises disturbing connotations of varying degrees of mind control inherent in Laon and Cythna. Passivity occurs in interpersonal relationships where a stronger mind dominates the weaker; the Hermit is in service to Laon's ideals of freedom and acts as his "passive instrument" (CP, 1549). Moreover authors are ineluctably subjected "to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live" (CP, 103). Hence autonomy is partially subordinated to "the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded" (CP, p. 103). Ascertaining the cardinal element in the "secret store" of wisdom is of significance to Shelley's revolutionary strategy. His initial consideration was "~~linked~~ thought", (BSM XIII, E. 14, p.15, 20) and "linked" highlights the importance of a

communication between minds as a key to social transformation. A discussion of this concept is deferred until later.

The "gentle Hermit" possibly modelled on Shelley's Etonian master Doctor Lind,⁹ shares a "Deep thirst for knowledge" (CP, 1484) and conveys a spiritual and intellectual radiance, like "a lamp / Of splendour" (CP, 1481-2). But unlike the visionary Laon, whom Mary Shelley describes as "a youth nourished in dreams of liberty" (CP, p. 271), the Hermit's philosophy of determinism sees humanity inescapably trapped because he "deemed that fate / Which made them abject, would preserve them so" (CP, 1488-9). This fatalistic acceptance preserves the status quo and is therefore censurable: "custom maketh blind and obdurate/ The loftiest hearts" (CP, 1486-7). The way in which "custom" has a pervasive stultifying influence, and affects even "The loftiest hearts", can be elucidated by philosophical insight. In existential terms one's being is subjected to "the 'tranquillizing' ways of that faceless public Heidegger calls 'the They'" (H, 37). A significant characteristic of "the They" is "idle talk." Noticeably Heidegger points out that this is not a "'disparaging' signification" but a general "interpretedness, which controls and distributes the possibilities of average understanding" (BT, 211). Under the influence of the "They" the individual is subconsciously controlled and subtly manipulated into a soporific compliance:

This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the "they" is unfolded. (BT, 164)

Shelley was vigilantly alert to the persuasive influence of dominant creeds and one of his frequent metaphorical analogies in Laon and Cythna is that of awakening the multitude, "to awaken public hope, and to enlighten and improve mankind" (CP, 100).

Hope is wielded at every conceivable opportunity in Laon and Cythna and emanates from a seemingly inexhaustible source: "Hope's immortal urn" (CP, 647). Throughout the poem the reader detects an optimism that is compellingly infectious: "Thoughts have gone forth whose powers can sleep no more!" (CP, 2260). Tracing "Patterns of Hope" in Shelley's poetry, Timothy Webb finds that "The poem constantly acknowledges the grounds for despair only to rise triumphantly above them."¹⁰ Shelley's notebooks show that in revision he vigilantly guarded against conveying "infectious gloom" (CP, p. 102) by consciously altering words to convey a positive note. In the published poem, Cythna's vision of regeneration resonates with anticipation: "Spring's messengers descending from the skies, / The buds foreknow their life—this hope must ever rise" (CP, 3161-2). But this polished affirmation of renewal originated somewhat pessimistically: "The buds foreknow their doom; [these] [hopes] [within]" (BSM XVII, E.10, p. 76, 19). To have portrayed the future as one of "doom" would have transgressed Shelley's creed of optimism: he celebrates poetry that is inspiriting and admonishes the "gloom and misanthropy" that have "tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds from which it flows" (CP, 102). Shelley realistically acknowledges that "those who now live have survived an age of despair" (CP, p. 101). Yet his unfaltering optimism affirms "the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue" (CP, p. 100). Shelley's depiction of the atrocities in the aftermath of the French Revolution is heedful of the manifold evils:

the consequences of legitimate despotism,—civil war, famine, plague, superstition, and an utter extinction of the domestic affections; the judicial murder of the advocates of Liberty; the temporary triumph of oppression. . . . (CP, p. 100)

Although Shelley graphically portrays a “death-polluted land” (CP, 3902) it is more in an abstract universal sense, heightened by the classical contextualization: “Faith, and Plague, and Slaughter, / A ghastly brood conceived of Lethe’s sullen water” (CP, 3944-5). At times the depiction is hellishly Dantesque: “Each well / Was choked with rotting corpses, and became / A cauldron of green mist (CP, 3973-5). Why does Shelley re-invoke such abjections in the contemporary imagination? Perhaps, as Richard Cronin suggests, “Laon and Cythna is an attempt to revive the memory in order that the trauma it produced might be healed.”¹¹ In the poem’s vast historical overview from the creation, evil is perceived as a temporary aberration and Shelley affirms eternal ideals: “if aught survive, I deem / It must be love and joy, for they immortal seem” (CP, 4376-7).

II

One of the poem’s crucial scenes occurs when Laon, bound naked to a column, witnesses Cythna’s abhorrent fate: he watches the ship that “bore Cythna o’er the plain / Of waters, to her blighting slavery sold, / . . . with such thoughts as must remain untold” (CP, 1258-60). Having already killed three guards in an effort to save Cythna, Laon faces a supreme mental ordeal which is at the heart of the poem’s quest for spiritual reformation: how to avoid experiencing “violent and malignant passions” (CP, p. 106) when confronted by tyranny. Shelley’s warning against retribution is clear: “to avenge misdeed / On the misdoer, doth but Misery feed / With her own broken heart!” (CP, 1813-15). In The Mask of Anarchy (1819), written in response to the Peterloo Massacre, Shelley plainly outlines his ideas on slavery. Most prominent is his conception of a self-induced mental and emotional bondage:

“Then it is to feel revenge

Fiercely thirsting to exchange

Blood for blood — and wrong for wrong—

Do not thus when ye are strong. (193-6)

If, as Shelley asserts in the Preface to Laon and Cythna, “There is no quarter given to Revenge, or Envy, or Prejudice” (CP, p. 106) because “Hate must be / The nurse and parent still of an ill progeny” (CP, 4358-9), then Laon’s thoughts are of immense significance, especially in a poem where thought is the principal determinant of futurity. Herein lies the challenge that has already been addressed by Cythna, a heroine who, like Laon, is ceaselessly “animated throughout by an ardent love of virtue” (CP, p. 271). Cythna’s personal courage is inspiring; she urges Laon to “say farewell in hope” (CP, 1180) but this insight falls on his “unheeding ear” (CP, 1189). Laon had earlier visualized a future in which he would experience desolation at Cythna’s departure: “I with tears shall stand / Watching thy dim sail skirt the ocean gray,” (CP, 1064-5). Consequently, his anticipated vision of futurity unfurls into a scene of utmost despair:

I gnawed my brazen chain, and sought to sever

Its adamantine links, that I might die:

O Liberty! forgive the base endeavour,

Forgive me if, reserved for victory,

The Champion of thy faith e’er sought to fly:—

(CP, 1270-4)

Although Laon does not succumb to enmity, his emotions, oscillating between suicidal despair, remorse and hope, disclose Shelley’s awareness of the endeavour necessary to transcend despondency.¹² “If” adds a note of humility to Laon’s intuitive role of liberator and reveals an uncertainty concerning his future that is voiced again later: “We know not where

we go" (CP, 2587). The reader detects an ambivalence in Shelley's vision concerning futurity; the poem is at once fascinated by, yet denies the legitimacy of attaining, pre-vision: "Nor should we seek to know" (CP, 2592). Laon's despondency, echoing the narrator's in the opening Canto, violates the poem's spiritual ideals. Earlier the Woman had warned that "To grieve is wise, but the despair / Was weak and vain" (CP, 311-12). As the advocate of Shelley's principles, Laon accepts the poem's uncompromising choice: "To breathe, to be, to hope, or to despair / And die, I questioned not" (CP, 1279-80).

The Preface rhetorically emphasizes the dramatic change in consciousness necessary to experience freedom: "Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent?" (CP, p. 101). Laon and Cythna directly addresses this question. The primary objective is to effect a radical transformation in consciousness by de-hypnotizing an entranced population from a mutual complicity in their own enthraldom: to "dissolve the world's unquiet trance" (CP, 1068). To accomplish "the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom" (CP, p. 100), Shelley examines the role of the oppressed as a trance-induced behavioural response to despotism. Clarification of Shelley's understanding of slavery is rendered explicit in The Mask of Anarchy: "What is Freedom?—ye can tell / That which slavery is, too well—" (156-7). By not exercising mental strength and personal volition mankind lose their autonomy:

"Tis to be a slave in soul
 And to hold no strong controul
 Over your own wills, but be
 All that others make of ye. (184-7)

Existentially to “be / All that others make of ye” is to be inauthentically immersed in Heidegger’s “the they”, which echoes Kierkegaard’s the “Public.” Exacting demands are placed on the subjugated in Laon and Cythna; the text outlines a dynamic role for the oppressed to transform their mental patterns and overcome their servitude. Conversely in Hellas (1821) Shelley envisioned the overthrow of Turkish domination and Greek liberation, by concentrating solely on manipulating the tyrant’s consciousness to concede defeat.¹³ Nathaniel Brown makes a cogent point about the failure of the revolution in Laon and Cythna: “Though temporarily bereft of power, the Tyrant has not yielded inwardly.”¹⁴ Shelley’s insistence on the necessity of internal changes is one of his most perspicuous insights. As William Ulmer remarks, the rebellion failed “because action preceded the inner moral revolution that provides social reform its only secure basis . . .”¹⁵ It is in “man’s deep and searchless heart” (CP, 4204) that there is transforming potential: “those dim labyrinths, where / Hope, near imagined chasms, is struggling with despair” (CP, 4205-6).

The downtrodden multitude have been inculcated into submissively accepting despair: “Even from our childhood have we learned to steep / The bread of slavery in the tears of woe, / And never dreamed of hope or refuge until now” (CP, 3403-5). Oppressors and oppressed are mutual accomplices; both are culpable because they perpetuate their position with despair and hatred: “hence each one / Is slave or tyrant; all betray and bow, / Command, or kill, or fear, or wreak, or suffer woe” (CP, 3277-9). There is no distinction between acts of atrocity and despairing vindictive thoughts against the aggressors:

For they all pined in bondage; body and soul
 Tyrant and slave, victim and torturer, bent
 Before one Power, to which supreme control,
 Over their will by their own weakness lent,
 Made all its many names omnipotent. (CP, 730-4)

Again and again Shelley reiterates that slaves participate in their own bondage by their loathing: "all vied / In evil, slave and despot; fear with lust / Strange fellowship through mutual hate had tied," (CP, 698-700). Shelley later defined evil in A Defence of Poetry with his discussion of Paradise Lost and redressed the balance of culpability more towards tyrants: "Implacable hate, patient cunning, and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil; and although venial in a slave are not to be forgiven in a tyrant." (PP, 498). In the final canto of the epic, Laon is the ideal Shelleyan captive. Although he is physically enslaved, "His head and feet are bare, his hands are bound / Behind with heavy chains" (CP, 4468-9), Laon's spirit is undefiled:

There are no sneers upon his lip which speak
That scorn or hate has made him bold; his cheek
Resolve has not turned pale,—his eyes are mild
And calm, and like the morn about to break,
Smile on mankind—his heart seems reconciled
To all things and itself, like a reposing child.

(CP, 4471-76)

The greatest obstacle to freedom is not physical violence or enslavement, but the emotive response that this provokes in the oppressed. Cythna recollects how a slave transformed his seemingly abject fate, by not focusing on hatred, but by uplifting his arbitrator:

How once, a slave in tortures doomed to die,
Was saved, because in accents sweet and low
He sung a song his Judge loved long ago,
As he was led to death.— (CP, 1029-32)

Self-defence against tyranny is explored as an option when the most courageous revolutionaries are armed with "A bundle of rude pikes, the instrument / Of those who war but on their native ground / For natural rights" (CP, 2444-6). But there is an utter revulsion against violence even though it is for what Shelley deemed the highest cause: "how ugly and how fell / O Hate! thou art, even when thy life thou shedd'st / For love" (CP, 2471-3). Shelley's ideal revolutionaries are liberated by "conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquillity of freemen" (CP, p. 101). Indeed "If blood be shed, 'tis but a change and choice / Of bonds,—from slavery to cowardice: / A wretched fall!—" (CP, 1657-9). Shelley's "moral and political creed" (CP, p.100) emanates from a keen awareness and sympathy for human subjugation: "The revulsion occasioned by the atrocities of the demagogues, and the re-establishment of successive tyrannies in France, was terrible, and felt in the remotest corner of the civilised world" (CP, p. 101). E. P. Thompson's analysis of the contemporary milieu depicts a fearful ruling class dominating by a descent into coercion: "England, in 1792, had been governed by consent and deference, supplemented by the gallows and the 'Church-and-King' mob. In 1816 the English people were held down by force."¹⁶ Even in the light of this extreme repression, Shelley dissuades the revolutionaries from seeking vengeance; he advocates "the contrition / Of anger turned to love" (CP, 1866-7) to counteract escalating oppression and "with soft attraction ever draw / Their spirits to the love of freedom's equal law" (CP, 1871-2).

Cythna, the poem's "prophetess of Love" (CP, 3641), explains to the mariners the centrality of love in the regeneration of society: "To live, as if to love and live were one,—" (CP, 3304). In *Laon and Cythna* "Love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the moral world" (CP, p. 106), because it is the poem's ultimate power of liberation: "a nation / Made free by love;—a mighty brotherhood" (CP, 1839-40). Love and its attendant forces are conceived in Platonic terms as the eternal primary reality: "Virtue, and Hope, and Love, like light and Heaven, / Surround the world" (CP, 3667-8). However in contrast to

Plato's ideal world, located in an intellectual realm beyond mortal reach, Shelley suggests the possibility of achieving an earthly perfection because love is implicit in creation; Cythna "tore the veil that hid / Nature, and Truth, and Liberty, and Love,—" (CP, 3523-4). Moreover physical oppression is delineated as immaterial: "And violence and wrong are as a dream / Which rolls from steadfast truth, an unreturning stream" (CP, 3647-8).

Shelley addresses not only the intellectuality of his readers, but he is determined to elicit a sense of mutual empathy by appealing "to the common sympathies of every human breast", in an epic of "lofty passions" deliberately calculated to "excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence" (CP, p. 100). It is an active engagement with the concept of freedom, experienced as an emotional cognition that will liberate humanity. Cythna envisages a victorious scenario where "Hearts beat as mine now beats, with such intent / As renovates the world; a will omnipotent!" (CP, 1034-5). In relation to the consequence of ardent passions, William Drummond's "very acute and powerful metaphysical criticism" (CP, p. 102 n. 1) is apposite:

Yet these are the moments, when emotions are forcibly felt, and are easily imparted; when bold expression conveys strong meaning—mind speaks to mind—thoughts are breathed in words—and eloquence, exciting, and excited by, passion, surprises, disturbs, and bears away the soul. (AQ, 16)

Drummond's expression of heightened emotions influencing the state of being is central to Shelley's metaphysical theories in Laon and Cythna. One of the secrets imparted by the anonymous Woman, "nurtured in divinest lore" (CP, 453), is that an intensity of passionate feelings has a kinetic impact in the world:

For I loved all things with intense devotion;

So that, when Hope's deep source in fullest flow,
 Like earthquake, did uplift the stagnant ocean
 Of human thoughts,— mine shook beneath the wide commotion.¹⁷

(CP, 465-8)

Shelley felt that he was acutely susceptible to emotions and the way in which they pervaded all levels of existence: he considered himself able

to apprehend minute & remote distinctions of feeling whether relative to external nature, or the living beings which surround us, & to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or material universe as a whole.

(LS I, 577)

Shelley's holistic conception is clarified in his fragmentary Speculations on Metaphysics; he refuses to assume "a distinction between the moral and material universe" (Julian VII, 62). His understanding of metaphysics uniquely comprehends the totality of existence:

Metaphysics may be defined as the science of all that we know, feel, remember and believe: inasmuch as our knowledge, sensations, memory and faith constitute the universe considered relatively to human-identity. (Julian VII, 62-3)

Shelley consciously studied human nature and relationships so that his conceptions would be accurate: he "watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men" (CP, p. 103). Mary Shelley's note on Laon and Cythna outlines his personal involvement to help alleviate "the most heart-rending evils to the poor", deeming

that his "active sympathy with his fellow-creatures gives a thousandfold interest to his speculations, and stamps with reality his pleadings for the human race" (CP, p. 272).

Cythna's mission, to "lead a happy female train" (CP, 1003) to liberty, demands that she is physically enslaved; she chooses "among captives willing chains to wear" (CP, 1184). In Shelley's hierarchy of human degradations, Cythna's rape is perhaps the most abject: "All torture, fear, or horror made seem light / Which the soul dreams or knows" (CP, 2879-80), compared with her "loathsome agony" (CP, 2875). Subjected to "the thralls / Of the cold Tyrant's cruel lust" (CP, 2857-8), Cythna's emotions become inwardly destructive resulting in her derangement: "borne, a loveless victim, and she tore / Her locks in agony" (CP, 2870-1). Authorial abhorrence at this scene is cleverly contrived to avoid compromising Cythna's ideals; "Deep curses" (CP, 2892) are voiced by slaves who sympathize with her defilement. Self-centred carnality is condemned as a perversion of natural affections because "selfishness mocks love's delight" (CP, 2876). Despite being repeatedly raped by the tyrant, who "bore / Again his load of slavery" (CP, 2872-3), Cythna's mental and spiritual resistance is resolute; she does not violate Shelley's spiritual creed with vindictive thoughts. Therefore her purity is intact, confirming Shelley's ideal of "the female mind / Untainted by the poison-clouds which rest / On the dark world" (CP, 973-5). Cythna's forced surrender is solely physical, "Where like a Spirit in fleshly chains she lay / Struggling, aghast and pale" (CP, 2882-3). Consequently in a text where thought is pre-eminent and determines experience, Cythna is never totally enslaved. The significance of this concept of inner freedom can be elucidated by Laon's speech to the revolutionaries; he demands that they search their consciousness to determine whether their "hearts are tried / In the true love of freedom" (CP, 2010-11). Laon rhetorically elaborates the need for self-awareness: "What call ye justice? Is there one who ne'er / In secret thought has wished another's ill?— / Are ye all pure?" (CP, 2017-19).

Although Cythna's circumstances are an extreme exemplar, she typifies the condition of early nineteenth-century women: "Woman as the bond-slave dwells / Of man a slave; and life

is poisoned in its wells" (CP, 3314-5) In this way her experience harmonizes in a universal voice the plight of subjugated women: "Like broken memories of many a heart / Woven into one" (CP, 2849-50). The process through which Cythna attains her liberation provides a convincing illustration of Shelley's metaphysical concepts. At first she concentrates her efforts solely on her current position of imprisonment:

I might be free,
 Could I but win that friendly bird to me,
 To bring me ropes; and long in vain I sought
 By intercourse of mutual imagery
 Of objects, if such aid he could be taught;
 But fruit, and flowers, and boughs, yet never ropes he brought.

(CP, 3085-90)

Surprisingly Cythna's thinking is in a causal sequential manner; she seeks release through a manipulation of her external circumstances. "Ropes" in connection with freedom are dubious since their usual signification is bondage. The futility of this endeavour illustrates that a miraculous unforeseeable solution is necessary to win freedom. Before her deliverance Cythna dissolves the boundaries between self and world: her captivity is no longer personal and localized, but universal and contextualized within the earth's bondage: "And thus my prison was the populous earth" (CP, 3136). Consequently it is through cosmic intervention that Cythna is released from her watery dungeon: "when sudden earthquake rent / The depth of ocean, and the cavern cracked / With sound" (CP, 3163-5). In addition to Cythna's expansion in consciousness to encompass the earth, she actively visualizes liberty: "Religion's pomp made desolate by the scorn / Of Wisdom's faintest smile, and thrones upturn" (CP, 3139-40). Prisons need not signify defeat if they are "Dungeons wherein the high resolve is found" (CP,

3151). Tenacious resistance to despair is paramount: "All is not lost! There is some recompense / For hope whose fountain can be thus profound,—" (CP, 3145-6). Prior to her release, Cythna questions the structure of her prison and undermines its solidity with a comparison to the human mind:

—What was this cave?

Its deep foundation no firm purpose knows

Immutable, resistless, strong to save,

Like mind while yet it mocks the all-devouring grave.

(CP, 3078-81)

Even during her confinement, Cythna's vision is always focused on victory: "And love made free,—a hope which we have nursed / Even with our blood and tears,—until its glory burst" (CP, 3143-4). Cythna's personal experience of gaining freedom serves as the prototype for female emancipation. An emotional and mental transformation is envisaged for women to be "possessed / By hopes" (CP, 3547-8) and break "their cold, careless, willing slavery" (CP, 3551). Servitude is seen as a self-imposed bondage and liberation occurs with the realization of this concept: "They looked around, and lo! they became free!" (CP, 3553). The human mind empowered by emotion is depicted as vanquishing physical circumstances: "Those who were sent to bind me, wept, and felt / Their minds outsoar the bonds which clasped them round" (CP, 3559-60).

To eliminate women's acquiescence in their subordination, Shelley's objective in Laon and Cythna is "the revolutionizing of the female will."¹⁸ But the French endeavour of liberating the "female will" proved to be fatal for its chief exponent. Marie Gauzes, writing under the name of Olympe De Gouges, outlined women's rights in Les Droits de la Femme et du Citoyen (1791). One of her most egalitarian propositions, that society should be founded on sexual

equality, would have resonated with Shelley's beliefs: "The Principle of sovereignty resides in essence in the Nation, which is nothing other than the conjunction of Woman and Man."¹⁹ Ironically Gauzes was herself a victim of radical excesses; she was guillotined for voicing antagonism towards Robespierre's Jacobin Terror. There is a poignancy in her claim that "The exercise of Woman's natural rights has no limit other than the tyranny of Man's opposing them."²⁰ However Gauzes' "ferocious legion of female militia"²¹ and rhetorical incitement to violence would have been untenable to Shelley. Indeed, although Cythna wields a sword, it is more a question of her role as an active liberator and the subversion of conventional gender stereotypes. Cythna's purity is unimpeachable: "like to an Angel, robed in white" (CP, 2502).

Accounts of Shelley's feminist poetics are diverse: Laon and Cythna has been heralded as "the most powerful feminist poem in the language"²² and also seen to perpetuate patriarchal values with the criticism that Cythna "speaks only through Laon's Romantic ventriloquism . . . effectively denying her any voice at all in the regions of eternity."²³ My interpretation finds that Shelly's paradigm of sexual equality is a convincing achievement, with the creation of a dynamic heroine who confronts the patriarchal view of female subservience. Even in captivity Cythna exemplifies the Shelleyan ideal of womanhood, fearlessly seeking wisdom: "calm and sad, musing alway / On loftiest enterprise" (CP, 2860-1). Unlike Laon who recovers his sanity with the help of a hermit, Cythna is totally reliant on her own inner resources. By being "fearless-hearted" (CP, 3095), she is able to initiate her regeneration:

'My mind became the book through which I grew

Wise in all human wisdom, and its cave,

Which like a mine I rifled through and through,

To me the keeping of its secrets gave—

One mind, the type of all, the moveless wave

Whose calm reflects all moving things that are:

Necessity, and love, and life, the grave
 And sympathy (fountains of hope and fear),
 Justice, and truth, and time, and the world's natural sphere.

(CP, 3100-8)

Shelley's deepest concern with the tyrant's rape of Cythna is in relation to the effects on the human soul: Cythna being physically abused seems less significant when juxtaposed with the spiritual violation of her "rent soul" (CP, 2885). In the loving relationship between Laon and Cythna, clothed in "Nature's modesty" (CP, 2686), desire pulsates to coition in a consummation that unifies all levels of being: "All thought, all sense, all feeling, into one / Unutterable power" (CP, 2642-3). Conversely when Cythna is forcefully taken by the tyrant it divisively sunders her being. Shelley inverts the conventional roles of masculinity and femininity; Laon's amatory reticence is characteristically associated with women: "some impulse made my heart refrain / From seeking her that night" (CP, 2322-3). This leaves the sensual pursuit in their relationship to Cythna. Indeed her rescue is couched in a sexually provocative idiom: "'Mount with me, Laon, now!" (CP, 2514). Laon's deliverance by Cythna from "the grasp of bloody hands" (CP, 2495), has a dual significance; he is literally rescued from physical death, but also symbolically from the Alastorian death of unrealized sexual communion. Here Laon's position is typically Shelleyan as outlined in his autobiographical stanzas "To Mary": "And-Death and Love are yet contending for their prey" (CP, 90). Prior to these lines Shelley presents a metaphorical account of his relationship with Mary who defied social mores: "when the mortal chain / Of Custom thou didst burst and rend in twain, / And walk as free as light the clouds among" (CP, 58-60). Consequently Shelley's "spirit sprung / To meet thee from the woes which had begirt it long!" (CP, 62-3).

Shelley's humanitarian desire for sexual equality and social reform is inspired by his personal quest for a passionate involvement with an intellectual equal; his sense of dejection

before meeting Mary is acute: "Hard hearts, and cold, like weights of icy stone / Which crushed and withered mine—that could not be / Aught but a lifeless clod, until revived by thee" (CP, 52-4) Consequently his poetics are not purely altruistic, but spring from a deep-seated personal need. Shelley's loveless marriage to Harriet was most damningly described to Hogg in October 1814: "I felt as if a dead & living body had been linked together in loathsome & horrible communion" (LS 1, 402). Shelley certainly considered the depths of his "woes" as life-denying; in his notebook he wrote and then crossed through "To meet thee ~~as from death~~" (BMS XIII, E. 14, p. 17, 22). Here Shelley's citation from Chapman's The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron is of relevance:

There is no danger to a man, that knows
 What life and death is: there's not any law
 Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
 That he should stoop to any other law. — CHAPMAN.

(CP, p. 106)

Charles Robinson perceives that Shelley "appears to have chosen his epigraph with ironic intent" especially since "he surely contrasted Byron's misanthropic Manfred with his own philanthropic Laon" (SB, 65). Whilst this is certainly a cogent observation there is a more imperative philosophical reason, concerned with the utmost parameters of existence, "life and death." Wilson Knight's analysis of Chapman's tragic drama determines that "No danger touches one who knows 'what life and death is'; the warrior, like the occult adept, is death-friendly. . . ." ²⁴ "Death-friendly" understood existentially in Heideggerian terms of "Being-towards-death" ²⁵ is to be focused on the totality of possibilities, and therefore an authentic mode of existence. Laon and Cythna is conceived and written under the auspices of Shelley's anticipation of his death. But Shelley's fascination with death is not one of existential consideration, but conceived as an actual imminent event, the fervent "communications of a



dying man" (LS 1, 577). As such Shelley is impelled to communicate his vision: "I felt the precariousness of my life, & I engaged in this task resolved to leave some record of myself" (LS 1, 577). Shelley's indefatigable resolve to "shake the Anarch Custom's reign" (CP, 86), irrespective of "temporary praise or blame" (CP, p. 104), conveys an authentic voice; the voice defined in existential terms of "Being-one's-Self" (BT, 344), and this "'Resoluteness' signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the 'they'" (BT, 345). Furthermore Shelley's "resoluteness" has a benign influence on humanity because "When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of Others" (BT, 344). In relation to death it must be pointed out that Heidegger's understanding of a conceivable existence after one's demise is complex and appears paradoxical. As "Dasein" is dependent on "Being-in-the-world" it would seem to preclude the notion of a post-mortal existence. But Heidegger states that

If "death" is defined as the 'end' of Dasein—that is to say, of Being-in-the-world—this does not imply any ontical decision whether 'after-death' still another Being is possible, either higher or lower, or whether Dasein 'lives on' or even 'outlasts' itself and is 'immortal.' (BT, 292)

Conversely Shelley's understanding of being in Laon and Cythna embraces a post-mortal metaphysical realm, "The Temple of the Spirit" (CP, 4815), where the lovers journey after being burnt at the stake. In this realm Shelley depicts a disembodied transcendent consciousness: "Then suddenly I stood, a wingèd Thought, / Before the immortal Senate" (CP, 4720-1). Death is conceived as an actual experience where conscious awareness is retained: "Ay, this is Paradise / And not a dream, and we are all united!" (CP, 4643-4). Such an awareness is implausible in Heideggerian thought as the "wholeness in death" means that we are "lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition and of understanding it as something experienced" (BT, 281).

Shelley's personal perception of "being-towards-death" proved to be a liberating artistic prerequisite, allowing Laon and Cythna to be "written fearlessly" (CP, 104) with Shelley ever thoughtful of the enduring presence of literary creation in eternity: "the stamp / Of ever-burning thoughts on many a page" (CP, 1478-9). Accordingly Shelley is driven by a concern for authenticity, describing his composition as "a genuine picture of my own mind. I felt that the sentiments were true, not assumed" (LS 1, 577). Whilst authorial comment is in no way proof of Shelley's genuineness, his lifelong ideals on love, sexual equality and freedom are inscribed into the text. Shelley's poetic characters are the emissaries of his personal principles, such as his ideas on vegetarianism. Timothy Morton's Shelley and the Revolution in Taste investigates the way in which vegetarianism "is an aspect of the revolutionary vision."²⁶ In Laon and Cythna he traces the consistency of Shelley's ideas to Queen Mab. In A Vindication of Natural Diet (1813) Shelley rebuked the "unnatural craving for dead flesh" (PWS, 85) in a cogent ecological argument which posits that "the depravity of the moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life" (PWS, 77). His entreaty, "By all that is sacred in our hopes for the human race, I conjure those who love happiness and truth, to give a fair trial to the vegetable system" (PWS, 83-4), is adopted by the revolutionaries in Laon and Cythna:

'My brethren, we are free! The fruits are glowing
 Beneath the stars, and the night winds are flowing
 O'er the ripe corn, the birds and beasts are dreaming—
 Never again may blood of bird or beast
 Stain with its venomous stream a human feast.

(CP, 2242-46)

One of the most convincing illustrations of Shelley's authenticity is his autobiographical connection to the epic, as evidenced in the stanzas "To Mary." The protagonists embody Shelley's metaphysical beliefs endowing his principles with a vitalizing presence: Shelley's own desire to "be wise, / And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies / Such power" (CP, 31-3) is similarly the aspiration which impels both Laon and Cythna. For Heidegger, "In 'poetical' discourse, the communication of the existential possibilities of one's state-of-mind can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a disclosing of existence" (BT, 205). Laon and Cythna overtly discloses how Shelley's motivation arises from a belief in the egalitarian ideals of "Pity and Peace and Love, among the good and free!" (CP, 2211).

Whilst focusing on "being-towards-death" may confer an existential authenticity on Shelley's poetic endeavour there are serious consequences for his theory of creativity; thought empowered by intense emotion creates one's experience of reality. Ironically Cythna's self-defined role as "the prophetess of Love" (CP, 3641) is one of prophesying her and Laon's death: "This is the winter of the world;—and here / We die" (CP, 3685-6). She visualizes "a glorious doom" (CP, 3728) creating a mental paradigm of an emotional intensity. Death is so vividly imagined that it presides over the canto as a psychic reality: "And Calumny meanwhile shall feed on us, / As worms devour the dead" (CP, 3739-40). Laon and Cythna's imminent demise is depicted as a physical actuality: "So be the turf heaped over our remains / Even in our happy youth" (CP, 3721-2). Curiously Cythna affirms that "We know not what will come—" (CP, 3640), but this is paradoxical in view of her convincing Laon that their deaths are inevitable: "O dearest love! we shall be dead and cold / Before this morn may on the world arise" (CP, 3694-5). Consequently the poem's denouement endorses its philosophical vision where "wingèd thoughts did range, / And half-extinguished words, which prophesied of change" (CP, 3521-2). Cythna's reasoning is complex; she tells Laon that "Her lips shall rob thee of the grace thou wearest, / To hide thy heart, and clothe the shapes which rove / Within

the homeless Future's wintry grove" (CP, 3642-4). As "prophetess" Cythna appropriates Laon's power and takes responsibility for shaping their destiny.

Clarification of Cythna's role is found in the drafting of these lines: "The ~~Poet~~ who shall steal the grace [thou] [?wearest] / Around thy heart" (BSM XVII, E. 10, p. 116, 27-8). This suggests that Cythna assumes the role of "Poet" and hence creator; nevertheless her vision is still in unison with Laon's: "For I now, sitting thus beside thee, seem / Even with thy breath and blood to live and move" (CP, 3645-6). In Cythna's calm acceptance of death there is a volte-face from her earlier declaration of the mind's invincibility: "Like mind while yet it mocks the all-devouring grave" (CP, 3081). Questions concerning the interrelationship of art and life arise as biographical details of the Shelleys are inscribed into the poetics of Laon and Cythna. The invocation to Spring reads as a veiled allusion to Mary Shelley's birth:

Sister of joy, thou art the child who wearest
 Thy mother's dying smile, tender and sweet;
 Thy mother Autumn, for whose grave thou bearest
 Fresh flowers, and beams like flowers, with gentle feet,
 Disturbing not the leaves which are her winding-sheet.

(CP, 3662-6)

Ostensibly "Thy mother" is "Autumn", but equally plausible is a biographical interpretation, especially considering that Mary Wollstonecraft died on 10 September 1797. That the circumstances of Mary Shelley's birth were prominent in Shelley's mind is apparent from the opening stanzas:

They say that thou wert lovely from thy birth,
 Of glorious parents, thou aspiring Child.

I wonder not — for One then left this earth
Whose life was like a setting planet mild,
Which clothed thee in the radiance undefiled
Of its departing glory. . . . (CP, 100-5).

The juxtaposition of death and love became deeply ingrained in Shelley's consciousness and is pursued more fully in Chapters Five and Eight.

¹ Neville Rogers, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973-5). I have chosen Laon and Cythna in preference to the revised epic, The Revolt of Islam, because my interest in the nature of poetic creativity is concerned with Shelley's original conceptions. This particular text of Laon and Cythna has been chosen for the following reasons: it is the most widely available text; the detailed quotations are easier for the reader to follow as the line numbers are cited. All quotes are prefaced by the reference CP and refer to line numbers unless otherwise indicated.

² Donald Reiman's comment in his Foreword to BMS XVII, viii.

³ Newman Ivey White, The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and His Contemporary Critics (1938; New York: Octagon, 1966), 121; hereafter referred to as White.

⁴ White, 127.

⁵ Harold Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking (1959; New York: Cornell UP, 1969), 8; hereafter referred to as Bloom.

⁶ In his chapter on "Authenticity, Heritage and Politics", David Cooper points out that "'Cultural critique' is an expression Heidegger would have hated", H, 37. Indeed Heidegger states that "Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein, and from the aspirations of a 'philosophy of culture'", BT, 211.

⁷ Michael Henry Scrivener, Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982), 124; hereafter referred to as Scrivener.

⁸ For a discussion of the way in which philosophy and magic are interrelated in Shelley's vision see Chapter Two, 47-9.

⁹ Mary Shelley's "Note" on Laon and Cythna directs the reader to make this parallel, CP, p. 271. However the character is complex and, in view of his belief in fatalism, it is equally feasible that Shelley had Godwin in mind.

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- ¹⁰ Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977), 113.
- ¹¹ Richard Cronin, Shelley's Poetic Thoughts (London: Macmillan, 1981), 96; hereafter referred to as Cronin.
- ¹² Michael O'Neill suggests that "Shelley produced in The Revolt of Islam a poem that deserved and deserves the closest attention . . . for the way it often threatens to undermine its own optimism", LL, 54.
- ¹³ See my discussion of Ahasureus influencing Mahmud by "natural magic", Chapter Seven, Hellas.
- ¹⁴ Nathaniel Brown, Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979), 185; hereafter referred to as Brown.
- ¹⁵ William A. Ulmer, Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 75; hereafter referred to as Ulmer.
- ¹⁶ E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1986), 663.
- ¹⁷ In an editorial decision Neville Rogers changes "emotion" to "commotion", but the former is, in my view, more in line with the epics focus on intense passion as an agent for transformation, CP, p. 122.
- ¹⁸ Brown, 184.
- ¹⁹ Although Shelley would certainly have opposed the term sovereignty, the idea of an equal relationship between men and women at the heart of society was in accord with his vision, Norman Davies, Europe: A History (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 716; hereafter referred to as Davies.
- ²⁰ Davies, 716.
- ²¹ Davies, 717.
- ²² Brown, 181.

²³ Ulmer, 71.

²⁴ G. Wilson Knight, The Golden Labyrinth: A Study of British Drama (London: Phoenix, 1962), 94.

²⁵ See my discussion of Heidegger's understanding of "Being-towards-death" in Chapter Two, 57-8.

²⁶ Timothy Morton, Shelley and the Revolution in Taste, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism Ser. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 114.

Chapter 4

"A Tale of Human Power": Vision and Reality in Laon and Cythna

*for to me is given
The wonders of the human world to keep,
And fancy's thin creations to endow
With manner, being, and reality.*

(Queen Mab VII, 60-3)

I

Through the labyrinths of the imagination Laon and Cythna negotiates a network of dreams, visions and trances which often collapse into tangible experiences. Laon dreams of being apprehended by "Legions of foul and ghastly shapes, which hung / Upon my flight" (CP, 1149-50). These swirling chimeras materialize into manifest existence:

And I lay struggling in the impotence
Of sleep, while outward life had burst its bound,
Though, still deluded, strove the tortured sense
To its dire wanderings to adapt the sound
Which in the light of morn was poured around
Our dwelling. Breathless, pale, and unaware
I rose, and all the cottage crowded found

With armed men, whose glittering swords were bare,
 And whose degraded limbs the tyrant's garb did wear.

(CP, 1153-61)

An interweaving of the material and immaterial planes of existence renders them almost inextricable: "A sense of actual things those monstrous dreams among" (CP, 1152). Laon's "terrific trance" (CP, 1306), provoked by physical deprivation, invokes a "giddy dance" (CP, 1308) of malignant apparitions that are indecipherable from external reality: "thought could not divide / The actual world from these entangling evils" (CP, 1311-12). The dominant tension in *Laon and Cythna* is the relationship between imaginative vision and empirical reality.¹ True to Shelley's *Speculations on Metaphysics* different apprehensions of existence have equal validity; there is no demarcation between "thoughts, which are called real, or external objects" and those which "are usually more obscure and indistinct, such as hallucinations, dreams and the ideas of madness" (*Julian* VII, 59). As Wilson Knight remarks in his discussion of "The immortality of consciousness" in Shelley's poetry: "image is event and event highly imaginative, while all are one with his own conflicting and swift-searching consciousness."² Through the characters of Laon and Cythna, Shelley designates consciousness as the decisive factor in dispelling tyranny; Laon's "many thoughts: a tameless multitude!" (CP, 747) populate the world to enact freedom's call:

my song

Peopled with thoughts the boundless universe,
 A mighty congregation, which were strong
 Where'er they trod the darkness, to disperse
 The cloud of that unutterable curse
 Which clings upon mankind:— . . . (CP, 928-33)

Here metaphor concretizes Shelley's ideas; "Peopled" and "A mighty congregation" evoke a definite physical presence which is further impressed with vigorous animation: "were strong / Where'er they trod." The materialization of thoughts resurfaces in Cythna's imaginative visions:

'For to my will my fancies were as slaves
 To do their sweet and subtile ministries;
 And oft from that bright fountain's shadowy waves
 They would make human throngs gather and rise
 To combat with my overflowing eyes
 And voice made deep with passion— . . . (CP, 3127-32)

Although Cythna's "ethereal combinations of the fancy" (CP, p. 99) appear magically conjured from the "shadowy waves" of vision, the blending of imagination, "will" and "passion" is consistent with Shelley's unfolding ideas on the nature of creativity.³ Before deciding on "passion" Shelley initially wrote "And voice made deep [by] ~~thought~~" (BSM XVII, E. 10, p. 74, 32). From this substitution it seems reasonable to assume that in Shelley's consciousness, thought and passion occupy a similar semantic level. Of relevance to Shelley's ideas on thought and passion are the scientific insights into being that are explored by David Bohm and David Peat in Science, Order, and Creativity. In their discussion of "creative intelligence", which they perceive as being "universal and acts in every area of mental operation", Bohm and Peat maintain that "the insights of neurochemistry and the nature of nerve networks indicate very strongly that there can be no fundamental separation at this level between thought, feeling, and will" (SOC, 219). If, at the level of creativity, these metaphysical elements are interrelated, then thought would naturally invoke passion and will and their combination is vitally creative.

Throughout Laon and Cythna Shelley exploits the interweaving, boundless nature of various layers of consciousness: "hallucinations", "dreams" and "madness" are given an ontological status which questions common perceptions about familiar reality. This dichotomy is most extreme with the birth of Cythna's dream-child, unfurled in "a strange tale of strange endurance" (CP, 2848). Immediately before Cythna's intuitive apprehension of pregnancy, her senses are deranged by "The misery of a madness slow and creeping" (CP, 2956). Insanity forces Cythna to question the credibility of her experiences: "no firm assurance, / So wild were they, could her own faith impart" (CP, 2850-1). Cythna's inner turmoil conditions her perceptions, rendering the physical world indivisible from her demented anguish. She apprehends a confusion between the natural elements "Which made the earth seem fire, the sea seem air" (CP, 2957). This chaotic disintegration in the conventional way of perceiving the world culminates with Cythna's metamorphosis in consciousness: "Thus all things were / Transformed into the agony which I wore / Even as a poisoned robe among my bosom's core" (CP, 2962-4). Shelley's understanding of an integral relationship between self and world, defined in On Life (1819), is of relevance here. In this essay, Shelley outlines two heightened states of awareness where perception disintegrates boundaries: "sensations as children" and "the state called reverie" (PP, 477). Under these states of perceiving, people "feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being." (PP, 477). In relation to Shelley's presentation of a unified field of being and world; there is an overt parallel between Cythna's derangement and childlike modes of perception. Psychological verification of Shelley's insight into the mental world of childhood can be elucidated by Jean Piaget's research.⁴

In The Child's Conception of the World Piaget deduces that, during the earliest years, children innately experience a sense of oneness: "There is thus in the beginning neither self nor external world but a continuum" (CCW, 235). Cythna experiences a regression to the

origins of her conscious experience of reality. The catalyst which precipitates this awakening is an Eagle relinquishing his hunting instincts:

‘This wakened me, it gave me human strength;
 And hope, I know not whence or wherefore, rose,
 But I resumed my ancient powers at length;
 My spirit felt again like one of those —
 Like thine! —whose fate it is to make the woes
 Of humankind their prey.— (CP, 3073-8)

Shelley shrewdly redirects the predatory nature of the Eagle to energize his revolutionary goals and vanquish adversity. Cythna’s self-healing where “time imparted / Such power to me” (CP, 3094-5) is not only a process to reintegrate her thoughts and emotions, but more importantly to create her destiny. Cythna explains her perception of existence thus:

‘We live in our own world, and mine was made
 From glorious fantasies of hope departed:
 Aye we are darkened with their floating shade,
 Or cast a lustre on them— (CP, 3091-4)

A sense of personal empowerment is central to Cythna’s account of her liberation. In his analysis of the child’s early mental patterns Piaget’s study defines a notion of ontological supremacy: “Just as the child makes his own truth, so he makes his own reality” (CCW, 167). Of greatest consequence to Shelley’s intellectual ideas is Cythna’s assumed mastery over external events; she wields a quasi-magical power with her ability “to wreak / Ruin upon the tyrants” (CP, 1013-4):

—All shall relent

Who hear me—tears, as mine have flowed, shall flow,

Hearts beat as mine now beats, with such intent

As renovates the world; a will omnipotent! (CP, 1032-5)

In regard to “a will omnipotent” Piaget’s deductions about the child’s understanding of the structure of reality are germane:

Reality is impregnated with self and thought is conceived as belonging to the category of physical matter. From the point of view of causality, all the universe is felt to be in communion with and obedient to the self. There is participation and magic. (CCW, 167).

However, Shelley’s and Piaget’s theoretical conclusions about the validity of the child’s perceptions to comprehend the nature of reality are diametrically opposed. For Piaget, the child experiences “egocentric illusions” (CCW, 168)⁵ arising from projection and an ignorance of subjectivity. By maturity people become disillusioned: “As adults we are aware of an external reality made up of causal connections and an internal subject” (CCW, 158). Here Piaget’s view is classically Cartesian and in contradistinction to Shelley’s holistic view of existence examined throughout this thesis.⁶ Shelley’s creative ideas demand that Cythna retains her childlike sense of oneness with the world and magical capacity to create.

In the poem Laon and Cythna’s “sensations as children” (PP, 477) have a significant role. Canto II, which introduces Cythna as “A child most infantine” (CP, 856), opens with “The starlight smile of children” (CP, 667) providing one of the rejuvenating balms for Laon’s “spirit’s folded powers” (CP, 675). Cythna has a spiritual innocence which gives her great inner strength:

How without fear of evil or disguise
 Was Cythna!— what a spirit strong and mild,
 Which death, or pain or peril could despise,
 Yet melt in tenderness! what genius wild
 Yet mighty, was enclosed within one simple child!

(CP, 950-4)

“Simple child” seems ironic given the complexity of Shelley’s depiction, but a few lines later it is apparent that one meaning of “simple” is innocence. Cythna is unaware of her abilities, “Unconscious of the power through which she wrought / The woof of such intelligible thought” (CP, 967-8). “Genius wild” denotes an original and anarchic way of thinking. Shelley tenaciously insists on Cythna’s childlike ingenuity. Even after she is ready to fulfill her mission and has “cast off the impotence that binds / Her childhood now” (CP, 1078-9) she is still perceived as “that dearest child” (CP, 1170). “Child” has a specific philosophical import in Laon and Cythna; it codifies a way of perceiving the world that is unencumbered by cultural conditioning:

New lore was this —old age, with its gray hair,
 And wrinkled legends of unworthy things,
 And icy sneers, is nought: it cannot dare
 To burst the chains which life for ever flings
 On the entangled soul’s aspiring wings. (CP, 955-9)

A “New lore” derived from Cythna’s childlike perceptions is pivotal to the furtherance of the poem’s revolutionary ideals, to overthrow “faiths which long have held the world in awe, / Bloody and false, and cold” (CP, 1543-4). Once initiated into Cythna’s creed of “new-born

liberty" (CP, 3446) even the captives are transformed into "earth's purest children, young and fair, / With eyes the shrines of unawakened thought" (CP, 3451-2).

With the pre-verbal natural bonding between mother and daughter, Cythna is able to re-experience a state of innocent perception through her creative play: "With heaps of golden shells we two did play,— / Both infants, weaving wings for time's perpetual way" (CP, 3017-8). The Romantic preference for childhood states is, perhaps, best exemplified in Wordsworth's ODE: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood. Wordsworth enunciates that visionary experience gradually diminishes and disappears in adulthood:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy
 But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;

 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.⁷

In his portrayal of Cythna, Shelley circumvents Wordsworth's suggested loss of visionary experience. Not only does Cythna become more spiritual as the narrative progresses, "like to an Angel, robed in white" (CP, 2502), she also retains her visionary ideals. Here the correspondence between a childlike state of consciousness and madness is incisive. Insanity, understood as a derangement of conventional cognitive structures, is a powerful phase of consciousness from which to elicit transformation. Paradoxically Cythna's derangement is both a debilitating experience, "madness misery brought,—" (CP, 2955), but also heralds

regeneration: "Her madness was a beam of light, a power / Which dawned through the rent soul" (CP, 2884-5).

What might Cythna's visionary experiences reveal about the structure of reality? Evidently Shelley's presentation of an interconnection between consciousness and world is at variance with a Cartesian schema which distinguishes mind from matter. The principles of an holistic conception of existence have been outlined by David Bohm's quantum interpretation in Chapter One. Bohm's ideas on the reality of thought confer an ontological status that has an affinity with Shelley's ideas. He perceives thought

as a real movement that is actually going on, both inwardly and outwardly, with real effects of very widespread and deep significance that interpenetrate and ultimately merge with the whole of reality in which we live. (OC, 65)

In Laon and Cythna the collapse of a boundary between internal and external reality is central to the creative act; from a nebulous vortex of immaterial images Cythna summons a "wondrous vision" to supersede her "visionary woes":

a long

And wondrous vision wrought from my despair,

Then grew, like sweet reality among

Dim visionary woes, an unreposing throng. (CP, 2970-3)

Shelley's diction is skillfully chosen to realize his metaphysical concepts. "An unreposing throng" undercuts the notion of permanence or stability and conveys a sense of anarchism; the "woes" are ungovernable because they are not structured by Cythna's conscious attention. The juxtaposition of "Dim" and "visionary" suggests fading and weakens their physical

presence. By contrast the “wondrous vision” encapsulates a brightness that becomes palpable, “grew, like sweet reality.” To the reader Cythna’s enslavement, rape and subsequent imprisonment may appear to be more concrete impediments than her description of “Dim visionary woes.” However, with the simile “grew, like sweet reality” Shelley negates the perpetuation of adversity with one of his central insights about creativity; imaginative vision has a generative nature which can displace tangible circumstances. Here the primary evidence in the Bodleian Shelley Manuscript is an invaluable guide to the development of Shelley’s conceptions. He drafted the lines, “~~Burst~~ like a reality among / Those visionary woes” (BSM XVII, E. 10, p. 67, 12-13). “Burst” invokes an instantaneous explosion, consonant with the account of creation in Canto 1: “when life and thought / Sprang forth, they burst the womb of inessential Nought” (CP, 350-1). Nevertheless Shelley most probably rejected “burst” and chose the more generative “grew”, in accord with his conviction that for creation to be lasting it must originate without violence: “the light which shows its worth, / Must among gentle thoughts and fearless take its birth” (CP, 710-11). Cythna’s derangement deconstructs the prevailing perceptual modes, allowing access to a multi-dimensional reality of countless possibilities from which she is able to construct her desired future:

‘And on the sand would I make signs to range
 These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought;
 Clear, elemental shapes, whose smallest change
 A subtler language within language wrought:
 The key of truths. . . . (CP, 3109-13)

“Signs” making “A subtler language within language” reveal a poetic aim to communicate a way of perceiving the world free from established linguistic structures. Heidegger points out the impossibility of relaying a primordial encounter of the world as “language already hides in

itself a developed way of conceiving" (BT, 199). Having, perhaps, pre-empted this line of argument Shelley reveals that the primary experience of reality is unverbalizable; in Canto 1 the woman's expression is in an "unintelligible strain / Of her melodious voice and eloquent mien" (CP, 300-1). Her communication is not through recognizable linguistic structures: "She spake in a language whose strange melody / Might not belong to earth" (CP, 289-90). However the woman can emotively convey meaning through her compassion: "The pity and the love of every tone" (CP, 292). Shelley intimates that the ultimate reality is beyond human reach and encapsulation:

Like what maybe conceived of this vast dome,
 When from the depths which thought can seldom pierce
 Genius beholds it rise, his native home,
 Girt by the deserts of the Universe,
 Yet, nor in painting's light, or mightier verse,
 Or sculpture's marble language, can invest
 That shape to mortal sense— (CP, 568-74)

Nevertheless, in humanity's experience of the universe thought and hope are the primary motivating agents and their linguistic articulation heralds change: "great is the strength / Of words" (CP, 1569-70). Words are alive with intent, their power is metaphorically depicted as the ammunition to destroy tyranny: the Tyrant orders his men "go slay the rebels" (CP, 3865) because "the weakest with one word might turn / The scales of victory yet" (CP, 3867-8).

Metaphysical elements predominate in Laon and Cythna; the elements of evil "In air, and light, and thought, and language, dwell" (CP, 389), but equally so does the power of good:

With deathless minds which leave where they have passed

A path of light, my soul communion knew;
 Till from that glorious intercourse, at last,
 As from a mine of magic store, I drew
 Words which were weapons;—round my heart there grew
 The adamantine armour of their power,
 And from my fancy wings of golden hue
 Sprang forth—yet not alone from wisdom's tower,
 A minister of truth, these plumes young Laon bore.

(CP, 838-46)

The drafting of these lines offers insight into Shelley's developing thoughts on creativity. Although clearly printed here, from Tokoo's editorial decisions, the facsimile highlights the problem of editing Shelley's notebooks; this text is cross-written over other lines that are not relevant to this discussion and therefore omitted. For ease of reading they have been rearranged thus:

(DRAWING	As from a mine of magic ^s power, I drew	(DRAWING OF
OF	[?Magic] my soul	a TREE)
TREES)	a-deep communion knew	
	Till from that ceaseless intercourse at last	
	As from a mind of magic store I drew	
	Words which were weapons; & had	
	round my heart there grew	
	The adamantine armour of thier power	
	(BSM XIII, E. 19, p. 8, 17-24).	

Of immediate significance is the close proximity of "~~As from a mine of magic power, I drew~~" to the tree drawing. Nancy Goslee's examination of Shelley's numerous sketches in the "Prometheus" Notebooks has a distinct relevance here; she finds in the sketches "a complex, fascinating range of interdependence with the developing verbal texts."⁹ In relation to the recurrent tree drawings, Goslee detects a "natural, organic, and generative," impetus which appears "closest to the processes of poetic generation."¹⁰ Most convincingly, "I drew" and the tree drawing, in the above cited lines, establish a powerful link and a source of creative inspiration. Noticeably Laon and Cythna was written in a natural setting "where the woods to frame a bower / With interlacèd branches mix and meet" (CP, 12-13).

To return to the drafted lines just cited, there is a development in Shelley's conception four lines later when "mine" is changed to "mind." Tokoo determines, and this seems to be the case from the facsimile, that the "'d' [is] superimposed in darker ink on 'e'" (BSM XIII, E. 19, p. 8, 21n.). Although Shelley's final choice was "mine", the implication that "mind" might be the magical source of creativity should not be overlooked. With the "ceaseless intercourse", and "deep communion" it is reasonable to conjecture that Shelley intimates a natural trance-induced state which connects with higher realms of consciousness: "~~the mighty spirits of the past.~~" What role might trees play in altering states of consciousness? Shelley's obsessive drawings seem to intuitively elicit a natural spellbinding power that was also sensed by "The early magnetizers" who "saw animal magnetism as something communicable to large numbers, either directly or via such objects as trees. . . ."¹¹ An interconnection between trees and creativity has a germane literary precedent in The Tempest, a play which later became a powerful influence on Shelley, most possibly because of Prospero conjuring and controlling the elements. Central to Prospero's magic "Art" is the freeing of Ariel from his imprisonment in a cloven pine by a witch. Ariel's release, slavishly to implement Prospero's orders, also symbolizes a freeing and then harnessing of the creative spirit in nature.

To Cythna the heart is pre-eminent, not only as the emotional centre but also as the creative sanctum. On a cosmic level monarchies are vanquished and freedom is metaphorically born: “the state / Of kingless thrones, which Earth did in her heart create” (CP, 2945-6). Although Cythna asserts that the human mind determines futurity because “it is the book of fate” (CP, 3372), Shelley’s initial choice was the heart: “Look on ~~the~~ your hearts — it is the book of / fate” (BSM XVII, E. 10, p. 113, 24-5). There is a thematic continuity throughout the narrative with the heart as the centre for expression and source of creativity: Cythna’s experiences are “Like broken memories of many a heart / Woven into one” (CP, 2849-50). Much earlier, with the anonymous Woman in Canto 1, Shelley located the heart as the seat of creation:

when that majestic theme
 Shrined in her heart found utterance, and she bent
 Her looks on mine; those eyes a kindling beam
 Of love divine into my spirit sent,
 And ere her lips could move, made the air eloquent.

(CP, 338-42)

It is in communication, via a radiating female benevolence, that the poem’s message of love is transmitted: “That love, which none may bind; be free to fill / The world, like light” (CP, 3336-7). Cythna’s stirring rhetoric, to incite the mariners to revolutionary fervour, is underscored by a sense of oneness: “we have one human heart— / All mortal thoughts confess a common home” (CP, 3361-2). Through the interconnection implicit in a universal heart, the emotional counterpart to “the one mind” (PP, 478) of Shelley’s intellectual philosophy, Cythna can emotively transmit and receive her visionary ideals:

“Let all be free and equal!— From your hearts
 I feel an echo, through my inmost frame
 Like sweetest sound, seeking its mate, it darts—

(CP, 3343-5)

But just as the heart is the source of creation, it is also the centre of mis-creation; the tyrant, enthralled by Cythna’s “spirit-thrilling lay” (CP, 2863), abuses “her wondrous loveliness” (CP, 2866), and in so doing corrupts himself. “The evil thoughts it made, which did his breast pollute” (CP, 2865). The drafting of these lines illustrates that Shelley was considering the corrupting effects of evil on the heart:

~~[With]~~~~[evil]~~ thoughts ~~[were]~~ ~~[made]~~ which did

his heart

The evil shapes which ruled his ~~[pollute]~~

249 heart [it]. (BSM XVII, E. 10, p. 61, 28-31)

Cythna’s initial realization of her pregnancy is bizarrely depicted, like being furtively possessed:

—there seemed a being

Within me — a strange load my heart did bear,

As if some living thing had made its lair

Even in the fountains of my life:— . . . (CP, 2967-70)

An uncanceled line in Shelley’s notebook confirms that he initially considered portraying a malignant progeny from Cythna’s forced impregnation by the tyrant: “As if some evil thing

had made its lair" (BSM XVII, E. 10. p. 67, 6). The heart is the point where Cythna is most vulnerable and open to destruction: "The fiend of madness which had made its prey / Of my poor heart" (CP, 2947-8). With the disappearance of her child, Cythna is consumed by devouring images of a "dream, which, like a beast / Most fierce and beautiful, in my memory / Had made its lair, and on my heart did feast" (CP, 3047-9). Like the lone Poet of Alastor, Cythna finds solitude, devoid of human empathy, life threatening:

But I was changed—the very life was gone
 Out of my heart—I wasted more and more,
 Day after day, and sitting there alone,
 Vexed the inconstant waves with my perpetual moan.

(CP, 3033-6)

During Cythna's second mania, thoughts, dreams, feelings, and physical signs cohere into a distinct sense that she gives birth to a daughter:

‘Methought I was about to be a mother—
 Month after month went by, and still I dreamed
 That we should soon be all to one another,
 I and my child; and still new pulses seemed
 To beat beside my heart, and still I deemed
 There was a babe within— and, when the rain
 Of winter through the rifted cavern steamed,
 Methought, after a lapse of lingering pain,
 I saw that lovely shape, which near my heart had lain.

(CP, 2974-82)

Cythna recounts vivid physical symptoms, such as her “breasts were swoln and changed” (CP, 3038), which undermines the wavering uncertainty as to whether it was a phantom or imaginative pregnancy: “‘twas a dream.’—Then Cythna did uplift / Her looks on mine, as if some doubt she sought to shift,—” (CP, 2990-1). The notion that dreams have a physical actuality has its origins in the early stage of childhood: “when they first dream all children regard their dreams as real. It is principally through the agency of its parents and its social environment that the child becomes undeceived” (CCW, 104). Here Piaget’s opinion of becoming “undeceived” through education runs counter to Shelley’s assertion that dreams can manifest into material existence. Repeatedly in drafting Laon and Cythna, as in the finished text, there is a commingling of dreams with reality. The following citation shows how dreaming and seeing are sometimes confused in Shelley’s consciousness: “What then is god? some moonstruck [sophist] [sate] / Dreaming watching the shade from his own soul” (BSM XVII, E. 10, p. 82, 21-2).

In Laon and Cythna the reader is compelled to engage with a fundamental question on the nature of creativity: who wields the generative power that will determine futurity? Does supremacy reside with God or humanity? Decisively the response to this issue determines the individual’s control over their destiny. To empower the oppressed Shelley ingeniously attempts to deconstruct religion’s hegemony in the human mind: “‘What dream ye? Your own hands have built an home, / Even for yourselves on a beloved shore:” (CP, 3226-7). His assault on the bastions of religion directly targets what Shelley’s perceives as the source of inequality, the misappropriation of divine benevolence to ratify power relations: “For it is said God rules both high and low, / And man is made the captive of his brother” (CP, 3309-10). The portrayal of a vengeful God is a weapon of oppression which justifies despotism: “Tyrants, that they may rule, with lies thus desolate” (CP, 3270). Humanity’s subjugation is secured with repressive religious strictures: “The ministers of fraud can scarce dissemble / The lies of their own heart” (CP, 1533-4). A quiescent acceptance of servitude is exposed as spiritual bribery to

avoid post-mortal suffering, "the hell hereafter"(CP, 3604). Consequently Shelley's poetic challenge is "the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission" (CP, p. 100). Here Wasserman's comments are apposite: in Laon and Cythna "Shelley most explicitly defined theology as a fiction invented to authorize man's tyranny over man . . ." (SCR, 90) and furthermore "To this projected fiction slavish man masochistically assigns an imaginary rod to scourge himself into slavery . . ." (SCR, 91). Through Cythna's rhetoric Shelley questions the precept of divine control over human life: "Dream ye that God thus builds for man in solitude?" (CP, 3234); he reassigns power to the individual: "'Twere as if man's own works should feel, and show / The hopes, and fears, and thoughts from which they flow, / And he be like to them!" (CP, 3238-40).

Shelley's emphasis on the dominance of the human will has its psychological antecedents in childhood. Piaget shows that the child constructs an anthropocentric paradigm: it is "man who is thought to be omniscient and all-powerful, and it is he who has created all things" (CCW, 354). Moreover Piaget contends that in accounting for the nature of existence "the majority of children only bring in God against their will as it were, and not until they can find nothing else to bring forward" (CCW, 353). Therefore in the child's formative years theological teaching "often appears as something foreign to the child's natural thought" (CCW, 353). Clearly Shelley's idea that humanity has an innate power to create reality can partly be seen as a psychological residue from childhood. However, for Shelley the power to create is not a childish illusion but a principal tenet of his revolutionary creed. The hermit encapsulates the poem's celebration of the invincible human spirit:

from shore to shore

Doctrines of human power my words have told;

They have been heard, and men aspire to more

Than they have ever gained or ever lost of yore. (CP, 1518-21)

II

Laon and Cythna celebrates its intertextuality, the poetic and philosophical precedences “from the lore of bards and sages old” (CP, 1514). Throughout the poem an unquenchable search for wisdom is pursued beyond mortal realms: “In converse with the dead, who leave the stamp / Of ever-burning thoughts on many a page” (CP, 1478-9). But of even greater textual relevance than “The good and mighty of departed ages” (CP, 3712), is Shelley’s appropriation of a contemporary source, Peacock’s unfinished Ahrimanes.¹² There is a thematic affinity between Laon and Cythna and Ahrimanes; both poems denounce the invidious power relations of “The lord and serf—the tyrant and the slave” (AHA, I. XXVII). Shelley likewise indicts humanity’s indoctrination into a quiescent acceptance of their servitude: “and we / Should seek for nought on earth but toil and misery— / ‘For thus we might avoid the hell hereafter.’ / So spake the hypocrites, who cursed and lied” (CP, 3602- 5). Similarly Peacock had earlier mounted an assault on the bastions of religion and denounced its oppressive regimes :

And Tyranny, with all its engines foul,
Sceptre and sword—the dungeon and the wheel;
And Falsehood, muffled close in priestly cowl,
With Persecution linked, and Fraud’s malignant scowl.

(AHB, I. XI)

At one level these resemblances reflect the contemporary issues of a revolutionary era and reveal how the poet “cannot escape from subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live” (CP, p. 103). However, there is evidence to support a more intimate connection between the texts and to show that Shelley borrowed freely from Ahrimanes. Kenneth Cameron surmises that

“after he abandoned the poem Peacock turned his manuscripts over to Shelley” (SC iii, 243). Peacock was not only “handing on the torch to a younger and more gifted poet” (SC iii, 243), but also to a more accomplished philosopher and innovative revolutionary. As interesting as the narrative correspondences are, it is Shelley’s adaptation of Peacock’s ideas into an original philosophical theory that is most significant.¹³ Here Shelley’s expression of the “beau ideal” is appropriate; he envisaged a revolution “produced by the influence of individual genius, & out of general knowledge” (LS I, 564). Shelley’s “individual genius” and the radical nature of his proposals can be elucidated by an analysis of the dissimilarities between Laon and Cythna and Ahrimanes.

Locating where the poet situates the source of creative energy is fundamental to understanding the poem’s philosophical creed and how a revolution in human consciousness may be achieved. In Ahrimanes power is devolved through a hierarchical system, the acme of which is the feminized force of Necessity. In the second version of Ahrimanes “four principal genii: the creating, the preserving, the destroying and the restoring spirits” (AHB, p. 428) enact Necessity’s laws. These spirits are depicted as gods served by “Unnumbered genii, creatures of their will” (AHB, I. II). In Peacock’s vision humanity is denied an active role in the determination of events because “Necessity governs the world” (AHB, p. 428) and people are powerless to influence futurity:

Parent of being, mistress of the-spheres,
 Supreme Necessity o’er all doth reign.
 She guides the course of the revolving years,
 With power no prayers can change, no force restrain:
 Binding all nature in her golden chain. (AHB, I. I)¹⁴

Necessity is conceived as an inexorable force in a poem where the dominating philosophical outlook is one of predeterminism: "The destined period of El-Oran's reign / Passed by, and Oromaze assumed his sway" (AHB, I. IV). In a detailed outline for the two canto version of Ahrimanes, Peacock further endorses a fatalistic vision of reality; "destined period" is reiterated three times in the opening paragraph (AHB, p. 428). Consequently the narrative progresses through alternating epochs of evil and good: destruction happens in the "fated hour" (AHB, I. VII), but Ahrimanes' evil empire of "Discord, Wrath, Revenge, and Hate" (AHB, I. XI) only endures "till from the ocean-tides / Shall rise the genius, in appointed hour" (AHB, I. IX).

For Shelley human life and thought have a quasi-divine status, the variables of which are immortally preserved in the Temple of the Spirit. In opposition to Plato's immaterial world of ideas, Shelley depicts eternal forms of human potential as corporeal structures: "forms on every side, / Sculptures like life and thought; immovable, deep-eyed" (CP, 584-5).

Ahrimanes opens optimistically with interpenetrating cosmic forces likened to "dreams of hope" (AHA, I. I), but both versions of Peacock's poem are despairingly named after the evil Ahrimanes rather than the benign deity who is "Oromazes—lord of peace and day—" (AHA, I. XVIII). Conversely Shelley dedicates his revolutionary narrative to the protagonists: "The authors of it are supposed to be my hero & heroine, whose names appear in the title" (LS I, 564). Even in revision Shelley's "Vision of the Nineteenth Century", The Revolt of Islam, focuses on the rebellion against despotism. Shelley contrives to alleviate the effects of destruction through the healing power of love:

I have attempted in the progress of my work to speak to the common & elementary emotions of the human heart, so that, tho it is a story of violence & revolution, it is relieved by milder pictures of friendship & love & natural affections. (LS I, 563)

Concepts which are undefined in Ahrimanes are seized upon by Shelley and charged with significance. For instance Ahrimanes, the evil god, is bound by "Supreme Necessity" to provoke conflict: "To shake the world with war, and rouse the powers of mind" (AHA, I. XVIII). Having portrayed an intriguing link between evil and the awakening of consciousness, Peacock fails to pursue its revolutionary potential. In Laon and Cythna to "rouse the powers of mind" becomes the poem's central weapon for vanquishing evil, and the mind's creative capacity forms the foundation of Shelley's theorizing about the nature of existence. Contrary to Peacock's reliance on supernatural forces, Shelley, through the role of Cythna, instructs both the mariners and the reader that fate is determined by human agency: "Look on your mind—it is the book of fate—" (CP, 3372).

Certainly Peacock intended to mount a philosophical exploration of humanity's subjection to tyranny: one of his unexecuted ideas for Canto four is that "The philosopher delivers his opinions on the past and future condition of the human race" (AHA, p. 283). Nevertheless there is no evidence in the finished stanzas, or the two outlines, to suggest that Peacock conceived of any doctrine other than a position of fatalism. Mass human effort is futile to overthrow the evil Ahrimanes: "Under his iron reign we live, anticipating the destined period of the restoring power" (AHB, p. 428). However, following the Romantic preference for exalting gifted individuals, Peacock envisaged a minority of "favored mortals" who could feel "the spirits of good" and are "given an impulse and a power of mind which rises triumphant over all the tyranny of Ahrimanes" (AHB, p. 428). But the poem fails to suggest a strategy for overcoming evil or show how victory could be accomplished by human effort. Humanity has little choice except to be a patient beacon for the restorative power:

Such is the picture of the virtuous man struggling with calamity; a picture which the preserver contemplates with joy from his southern paradise, which the restorer hails with anticipative delight as the omen of his terrestrial reign (AHB, p. 429).

Indeed it is only through supernatural causes when the preserving spirit's "genii come forth from time to time to mingle with mankind" that regeneration is hastened with "the reign of the restorer" (AHB, p. 428). Underpinning Peacock's notion of reality is a Cartesian division of subject and object, mind and matter. Consequently even though humanity is guided by supernatural phenomena, it nevertheless remains separate from the creative process.

In Shelley's *Temple of the Spirit* there is an interpenetration of spiritual realms and human accomplishments. Creative transformation emanates from artistic expression which is inspiringly channelled through the human spirit:

And on the jasper walls around, there lay
 Paintings, the poesy of mightiest thought,
 Which did the Spirit's history display;
 A tale of passionate change, divinely taught,
 Which, in their winged dance, unconscious Genii wrought.

(CP, 599-603)

The *Temple of the Spirit* is conceived as a divine form with numinous genii: "It was a Temple, such as mortal hand / Has never built" (CP, 559-60). However it is not populated by mythical gods but by human spirits: "The Great, who had departed from mankind, / A mighty Senate" (CP, 605-6). Moreover Shelley's ideas on equality are evident from his eclectic choice of spirits:

some, whose white hair shone
 Like mountain snow, mild, beautiful, and blind;
 Some, female forms, whose gestures beamed with mind;
 And ardent youths, and children bright and fair. (CP, 606-9)

This egalitarian representation in Shelley's "Senate" encompasses all ages and effectively provides an alternative paradigm to patriarchal relationships in which Shelley censured fear-imposed domination: "But children near their parents tremble now, / Because they must obey—one rules another, / For it is said God rules both high and low," (CP, 3307-9). Laon and Cythna's revolutionary philosophy resides in the fact that Shelley ascribes divine potential to humanity: "The whole poem, with the exception of the first canto & part of the last is a mere human story without the smallest intermixture of supernatural interference" (LS I, 563). "Mere" could devalue Shelley's "tale of human power" (CP, 648), but it is perhaps more appropriately read as an ironic comment on Peacock's preference for the supernatural.

At times confusion arises as to Peacock's precise theoretical intent; he pointedly censures religious conventions and yet Ahrimanes is inescapably subjected to a system of worship. During the golden age humanity pay homage to a benign god: "At Oromazes' sylvan shrine they knelt: / And morn and eve did choral suppliance flow" (AHA, I. IX). Implicit in this ritualistic veneration is an endorsement of the Christian value-system: "at morn to twine / The votive wreath round Oromazes' shrine" (AHA, I. XIII). Almost unwittingly Peacock preserves domination and subordination. Despite constructing a mythological schema which contests the biblical account of creation, Peacock invests power in a creative deity that dominates humanity. In view of the poem's fatalism humanity are powerless to initiate their regeneration. If the future is unaffected by human power then there is little hope or incentive to incite a revolution. In the earliest version of Ahrimanes, Darassah is reliant on external forces; he is not empowered with mental and emotional strength, but by a magical ring which can defeat obstacles: "This gifted ring shall every barrier break" (AHA, I. XV). Darassah is manipulated by the creative power, "The monarch of the world hath chosen thee / To spread his name on earth, in power and majesty.—" (AHA, I. XXVIII). More disturbingly, Darassah's autonomy is overwhelmed; his apprehension of reality is deconstructed as he is held in thrall:

The youth received

The glittering spell, in awe and mute amaze;
 Standing like one almost of sense bereaved,
 That fixes on the vacant air his gaze,
 Where wildered fancy's troubled eye surveys
 Dim-flitting forms, obscure and undefined,
 That doubtful thoughts and shadowy feelings raise,
 Leaving no settled image on the mind. (AHA, I. XXIX)

Conversely for Shelley the mission to liberate humanity is relayed as a personal quest, instigated and empowered by his own compassion:

‘I will be wise,
 And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
 Such power, for I grow weary to behold
 The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
 Without reproach or check.’ I then controlled
 My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold.

(CP, 31-36)

Peacock initially depicted a weak-willed protagonist with morals that are easily transgressed: “Less pure Darassah’s thoughts: ambitions spell / Had touched his soul, and dreams of power and fame” (AHA, II. VII). Consequently, in the outline of Canto 10, Darassah descends to evil practices: “He builds a temple to Ahrimanes and orders all persons to worship in it” (AHA, p. 285). In his revised plan Peacock makes a moral volte-face; he asserts that the “two lovers Darassah and Kelasris remained incorruptible” (AHB, p. 429). This inconsistency reveals a

lack of coherence in Peacock's conceptions and perhaps it is partly in response to Darassah that Shelley portrays Laon as unswervingly faithful to his beliefs.

III

The communication between sympathetic minds is the defining impetus of Shelley's transforming vision: "shall all the kinds / Of evil, catch from our uniting minds / The spark which must consume them" (CP, 1075-77). The development since the Alastorian quest is evident; Shelley now portrays intense passion as being outwardly inspiring:

In me, communion with this purest being
 Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise
 In knowledge, which, in hers my own mind seeing,
 Left in the human world few mysteries. (CP, 946-9)

There is a deep-rooted conflict between Shelley's affirmatory poetics where thought has a creative impact that will decide futurity and a sceptical uncertainty concerning public recognition of his work. Qualms and insecurities permeate the prefatory comments to Laon and Cythna as evidenced in the opening statement: "[1] The Poem which I now present to the world is an attempt from which I scarcely dare to expect success, and in which a writer of established fame might fail without disgrace" (CP, p. 99). Juxtaposed with Shelley's enterprise "to awaken public hope, and to enlighten and improve mankind" (CP, p. 100) is an expectation of defeat:

Should the Public judge that my composition is worthless, I shall indeed bow
 before the tribunal from which Milton received his crown of immortality; and shall

seek to gather, if I live, strength from that defeat, which may nerve me to some new enterprise of thought which may not be worthless. (CP, p. 105)

“If I live” intimates that failure might be fatal. What might “some new enterprise of thought” mean? Poetically Shelley muses on his options:

Is it, that now my inexperienced fingers
 But strike the prelude of a loftier strain?
 Or, must the lyre on which my spirit lingers
 Soon pause in silence, ne'er to sound again. (CP, 82-5)

Time answered this question by verifying one of Shelley's intuitive thoughts concerning his future: Laon and Cythna is “the prelude” to a penetrating intellectual pursuit into the impact of human consciousness in the recreation of the world. In drafting the above lines, Shelley twice considered that the depth of his song emanated from his “soul” (BSM XIII, E. 14, p.20, 6, 8). Any renunciation of Shelley's philosophical ideals is inconceivable in view of his zealous acquisition of knowledge to out-manceuvre the world's oppressors “And charm the minds of men to Truth's own sway” (CP, 87). In this respect Laon's relentless dedication and overwhelming sense of responsibility are unmistakably Shelleyan: “And ever from that hour upon me lay / The burden of this hope, and night or day, / In vision or in dream, clove to my breast” (CP, 796-8). Laon voices resolute allegiance to the poem's revolutionary goals:

‘It must be so —I will arise and waken
 The multitude, and like a sulphurous hill,
 Which on a sudden from its snows has shaken
 The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill

The world with cleansing fire: it must, it will—
 It may not be restrained! —And who shall stand
 Amid the rocking earthquake steadfast still,
 But Laon? . . . (CP, 784-91)

If Shelley believed that thoughts have such immense power in the determination of events why did he seemingly sabotage his efforts for publication with negative doubts? The possibility of failure is clearly anticipated: "If there must be no response to my cry— / If men must rise and stamp with fury blind / On his pure name who loves them,—" (CP, 119-21). Perhaps Shelley's wavering uncertainty about success emanates from the experimental nature of a work that might engage only a limited audience "the enlightened and refined" (CP, p. 99). Although this conjecture is of some relevance there is a more fundamental problem: Shelley's divisive attitude towards the appropriation of personal power. Inscribed into the poetics of Laon and Cythna is an impulse towards an annihilation of the self and a disdain of personal fulfilment: "How I braved death for liberty and truth, / And spurned at peace, and power, and fame—" (CP, 519-20). Moreover, although Laon's and Cythna's "steadfast will has bought / A calm inheritance" (CP, 3727-8), their deaths are necessary to initiate the Earth's regeneration: "Behold! Spring comes, though we must pass, who made / The promise of its birth,—" (CP, 3688-9). By voicing these misgivings Shelley is counteracting the poem's "struggle to relume / The lamp of Hope o'er man's bewildered lot" (CP, 1472-3). Paradoxically Shelley is calling for a collective transformation in consciousness that has not yet been fully assimilated into his own psyche. Repeatedly he stresses the necessity to envision a resounding victory: "And earth's immense and trampled multitude / In hope on their own powers began to look" (CP, 403-4).

In relation to public appeal it is appropriate to contrast a classical antecedent similarly concerned with transformations, Ovid's Metamorphoses which similarly opens with a myth of

creation and was read by Shelley during April 1815. In his Metamorphoses Ovid's concluding words resonate with a defiant challenge to divine wrath and anticipate undying acclaim for his composition:

My work is complete. . . . I shall soar, undying, far above the stars, and my name will be imperishable. Wherever Roman power extends over the lands Rome has subdued, people will read my verse. If there be any truth in poets' prophecies, I shall live to all eternity, immortalized by fame.¹⁵

This self-congratulatory prophecy has an egocentricity that Shelley would certainly have abhorred; nevertheless Ovid powerfully expresses an overwhelming belief in the consequence of his work. Shelley's dubiety towards fame can be elucidated by his consideration of "Benevolence" in "A Speculation on Morals." Here Shelley altruistically encourages "pursuing good for its own sake" (Julian VII, 77) and advocates "disinterestedness, which we feel to constitute the majesty of our nature" (Julian VII, 76). Even though he examines positive reasons for aspiring to fame, ultimately Shelley cannot find intellectual justification for such an endeavour and maintains a position of self-renunciation:

But there is a great error in the world with respect to the selfishness of fame. It is certainly possible that a person should seek distinction as a medium of personal gratification. But love of fame is frequently no more than a desire that the feelings of others should confirm, illustrate, and sympathise with, our own. In this respect it is allied with all that draws us out of ourselves. It is the 'last infirmity of noble minds.' Chivalry was likewise founded on the theory of self-sacrifice.

(Julian VII, 76)

The consequences of eschewing fame and a policy of "self-sacrifice" are not conducive to the widespread communication of the poem's revolutionary objectives. The wise hermit is unable to instigate the revolution because he is "both unknown and old" (CP, 1558). Conversely Laon's renown renders him a victorious leader:

But Laon's name to the tumultuous throng
 Were like the star whose beams the waves compel
 And tempests, and his soul-subduing tongue
 Were as a lance to quell the mailed crest of wrong. (CP, 1563-6)

In the poem's intellectual system, where human thought and expression has a divine creative potential, because "great is the strength / Of words" (CP, 1569-70), circumspection is paramount: "Much must remain unthought, and more untold, / In the dark Future's ever-flowing urn." (CP, 344-5). Embedded in this cryptic message is a warning that emotive thoughts may have an impact on the field of being. The way in which the future unfolds is explored through Shelley's understanding of necessity; a concept that is more acutely defined in Laon and Cythna than in Queen Mab:

'In their own hearts the earnest of the hope
 Which made them great, the good will ever find;
 And though some envious shades may interlope
 Between the effect and it, One comes behind,
 Who aye the future to the past will bind—
 Necessity, whose sightless strength for ever
 Evil with evil, good with good must wind
 In bands of union, which no power may sever:

They must bring forth their kind, and be divided never!

(CP, 3703-11)

Significantly although other events may intervene between “hope” and its realization, the process is inexorable, “working with disquieting impartiality.”¹⁶ In his interpretation Kenneth Cameron appropriately comments that necessity is a pliable force “like a flowing river, which human power cannot do away with but can divert, one way or the other” (SGY, 332). It is the nature of human power, and the underlying causes necessary to create a diversion in necessity’s force, that are pivotal to Shelley’s vision of regeneration. My extended reading of Laon and Cythna has explored philosophical questions that the epic poetically raises in relation to freedom, creation, and even the very structure and nature of reality; questions that receive deeper investigation in Chapter Six on Prometheus Unbound.

¹ Richard Cronin's interpretation suggests that "An unstable relationship between the literal and the metaphoric is, in the terms of Shelley's poem, a badge of mental strength. The poem is designed to drive together the world of public event and of private imagining, to represent the one as the product of the other", Cronin, 103.

² G. Wilson Knight, The Starlit Dome: Studies in the Poetry of Vision (London: Methuen, 1959), 189; hereafter referred to as Knight, Starlit Dome.

³ For the most cogent portrayal of Shelley's ideas concerning creativity, see my discussion of Hellas, Chapter Seven.

⁴ In his analysis of "Physics and Perception", David Bohm gives a brief summary of Piaget's psychological research into various stages of perception and the way in which intelligence develops in children. His discussion ranges from the initial stage of the child "experiencing an almost undifferentiated totality" (187) of existence, to the way in which the child first "seems to regard causality as if it were a kind of 'sympathetic' magic" (190). Bohm likens the differing apprehensions of reality, from holism to dualism, to the notions inherent in "relativistic" and "prerelativistic" physics, The Special Theory of Relativity (1965; London: Routledge, 1996), 187-96.

⁵ In an earlier work Piaget stated that "'ego-centric' is to be taken in an intellectual, not in an ethical sense" and this "intellectual" idea certainly seems to be the most valid interpretation here, Jean Piaget, The Language and Thought of the Child, trans. Marjorie Gabain (1926; London: Routledge, 1959), 10.

⁶ A major philosophical consideration in my decision to reinterpret Shelley's poetry in the light of Heidegger's ideas is his holistic conception of existence. In his study of existentialist philosophy, David Cooper examines the existentialist's dissolution of certain dualisms, namely: "Subject versus Object"; "Mind versus Body"; "Reason versus Passion"; "Fact versus Value", Existentialism, Chapter Five, 79-94.

⁷ William Wordsworth, Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt (1904; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936), 66-70, 75-6.

⁸ Tokoo cites "magiac", but a close inspection of the text suggests that this spelling may be an editorial mistake and should read "magic."

⁹ Nancy Moore Goslee, "Shelley at Play: A Study of Sketch and Text in his Prometheus Notebooks", The Huntington Library Quarterly, 48, 1, 1985, 211; hereafter referred to as Goslee.

¹⁰ Goslee, 250.

¹¹ P.M.S. Dawson, "A Sort of Natural Magic", KSR 1, 1986, 18; hereafter referred to as Dawson.

¹² There are two distinct versions of Ahrimanes. Citing textual evidence, and what he perceives to be "psychological grounds", Kenneth Cameron convincingly argues that the longer version of Ahrimanes is the earliest draft: "it is more likely that a poet would begin with an ambitious plan for a twelve canto poem and then retreat to a two canto one", SC iii, 230. The order of composition is not of great relevance to my discussion, except to point out certain inconsistencies in Peacock's thought and minor refinements in the poem's philosophical outlook. As citations will be freely included from both drafts the texts will be distinguished as follows: AHA, followed by canto and stanza, or page reference, denotes the projected twelve canto version and outline. AHB, followed by stanza reference, or page number, denotes "Ahrimanes: The Shorter Verse Fragment and the Longer Prose Outline." All references to Ahrimanes are from The Halliford Edition of The Works of Thomas Love Peacock vol.7, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones (London: Constable, 1931).

¹³ Kenneth Cameron outlines the narrative similarities between Laon and Cythna and Ahrimanes, SC iii, 242-3.

¹⁴ Ahrimanes, AHB, I. I. See my discussion on Shelley's conception of necessity, 139-140.

¹⁵ Ovid, 357.

¹⁶ Michael O'Neill, "A More Hazardous Exercise: Shelley's Revolutionary Imaginings", The Yearbook of English Studies, 19, 1989, 262.

Chapter 5

“Love Sometimes Leads Astray to Misery”: Julian and Maddalo’s Darker

Vision of Being.

I could lie down like a tired child
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear
Till Death like Sleep might steal on me.¹

I

Laon and Cythna’s epic vision of freedom is prefaced by Shelley’s dedication to the ideals of love, truth and hope in the face of what appears unyielding tyranny: “I would fain / Reply in hope — but I am worn away, / And Death and Love are yet contending for their prey.”² This portrayal of being sacrificially torn between the forces of “Death and Love” surfaces frequently in Shelley’s poetry and operates at two interconnected levels: universally with the lack of artistic recognition, and on a personal level with the failure to unite with, or find sympathy from, his feminine ideal.³ Poetic vision outsoars these themes, but their tacit presence fosters an atmosphere conducive to lyrical expression. Often in Shelley’s vision “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.”⁴ And in this vein, as a prelude to my discussion on Julian and Maddalo, I have chosen one of Shelley’s “most despairing lyrics” (PP, 127 n. 1) in which “Death” has a permeating presence.

“Stanzas written in Dejection—December 1818, Near Naples” imparts its message of despair with a finely wrought eloquence. For all its implicit melancholia, there is a seductive

beauty in Shelley's lyricism, as seen in the lines: "I see the waves upon the shore / Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown" (12-13). Moreover in his solitude the poet creates a vision of desired presence: "How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion" (18).⁵ In a series of negations, commencing "Alas, I have nor hope nor health" (19), Shelley wistfully lists those life-enhancing elements whereby his situation becomes pointedly juxtaposed with Byron's success:⁶

Nor fame nor power nor love nor leisure—

Others I see whom these surround,

Smiling they live and call life pleasure:

To me that cup has been dealt in another measure. (24-7)

"They live" registers his depth of desolation. But as Shelley acknowledges, the "despair itself is mild" (28). With a "lost heart, too soon grown old" (39) there is no anguished resistance to this mood, just a quiescent acceptance in which Shelley prophetically envisages the scenario of his own death: "And I might feel in the warm air / My cheek grow cold, and hear the Sea / Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony" (34-6). A self-pitying tone impinges on the artistic restraint with Shelley's surmise that he is "one / Whom men love not" (41-2). In relation to the nature of creativity the poem's wistful enticement of death places it as one of the many possible futures, emotively imagined and perhaps to be.

Julian and Maddalo re-visits the theme of suffering through unrelenting adherence to one's principles with the Maniac's resolution, "I am ever still the same / In creed as in resolve" (358-9). But whereas "Stanzas written in Dejection" focused on the negation of benign ideals, such as "love", "hope" and "fame", the Maniac's articulations are a succession of negative images:

Nor dream that I will join the vulgar cry,

Or with my silence sanction tyranny,
 Or seek a moment's shelter from my pain
 In any madness which the world calls gain,
 Ambition or revenge or thoughts as stern
 As those which make me what I am, or turn
 To avarice or misanthropy or lust
 Heap on me soon, o grave, thy welcome dust! (362-9)

Here the desired destination of the grave is the same as "Stanzas written in Dejection", but in comparison there is less dignity in these vociferations. What they do convey is a psychological perspicuity into the inmost depths of despair that suggests lived experience.⁷ In Heideggerian terms "Being-towards-death" is an existential ideal of being which encourages, amongst other attributes, "resoluteness" and "authenticity." It does not signify willfully conjuring our demise: "Manifestly Being-towards-death, . . . cannot have the character of concernfully Being out to get itself actualized" (BT, 305). Increasingly in Shelley's vision death is sought as the preferred destination, especially in relation to the alternative of sacrificing one's ideals to "any madness which the world calls gain" (365). In his examination of the evidence for dating Shelley's composition of the Maniac's monologue, Donald Reiman suggests, amongst others, the following influences: "Shelley's conversations with Byron in Venice and his continuing interest in Tasso as the type of sensitive, poetic soul driven to madness by unrequited love and an unfeeling world."⁸ It is certainly plausible that the above cited lines and Julian's concluding comment register a degree of bitterness about Shelley relaying the depth of his poetic vision to an unlistening "cold world" (617).

Julian and Maddalo entices the reader to engage in an evaluative encounter between its philosophical ideals "Concerning God, free-will and destiny" (42) and their relevance to human existence. These tensions between ways of knowing and life experiences enrich

Shelley's narration of the Maniac's tragic predicament, giving it a universal appeal: "the unconnected exclamations of his agony" solicit a compassionate response from "the text of every heart" (PP, 113). This emotional intensity in Shelley's "text" induces the reader to engage with the Maniac's "sad history" (231). The challenge of this dialectical interplay is to resist imposing an unsubstantiated theoretical position; one that is in Maddalo's words merely "refutation-tight / As far as words go" (194-5). Reading Shelley's poetic "text" is a hermeneutical endeavour where experience becomes a prime factor in the construction of meaning. This demands a subtle negotiation between reader, text and theory because "the reading process is selective, and the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations."⁹ My interpretation of Julian and Maddalo focuses on the poem's anxieties of communication: especially the conflict between Shelley's reticence about, and his compulsion to articulate, the depths of wretchedness. This equivocality about articulation heightens the Maniac's anguish where he laments "And not to speak my grief—o not to dare / To give a human voice to my despair" (304-5). In voicing despondency Shelley registers an awareness of its power to "infect" others with the Maniac's comments, "I am subdued—that the full Hell / Within me would infect the untainted breast / Of sacred nature with its own unrest" (351-3). Given this dichotomy, Shelley skillfully exonerates the Maniac from tainting others; Julian and Maddalo witness his deranged utterances as uninvited voyeurs: "we stood behind / Stealing his accents from the envious wind / Unseen" (296-8).

Shelley aptly designates Julian and Maddalo as among his "saddest verses" (LS-II, 246), which "would not harmonize" (LS II, 196) with Prometheus Unbound. In his distinction Shelley pointedly alludes to the manner of presentation: Julian and Maddalo is "a sermo pedestris way of treating human nature quite opposed to the idealism of that drama" (LS II, 196). Shelley's vision of "human nature" in Prometheus Unbound is voiced by the Spirit of the Hour who defines the perfected human state as one of self-autonomy; where man would become "the King / Over himself; just, gentle, wise—but man: / Passionless? no —yet

free from guilt or pain" (III. iv. 196-8). Paradoxically passion literally suggests suffering, and although it is designated as the creative energy in Shelley's vision of transformation, he sometimes envisages that it contravenes happiness and security. In "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" Shelley seeks a haven of respite: "Where for me, and those I love, / May a windless bower be built, / Far from passion, pain, and guilt" (343-45). No respite is found in Julian and Maddalo; passion oozes from the Maniac's monologue with his desperate analysis of his own degradation. Although a sense of victimization is evident in his question, "What Power delights to torture us?" (320), he does accept partial responsibility for his predicament: "I know / That to myself I do not wholly owe / What now I suffer, though in part I may" (320-2). Interestingly the Maniac's continued confinement is a deliberate choice as Maddalo explains, "Some fancy took him and he would not bear / Removal" (251-2).

Vincent Newey's reading foregrounds Shelley's emphasis on feeling with his suggestion that the poem calls for "the rejection of ideas in favour of sympathetic insight into 'being', philosophic speculation and views in favour of the imaginative embrace of experience."¹⁰ But the philosophical disquisition, although ultimately discarded by Julian and Maddalo, "our argument was quite forgot" (520), has a central role. Their opposing views on existence are cleverly placed so that the ensuing scene at the madhouse is structured through the opening debate about humanity's capacity to overcome mental restrictions. Can Shelley's readers simply disregard that which has hitherto conditioned their perceptions? Moreover had Shelley not intended to give greater cogency to this disquisition about the nature of existence, it would not have been so thoughtfully rendered in a debate regarding

all that earth has been or yet may be,
 All that vain men imagine or believe,
 Or hope can paint or suffering may atchieve. (43-5)

The exhilaration of the opening scene stems from Julian's limitless experience of existence, "where we taste / The pleasure of believing what we see / Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be" (15-7). Given this interconnection there is a rapturous lightness, an "aërial merriment" (27), where communication between Julian and Maddalo is conveyed rapidly with empathetic delight:

So, as we rode, we talked; and the swift thought,
 Winging itself with laughter, lingered not,
 But flew from brain to brain,—such glee was ours—
 Charged with light memories of remembered hours. (28-31)

Unable to sustain this effortless spontaneity a sombre mood intervenes with "till we came / Homeward, which always makes the spirit tame" (32-3). Noticeably it is when travelling "Homeward" that Julian and Maddalo ponder philosophical questions as if their debate had relevance to their destination. "Our talk grew somewhat serious" (36) denotes a natural generative progression of thought in which intellectual depth is evoked with the antithesis "'twas forlorn / Yet pleasing" (39-40).

The Virgilian epigraph places the Maniac's plight within a classical context, universalizing his suffering from "some deadly change in love / Of one vowed deeply" (527-8) as an integral part of human experience. "Eclogue X" is an apposite choice in view of Virgil's concluding statement concerning Gallus' unrequited love: "Love conquers all: we must also submit to Love" ("omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori").¹¹ There is a distinct parallel between Gallus' surrender to "demented love" ("insanus amor")¹² and the Maniac's rejected love and sense of estrangement which sunders his sanity: "I am mad, I fear, / My fancy is o'erwrought . . . thou art not here . . ." (394-5). The Virgilian frame of reference serves as an acute contrast, a pointed exemplification of how "frustrated ideals can lapse into a psychological

antipastoral.”¹³ In Julian and Maddalo the Maniac is mentally and physically incarcerated in the locus of despair; the madhouse is depicted as “A windowless, deformed and dreary pile” (101), the antithesis of a verdurous Arcadian landscape. Shelley’s portrayal is nightmarishly gothic, conjured from the darkest recesses of human suffering where the continuation of life is deemed a tortuous mockery: “I live to shew / How much men bear and die not!” (459-60).

The prefatory comments to Julian and Maddalo offer a tentative and detached understatement of the Maniac’s self-destruction: “He seems by his own account to have been disappointed in love” (PP, 113). This opening conjecture is revised into a unanimous agreement that his “dreadful ill” (525) was “Wrought on him boldly, yet unspeakable / By a dear friend” (526-7). Why “Love sometimes leads astray to misery” (349), in Shelley’s poetic vision, becomes apparent by juxtaposing the Maniac’s experience with Shelley’s belief that love is the fundamental life-giving energy, the *sine qua non* of being: “So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.—” (PP, 474). To restrict one’s deepest energies sabotages the life force and precipitates mental and physical decline. The Maniac’s emotions are focused inwards; his supposed suppression of “All human passions” (502), particularly intense grief, fuels his self-consumption. His concluding utterances desolately image death:

Here I cast away

All human passions, all revenge, all pride;

I think, speak, act no ill; I do but hide

Under these words like embers, every spark

Of that which has consumed me— quick and dark

The grave is yawning . . . as its roof shall cover

My limbs with dust and worms under and over

So let Oblivion hide this grief . . . the air

Closes upon my accents, as despair

Upon my heart — let death upon despair!" (501-10)

The stated negation of "passions" is an overt contradiction in a passage fuelled by intense negativity. "Grief" and "despair" are deep emotions which create an atmosphere of dispiriting gloom, the consequences of which will be addressed later in the chapter.

The Preface, like the poem, is dominated by the focused attention on passion, the principle which motivates the three protagonists, albeit in differing ways. Maddalo's pessimism is self-inflicted; he is at the mercy of "the concentered and impatient feelings which consume him" (PP, 113), his emotions, like those of the Maniac, are introvertedly destructive: "it is on his own hopes and affections only that he seems to trample" (PP, 113). Shelley's prefatory comment about Julian's belief in "the power of man over his own mind" (PP, 113) is not outlined with intellectual detachment, but with emotive force; he is "passionately attached to those philosophical notions" (PP, 113). The Maniac's broken heart dominates his perceptions and sunders his being by overthrowing his "right senses" (PP, 113). Interpretation must arbitrate between these diverse emotive perspectives as Shelley's portrayal evades moral disclosure. The avoidance of didacticism is not a means of escaping issues, but an intentional feature of Shelley's poetic creed, outlined later in A Defence of Poetry: "A Poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of time and place" (PP, 488). Whatever temporal adversities exist, the most inspired poets are able to transcend such concerns: the "bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius" (PP, 498). However, Shelley deemed that Tasso often yielded to moral considerations:

Those in whom the poetical faculty, though great, is less intense, as Euripides, Lucan, Tasso, Spenser, have frequently affected a moral aim, and the effect of

their poetry is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose. (PP, 488)

Possibly this may suggest why Shelley never finished his planned drama on Tasso.¹⁴ Nevertheless Tasso is cited as one of the "great writers" to "have celebrated the dominion of love" (PP, 497). And as Shelley claims that "The great secret of morals is Love" (PP, 487), then perhaps love is one of the prime principles by which to evaluate the Maniac's experiences in Julian and Maddalo.

II

Shelley's essay "On Love" appears in The "Julian and Maddalo" Draft Notebook and its composition "probably dates from July 20-25 1818" (JMN, p. xiv). Shelley focused intensely on the subject of love in the productively creative but "restless period between the summer of 1818 and the spring of 1819" (JMN, xiii). Amongst other compositions he translated the Symposium and wrote the introductory composition, "A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love." Consequently the depths and variety of emotive feelings, generated by the power of love, were deeply embedded at both an intellectual and imaginative level of Shelley's consciousness. Love is defined in the "Discourse" as a most "profound and complicated sentiment" (PS, 408) and has an essential place in Shelley's view of existence. A cancelled phrase from the draft of "On Love" declares that love "~~is the sweet chalice of life whose /-dregs are bitterer than wormwood~~" (JMN, E. 11, p. 2, 11-12). Accordingly the attainment of love, "the sweet chalice", is conceived in quasi-mythical terms as the earthly attainment of a symbolical grail-like quest.¹⁵

One of the many obvious features of courtly love is the impossible attainment of its ideals; the worship of a superior, often married, lady for whom the questor undertakes great feats with

little physical reward. In Julian and Maddalo the anonymous “imperious” (600) beloved is suggested by Tasso’s “The Lady Leonora” (JMN, E. 11, p. 165, 5 rev). Another deleted passage in “On Love” allows the reader to detect an undercurrent of possessiveness in Shelley’s vision of love: “~~and the [?] imagination clings seeks / the likeness of that which is most- / beautiful within itself . . .~~” (JMN, E. 11, p. 3, 1-3). Indeed the very fact that Shelley considered “clings”, even though the word is replaced by “seeks” in the published version, indicates a psychological contradiction of his early affirmation of freedom outlined in a note to Queen Mab: “Love withers under constraint: its very essence is liberty: it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, or fear” (PW, 806). The notion of binding attachment is antithetical to Shelley’s insistence on the mutual reciprocity and sharing of freely flowing energy, which should be conferred voluntarily in human relationships. Shelley is effusive, but precise on this point, where he incorporates the notion of inconstancy as an inherent feature in both love and philosophical beliefs: “Love is free: to promise forever to love the same woman is not less absurd than to promise to believe the same creed” (PW, 807). In Epipsychidion (1821), these sentiments are poetically encapsulated:

Narrow

The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
 The life that wears, the spirit that creates
 One object, and one form, and builds thereby
 A sepulchre for its eternity. . . . (169-73)

These speculations on love, which seem consistent throughout Shelley’s work, raise questions as to the precise emotion experienced by the Maniac whose constancy, far from appearing as a virtue, can be interpreted as an act of reification; he becomes irretrievably locked into a specific moment in time:

for since thy lip

Met mine first, years long past, since thine eye kindled

With soft fire under mine, I have not dwindled

Nor changed in mind or body. . . . (467-70)

A prose fragment in The "Julian and Maddalo" Draft Notebook, entitled "In the . . . human world . . .", underlines that sensual expression is central to Shelleyan love: "In the human world; love is one / of the commonest expressions of love is / sexual intercourse . . ." (JMN, E. 11, p. 52, 1-3). Physical intimacy expresses the spiritual, imaginative and emotional bonds and establishes a deeper degree of inter-involvement. In his experience of love the Maniac appears to have lost his individual integrity and the ensuing disunion leads to a sense of physical and psychic fragmentation. He perceives that her feelings are those of revulsion in which she rejects him, "The deep pollution of my loathed embrace—" (422). What follows is a passage of disturbingly violent eroticism with a graphic image of self-castration:

That, like some maniac monk, I had torn out

The nerves of manhood by their bleeding root

With mine own quivering fingers, so that ne'er

Our hearts had for a moment mingled there

To disunite in horror — . . . (424-8).

This physical vehemence arises from the intensity of feeling: "The nerves of manhood" penetrates to the source the Maniac's masculinity, seeking to eradicate the anguish from the depths of his being. However, the overt sexual repugnance is only one level of reading. Implicit in "disunite" is also the notion of an emasculated self, where life experiences have a sully influence by obliterating the Maniac's youthful ideals: "when a boy / I did devote to

justice and to love / My nature, worthless now!" (380-2). The Maniac has lost his interrelatedness with the world, and this sense of division is highlighted when contrasted with Julian's holistic transcendence of boundaries where "the Earth and Sea had been / Dissolved into one lake of fire" (80-1). This yields an elevated experience: "The inmost purple spirit of light" (84). Moreover, before witnessing Maddalo's darker perspective, centred on the madhouse, Julian's vision is uplifting:

I leaned, and saw the City, and could mark
 How from their many isles, in evening's gleam,
 Its temples and its palaces did seem
 Like fabrics of enchantment piled to Heaven. (89-92)

When seeking explanations for the source of the Maniac's madness as a sense of fragmentation or disillusionment of youthful ideals, perhaps the reader should question whether Maddalo had any influence.¹⁶ Certainly Maddalo's admission to Julian that the Maniac's sanity was intact before their discussion may have some relevance: "I knew one like you / . . . With whom I argued in this sort, and he / Is now gone mad" (195, 197-8).

Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall's The Quantum Society synergizes physics, philosophy and psychology to provide a lucidly rewarding interpretation of the energy patterns inherent in human relationships. Most intriguing, and relevant to Julian and Maddalo, is their exploration of the dichotomy between freedom and possession in interpersonal relationships, which they metaphorically relate to the differing manifested states of the coexisting wave / particle duality in modern physics:

With our particle aspect we stand apart and experience life from our own point of view; with our wave aspect we are literally taken up by, woven into, the being of

others and of all that surrounds us. It is this duality that allows us to 'contain and be contained by others without our personal truth ever being wholly isolated or exhausted.' (QSO, 82)

But if either the "wave aspect", which allows physical and psychic inter-involvement in relationships, or the "particle aspect" of individuality which defines boundaries, predominates, then there is a lack of balance: the "wave aspect" results in a lack of commitment; the "particle aspect" with its objectifying tendency, can lead to a single-minded obsessiveness.¹⁷ In relation to the Maniac, his love appears to be fixated and based upon a relationship of doubts and fears. The following passage suggests a lack of communication, as evidenced by the divergent perceptions between himself and the beloved:

'You kiss me not

Ever, I fear you do not love me now'—

In truth I loved even to my overthrow

Her, who would fain forget these words: but they

Cling to her mind, and cannot pass away. (403-7)

Here "they / Cling to her mind" inversely projects the Maniac's own attachment to his lost love.

The erotic violence of the maniac's soliloquy suggests that it was written under intense anguish. For Shelley deep passions generate poetic expression by inducing a creative state of being in which "passion exceeding a certain limit touches the boundaries of that which is ideal" (LS II, 108). However, the Preface appeals to a dispassionate, "pious reader" (PP, 113) to confer a value-judgment on Julian's character and such an invitation can only be interpreted as decidedly ironic. Sanctimonious moralizing blinkers perception, "Religion made men blind"

(189), and is antipathetic to the poem's demands for an emotive response. Shelley's sympathies appear to be with the iconoclastic views of Julian, "a complete infidel, and a scoffer at all things reputed holy" (PP, 113). Julian believes in the amelioration of humanity through creating a positive vision of futurity, whilst simultaneously retaining a realistic awareness of the current deprivations in society: "Without concealing the evil in the world, he is forever speculating how good may be made superior" (PP, 113). The poem stimulates a reading which eschews moral judgments yet still requires the reader to appraise its exploration of feelings. Julian's philosophical ideals of "love, beauty and truth" (174) provide a valid code of ethics. His speech is carefully structured to suggest that these principles are not external virtues, imposed upon humanity, but an intrinsic part of existence:

— we might be all

We dream of happy, high, majestic.

Where is the love, beauty and truth we seek

But in our mind? (172-75)

The repetition of "we" and the rhetorical question persuades the reader to agree with Julian's affirmative vision. The use of "dream" could be seen to undermine Julian's philosophical assertion by dismissing it, like Maddalo does, as one of Utopian idealism. But when juxtaposed with the "Speculations on Metaphysics", "dream" takes on a greater significance: Shelley eradicates any distinction between "thoughts, which are called real or external objects", and those which "are usually more obscure and indistinct, such as hallucinations, dreams, and the ideas of madness" (Julian VII, 59). The only meaningful differentiation that can be made is with regard to their potency or "force" and whether they enhance or detract from a fulfilled life. Viewed in this light, both Julian's ideals of perfection, gleaned through "dreams", and the Maniac's fragmented soliloquy share equal authenticity as ways of

structuring and understanding their experiences of reality. That thoughts and dreams may convey a similar inflection in Shelley's consciousness is suggested in a cancellation in The "Julian and Maddalo" Draft Notebook; the final choice of "dream" was initially drafted as "think": "We might be otherwise, . but we might be all / ~~That we can think high~~ / We dream of happy - , high , majestic" (JMN, E. 11, p. 84, 4-6).

The transgression of spiritual ideals through negative "despondency" (48) and "pride" (48) renders Maddalo's "eagle spirit blind" (51). "Spirit" recurs throughout Shelley's writing, frequently adopted as a linguistic sign when the highest ideals of human thought creatively merge with a supernatural essence, as in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty": "Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate / With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon / Of human thought or form" (13-15).¹⁸ Julian refuses to allow Maddalo to "cast / A darkness on my spirit" (159-60); he envisions conquering self-imposed mental restrictions on the spirit, rather than succumbing to pessimism:

How strong the chains are which our spirit bind;
 Brittle perchance as straw . . . We are assured
 Much may be conquered, much may be endured
 Of what degrades and crushes us. We know
 That we have power over ourselves to do
 And suffer—what, we know not till we try;
 But something nobler than to live and die— . (181-87)

Conversely the Maniac, having lost his "spirit's mate" (337), is spiritually, mentally and emotionally crushed; his "lip is tortured by the wrongs which break / The spirit it expresses" (409-10). It is the violation of the principle of truth which causes him greatest suffering: "Alas, no scorn or pain or hate could be / So heavy as that falsehood is to me—" (310-11).

Julian's philosophical union of the human mind with spiritual ideals has a consonance with Zohar's quantum paradigm of consciousness in which she posits a process of continual interaction that is one of mutual redefinition:

I am by nature a creature which is stuff of the same substance with love, truth and beauty. Not because I create them, but because the nature of my consciousness is synonymous with the nature of their meaning. Through my own being I have the capacity to act as midwife to their expression in this world, and they in turn mould and make the self that I am. (QS, 146)

But in Julian and Maddalo the highest ideals of "love, truth and beauty" compete against their inverse aspects, "hate, scorn, remorse, despair" (441) which pollute existence by creating "the mind's hell" (441). The narrative presents an unresolved contention between these forces through the Maniac's "living death of agonies!" (415). Wasserman's account in "Skepticism and the Poetry of Reality" concludes that "the poem is the honest presentation of a skeptical incertitude, not a solution" (SCR, 75). But the most penetrating insights into how the Maniac's dementia may be cured arise with Julian's ideals; he envisions a strategy of reclamation through seeking "a 'soul of goodness' in things ill" (204). Julian's scheme is carefully configured:

But I imagined that if day by day
 I watched him, and but seldom went away,
 And studied all the beatings of his heart
 With zeal, as men study some stubborn art
 For their own good, and could by patience find
 An entrance to the caverns of his mind,

I might reclaim him from his dark estate. (568-74)

Although Julian's aspirations, resembling those of a cognitive therapist, remain at a theoretical level, they do provide a foundation from which Shelley's belief in regeneration is furthered. The seemingly flippant allusion to this scheme, prefaced as "perhaps an idle thought" (567), easily encourages a reading which undervalues Julian's creed as a temporary aberration of idealistic impulses: "such dreams of baseless good / Oft come and go in crowds or solitude / And leave no trace" (578-80).¹⁹ Nevertheless, closer examination of this passage finds that Julian's combination of imagination, "zeal" and emotional insight, to penetrate to the Maniac's innermost thought processes is well conceived. Finding "An entrance to the caverns of his mind" (573) by studying "all the beatings of his heart" (570), reveals a psychological perspicacity that can be seen as an extension of Shelley's "aspiring theories" (201) about the creative capacity of thought and emotion to overcome tyranny or adversity. Shelley's development of such ideas gains in sophistication in Prometheus Unbound and culminates in Ahasuerus' transformational metaphysics in Hellas. In the latter composition Shelley declares that not only are emotive states the basis of all being, but that the power for transformation exists in the present moment:

The future and the past are idle shadows

Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being.

Nought is but that which feels itself to be. (783-5)

The "skeptical incertitude" that Wasserman discerns in Julian and Maddalo does not arise from Shelley's doubt about the validity of Julian's convictions, but from the divorce of knowledge from its practical implementation. Julian and Maddalo's vision deals with the darkest recesses of the human psyche and in his treatment of this theme Shelley shows the

irresolvable tension emanating from the lack of an experiential theory about the nature of existence.

Wasserman's condemnation of Julian's impractical theorizing is absolute: "Julian has learned nothing"; moreover his departure from Italy is read as an act of acquiescence in the "passive, self-indulging purpose of dispelling his gloomy thoughts of" the Maniac (SCR, 80). It is one of the many critical accounts eagerly "pouncing on Julian's ineffectuality . . . in a more accusatory spirit than the poem will allow" (HMI, 53). Perhaps it is possible to redress the balance of this criticism, shown elsewhere in Hogle's view of "Julian's impotent hopefulness" (SPR, 126), by delving into the motives behind his withdrawal and testing whether Julian's action is consistent with his "true theory" (203).

Julian and Maddalo is dominated by an excess of emotive feelings and extreme sensitivity which psychically expose the Maniac "as a nerve o'er which do creep / The else unfelt oppressions of this earth" (449-50). His empathetic capacity to "moan / For woes which others hear not" (444-5), and reconstruct such devastating visions, by invoking "The absent with the glance of phantasy" (446), is a debilitating engagement in pessimism. Unlike Julian's optimistically uplifting rhetoric, "and I (for ever still / Is it not wise to make the best of ill?) / Argued against despondency" (46-8), the Maniac willingly participates in scenes of destruction even metaphorically "Following the captive to his dungeon deep" (448). Herein lies a more penetrating insight into his "sad history" (231) than the prefatorial gloss discloses. Perhaps it is no mere coincidence that the Maniac, partly modelled on Torquato Tasso, shares the same fate of mental and physical incarceration that he has so intensely envisioned and empathized with previously. In this way he becomes an unwitting sacrificial victim of his own creation. Romanticism invests ultimate power in the imagination, but it can equally be a tool of liberation or tyranny. The Romantic pre-disposition towards consciously re-conjuring past suffering is exemplified by Mary Wollstonecraft's correspondence with William Godwin. Emotional wounds from her relationship with Gilbert Imlay recreate a current state of anxiety

when she is "haunted by old sorrows that seemed to come forward with new force to sharpen the present anguish."²⁰ Perceptively Mary Wollstonecraft outlines her inherent proclivity to despair:

Yet, struggling as I have been a long time to attain peace of mind (or apathy) I am afraid to trace emotions to their source, which border on agony. . . . My imagination is for ever betraying me into fresh misery, and I perceive that I shall be a child to the end of the chapter.²¹

Yet even with recognition of her complicity, Mary Wollstonecraft still struggles with these destructive patterns. In Shelley's vision of existence, where emotion has a creative impact, the process of continually tracing "emotions to their source, which border on agony" results in physical consequences. In this respect Julian and Maddalo can be read as a consciousness-raising warning against the destructive misuse of energy, which fetters rather than liberates mankind. Maddalo, who is endowed with an "extraordinary mind", embodies the potentiality "of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country" (PP, 112) by envisioning the regeneration of humanity. For Shelley it is a spiritual transgression to accede to despondent futility by finding "an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life" (PP, 113). Yet Maddalo is also an admirable character: "He is cheerful, frank, and witty. His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication; men are held by it as by a spell" (PP, 113). Even so, Shelley's artistic rendering of Maddalo is partly animated by his impression of Byron's gloomy vision of existence as expressed in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV. Here Shelley praises Byron as "a great poet", but denounces his pessimism: "The spirit in which it is written is, if insane, the most wicked & mischievous insanity that was ever given forth. It is a kind of obstinate & self-willed folly in which he hardens himself" (LS II, 58). What really matters to Shelley is that

the poetic spirit should be channelled to inspire humanity. His further censure of Byron makes this point evident:

He is not yet an Italian & is heartily & deeply discontented with himself, & contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts, the nature & the destiny of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt & despair? (LS, II, 58)

Julian simplistically, but effectively, contrasts the "sick thoughts" (169) which overshadow Maddalo with the pure thoughts of his child, who is untainted by preconceived notions and is "blithe, innocent and free" (167).²² Shelley made several revisions to this passage; he twice contemplated "ill", and then evil thoughts "before the final choice of "sick thoughts" (JMN, E. 11, p. 83, 15-17). Possibly the decision may have been influenced by a consideration of metrical stresses. Nevertheless this studied deliberation also makes apparent Shelley's careful analysis of the detrimental effects caused by enveloping pessimism, which impinge upon Julian's consciousness, culminating with his desire to escape; he readily "sought relief / From the deep tenderness that maniac wrought / Within" (565-7) him. Julian's reluctance to engage with the Maniac's agonies could emanate from an element of self-recognition and identification; his own inner conflict being mirrored in the Maniac: "never saw I one whom I would call / More willingly my friend" (576-7). His capacity for compassion psychically embroils Julian in the Maniac's despair. It is the extreme violent passion in his soliloquy which pollutes the surrounding atmosphere and renders Julian's embroilment a possibility. In Shelley's vision, once passionately excited, negative thoughts carry a destructive potential that can influence the whole interconnected field of consciousness, as seen with the furies in Prometheus Unbound. This destructive potentiality is a valid reason for Julian not conveying the emotive "force" of Maddalo's pessimism: "I recall / The sense of what he said, although I mar / The force of his

expressions" (130-2). The suppression of deep-seated grief is explored in detail with the Maniac.

Of greatest significance in the Maniac's deranged rhetoric are the "secret groans" (341) of his "incommunicable woe" (343), carefully concealed to protect his "spirit's mate" (337) by a "mask of falsehood" (308). This concealment of his tragic situation is extended to his immediate circle:

"Ye few by whom my nature has been weighed
 In friendship, let me not that name degrade
 By placing on your hearts the secret load
 Which crushes mine to dust. . . . (344-7)

It is the "secret load" (346) of grief, privately borne, which destroys the Maniac. Ironically he needs "a medicine for the mind" and his recognition that "scorn" and "hate" (355) are perversions of spiritual ideals shows an awareness of the influence of negative thoughts and emotions on the nature of consciousness. However, the Maniac's mind is still replaying destructive scenarios and his condition remains dire.

Shelley's letters during this period intermingle literary and personal consciousness, enticing the reader to foreground biographical evidence and draw significant parallels between his poetry and life. For instance, Shelley sent Leigh-Hunt Julian and Maddalo "to give to Ollier for publication" anonymously, whilst hinting that personal, distressing circumstances may have been integral to his literary fervour: "Though surrounded by suffering and disquietude, and, latterly, almost overcome by our strange misfortune I have not been idle" (LS II, 108). Where I focus on biographical concerns my purpose is not to delve into specific events, but to provide a keener insight into the creative reciprocity between art and life. The literary work becomes so entangled in the poet's psyche that creativity is a more involved process than a sequential,

one-way transmutation of life experiences. The notion that poetic expression is interwoven with the poet's personal agonies is found in an analysis of Maddalo's premise that

"Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
They learn in suffering what they teach in song." (544-6).

Michael O'Neill's interpretation of these lines posits that "Poetry for Maddalo has its origins in some initial 'wrong'; 'song' requires 'suffering.'"²³ An investigation of The "Julian and Maddalo" Draft Notebook reveals the depths and extent of this agony envisaged by Shelley. The aesthetic distance achieved in the published poem originates from a quasi-prosaic, yet rewarding insight into the subjective interaction between the poet's life and his poetic expression. Shelley writes "It is because they act the parts themselves / And learn through suffering what they speak in song" (JMN, E. 11, p. 156, 9-10 rev). Here acting conveys a conscious deliberation to become emotively involved in agonized experiences for the purpose of creation. Another attempt at these lines verifies the interpretation that "suffering" is portrayed, from Maddalo's perspective, as an elevating experience that shapes and ennobles the psyche:

~~[?] What wonder minds are made sublime~~
Their minds are made sublime & keen [by] wrong
They learn [thro]. (JMN, E. 11, p. 116, 18-20)

But although "suffering" yields artistic excellence "where minds are made sublime", the personal consequences can be devastating. Earl Wasserman remarks on Shelley's censure of

mis-creation by inter-linking Rousseau and Maddalo's pessimistic visions: "poetry is vicious which records only misanthropy and despair and wails that the world is wrong."²⁴

In my interpretation of Julian and Maddalo I have suggested a positive reassessment of the creative potential in Julian's meliorism and accounted for its centrality to Shelley's philosophical beliefs. Retaining "a 'soul of goodness' in all things ill" (204) is central to the Promethean quest for regeneration and explored at deeper levels of being in the following chapter.

¹ "Stanzas written in Dejection— December 1818, Near Naples", 30-3.

² Dedication "To Mary [Wollstonecraft] [Shelley]", CP, 88-90.

³ In his searching biography Richard Holmes suggests the following reasons for Shelley's sense of Mary's emotional withdrawal in late 1818: "The death of little Clara, to which Shelley's carelessness and unconcern had distinctly contributed, brought to a state of crisis the already strained relations between husband and wife", SP, 447.

⁴ "To a Sky-Lark", 90.

⁵ Even in despondency Shelley re-drafted his initial consideration of lack "~~with none to share~~" to a more positive vision, JMN, E. 11, p. 69, 20 rev.

⁶ Reiman and Powers comment that "If lines 25-6 were indeed written on the date and at the place Shelley gives, the chief reference is surely to Lord Byron and his circle at Venice", PP, 128 n. 3.

⁷ In relation to the depth of feeling evoked from lived experience, an interesting comparison can be made with Heidegger's notion of "event philosophy." Rüdiger Safranski explains Heidegger's interest in conjuring sensations to apprehend a deeper insight into existence: "The fundamental ontologist can existentially analyze only what he has existentially lived through." Moreover "Any philosophizing that does not take its beginning from the moments of true sensation is devoid of roots and relevance. . . . He who wants to hear, and, even more so, he who wants to understand, must feel", Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 177.

⁸ Donald Reiman also states that "On the other hand, the portions of the maniac's speech not found in the drafts contain all the passages that White and others believe reflect most explicitly Shelley's personal tribulation. These could have been written after the death of William Shelley", SC vi, 864.

¹⁰ Vincent Newey, "The Shelleyan Psycho-Drama: 'Julian and Maddalo'" in Essays on Shelley, ed. Miriam Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1982), 74.

¹¹ Virgil, The Eclogues, trans. Guy Lee (1980; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), X, 69; hereafter referred to as Virgil.

¹² Virgil, X, 44.

¹³ Stuart Curran, Poetic Form and British Romanticism (1986; New York: Oxford UP, 1989), 122-3.

¹⁴ See Donald Reiman's comments on Shelley failing to write about Tasso, SC vi, 863.

¹⁵ See my discussion of Asia's quest to re-unite with Prometheus in Chapter Six, 188.

¹⁶ Jerrold Hogle discusses "Maddalo's employment of transference to produce an almost Gnostic objectivity at the core of his belief system" which leaves a sense of self-division. Therefore Hogle suggests that "The 'insanity' in this world-picture is especially visible . . . when Maddalo (or "mad"-alo) refines his symbolic use of the Maniac and the asylum by crafting a metaphor of general human existence out of 'the madhouse and its belfry tower'", SPR, 122.

¹⁷ In relation to freedom in love Zohar and Marshall posit a similar view to Shelley's ideas, with their suggestion that "Only love is poised and alert, accepting the reality of that with which it is in relation, committed to that relationship and ready to let it evolve, ready, if necessary, even to let it go rather than to pin it down and turn it into an object," QSO, 103.

¹⁸ In his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" Shelley laments that the absence of this "unseen Power," (1) is desolating.

¹⁹ Julian's idealistic ventures are justly open to criticism. In his analysis of "The Language of Self-Love", Richard Cronin suggests a notable flaw in Julian's idealism: "the love of humanity he professes is an emotion he finds easiest to cultivate in solitude. Theory is disjoined from practice . . .", Cronin, 119.

²⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Ralph M. Wardle (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979), 337; hereafter referred to as Wollstonecraft.

²¹ Wollstonecraft, 337.

²² For the philosophical import of childlike modes of apprehension in Shelley's vision see Chapter Four, 113-117.

²³ Michael O'Neill, "'The Mind Which Feeds This Verse': Self-and Other-Awareness in Shelley's Poetry", Durham University Journal (1993), 284.

²⁴ SCR, 69. For a full account of this connection see Wasserman's discussion, 67-70.

Chapter 6

Reading "His Written Soul": Shelley's Promethean Engagement with Being

Dreams and the light imaginings of men

And all that faith creates, or love desires.

(I. 200-1)

My soul is an enchanted Boat

Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float

Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing,

And thine doth like an Angel sit

Beside the helm conducting it

Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.

(II. v. 72-7)

I

Prometheus Unbound is assuredly "of a higher character than" (LS II, 116) Shelley's previous compositions, a cosmic drama culminating in an ecstatic celebration of existence. Demogorgon defines this perfected state as "Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free; / This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory" (IV. 577-8). Victorious conquest is the destination of a vision in which Shelley forcefully denounces Aeschylus' inferred resolution of propitiation; he is "averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind" (PP, 133). Written under the sway of Shelley's "passion for reforming the world"

(PP, 135), the drama embarks on a metaphysical quest to release "Love from its awful throne of patient power / In the wise heart" (IV. 557-8).

The present chapter's reading of Prometheus Unbound contends that Shelley presents a Promethean engagement with the nature of being, an experiential enactment of suffering and redemption, in a work defined by him as a literary innovation, "a drama, with characters & mechanism of a kind yet unattempted" (LS II, 94). Shelley's originality is apparent in the way that the spiritual, imaginative, emotional and sensuous levels of existence intermesh in a cosmic dance of being. Here emotion is the principal element that precedes and more often determines perception, as evidenced when the freed Prometheus anticipates the Spirit of the Hour's account of rebirth: "We feel what thou hast heard and seen — yet speak" (III. iv. 97). In contradistinction to both Plato and Dante, Shelley's vision depicts the sensible realm as conveying the deepest, most truthful apprehension of existence. Moreover in A Philosophical View of Reform he defines poetry as "an intense and impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions respecting man and nature" (Julian VII, 19). "Intense and impassioned impressions" are foremost in Prometheus Unbound; affective states are granted an ontological status and when powerfully expressed can actualize form. Indeed in the drama's concluding affirmation of renewal Demogorgon motivates the dramatis personae and reader, not to accept resignedly the existent reality of evil, but "To defy Power which seems Omnipotent" (IV. 572). Against what seem unyielding circumstances, Demogorgon declares that optimistic desire can materialize a regenerated world: "To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates" (IV. 573-4). In this metaphysical universe spirits are propelled by human emotion and their progress is enhanced through love and impeded by despair: retrospectively the spirits recount how "Through blood and tears, / And a thick hell of hatreds and hopes and fears, / We waded and flew" (IV. 118-20). Given this fluidity of existence, the annihilation of evil is primarily accomplished on the mental and

emotional planes of being, when “the mind / Of human kind” (93-4) creates “an Ocean / Of clear emotion, / A Heaven of serene and mighty motion” (96-8).

Claiming the sanction of heaven, Prometheus accepts divine responsibility for the destiny of humanity, his “beloved race” (I. 386). Shelley equivocates in his meaning of heaven depending on whose power presides on earth: “Heaven’s fell King” (140) Jove, or an empyrean of Prometheus’ beneficence. The opening of the “Ode to Heaven” (included in the 1820 volume) suggests why this vacillation occurs; heaven is not conceived in Christian terms, as the dwelling place of the blessed, but as the mutable sphere under which futurity unfolds: “Ever-canopying Dome / Of acts and ages yet to come!” (8-9). Heaven is venerated as the mirror of humanity’s destiny: “Heaven! for thou art the abode / Of that Power which is the glass / Wherein man his nature sees;—” (20-2). In Shelley’s lyrical drama, Mercury specifies that Prometheus is the only living being with the knowledge “Which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven” (I. 373). Consequently Prometheus’ awesome challenge, whilst experiencing psychological and physical torture, is to retain his own nature and express “the glory of that form / Which lives unchanged within” (II. i. 64-5).

The dramatic conflict opens with Jupiter’s despotism imperiously inscribed in the blank verse with its account of “toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts, / With fear and self contempt and barren hope” (I. 7-8). Repeatedly “and” ladens and protracts torment. Thrown into this plight, Prometheus encounters a state of barbarity; he declares that “torture and solitude, / Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire:—” (14-15). Shelley’s Promethean universe is not only intimately interrelated but also sentiently conscious.¹ In his agony Prometheus solicits a cosmic responsiveness: “I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt?” (I. 25); “I ask yon Heaven—the all- beholding Sun, / Has it not seen?” (26-7); “The Sea . . . Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?” (27, 29). These questions, seemingly designed to establish a philosophy of existence where matter is vitally conscious, simultaneously denote the collapse of this animated communion: “Nature is fallen and fragmented, man is fallen from himself, experience

rules, relationship is nowhere to be seen.”² Prometheus is devoid of any sustaining sympathy from nature, chained to a barren precipice on an inaccessible “eagle-baffling mountain, / Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb, / Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life” (20-2). But Bloom’s ideas about the absence of relationship³ need qualification since, although the sacred wholeness of a thou relationship with nature is wanting, Prometheus is embroiled with Jupiter in an enduring interaction bonded by hate: “mine own misery and thy vain revenge.— / Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours” (11-12). Jupiter’s corruption has a pervasive presence extending beyond any notion of individual autonomy. His permeating influence is explained when the Phantasm of Jupiter reiterates Prometheus’ curse: an imprecation originally declaimed from Prometheus’ complicit position in Jupiter’s despotic power relations:

But thou who art the God and Lord—O thou
 Who fillest with thy soul this world of woe,
 To whom all things of Earth and Heaven do bow
 In fear and worship—all-prevailing foe! (282-5)

In the Promethean universe metaphysical laws prevail; thought and emotion construct and compel form into being.⁴ Jupiter’s “antique empire” rests on an immaterial basis, being “built / On eldest faith, and Hell’s coeval, fear” (III: i, 9-10). Yet awareness of this extreme mutability does not present an easy challenge. The tension between Prometheus’ future vision of a regenerated world and the current realism of Jupiter’s tyranny is precariously balanced. As Michael O’Neill suggests, Shelley’s writing demonstrates an acute understanding of the temptation towards despondency: “A continual strength of Shelley’s poetry is its vigilant empathy with states of despair beyond which he seeks to move.”⁵ Significantly the battle between Prometheus and “the all-miscreative brain of Jove” (I. 448) is enacted on the

threshold of creation, wavering at the point where the elements of thought and emotion are hypostatized into temporary forms. Hence the Furies, “ministers of pain and fear” (452) which torture Prometheus, are imaginatively invoked as evil projections, Jove’s “thought-executing ministers” (387); their lack of autonomy is apparent as they appear as shadowy visitations apprehended by Prometheus as “Phantasms so foul through monster-teeming Hell” (447).⁶ Prometheus is a participator in his anguish, perhaps unwittingly so, as the Furies are conjured in an act of co-creation in which the evil thoughts of Jove unite with the emotive hatred in Prometheus’ curse. Accordingly the second Fury explains, “So from our victim’s destined agony / The shade which is our form invests us round, / Else are we shapeless as our Mother Night” (I. 470-2). These interconnections are not always apparent as there is a time delay between that which is imaginatively and emotively created and its sequential manifestation. Towards the end of Act III the Spirit of the Hour illustrates the interval between internal changes and external events:

I wandering went
 Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind
 And first was disappointed not to see
 Such mighty change as I had felt within
 Expressed in outward things; but soon I looked,
 And behold! thrones were kingless. . . . (III. iv. 126-31)

Danah Zohar analyzes the metaphysical consequences of malevolent thoughts and postulates that there is a pervasive influence extending to all being:

If I injure my consciousness — fill it with malicious or selfish or evil thoughts —
 I injure the whole non-locally connected ‘field’ of consciousness. Each of us,

because of our integral relationship with others, with Nature, and with the world of values, has the capacity to beatify or to taint the waters of eternity. Each of us therefore carries, as a result of our quantum nature, an awesome moral responsibility. (QS, 151)

This supposition that “evil thoughts” have injurious ontological consequences is a cogent deduction from a “quantum world-view [which] stresses dynamic relationship as the basis of all that is” (QS, 220). Shelley’s poetic exploration of the interactive nature of consciousness is central to his philosophy of transformation; amelioration arises at the metaphysical level with Prometheus’ articulation of his cerebral and emotional transcendence of enmity: “It doth repent me: words are quick and vain; / Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine. / I wish no living thing to suffer pain” (I. 303-5). But there is a relentless pull towards being overwhelmed by depravity because “Evil minds / Change good to their own nature” (380-1). Initially Mercury’s arrival with a pack of salivating Furies to exact “torture, unretrieved” (423) does not faze Prometheus “within whose mind sits peace serene / As light in the sun, throned” (430-1). When exposed to the Furies’ pervasive evil Prometheus faces an arduous challenge in which he is almost overpowered: “Whilst I behold such execrable shapes, / Methinks I grow like what I contemplate” (449-50). Significantly, with “grow” Shelley intimates an organic metamorphosis that is both psychological and physiognomic: thinking literally determines being.⁷ Shelley consistently portrays form as protean; in the regenerated world the Moon’s lyrics similarly impart how mere perception physically affects the nature of being: “As a lover or chameleon / Grows like what it looks upon,” (IV. 483-4). Herein lies a crucial issue in Prometheus Unbound: in a universe with fluid boundaries of relationship how does one interact with other beings and yet remain firmly rooted in self-identity? Supreme inner strength of a heroic quality is necessary to retain autonomy and vanquish evil as Prometheus asserts: “Yet am I king over myself, and rule / The torturing and conflicting throngs within” (I.

492-3). But Jove is an accomplished antagonist, a "subtle Tyrant!" (638), who is metaphysically adept and employs a psychological stratagem combining "dread thought" (488) and "foul desire" (489) for "tearing up the heart / Of the good Titan" (579-80).

The figure of Prometheus inspired the Romantic imagination and the creative appropriation of the myth has produced diverse interpretations which deserve comparison with Shelley's vision. Byron's brief version of the Titan's suffering, entitled "Prometheus", aptly registers the quest to alleviate adversity and empower humanity: "To render with thy precepts less / The sum of human wretchedness, / And strengthen Man with his own mind" (BP IV, 36-8). In relation to the power of the mind, Coleridge suggested that this was the Promethean gift to humanity: "The fire that Prometheus bought was symbolic of the Nous."⁸ Certainly Shelley's drama celebrates self-empire attained through mental supremacy: "Thought's crowned Powers" (IV. 103). But Byron's vision fails to accomplish amelioration through mental empowerment; his "Prometheus" focuses on torment and uninspiringly concludes by "making Death a Victory" (BP IV, 59) for the tortured. Conversely Goethe's short "Prometheus" imparts an optimistic spirit that has a correspondence with Shelley's regenerative vision. With titanic defiance Prometheus fashions human beings to experience the spectrum of emotions: "I sit here, make men in my image, . . . to suffer, to weep, to enjoy and be glad. . . ." Goethe denounces the abhorrent conduct of the Gods who enforce supplication: "You feed your majesty scantily on sacrificed tribute and the breath of prayer."¹⁰ Likewise Shelley's Jupiter tyrannizes over "this Earth / Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou / Requistest for knee-worship, prayer and praise," (I. 4-6). Goethe's protagonist relies on his emotional resilience to adversity: "Holy glowing heart, did you not achieve all this yourself?"¹¹ Here Shelley's plot deviates significantly from Goethe and the original Greek myth: his Prometheus depends on feminine figures to sustain his endurance: "Fair sister nymphs, who made long years of pain / Sweet to remember through your love and care:" (III. iii. 8-9).

Shelley's unrelenting focus on the mental and emotional levels of being is in contrast to Aeschylus' graphic physical depiction.¹² Jupiter's evil "works" infiltrate levels of Prometheus' being and derange his mental state into a "woe-illumed mind" (I. 637). Whereas "illumed" undercuts the extent of despair, nevertheless with this internal discord Prometheus' psyche currently lacks the balanced integration necessary to become humanity's saviour: "Man, one harmonious Soul of many a soul / Whose nature is its own divine controul" (IV. 400-1). Yet at the innermost level of being Prometheus' strength is unvanquished: "The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul / With new endurance" (I. 643-4). Even though agonizingly depicted, Prometheus' patient resistance is paradoxically ennobling; it yields "such mixed joy / As pain and Virtue give" (656-7). Whereas "Peace is in the grave—" (638), Prometheus courageously accepts his immortality rather than seeking a defeatist escapism.

Shelley's Promethean drama subtly suggests a metaphysical flaw in the redeeming power of Christ's crucifixion to gain humanity's redemption. The equation of blood for salvation is indefensible to Shelley. Violence has no place in Shelley's millennial vision and Jupiter's "overthrow is effectively understated, the only sound and fury being Jupiter's unavailing melodramatics."¹³ Redemption does not occur during Prometheus' torture, when "Drops of bloody agony flow / From his white and quivering brow" (564-5). As Panthea witnesses Prometheus' suffering, his anguish permeates the field of consciousness and opens further vistas of destruction: "The Heaven around, the Earth below / Was peopled with thick shapes of human death, / All horrible," (586-8). Shelley's dictum is clear; to focus on despair magnetically attracts visions of greater adversity: "Let us not tempt worse fear / By looking forth —those groans are grief enough" (592-3). Yet Prometheus' suffering is pivotal; it confers a sense of realism on the dramatic action and his agony evokes and engages the reader's deepest sympathies. Moreover, as Susan Brisman shows, Shelley's Prometheus necessarily revitalizes the role of redeemer because Christ, the "wounded sufferer for mankind has become so much the object of human pity that men cannot see his compassion as a power."¹⁴

Unlike Christ, Prometheus is never a passive victim of Jove's malevolence, but experiences a reality wittingly created through his own invitation:

Let thy malignant spirit move
 Its darkness over those I love:
 On me and mine I imprecate
 The utmost torture of thy hate. (276-9)

Heidegger's existential concept of "our mood, our Being-attuned" (BT, 172) is of relevance to the import of Prometheus' encounter with Jupiter's evil regime. Just as in Bohm and Zohar's quantum understanding, in Heidegger's view relationship to both the world and others is a fundamental existential principle, inextricably bound up with individual existence. In his analysis Heidegger asserts that "ontologically mood is a primordial kind of Being . . . prior to all cognition and volition, and beyond their range of disclosure" (BT, 175). Moreover because of this primal origin, "A mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside', but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being" (BT, 176). Consequently moods operate at an ontological level; in his dealings with Jupiter and his hellish world Prometheus confronts the bounds of his self-determination. Prometheus is compelled to consciously inhabit the fragmented manifest world of Jupiter: external reality dominates his perceptions and the visionary realm of holistic-consciousness, experienced in dream states, is denied to him.

Prometheus and Jupiter have different experiences of reality, not surprisingly perhaps, as they have unequal powers. Jupiter's omnipotence is fatally incomplete as his Phantasm is compelled to restate with Prometheus' curse, "O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power, / And my own will" (I. 273-4). Whether this avowal has validity in relation to the former factor, autonomy, is questionable. If so, Jupiter has been denied a fundamental principle of being, expressed by Asia as "Self-empire" (II. iv. 42). In Shelley's vision impassioned

perceptions act upon the state of being and the veracity of such apprehensions depends on the emotion felt: a malediction uttered with hate has not the perspicacity of a vision conceived with love. In the regenerated world the Spirit of the Hour elucidates how love infuses all being and yields greater insight into the nature of existence:

There was a change . . . the impalpable thin air
 And the all-circling sunlight were transformed
 As if the sense of love dissolved in them
 Had folded itself round the sphered world.
 My vision then grew clear and I could see
 Into the mysteries of the Universe. (III. iv. 100-5)

The denouement of Act I heralds change. With a glimmering iridescence originating from "the dim caves of human thought" (I. 659) "subtle and fair spirits" (658) appear to uplift Prometheus; their appearance has a radiance that is barely perceptible, "Like fountain-vapours" (667). Arriving to revivify Prometheus, the chorus of Spirits "breathe, and sicken not, / The atmosphere of human thought" (675-6). The third and fourth Spirits lyrically impart how philosophy and poetry coexist in symbiotic relationship in Shelley's psyche. The third Spirit "sate beside a sage's bed . . . Near the book where he had fed" (723, 725). Following the sage's intellectual pursuit, "a Dream with plumes of flame / To his pillow hovering-came," (726-7). Whilst the third Spirit appears in close proximity to the sage, the fourth Spirit relates an intimate interaction: "On a Poet's lips I slept / Dreaming like a love-adept / In the sound his breathing kept" (737-9). Why a "sage's" "pillow" and yet a "poet's lips?" The former connotes the suspension of rationally induced wisdom: the latter rhythmically gifts inspiration, lovingly bestowed through "aerial kisses" (741). The fourth Spirit's song has an affinity with the drama's overall vision which releases a regenerative force intermingled with "Love,

Thought, and Breath, / The powers that quell Death" (IV. 150-1). To become poetically inspired

He will watch from dawn to gloom
 The lake-reflected sun illumine
 The yellow bees i' the ivy-bloom
 Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
 But from these create he can
 Forms more real than living man,
 Nurslings of immortality!— (743-9).

Here the golden atmosphere suggestively "drenches the spirits even to intoxication" (PP, 133) inducing a quasi-hypnotic trance in which poetic vision is animated by, yet ultimately transcends, the natural world. Just as the poet platonically refrains from "mortal blisses" (740) he disregards the intrinsic nature of existing forms. The reversal of syntax in "create he can" accentuates generation by merging the creative act with the creator. There is, as Notopoulos notices, "a remarkable similarity between the spirit of these lines and Agathon's speech in the Symposium" (PS, 244). Shelley's translation (1818) and poetic refiguration of Plato's dialogue are animated in Prometheus Unbound to a point where "Agathon and Diotima seemed / From death and dark forgetfulness released."¹⁵ In a convivial tone Agathon appraises his musings on love as "partly composed . . . of thoughtless and playful fancies, and partly of such serious ones . . ." (PS, 437). Essentially Agathon determines that "Love is a great poet" and his skill as a rhetorician is evident in the way he elicits consent for his supposition: "And who will deny that the divine poetry, by which all living things are produced upon the earth, is not harmonized by the wisdom of Love?" (PS, 436). Harmonizing love sweeps through "all living things" in the millennially awakened universe of Prometheus Unbound, and its communication

is ingeniously presented both at a cosmic level and through the interactions of the mythological personae.

Panthea's erotic dream vision of Prometheus' sensual arousal and their intimate commingling of being on the imaginative, emotional and sensuous planes of existence transpires when

the overpowering light

Of that immortal shape was shadowed o'er
 By love; which, from his soft and flowing limbs
 And passion-parted lips, and keen faint eyes
 Steam'd forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere
 Which wrapt me in its all-dissolving power
 As the warm ether of the morning sun
 Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew.
 I saw not —heard not—moved not— only felt
 His presence flow and mingle through my blood
 Till it became his life and his grew mine
 And I was thus absorbed— . . . (II, i. 71-82)

"Only felt / His presence" signals the interpenetration of being in a union that culminates with orgasmic release. Not surprisingly recollection of this dream leaves Panthea "faint / With the delight" (II, i. 35-6). But to be "faint" in a conscious state suggests an indelible impression akin to that created by physical occurrence. The past tense of "felt", coupled with generative connotations in "life and "grew", enhances the sense of actual experience. Earl Wasserman views Panthea's dream as a "spiritual communion" and a "spiritual absorption."¹⁶ But his emphasis on the "spiritual" is a partial account which denies the eroticism and sunders rather

than reconciles being. In a psychological explanation of the potency of feelings and dream experience, Montague Ullman defines their significance thus:

Our dreams arise out of recent and remote feeling residues. That part of us which is linked to others through feeling is more real, more enduring and more significant than other dimensions of our existence. It compels belief. It dissolves distance, creates unity and links us to the real world. This is the stuff of reality.¹⁷

This passage conveys a distinct consonance with Shelley's intuition that feelings and passions have fundamental impact on the nature of being. Furthermore for Shelley dreams have an ontological status, literally rendering them "the stuff of reality."¹⁸ In his analysis Ullman states that "As metaphorical expositions" dream "images reflect the core of our being and the place we have made for ourselves in the world."¹⁹ And this primal sense of human experience which plunges the depths of existence is dramatically evoked in Prometheus Unbound.

Communication is quintessential in the Promethean world and the deepest experiences of being are relayed pictorially, recounted through the retrieval of dream symbolism:

Thou speakest, but thy words

Are as the air. I feel them not oh, lift

Thine eyes that I may read his written soul! (II. i. 108-10)

Here Asia desires sentient communication with the depths of Prometheus' being; to read those inexpressible passions that are indelibly etched upon his soul. A cancelled passage in The "Prometheus Unbound" Notebooks (struck through with a single vertical line) shows that Shelley originally drafted this interchange in fervent images of Promethean fire whose erotic energy is combustible on transmission: "~~Lift up thine eyes Panthea— they pierce— they~~

burn!" (PN, E. 2, F. 26v, 11). Panthea is virtually devoured by this intensity: "Alas I am consumed- - I melt away / The fire is in my heart - -" (PN, E. 2, F. 26v, 13-14). Similarly when Asia encounters a vision of Prometheus' spirit, relayed through Panthea's eyes, her being is subsumed: "my life / Is ebbing fast - - I cannot speak - -" (PN, E. 2, F. 26v, 23-4). It is at the moment of communication that Prometheus' inspiring fire ignites meeting Asia who symbolizes "passionate creative love."²⁰ This level of potency was obviously untenable; Panthea and Asia's demise would have truncated the dramatic plot. Yet after such energetic, albeit quasi-melodramatic, vociferations Shelley's final choice seems surprisingly understated: "I lift them, though they droop beneath the load / Of that they would express" (II. i. 111-12). He replaces images of intense brilliance with endless shadowy labyrinths; eyes that are "— dark, far, measureless, — / Orb within orb, and line through line inwoven.—" (II. i. 117-8). These lines imply that there is no easy access to the enigmatic complexities of the soul²¹ and Shelley's revision to images of darkness is also consistent with the interplanetary interaction in the final act:

The Moon

As in the soft & sweet eclipse

meets

When soul ~~darkens~~²² soul on lovers lip

High hearts are calm & brightest eyes are dull

So when thy shadow falls on me

Then am I mute & still, - - by thee

Covered; of thy love, Orb most beautiful,

Full, oh too full! - -.

(PN, E. 1, F. 25R, 9-17)

Although “darkens” is changed to “meets” the outcome of this assignation undeniably obscures radiance, accentuated with a succession of images: “eclipse”, “dull” “shadow” and finally “Covered.”

II

Personal volition seems crucial to Prometheus’ mission. Yet the dichotomy between exercising free-will and being sucked into necessity’s unrelenting stream is an issue which continually surfaces. Aeschylus’ Prometheus voices the Greek view of an ineluctable destiny apportioned to the Gods and humanity: “My appointed fate I must endure as best I can, / Knowing the power of Necessity is irresistible.”²³ Shelley’s portrayal of fate is Greek in his conception of interconnected moral and physical laws, but his position between determinism and free-will is complicatedly presented. Interspersed throughout the drama are declarations of what appear to be a predestinarian philosophy: Prometheus awaits the “retributive hour” (I. 406); he is depicted by Asia as “Withering in destined pain” (II. iv. 100). In relation to Prometheus’ release, Asia phrases her question to Demogorgon in the language of determinism: “When shall the destined hour arrive?” (128). Prometheus defines his own ordeal equivocally, as a willing choice of a pre-ordained Christ-like fate, which carries collective responsibility, “I would fain / Be what it is my destiny to be, / The saviour and the strength of suffering man” (I. 815-7). To unravel the philosophical perplexities in the drama’s “wise and lovely songs / Of fate and chance and God, and Chaos old” (II. ii. 91-2) demands an examination of Shelley’s conception of destiny and the elements which determine its fulfillment.

Shelley’s vision of redemption in Prometheus Unbound is alert to the pitfalls created by non-experiential theories that are in Maddalo’s understanding merely “refutation-tight / As far as words go”, and in Julian’s words insubstantial “dreams of baseless good” (Julian and Maddalo, 194-5, 578). Mary Shelley comments that “Shelley develops, more particularly in

the lyrics of this drama, his abstruse and imaginative theories with regard to the Creation" (PW, 272). However she states that his "mystic meanings" are so complexly interwoven that "It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own" (PW, 272) to decipher their significance. This is particularly evident in the drama's main philosophical explorations between Asia and Demogorgon, which delve into the origins of existence. In her reflections, Mary Shelley perfectly registers the subtle ethereality, yet cogent presentation, of Shelley's ideas, "They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague" (PW, 272).

For Shelley the prevailing way of encountering "Demogorgon's mighty law" (II. ii. 43) is through emotional cognition; Panthea senses Demogorgon's being, "we feel it is / A living Spirit" (II. iv. 6-7). Furthermore Asia's verification of Demogorgon's utterances is through an emotional apprehension: "So much I asked before, and my heart gave / The response thou hast given; and of such truths / Each to itself must be the oracle.—" (II. iv. 121-3). If, as Jerrold Hogle suggests, Demogorgon is "the possibility of all the thought-connections that construct (or could reconstruct) observed existence" (SPR, 188), then this is the decisive point where feeling meets the potentiality of thought and becomes vitally creative in Shelley's vision. Geoffrey Matthews views Asia's interchange with Demogorgon as an "exasperating 'dialogue'", yet he perceptively discerns that Asia is really questioning and articulating her deepest intuitions: "She is made to interrogate her own soul."²⁴ Through her questions to Demogorgon Asia seeks to ascertain the origins of creation: "Who made the living world?" (9). Having established a divine cause, Asia focuses on the totality of existence: "Who made all / That it contains—thought, passion, reason, will, / Imagination?" (9-11). Whether these lines should be interpreted "as a useful myth rather than a declaration of Shelley's beliefs about reality"²⁵ is questionable and of significance to his vision of regeneration. Matthews aptly sees Asia's "moment of supreme prophetic consciousness"²⁶ as emanating from the inhalation of volcanic vapour. Here Asia's vision of existence bears a striking resemblance to Humphry

Davy's whirling exclamations about the structure of reality, which he experienced under an altered state of consciousness induced by nitrous oxide: "Nothing exists but thoughts! — the universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains!"²⁷ Shelley certainly had Davy in mind whilst composing the Triumph of Life; he wrote "S rum fre de v i / Sir Humphrey Davy / Davi" sideways along the left hand margin finishing just below the lines "Of Throned in the thoughts of men, and still had / The Jealous keys of truths eternal doors" (BSM I, f. 32v, 17-18). Whether Shelley thought that Davy possessed "The Jealous keys of truths eternal doors" is open to conjecture, but certainly his transcendental speculations are of relevance to Shelley's Promethean vision.

Philosophically and psychologically an immaterial universe, created from a complex nexus of thoughts and emotions, is the level of existence at which the drama is enacted: thought "is the measure of the Universe" (II. iv. 73); heart-felt emotion is the activating principle which equally propels good or evil ideas into physical actuality. With the essential nature of creation and destruction operating from a metaphysical basis, Panthea related earlier that "human death" (I. 587) is not solely "wrought by human hands" (588) but "some appeared the work of human hearts, / For men were slowly killed by frowns and smiles" (589-90).

Like the anonymous Woman in Laon and Cythna who presents a myth of creation, Asia explores the historical antecedents to Jupiter's reign. Her speech opens with a created universe in a state of paradisaal bliss: "There was the Heaven and Earth at first / And Light and Love" (II. iv. 32-3). In her account of Saturn's denial of basic human attributes, Asia designates a quasi-magus like ability, in which humanity can utilize elemental power:

The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
 The skill which wields the elements,²⁸ the thought
 Which pierces this dim Universe like light,
 Self-empire and the majesty of love. (39-42)

Noticeably, Jupiter's fall becomes irrevocable once he senses that he is powerless to command natural forces, "The elements obey me not . . . I sink . . . / Dizzily down—ever, forever, down—" (III. i. 80-1).

Tellingly, what really matters in the Promethean world is to have an empowering theory about the structure of reality, insight into "The skill which wields the elements" (II. iv. 40).²⁹ Stuart Curran points out that Jupiter is impeded and eventually destroyed by "his passive subservience to a deterministic conception and he is overwhelmed and destroyed by his own mind" (SAM, 105). He concisely epitomizes any apparent ambiguities in Shelley's philosophical ideas as one of mere perception: "Determinism, however, exists only if it is conceived to exist" (SAM, 105). Ontologically determinism has no legitimacy in the Promethean universe, yet it surfaces at every juncture, accompanied, tacitly and obliquely at times, by its counterpart free will. For instance, the resonating echoes of "follow" suggestively entice Asia to her encounter with Demogorgon, "While our music, wild and sweet, / Mocks thy gently-falling feet, / Child of Ocean!" (II. i. 185-7). Here sub-conscious processes are so interconnected with the material universe that the visual content of Panthea's dream, where "on each leaf was stamped" (139) "O follow, follow!" (141), is audible in a waking state. The trance-inducing recurrence of "follow" and the way in which it is subliminally impregnated through both Panthea and Asia's dreams evoke a sense of compelled inevitability.³⁰ At this point in the drama, Shelley seemingly assigns free choice to Asia, as shown in her question to Panthea, "Shall we pursue the sound?" (188). Yet even this conscious decision is subsequently underscored by an uninvited, seductive melliflence:

And first there comes a gentle sound
 To those in talk or slumber bound,
 And wakes the destined — soft emotion
 Attracts, impels them . . . (II. ii. 48-51)

Even if Asia and Panthea are initially able to evade the allure of “those enchanted eddies” (41), their course is motivated by the irresistible magnetism of the tempestuous crescendos of “The storm of sound” (59), drawing them to Demogorgon’s “fatal mountain” (62). Shelley intricately manoeuvres his vision through the idiom of determinism to denote a collective vision of co-creation; free choice must be faithfully submitted to the cosmic forces that will bring about its enactment. Like the Poet of *Alastor*, who is “Obedient to the light / That shone within his soul” (492-3) and compelled by both external and internal energies, Asia’s journey, to yield a transformation of her being, emanates from the dictates of her inner nature aligned to cosmic powers.³¹ Asia embarks on this grail-like quest because her “desolated heart” has restlessly not “learnt repose” (II. i. 4-5). The Echoes temptingly offer Asia the promise of re-uniting with Prometheus: “On the day when He and thou / Parted — to commingle now” (204). Constantly a sense of personal fulfillment is interwoven with universal goals. In the fourth act Love is celebrated by the Earth as the aim of Shelley’s philosophic vision: “This true fair world of things— a Sea reflecting Love” (IV. 384). Yet even though “all love is sweet, / Given or returned” (II. v. 39-40), in a drama where affective states are pre-eminent and determine both perception and being, Asia reveals that the deepest experience of love is sought:

They who inspire it most are fortunate
 As I am now; but those who feel it most
 Are happier still, after long sufferings
 As I shall soon become. (II. v. 44-7)

Along this voyage, in a lyricism inspired by Panthea’s musicality, Asia’s spirit soars: “My soul is an enchanted Boat / Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float / Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing” (72-4). Absolute trust is invested in the implicit power which conducts this

symphonic sonance. the Oceanides travel “Without a course — without a star — / But by the instinct of sweet Music driven” (89-90). In a hauntingly beautiful metaphor of Asia’s voyaging soul, searching “desire” is subliminally steered: “The boat of my desire is guided — Realms where the air we breathe is Love” (94-5). Asia’s destination, to re-unite with Prometheus, is achieved: conversely in the denouement of Alastor, the poet willingly accepts death after failing to find a physical embodiment of his feminine ideal.

Shelley’s previous exploration of freedom, Laon and Cythna, fruitfully reveals correspondences and developments in his philosophical insights. Significantly both poems present heroic attempts of liberation where humanity’s emancipation is envisioned as emanating from the internalized psychological processes of re-birth experienced by their protagonists: Laon and Cythna; Prometheus and Asia. In these quests Shelleyan women play a leading role and are invested with exemplary accomplishments: they are adventurously courageous, philosophically adept and embody Shelley’s complex vision of love. In Prometheus Unbound the Spirit of the Hour defines this perfection:

And women too, frank, beautiful and kind
 As the free Heaven which rains fresh light and dew
 On the wide earth, past: gentle, radiant forms,
 From custom’s evil taint exempt and pure;
 Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
 Looking emotions once they feared to feel
 And changed to all which once they dared not be,
 Yet being now, made Earth like Heaven—

(III, iv. 153-60)

The final line registers a transformation of existence, evoking a sense of, but ultimately resisting, unison; the “wide earth, past” is drawn closer to “the free Heaven” through capitalization and simile. Here Shelley is defining fundamental changes to the state of being and these lines anticipate his conception of love in A Defence of Poetry: “The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love. Love became a religion The familiar appearance and proceedings of life became wonderful and heavenly; and a paradise was created as out of the wrecks of Eden” (PP, 496-7).

Shelley praised Dante’s Paradise as “a perpetual hymn of everlasting love” (PP, 497) and the overwhelming radiance of the Italian poet’s Beatrice is implicitly woven into Shelley’s heroines; the following adoration is equally applicable to Asia:

Then Beatrice looked at me, her eyes
 sparkling with love and burning so divine,
 my strength of sight surrendered to her power —

with eyes cast down, I was about to faint.³²

Mark Musa cogently points out in his introduction that “Beatrice’s beauty in the Paradise is in her words. It reveals itself through her arguments.”³³ Beatrice expresses Dante’s divine vision apprehended through poetic intellection. Similarly, Asia’s philosophical disquisition precedes and precipitates her transformation; appositely a disembodied Spirit voice hymns her intellectual beauty: “Life of Life! thy lips enkindle / With their love the breath between them” (II. v. 48-9). To reach this stage of enkindling love, Asia has confronted the bounds of knowledge and the depths of being. The climactic point in her search to ascertain the creative power that brings futurity into being occurs in the previous scene with Demogorgon’s rhetorical address:

—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. 114-120)

Frustratingly, although “the destined hour” (128) seems certain, as it has hitherto carefully been constructed through Prometheus’ will and compassion combined with Asia’s desiring love, it is still lingering in the quantum realm of possible futures; its late arrival is welcomed by Prometheus as “long desired / And long delayed” (III. iii. 5-6). If “the deep truth” refers to the forthcoming reality, it is “imageless” simply because it is, at this point, un-created, implicitly inherent yet not explicitly manifested.³⁴ “Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change” are philosophical concepts which gesture towards, but do not yield insight into, the very fabric of existence. Their failure lies in the fact that human perceptions and emotions are the catalysts necessary for generation with supreme value bestowed on “eternal Love.” Mary Shelley misreads the intricacies in Shelley’s creative vision with her summation that “Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none” (PW, 271). Willing against evil further energizes those-negative, base emotions, and does not create a perfected vision of love. Whereas Shelley recognized that his “perpetual Orphic song” (IV. 415) must realistically portray evil, he transcended its influence by envisioning and creating a world of love. “Eternal Love” is personified in Asia, Shelley’s “Child of Light!” (II. v. 54),³⁵ and her role in the dramatic action is pivotal: “Asia thus initiates the revolutionary crisis as she grasps her own agency in its processes.”³⁶ Panthea delights in Asia’s transfiguration which she depicts as radiating from her innermost being and permeating all existence: “love, like the

atmosphere / Of the sun's fire filling the living world, / Burst from thee, and illumined Earth and Heaven" (26-28). From his atemporal perspective, enshrined in love, Prometheus gleans spiritual prescience of the future's great works of art, their forms as yet unconceived,

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)

Demogorgon has been interpreted from its Platonic connection to the "Demiourgos of the Timaeus" which evokes the role of creator.³⁷ Etymologically Douka Kabitoglou sees Demogorgon as a "linguistic concoction for the concretization of that 'awful power' that haunts the Shelleyan mind — and text," and which paradoxically denotes both the divine and the demonic.³⁸ In relation to creativity, Shelley's portrayal of Demogorgon as "a mighty Darkness / . . . Ungazed upon and shapeless—neither limb / Nor form—nor outline" (II. iv. 2, 5-6), can be elucidated by Jung's understanding of the artist's visionary experience. Panthea and Asia's cascading descent to his volcano signifies the labyrinthine depths of unconsciousness: "In the depth of the Deep, / Down, down!" (II. iii. 81-2). From a Jungian perspective Demogorgon's inchoate mass evokes the unstructured chaos from which art is generated:

the primordial experience is the source of his creativeness, but it so dark and amorphous that it requires the related mythological imagery to give it form. In itself it is wordless and imageless, for it is a vision seen "as in a glass, darkly." It is nothing but a tremendous intuition striving for expression. It is like a whirlwind that seizes everything within reach and assumes visible form as it swirls upward.

(SMA, 96-7)

A psychological perspective is germane in view of Shelley's poetic technique: "The imagery which I have employed will be found in many instances to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind" (PP, 133). But Shelley's awareness of his creativity is more inclusively defined as a dual process, combined with "those external actions by which they are expressed" (PP, 133). In this vein "Poets . . . are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age" (PP, 135). A pre-publication review in The London Magazine (June, 1820) aptly registers the drama's socio-political contemporaneity:

This poem is more completely the child of the Time than almost any other modern production: it seems immediately sprung from the throes of the great intellectual, political, and moral labour of nations. Like the Time, its parent, too, it is unsettled, irregular, but magnificent.³⁹

The examination of specific historical events is not a central issue in this thesis: the main focus is on the latent energies of thoughts and emotions which precede and precipitate revolutionary changes.⁴⁰ Shelley focuses on awakening the origins of transformation, "the legioned hopes / Which sleep within folded Elysian flowers" (II. iv. 59-60). Michael O'Neill's contextualist reading of Shelley's artistic life justly identifies the complex dynamics in his creativity. He sees Shelley as "highly sensitised to underlying social and political forces at

work in his culture," with this awareness resulting in greater "emphasis on the imagination as a means of transforming consciousness" (LL, 7). It is the later consideration that is central to my interpretation, especially in relation to Shelley's suggestion of a material transfiguration, enacted through the "Dreams and the light imaginings of men / And all that faith creates, or love desires" (I. 200-1). In accord with the drama's humanism the Promethean world is geocentric. Asia's apostrophe exalts the beauty of the physical world: "Fit throne for such a Power! Magnificent! / How glorious art thou, Earth!" (II. iii. 11-12). Throughout Prometheus Unbound the Earth is appositely the physical dimension which grounds imaginative visions by bringing them into being.

The Aeschylean precedent, Prometheus Bound, is influential in advocating the primacy of thought to Shelley: Aeschylus's Prometheus is depicted as a "god of mountainous thoughts"⁴¹ whose physical anguish partly emanates from emotional turmoil: "thought and anger gnaw my heart, / To see myself so outraged."⁴² However Shelley is not attempting a restoration of "the lost drama of Æschylus" but a vision that encompasses "the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (PP, 133). To accomplish this ideal Shelley develops a metaphysics in which the most emotively driven vision, conceived with the utmost clarity of thought, determines reality. Yeats' remark that he has "re-read Prometheus Unbound . . . as a sacred book" which deserves inclusion "among the sacred books of the world"⁴³ recognizes in Shelley's poetics a divine vision. And perhaps what Shelley considered his, as yet, unfulfilled ambition of "a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, & harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled", (LS II, 71) is achieved in Prometheus Unbound:

As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth

Is loosened, and the nations echo round

Shaken to their roots: as do the mountains now. (II. iii. 40-2)

Freedom depends on the cumulative effect of thoughts and Shelley's 1820 volume scatters multiple images of their generation in an attempt to disseminate his vision. In the "Ode to the West Wind" Shelley impels the elements: "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!" (63-4). An embryonic development is suggested in the "Ode to Liberty" where Shelley wonders whether "power in thought be as the tree within the seed?" (248). In her "Note on Prometheus Unbound", Mary Shelley encapsulates the profound basis of Shelley's poetic vision: "He considered these philosophical views of Mind and Nature instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry" (PW, 272).

Reading "his written soul" ostensibly refers to Asia's communication from Prometheus, yet it has equal relevance to Shelley's ideas on creativity, where great writers exhibit "the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind" (PP, 134). In a Defence of Poetry Shelley conceded that poets are "compelled to serve, the Power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul" (PP, 508). A slight variation of this conception appears earlier in A Philosophical View of Reform (1819).⁴⁴ What depth of understanding is Shelley demanding from his readers? Encapsulated in a prefatory comment is the Promethean goal for self-regeneration:

until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. (PP, 135)

To be a conscious "passenger" is to have an epiphanic realization that the mythic drama places the reader in a self-relationship with Shelley's regenerative principles. Accordingly a "highly refined imagination" (PP, 135) is quintessential, one that has capacious responsiveness to engage with the ultimate ideals of "Wisdom, Justice, Love and Peace," (I. 796). It is in this sense that Prometheus Unbound "is written only for the elect" (LS II, 200), those readers who

choose to enter into creative dialogue with the drama. Sir William Drummond, who visited the Shelleys in Italy in 1819 (SP, 486) and whose Academical Questions influenced Shelley's thought, conceived that the imagination was the channel which influenced the inner spiritual life: "it is the faculty of imagination, which carries our thoughts beyond the limits of existence, which pleases the soul with phantastic visions, or which affrights it with ideal terrors" (AQ, 3-4). In A Defence of Poetry Shelley cogently defines an intense empathetic engagement, so vividly apprehended that it is woven into the reader's own psyche: "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively . . . the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" (PP, 487-8). With this degree of mental and emotional impregnation fundamental changes occur in the nature of perception: "Every man's mind is . . . modified by all the objects of nature and art, by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form" (PP, 135). What distinguishes Shelley's vision is the view that interiority determines external experiences in the world. Prometheus's curse of Jupiter conveys this inevitability: "let the hour / Come, when thou must appear to be / That which thou art internally" (I. 297-9).

III

Freedom precipitates a cosmic realignment and the drama registers atmospheric changes in anticipation of an emotional deluge from "The clouds that are heavy with Love's sweet rain" (IV. 179). Act IV gives a resounding affirmation to Shelley's ultimate question in his "Ode to the West Wind": "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (70). Once regeneration has occurred on the metaphysical level it has cosmic reverberations with an "unexpected birth" (IV. 360) as in the Moon's joy: "The snow upon my lifeless mountains / Is loosened into living fountains" (IV. 356-7). To date, both Heideggerian and quantum concepts of holism have

been discussed to illustrate the depth and consequences of Shelley's vision. However the monistic philosophy of Spinoza had a specific influence in shaping Shelley's views on the nature of existence and merits consideration in regard to his ideas on love.⁴⁵

Shelley expressed his admiration for Spinoza in A Philosophical View of Reform, citing him with Lord Bacon, and Montaigne as among the "great luminaries of the preceding epoch" (Julian VII, 9). In a note to Queen Mab Shelley denies that there is any evidence to support the Christian concept of a personal God: "an eternal, omniscient, omnipotent being" (PW, 814). His theory of the divine is an impersonal, permeating force, "a generative power" (PW, 814). The note opens with the controversial assertion that:

There is no God.

This negation must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe remains unshaken. (PW, 812)

A "pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe" perfectly encapsulates Spinoza's pantheist vision where he proclaims the centrality of God as inherent in all creation: "since nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that all things in nature involve and express the concept of God, in proportion to their essence and perfection."⁴⁶ There appears to be a fundamental distinction between Spinoza's all-pervasive insistence on God and Shelley's total rejection of God. However, this is more a question of terminology than a conceptual difference. One of Shelley's pencilled annotations to Spinoza identifies the divine as synonymous with the cosmos: "God & Nature / the Same."⁴⁷ One of the most significant parallels between Spinoza and Shelley, which originates from the concept of a divine permeating presence, is the far reaching claims made for the human mind. Although it is probable, but not certain, that Shelley was familiar with The Ethics,⁴⁸ it is interesting to compare their accounts of the divinity of the human mind. Spinoza's axiomatic pursuit of truth posits the corollary: "that the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God."⁴⁹ Whereas Spinoza exalts the concept of God, depicting

human thought as a revelation of the divine “intellect of God”, Shelley’s humanist vision bestows divine attributes on humanity. A Refutation of Deism argues that:

There is no attribute of God which is not either borrowed from the passions and powers of the human mind, or which is not a negation. Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Infinity, Immutability, Incomprehensibility, and Immateriality, are all words which designate properties and powers peculiar to organized beings. (PWS, 120)

A distillation of Shelley’s expression of an interpenetration of life and world is captured in the trochaic rhythms of “Love’s Philosophy”, a lyric written for Sophia Stacey:

The fountains mingle with the river
 And the rivers with the Ocean,
 The winds of Heaven mix for ever
 With a sweet emotion;
 Nothing in the world is single;
 All things by a law divine
 In one spirit meet and mingle.
 Why not I with thine?—.(PW, 1-8)

Compositionally the poem is a hybrid; it combines elements of the metaphysical erotic lyric with a pantheist philosophy that is lucidly expressed. An all-embracing notion of wholeness is achieved by suffusing elements in the natural world with the human attribute of “sweet emotion.” The eroticism in Shelley’s “law divine” is diametrically opposed to Spinoza’s spiritual aspiration which excludes sensual love. Like Plato, Spinoza elevates love beyond the

world of sense, "toward the eternal and infinite";⁵⁰ he depicts sexual enjoyment as a distraction which "thoroughly confuses and dulls the mind."⁵¹ This divisive sundering of the spiritual and sensual planes of existence is antipathetic to Shelleyan love which desires to interconnect the totality of being.⁵² love is "the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive" (PS, 408). Having philosophically established a cosmic scene of magnetic attraction, Shelley cleverly solicits an amorous embrace:

See the mountains kiss high Heaven
 And the waves clasp one another;
 No sister-flower would be forgiven
 If it disdained its brother;
 And the sunlight clasps the earth
 And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
 What is all this sweet work worth
 If thou kiss not me? (PW, 9-16)

Lyricaly the poem moves towards a question persuasively formulated, yet delicately proffered. Shelley culminates with a note that intimates a coy, tantalizing resistance.

Resistance is untenable in Prometheus' regenerated universe where a holistic vision of existence interpenetrates the Promethean "new world of man" (IV, 157):

But now —oh weave the mystic measure
 Of music and dance and shapes of light,
 Let the Hours, and the Spirits of might and pleasure
 Like the clouds and sunbeams unite. (77-80)

“Unite” resonates as Shelley poetically establishes a level of cosmic inter-involvement that is best apprehended through metaphorical analogy. In accord with drama’s mythical spirit, Heidegger’s aesthetic thinking yields a deeper understanding of cosmic consanguinity. For Heidegger, being intermeshes in an “appropriating mirror-play of the simple onefold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, we call the world” (PLT, 179).⁵³ These elements, designated as “the fourfold”, are indivisible and therefore “strangled in their essential nature when we think of them only as separate realities” (PLT, 180). To encapsulate a unifying presence Heidegger moves beyond the compound hyphenated expressions that dominated *Being and Time*, to a more poetic emphasis which, at times, suggests an implicit eroticism; “the four” are “betrothed, each to the other in simple oneness” (PLT, 180). Poetically Shelley “often uses intersense analogies as though they partook of an ultimate unity or harmony”,⁵⁴ as in the stage direction when Prometheus kisses the earth and his cosmic embrace inspires regeneration:

I hear—I feel—

Thy lips are on me, and their touch runs down

Even to the adamantine central gloom

Along these marble nerves—’tis life, ’tis joy.

(III. iii. 84-7)

Unity in Shelley’s vision is created and sustained through love as seen with the Moon’s ecstatic rejoicing, “’Tis Love, all Love!” (IV. 369). The Earth is reinvigorated as love suffuses every particle of existence.⁵⁵

It interpenetrates my granite mass,

Through tangled roots and trodden clay doth pass

Into the utmost leaves and delicatest flowers;

Upon the winds, among the clouds 'tis spread. (IV. 370-3)

This chapter has explored Shelley's ideas on love and creativity and the philosophical implications that they raise concerning the nature of existence. I have read Prometheus Unbound as a multi-dimensional drama that operates on all planes of being: spiritual, imaginative, intellectual, emotional, and sensuous. It is by means of achieving this level of communication and depth of experience, that Shelley's drama seeks to infiltrate and engage the reader's emotions in a universal empathy: "Till the world is wrought / To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not" ("To a Sky-Lark", 39-40).

¹ In his study of "Romantic Pantheism" Piper explains that the philosophical and scientific ideas of animism had a pervasive influence on Romantic writing: "Thus the ideas that all matter was living, organic and animal, that all natural objects, as organized forms of matter, had their own life and sensibility, and that the whole organization of the natural world was capable of intelligent purpose . . . were all widely diffused in pre-Revolutionary France", H. W. Piper, The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets (London: Athlone, 1962), 25.

² Bloom, 101.

³ Harold Bloom uses Martin Buber's "distinction between 'two primary words', I-Thou and I-It": the former is the boundless world of mutual interrelationship; the latter denotes a limited vision centering on experience of the other, Bloom, 1.

⁴ In his interpretation Carl Grabo traces the source of Shelley's ideas on the materialization of thoughts and finds a parallel in Platonic philosophy: "Creations of thought and passion, these ministers of Jove dwell in the world", "Prometheus Unbound": An Interpretation (1935; New York: Gordian, 1968), 32-33; hereafter referred to as Grabo, Prometheus Unbound.

⁵ Michael O'Neill, "Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus Unbound", A Companion to Romanticism, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 265; hereafter referred to as O'Neill, Prometheus Unbound.

⁶ Jerrold Hogle interprets the "thought-executing ministers", which he perceives to be in relation to Mercury rather than the Furies, as having a political significance in which Mercury is "determined to kill any self-transfiguring thought that might transgress the limits of the reigning ideology", SPR, 177.

⁷ In his analysis of thought David Bohm points out that "There is a profound connection between the state of the body and the way you think", Thought as a System, 9.

⁸ See the discussion of Coleridge's Royal Society of Literature Lecture of 1825 in Anthony John Harding, Coleridge and the Idea of Love: Aspects of Relationship in Coleridge's Thought and Writing (London: Cambridge UP, 1974), 140.

⁹ Leonard Forster, introd. and ed. The Penguin Book of German Verse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 203; hereafter referred to as German Verse.

¹⁰ German Verse, 201.

¹¹ German Verse, 202.

¹² Aeschylus' version reads, "The dark-winged hound of Zeus will come, the savage eagle, / An uninvited banqueter, and all day long / Will rip your flesh in rags and feast upon your liver, / Gnawing it black", "Prometheus Bound", "The Suppliants", "Seven Against Thebes", "The Persians", trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 51; hereafter referred to as Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound.

¹³ O'Neill, Prometheus Unbound, 266.

¹⁴ Susan Hawk Brisman, "'Unsayings His High Language': The Problem of Voice in Prometheus Unbound", SIR xvi (1977), 69.

¹⁵ "Prince Athanase", Fragment II, PW, 228-9.

¹⁶ My reading of Panthea's dream encounter deviates from Earl Wasserman's "spiritual" understanding in that I interpret this scene, like the overall drama, as being enacted on all planes of existence: spiritual, imaginative, emotional and physical. Wasserman states that "The subject is not Existence but its ideal state. Even in her dream Panthea did not experience with her senses, but through an absorption of her soul . . .", SCR, 308.

¹⁷ Montague Ullman, "Wholeness and Dreaming", QL, 388; hereafter referred to as Ullman.

¹⁸ See Shelley's "Speculations on Metaphysics", Julian, VII, 59 and my discussion in Chapter Four.

¹⁹ Ullman, 388-9.

²⁰ Grabo, Prometheus Unbound, 52. Carl Grabo also interprets the symbolism of Asia's sister Oceanids: he views Panthea as "sympathetic love" because "Hers is the love which comforts Prometheus and Asia in separation" (54); Ione represents "the Spirit of Love in Beauty" (57). For a commentary on the varying interpretations of Asia, Panthea and Ione see also Lawrence Zillman, Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound": A Variorum Edition (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1959), 327-34; hereafter referred to Zillman.

²¹ Jerrold Hogle notes that in Asia's role of communicating with Prometheus' soul, Asia "can hardly be separated from intellectual effort . . .", SPR, 182.

²² Neill Fraistat states that "PBS first superimposed an m on the d of 'darkness'" and afterwards pencilled "meets" above, PN, p. 526, 11-12

²³ Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 24.

²⁴ G. M. Matthews, "A Volcano's Voice in Shelley" English Literary History, vol 24 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1957), 216 n. 68; hereafter referred to as Matthews.

²⁵ Reiman and Power's note encourages the reading of "a useful myth" because Demorgogon neither agrees or disagrees with Asia's assumptions about the totality of existence, PP, 172 n. 9.

²⁶ Matthews, 217 n. 68.

²⁷ Knight, 30.

²⁸ Carl Grabo's study of Shelley's attraction to contemporary science traces the influence of Erasmus Darwin's ideas on his poetic vision. Shelley's pursuit of "The skill which wields the elements" in Prometheus Unbound demonstrates an eclectic vision which Grabo interprets as syncretistic: he sees Shelley "seeking a synthesis of science and metaphysics, endeavoring to reconcile materialism and mysticism." Darwin's significance to Shelley is that he was "one of the most imaginative of scientists" and "less concerned with scientific certainty than with philosophic plausibility", A Newton among Poets: Shelley's Use of Science in Prometheus Unbound (1930; New York: Cooper Square, 1968), 59.

²⁹ In his discussion of Act I, Michael O'Neill remarks that "Characters are shown choosing to see or read reality in a certain light and, as a consequence, shaping reality", HMI, 95.

³⁰ Wasserman's reading places great emphasis on the unswerving law of Necessity which he cogently defines as "the immanent and self-fulfilling causal sequence that is neither a conscious guiding mind nor a teleological force, but the fixed law of the energy that effects the course of events", SCR, 313. My interpretation of Necessity accredits a central role for human thoughts and emotions which form the basis of its unfolding power.

³¹ As Shelley read Cary's blank verse translation of The Divine Comedy, I am citing this version for the philosophical ideas (Mark Musa's translation in terza rima is quoted for the poetic encapsulation of Beatrice's divine love and beauty). In the Paradise, through the figure of Beatrice, Dante discusses the concept of free-will and states that, "Supreme of gifts, which God creating gave / Of his free bounty . . . Was liberty of the will", Dante, The Divine Comedy: The Vision of Dante, trans. Henry Cary, ed. Ralph Pite (1908; London: Everyman, 1997), v. 18-19, 21. In Dante's vision there is the notion of personal will being sacrificed to God's will. Shelley's most innovative departure from Dante is in his intricately complex presentation of free-will that is enacted both at conscious and subconscious levels of being.

³² Musa, Paradise, iv, 139-42.

³³ Musa, Paradise, p. xxv.

³⁴ For further insight into latent energies which precede the manifestation of form see Bohm's "implicate order" discussed in detail in Chapter One.

³⁵ Shelley's vision of love, embodied through the feminine ideal, relies on childlike modes of apprehension and being, see my discussion in Chapter Four, Laon and Cythna, 113-117.

³⁶ Kelvin Everest. "'Mechanism of a Kind Yet Unattempted': The Dramatic Action in Prometheus Unbound." Durham University Journal (1993), 239-40.

³⁷ See Notopoulos' discussion in PS, 245-6.

³⁸ E. Douka Kabitoglou, Plato and the English Romantics: διαλογοι (London: Routledge, 1990), 231; see also 306 n. 19.

³⁹ Zillman, 690.

⁴⁰ Hughes aptly reads the denouement of the drama as one where “The Potential has overcome the Actual”, PP, 612. He perceives that “Shelley is concerned with reform in the poem, but the reform is more metaphysical than political and more ontological than social”, PP, 617.

⁴¹ Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 21.

⁴² Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 33.

⁴³ W. B. Yeats, “The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry”, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), 65.

⁴⁴ In his earlier drafting Shelley wrote poets are “compelled to serve that which is seated on the throne of their own soul”, Julian VII, 20.

⁴⁵ Donald Reiman states that Shelley had acquired The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus from Hookham early in 1813, SC, viii, 742.

⁴⁶ Benedict de Spinoza, A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works, trans. E. Curly (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 28; hereafter referred to as Spinoza.

⁴⁷ Shelley’s annotation is in relation to Spinoza’s The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, SC, viii, 732.

⁴⁸ Donald Reiman cites as evidence a letter from Arthur Henry Hallam in which he states that he possessed “a copy of Spinoza’s Ethics, said to have belonged to” Shelley, SC, viii, 742.

⁴⁹ Spinoza, 123.

⁵⁰ Spinoza, 4.

⁵¹ Spinoza, 3.

⁵² In a note to Queen Mab Shelley had forcefully denounced Christian morality: “the fanatical idea of mortifying the flesh for the love of God”, PW, p. 806.

⁵³ Heidegger's understanding of interrelatedness is taken from his essay "The Thing" in PLT. David Cooper points out the etymological significance of the term: "The Old German 'thing' meant an assembly or gathering", H, 82.

⁵⁴ Glenn O'Malley, Shelley and Synesthesia (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1964), 24.

⁵⁵ Kenneth Cameron's discussion of Shelley and contemporary science discerns the relevance of Shelley's fascination with science to his poetic vision. Cameron states that "In his descriptions of the earth and moon, . . . Shelley is not simply attempting to put science into verse but giving what he believed was a deeper picture of reality than had been available to poets of the past. The findings of Herschel, Priestley, Davy, Dalton, Cavendish, and others had, he believed, penetrated further into the forces behind the appearances of nature than had ever been done before", SGY, 554. Moreover, it is quite remarkable to see the extent to which Shelley's vision of existence actually "anticipates modern physics", and this creative perception arises because Shelley is not simply "reflecting the experimental science of his time but [of] imaginatively reaching beyond it, to pick out with intelligent discrimination from a vast mass of material the essential elements", SGY, 550.

Chapter 7

Unveiling the “Unborn Hour”: Shelley’s Creative Vision of Futurity in Hellas

*How wonderful! that even
The passions, prejudices, interests,
That sway the meanest being, the weak touch
That moves the finest nerve,
And in one human brain
Causes the faintest thought, becomes a link
In the great chain of nature.*

(Queen Mab II, 102-8)

Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.

(“Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”, 52)

I

Hellas is a dynamic adventure in consciousness “which pierces / The present, and the past, and the to-come” (147-8). The drama emerges as a climactic statement of Shelley’s ideas about the impact of thought on the state of being and offers a conception of existence which confronts the limits of comprehension. In a similar way to Ahasuerus’ profound effect on the Turkish tyrant, Mahmud, Shelley’s “words stream like a tempest / Of dazzling mist within” (786-7) the reader’s mind. Greece’s struggle for liberation evokes “intense sympathy” (PP, 408) in Shelley which he effectively channels into an artistic vision that is “insusceptible of being treated

otherwise than lyrically" (PP, 408). Like Prometheus Unbound, with its Aeschylean precedent, Hellas is also a generic hybrid, initially influenced by "The Persæ of Æschylus" (PP, 408).

The "Preface" to Hellas celebrates the pervasive cultural inheritance from classical Greece: "We are all Greeks — our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece" (PP, 409). Undoubtedly the most significant legacy from Greece, outlined in Shelley's "Prologue to Hellas", is the ever-living presence of "Plato's sacred light" (PW, 94). Hellas is the artistic culmination of an intense period of translation and re-reading of Plato, whose metaphysical concepts became deeply assimilated within Shelley's poetic vision. Indeed when Hellas was nearing completion Shelley attributed his inspiration to two major sources: "I read the Greek dramatists & Plato forever" (LS II, 364). However, it is not the similarity with Plato's ideas that I wish to address, but a significant deviation: Shelley's idea that thoughts, when empowered by intense emotion, can enact a transformation in the world. In their introduction to The "Hellas" Notebook Donald Reiman and Michael Neth comment that "a strong case can be made that in fact the drama is a carefully structured, profound meditation on the nature of human perception and the mind's power to affect physical reality" (HN, p. xxxiv). This chapter examines the extent of this "strong case" of "the mind's power to affect physical reality" and suggests that Shelley's philosophical views have a remarkable prescience in relation to David Bohm's theories about the participatory nature of thought and its implicit function in the structure of reality.

Shelley's insights on the creative power of thought are appropriately elicited in Platonic style; a dialogical pursuit to ascertain the nature of existence. As protagonist and antagonist, Shelley chose two powerful adversaries: Ahasuerus, whose supremacy emanates from his command of thought, and Mahmud who wields political power. Their dialectic is portrayed as a monumental interchange in a meeting which conveys an intimation of fatalism since it occurs "When the omnipotent hour to which are yoked / He, I, and all things shall compel" (189-90). Shelley's choice of "omnipotent hour" emerged from studied consideration; the cancellations in

drafting, one of which is illegible, suggest that it was a difficult passage to achieve artistically. The rejection of “stormy hour” and most possibly “[?whirlwind]”, (HN, E. 7, p. 88, 20, 19) shows Shelley searching for a more portentous expression. In the intercourse between Ahasuerus and Mahmud the reader’s sympathies are manipulated by Shelley’s overt value-judgments: Ahasuerus’ ingenuity, suggested by a “dazzling mist” (787), elicits approval, whilst the “sulphurous mist” (829) of Mahmud’s clouded perceptions evokes censure. That Shelley intended to portray Ahasuerus’ conceptions as brilliant is substantiated by his first contemplation “Of radiant mist” (HN, E. 7, p. 115, 18).

Ahasuerus is presented as a mystical figure with arcane wisdom, his “spirit is a chronicle / Of strange and secret and forgotten things” (133-4). Unlike Mahmud he is not bounded by the concept of time: “from his eye looks forth / A life of unconsumed thought which pierces / The present, and the past, and the to-come” (146-8). Here Ahasuerus upholds Shelley’s “presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being” (PW, 479). Ahasuerus appears virtually as unbounded consciousness which is implicit in the scheme of creation. In a succession of elemental images Shelley confronts the notion of human autonomy:

The hoary mountains and the wrinkled ocean
 Seem younger still than he—his hair and beard
 Are whiter than the tempest-sifted snow.
 His cold pale limbs and pulseless arteries
 Are like the fibres of a cloud instinct
 With light, and to the soul that quickens them
 Are as the atoms of the mountain-drift
 To the winter wind— (139-46)

The linguistic construction of this passage draws attention to its patterned style: the syntactical repetition of similes, enjambment and minimal punctuation all contrive to effect an integration which signifies Ahasuerus's indivisibility from the world. The incorporeal imagery collapses any distinction between nature and consciousness. Shelley's confluence of the atmospheric and spiritual, combined with his interest in atomization, shows a microcosmic delving into the nature of creation. It is as if Shelley accounts for, and sees the relevance of, every particle of existence; even the smallest life forms are important elements of an interrelated whole. Ahasuerus tells Mahmud that "The Fathomless has care for meaner things / Than thou canst dream" (763-4). In a letter to Hogg, 3 January 1811, Shelley had enthusiastically advanced a similar theory:

I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on wh. we trample are in themselves more conclusive than any which can be adduced 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. (LS, I, 35)

Ahasuerus fuses many branches of knowledge in his apprehension of existence; one of which is that of a quasi-mathematical and scientific analysis. Mahmud praises this erudition:

Thou art an adept in the difficult lore
Of Greek and Frank philosophy; thou numberest
The flowers, and thou measurest the stars;
Thou severest element from element. (741-44)

Ahasuerus is the dynamic enactment of Shelley's philosophical ideas, personifying limitless potentiality. The plurality of identities etched upon Ahasuerus' consciousness endorses Shelley's belief that individuality of a single consciousness is not a meaningful explication of human existence. Indeed Ahasuerus's character is that of a multi-dimensional being, possessed of an inner wisdom and power. The following passage invites speculation concerning Ahasuerus' origins:

Some say that this is he whom the great prophet
 Jesus, the Son of Joseph, for his mockery
 Mocked with the curse of immortality.—
 Some feign that he is Enoch —others dream
 He was preadamite and has survived
 Cycles of generation and of ruin. (149-54)

This mysterious portrayal provokes questions as to Ahasuerus's literary antecedents, and indicates how he is a composite delineation of ideas that had been fermenting in Shelley's consciousness since his earliest writings. In the previously cited letter to Hogg, 3 January 1811, Shelley declares: "I confess that I think Pope's 'all are but parts of one tremendous whole' something more than Poetry, it has ever been my favourite theory" (LS I, 35). Noticeably Shelley's citation does not include the second line of this couplet, almost certainly because of the word "God", which the young radical felt "has been [and] will continue to be the source of numberless errors until it is erased from the nomenclature of Philosophy" (LS I, 35). But a close examination of Alexander Pope's dictum in An Essay on Man suggests that an interpretation could be reached of a divine implicit power that is consonant with Shelley's belief in a universal soul. Pope rhymes his precept thus: "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body Nature is, and God the soul."¹ The first Epistle of Pope's An Essay on

Man, entitled "Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to the UNIVERSE", addresses one of Shelley's lifelong concerns, humanity's indivisible place in the scheme of creation.² The following wittily constructed couplet has a philosophical base that would have been attractive to Shelley, and is in accord with Ahasuerus' visionary experience: "He, who through vast immensity can pierce, / See worlds on worlds compose one universe."³ However, although Pope and Shelley are both concerned with humanity's place in the scheme of creation, Shelley conceives of a dynamically creative role for humanity, whereas Pope vindicates God's justice.

The dissolution of boundaries between Ahasuerus' characteristics and the natural world exemplifies Shelley's idea of "reverie" in On Life. With this experience people "feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being" (PP, 477). The synthesis of self and world is a metaphorical expression that appears physically plausible in Bohm's quantum view of existence where he posits "a new notion of unbroken wholeness, in which consciousness is no longer to be fundamentally separated from matter" (WIO, 197). For Shelley a union of what are commonly perceived as subjective and objective states of being, provides a credible basis to develop Ahasuerus' quasi-mystical powers. With such an affinity to nature, Ahasuerus can communicate through, and even control, the elements. Questing applicants, who desire an audience with Ahasuerus, must look for signs in nature:

If his prayer

Be granted, a faint meteor will arise

Lighting him over Marmora, and a wind

Will rush out of the sighing pine forest

And with the wind a storm of harmony

Unutterably sweet, and pilot him

Through the soft twilight to the Bosphorus:

Thence at the hour and place and circumstance

Fit for the matter of their conference

The Jew appears. . . . (175-84)

Here, Ahasuerus' Prospero-like powers are quasi-divine, and in fundamental conflict with Mahmud's Islamic view of creation which avows that "It is God who drives the winds that stir the clouds" and "has power over all things."⁴ A penetrating study into "the relationship between matter and consciousness," discussed in earlier chapters and of relevance to Hellas, is Danah Zohar's quantum perspective "which promises to bring us back into partnership with the universe" (QS, 1). Zohar's following contention has a specific relevance to Shelley's idea of a continuum between being and world as expressed in Hellas:

We are, in our essential being, made of the same stuff and held together by the same dynamics as those which account for everything else in the universe. And equally, which brings out the enormity of this realization, the universe is made of the same stuff and held together by the same dynamics as those which account for us. (QS, 83)

This realization that the human beings are chemically equivalent with the world, and interconnected "by the same dynamics", appears to be implicitly woven into the depiction of Ahasuerus and, perhaps, provides the key to Shelley's suggestion of thought transference. Thoughts can be communicated telepathically to Ahasuerus, as Hassan informs Mahmud:

Thy will is even now

Made known to him, where he dwells in a sea cavern

Mid the Demonesi, less accessible

Than thou or God! . . . (162-4)

Ahasuerus is ethereally presented and barely personified. Yet, his depiction in Hellas is complex and also paradoxically affirms his humanity as Mahmud's assertion shows, "Thou art a man" (738). Ahasuerus, the wandering Jew, figured in Shelley's literary consciousness from his earliest writings. In Queen Mab (1813) Shelley's portrayal of Ahasuerus was virtually incorporeal: "a wondrous phantom" whose "inessential figure cast no shade / Upon the golden floor" (VII. 64, 71-2). In the much later composition the depiction of Ahasuerus is far more sophisticated. One of Shelley's notes to Hellas reveals the subtlety with which he sought to portray him:

I could easily have made the Jew a regular conjuror, and the Phantom an ordinary ghost. I have preferred to represent the Jew as disclaiming all pretension, or even belief, in supernatural agency, and as tempting Mahmud to that state of mind in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination. (PW, 479 n. 6)

Shelley's disavowal of a "supernatural agency" suggests that Ahasuerus' powers are somehow within the possibility of human potential. Here, in "the confusion of thought with the objects of thought," Shelley dissolves the boundaries of subjective and objective reality, and offers a resolution to the Cartesian schism between mind and matter. "Confusion" is appropriately employed in its rarer meaning of intermixing, or coalescence.⁵ David Bohm's understanding of the impact of thought on the whole state of being cogently exemplifies the underlying dynamics in Shelley's suggestion that "ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations." For

Bohm “thought is never just thought, it’s also the bodily state, the feeling, the nerves. Whatever is going on in the intellectual part connects with everything else.”⁶

Although Shelley advanced the notion of unity between self and world in On Life, he asserted that the mind had limited potential: it “cannot create, it can only perceive” (PP, 478). But his note to Hellas beguilingly proposes that thought is vitally creative when empowered by emotive feelings, with “the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination.” This creative vision is also evident in Prometheus Unbound where Shelley validates an ontological consequence for emotional cognition with the hypostatization of the Furies.⁷

Pivotal to Plato’s hierarchical philosophy of reality is the pre-eminence accorded to the intellectual realm of ideas. Hellas also privileges eternal ideas over current forms by celebrating the “chrystalline sea / Of thought and its eternity” (698-9). However, Shelley’s poetic vision is a creative appropriation of Platonic philosophy; the world depicted in Hellas is not an immutable “realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless,”⁸ but created moment by moment through successive energy cycles of destruction and renewal:

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
 From creation to decay,
 Like the bubbles on a river
 Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
 But they are still immortal
 Who through Birth’s orient portal
 And Death’s dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
 Clothe their unceasing flight
 In the brief dust and light
 Gathered around their chariots as they go;
 New shapes they still may weave,

New Gods, new Laws receive,
 Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
 On Death's bare ribs had cast. (197-210)

Shelley explains his philosophical ideas in this stanza as one of contrast between “the immortality of the living thinking beings which . . . clothe themselves in matter, with the transience of the noblest manifestations of the external world” (PP, 416 n. 4). What distinguishes Shelley’s thought is the presentation of immortality in continual activity: “Sparkling, bursting, borne away. / But they are still immortal.” A valid approximation to Shelley’s concept can be found in Bohm’s “implicate” and “explicate” paradigms of reality, outlined in Chapter One. These interrelated orders have a dynamic relationship of ceaseless manifestation and dissolution, and form a totality which Bohm terms “Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement” (WIO, 11).

Plato’s account of creation in the Timaeus devalued human emotion as an inevitable part of mortality where “terrible and necessary feelings” give rise to “two foolish counsellors, obstinate passion and credulous hope.”⁹ Conversely in Shelley’s metaphysics “hope” is quintessential for the regeneration of Greece: “Through the sunset of Hope / Like the shapes of a dream / What Paradise islands of glory gleam!” (1050-2). Moreover “passion” does not obscure reality, but is the generative power which facilitates its enactment. Whereas Platonism aspires to transcend the world-of-sense, Shelley elevates human emotion to a quasi-divine level. A significant Romantic precedent is found in Blake’s A Vision of The Last Judgment (1810):

Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern’d their
 Passions or have No Passions, but because they have Cultivated their
 Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not the Negations of Passion, but

Realities of Intellect, from which all the Passions Emanate Uncurbed in their
Eternal Glory.¹⁰

In *Hellas* Ahasuerus likewise explains an intricately dynamic relationship between thought and emotion, the combination of which unfolds the world's destiny:

Thought

Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
They are, what that which they regard, appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er, worlds, worms,
Empires and superstitions . . . (795-801)

To make "Thought" the principal determinant of futurity is a far reaching claim and suggests a mutable world in a state of continual recreation. This creative process is delineated to encompass all levels of existence, both physical and mental: "worlds, worms, / Empires and superstitions." In the heavily cancelled drafting of this lines, Shelley frequently revised the linguistic organization and on three occasions tried to incorporate "Passion" immediately following "Thought":

thought alone

Passion, art,-

And—its [inform] [pe]

Passion—and will

And its [im-me]

P assion & will—& reason

And its quick elements, sense, passion will.

(HN, E. 7, p. 116, 1-7)

This persistent rearrangement further supports the prominence of "Passion" in Shelley's conception of the "animating principle" outlined above. Comparing Shelley's expression of a creative involvement between "thought," "passion" and the material world with Bohm's ideas shows a demonstrable correspondence concerning an interpenetration of being and world. Bohm cogently expresses his notion of the totality of existence as an interconnected field:

in some sense, consciousness (which we take to include thought, feeling, desire, will, etc.) is to be comprehended in terms of the implicate order, along with reality as a whole. That is to say, we are suggesting that the implicate order applies both to matter (living and non-living) and to consciousness, and that it can therefore make possible a general relationship of these two, from which we may be able to come to some notion of a common ground of both . . . (WIO, 196)

William Drummond's Academical Questions has been shown to influence Shelley's conceptions and what is most insistent in his vision is that mind is at the mercy of deep emotions because "There is no power, by which men can create, or destroy their feelings" (AQ, 21). Similarly, Shelley declares that we cannot consciously determine whether to feel emotion because "Thoughts and feelings arise, with or without our will" (PP, 475). The central importance of emotion in Shelley's philosophical view was evident in his earliest speculations. Queen Mab provides a remarkable metaphysical and quasi-scientific analysis of existence. Shelley's vision probes deeply into the origins of creation and accredits a degree of sentient consciousness to every atom in the universe:

Throughout this varied and eternal world
 Soul is the only element; the block
 That for uncounted ages has remained
 The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight
 Is active, living spirit. Every grain
Is sentient both in unity and part,
And the minuest 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 of hate,
 That variegate the eternal universe. (IV. 139-50)
 (emphasis added)

When read in the light of Bohm's theories the underlined section comes into sharper focus. One of Bohm's most radically contentious perceptions about the structure of reality, discussed in Chapter One, "A Poetics of Being", is his teleological view that "meaning is the essence of reality" (QI, 441).¹¹ Bohm's conception ranges from the upper echelons of evolved human consciousness down to the smallest cosmic particles.¹² As Weber suggests, Bohm's view of reality, where life is implicitly meaningful, is "a beautiful and poetic metaphor" (QI, 443). Yet this teleological account is simultaneously his considered philosophic evaluation and the significance to this thesis lies in the way his view of reality illuminates Shelley's speculation that "Every grain / Is sentient both in unity and part." Both Shelley's microscopic analysis and Bohm's subatomic investigations seek to uncover deeper levels of reality, and the universal motivation, or in Shelleyan terms "animating" (PW, 479) principle that determines the way in which life unfolds. Greater relevance to these theoretical insights occurs by analyzing the way

in which Shelley's poetic conception, "Nought is but that which feels itself to be" (785), operates in Hellas.

In Shelley's portrayal of Mahmud there is a development in his character towards a more sentient level of being. Initially Mahmud's suggests that he would be willing to change his fundamental nature to mirror Ahasuerus, but considers this an impossible act: "I honour thee, and would be what thou art / Were I not what I am" (751-2). The invocation of "thou" and "thee" in Mahmud's address suggests a sense of veneration, but also creates distance and highlights the chasm between the two men. From Bohm's theoretical understanding of being, it can be deduced that Mahmud "doesn't choose his meanings; he is his meanings" (QI, 439). Consequently Mahmud acts with fundamental Islamic values; values which have been continually re woven into his experience and conditioned his perceptions of the world. As Bohm states: "What is the culture but a whole set of meanings? If you change the meaning, you have changed the culture. If you change the meaning of life to the individual, he is different" (QI, 438). Central to Ahasuerus's manipulation of events in Hellas is the way in which he exploits thoughts and emotive feelings to undermine Mahmud's perception of events and "change the meaning of life" to him. Shelley defines Ahasuerus' power thus:

It is a sort of natural magic, susceptible of being exercised in a degree by any one who should have made himself master of the secret associations of another's thoughts. (PW, 479 n. 6)

How should Ahasuerus' role in the drama be interpreted? Certainly he is pivotal. Although, as the Third Messenger relates, omens besiege Mahmud, "Ominous signs / Are blazoned broadly on the noonday sky" (601-2), Mahmud is in a state of mental impasse without Ahasuerus' guidance. Indeed, even the grave is yielding the dead to show Mahmud that his fate is one of "oblivion" (451), sealed by "The tempest of the Omnipotence of God / Which

sweeps all things to their appointed doom" (449-50). Mahmud realizes that he rules a "sinking Empire" (459), yet he is still nescient of the complex web of existence. Herein lies Ahasuerus' dramatic function. He is a metaphysician, or supreme spiritual teacher, who is aware of the universal laws emanating from the interrelatedness of all existence.

Ahasuerus' dialogue with Mahmud is a psychological battle through which he exacts a cataclysmic deconstruction of Mahmud's fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world and creates "Doubt, insecurity, astonishment" (791). Significantly Ahasuerus' revelations not only "shake / The earth on which" (787-8) Mahmud stands, they also undermine the actual solidity of the universe and expose the fragility of existing structures, "This firmament pavilioned upon chaos" (772). In the "Prologue to Hellas" the sovereign power of "Hierarchs and kings" is likewise precariously balanced, being "Pavilioned on the radiance or the gloom / Of mortal thought" (PW, 7, 10-11). This chaotic creation of destiny is encapsulated by Semichorous II, preceding Ahasuerus and Mamud's dramatic encounter:

The world's eyeless charioteer,
 Destiny, is hurrying by!
 What faith is crushed, what empire bleeds
 Beneath her earthquake-footed steeds?
 What eagle winged victory sits
 At her right hand? what shadow flits
 Before? what splendour rolls behind?
 Ruin and Renovation cry
 "Who but we?" (711-19)

Here Shelley portrays an unpredictable randomness about events as "Destiny" is carelessly driven by an "eyeless charioteer"; hence uncertainty prevails as to whether the future will be

one of "Ruin" or "Renovation." The element of chance as the major determinant in creation is in direct contrast to Mahmud's view where destiny is controlled by divine power when "God brings the Creation into being."¹³ Shelley's innovative vision of an "eyeless charioteer" can be further illuminated by distinguishing between the competing world views of the old and new physics: the classical Newtonian laws have predictability and a mechanistic determination; some quantum theories (contrary to Bohm's ideas outlined earlier), such as "the Bohr-Heisenberg view of indeterminacy," offer no certainties as they suggest that "the foundation of reality itself is an unfixed, indeterminate maze of probabilities" (QS, 12). In Hellas Shelley negotiates between these conceptual paradigms of causal predictability and complete indeterminacy by assigning potential to the human mind for transforming reality and disestablishing tyranny. Hence the "charioteer" is "eyeless" because he drives a "Destiny" that unfolds from the coagulation of competing thoughts and emotive visions, the strongest of which manifests.

In a psychological strategy, carefully wrought by Ahasuerus, Mahmud succumbs to his supremacy of thought with his admission that "Thy words / Have power on me! —I see—" (811-12). Mahmud experiences an anguished acquiescence; he is "Vexed by the wise mad talk of the old Jew" (919). In Hellas true power is not invested in destructive tyrannies where "Blood is the seed of gold" (248). Indeed, however seemingly apparent is Mahmud's success, he is led to realize the inevitability of "How what was born in blood must die—" (811). Ahasuerus' lesson is explicit:

Thou may'st now learn how the full tide of power
 Ebbs to its depths.— Inheritor of glory,
 Conceived in darkness, born in blood, and nourished
 With tears and toil, thou see'st the mortal throes
 Of that whose birth was but the same. The Past

Now stands before thee like an Incarnation
Of the To-come. . . . (848-54)

That which is ill-begotten, "Conceived in darkness," is inevitably doomed; hence the cry of "Victory! Victory!" is a temporary aberration: "Weak lightning before darkness! poor faint smile / Of dying Islam" (914-16). It is an immutable law of the creative cycle that empires arising from death and destruction have unstable foundations and are ultimately vanquished:

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

Mary Shelley's "Note on Hellas" endorses this understanding; her comment on these lines praises Shelley's vision as "philosophical truth felicitously imaged forth" (PW, 482). Ahasuerus exposes "the guilty mind" of Mahmud when he raises "the sulphurous mist" (830) that has hitherto obscured his perceptions of reality. Consequently, in his final speech, Mahmud is left despondently echoing Ahasuerus' prophecy:

Come what may,
The Future must become the Past, and I
As they were to whom once this present hour,
This gloomy crag of Time to which I cling
Seemed an Elysian isle of peace and joy
Never to be attained. — I must rebuke

This drunkenness of triumph ere it die
 And dying, bring despair. Victory? poor slaves! (923-30)

Ahasuerus has firmly planted the idea of inevitable defeat in Mahmud's mind, thus ensuring Greek liberation and Turkish defeat.¹⁴ A seeming paradox arises in Shelley's creative theory; he stress the significance of "Passion" (796) as a central feature of his creative vision and yet Ahasuerus, in true Socratic style, relies solely upon mental powers as he has virtually transcended the world of sense. However, even though Ahasuerus appears devoid of emotion himself, he acts like a catalyst by invoking an intense emotional response in Mahmud which impairs logical thought and reaches his innermost being: "Wild —wilder thoughts convulse / My Spirit" (806-7). Consequently Mahmud experiences mental confusion; he is uncertain whether he has been deceived by Ahasuerus into creating a vision of his deepest fears:

Were there such things or may the unquiet brain,
 Vexed by the wise mad talk of the old Jew,
 Have shaped itself these shadows of its fear? (918-20)

Wilson Knight rightly attributes a benign outcome to Ahasuerus's teachings as he is "gradually demoralizing, or rather regenerating, Mahmoud the Tyrant."¹⁵ Permanent regeneration is central to Shelley's poetic vision for humanity to -escape- from the habitual recurrence of destruction:

O cease! must hate and death return?
 Cease! must men kill and die?
 Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
 Of bitter prophecy. (1096-99)

In these lines Shelley presents a disheartening vision of the future: the “dregs of the urn” and “bitter prophecy” are in direct contrast to Laon and Cythna which is infused with optimism overflowing “from Hope’s immortal urn” (CP, 647). In Shelley’s earlier lyrical drama, Prometheus Unbound, Prometheus’s redemption occurs through heart-felt compassion, experienced even under intense anguish. Mahmud’s regeneration occurs through an epiphanic realization that his perceptions about the structure of reality are totally flawed.¹⁶ Ahasuerus comments on this regeneration: “the sulphurous mist is raised thou see’st—” (830). Perhaps the greatest hope for the amelioration of humanity is that Mahmud, who personifies tyranny, experiences a radical change in consciousness; he experientially grasps Ahasuerus’s spiritual lessons at a deep level with the insight that “nought we see or dream, / Possess or lose or grasp at can be worth / More than it gives or teaches” (921-3).

An examination of The “Hellas” Notebook elucidates that during his composition of the drama, Shelley’s foremost concern was to exhibit the manifold connections between the intellectual realm of thought and the supremacy of political power. Mary Shelley’s “Note on Hellas” confirms that Shelley concentrated on “the assertion of the intellectual empire” which she attributed to his “peculiar style”; her justified admiration of Hellas as “among the most beautiful” (PW, p. 481) of Shelley’s compositions indicates that “peculiar” should be interpreted here as distinctive. Yet in the published poem there is a less inclusive declaration “of the intellectual empire” than in the draft. Twice Shelley pondered over incorporating the following lines before striking them out: “Sultan thy power thy is built on thought,— / Thy Sultan thy power is built on thought” (HN, E. 7, p. 116, 20-1). Why Shelley decided to withhold an explicit declaration that thought is the metaphysical principle inherent in Mahmud’s sovereignty is unclear. In the finalized drama, immediately following where these deletions would have appeared, Ahasuerus beguilingly offers Mahmud precognition: “Would’st thou behold the future?— ask and have! / Knock and it shall be opened—look and lo!” (803-4). These lines are ingeniously contextualized within a biblical framework, so that

extraordinary proposal of prescience is not instantly dismissed by the reader, like Mahmud as “Wild — wilder thoughts” (806), because it conveys a distinct sense of familiarity. But prescience is an “art” that has so far eluded Mahmud, because he doubts its credibility even with Ahasuerus’ powers: “thou art no interpreter of dreams; / Thou dost not own that art” (757-8). Ahasuerus opens Mahmud’s consciousness to the possibility of psychic power, facilitating the recall of his dream with the hypostatization of Mahomet II.

What thou see’st

Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream.

A dream itself, yet, less, perhaps, than that

Thou callest reality. Thou mayest behold

How cities, on which empire sleeps enthroned,

Bow their tower’d crests to Mutability. (841-6)

The heavily punctuated line (843) commencing with “A dream” forces the reader to pause to elicit the precise relation between “dream” and “reality.” The “Hellas” Notebook reveals the significance that Shelley himself attributed to dreams: “A dream itself, ~~as all things~~” (HN, E. 7, p. 214, 5). Again in drafting Shelley considers making an overt statement of the interrelationship between thought and power, struggling over the following lines: “Sultan - thy power, and that thy father wielded / ~~Is — thought — / Is but one thought tempered with many.~~” (HN, E. 7, p. 116, 30-2). “One thought tempered with many” vitally discloses the most salient feature of Shelley’s creative theories; all thoughts, good and evil, compete as metaphysical energies for physical manifestation. Shelley states that the factor which determines whose thoughts will unveil the future is “Passion” (796) in the poem, and “the excess of passion” in his note to Hellas (PW, 479 n. 6). “Passion” is designated as the primary activating agent and it is the strength of the emotive force that materializes a particular thought, or group of thought

forms. An effective example occurs with the conflicting collective visions of the Greeks and the Turks which compete in "The mingled battle cry" (828). Whilst drafting *Hellas*, Shelley encapsulated this dynamic battle in a metaphysical metaphor: "legions of swift thought" (HN, E. 7, p. 114). The Greeks are firmly focused on their impending success with their shout "Εν τούτω νικη—" (829) translated by Reiman and Powers as "In this [sign], Victory" (PP, 433 n. 2); the Turkish war cry, "Allah-Illa, Allah!" (829), fixates on God and invokes a power, the consequences of which, are not fully understood by anyone except Ahasuerus:

Thou would'st ask that giant spirit
 The written fortunes of thy house and faith—
 Thou would'st cite one out of the grave to tell
 How what was born in blood must die—. (808-11)

Ahasuerus, who is "Mocked with the curse of immortality" (151) participates in the realm of eternity and from this omniscient perspective realizes that Mahmud's supremacy is coming to an end. With the hypostatization of The Phantom of Mahomet the Second, Shelley indulges his youthful fascination with "Hopes of high talk with the departed dead."¹⁷ "The imperial shade" warns Mahmud of his impending doom: "I come / Thence whither thou must go! the grave is fitter / To take the living than give up the dead" (861-3). "The written fortunes" (809) of Islam, enshrined in *The Koran*, reveal an historical precedent where God sided with the Greeks and promised them victory, after they were defeated by the Persians in A.D. 615.¹⁸

II

The centrality of Shelley's "own sensations" and fervent imagination as the origination of reality is epitomized in a letter to Peacock written on the 6 November 1818: "—You know I

always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object” (LS II, 47). This statement has been misinterpreted as an idealistic avoidance of physical reality. But here “manifestation” crucially underlines Shelley’s engagement with the world and his suggestion of a dynamic role for human consciousness in the formation of reality. As such Shelley’s declaration could be celebrated as a creative dictum, rather than censured as a technique of displacement.¹⁹ The “Preface” to Hellas shows that Shelley was aware of the contemporary milieu and it has been credited as “one of the most active political statements on the struggle for liberty which Shelley ever framed . . .” (SP, 678). Furthermore, Mary Shelley remarks how Shelley avidly followed the current political struggles: “The interest he took in the progress of affairs was intense” (PW, 481). Shelley’s concern in Hellas is in revealing the intricate metaphysical principles which combine to create futurity. As in Prometheus Unbound, Shelley is consistent in his recognition that the mimetic representation of death and destruction has not the creative potential to transform the Greek cause into victory. The visionary nature of Shelley’s conceptions concerning the primacy of thought that pervade his work are now receiving credence through the emergent theories about the structure of reality, following the advent of modern physics.²⁰ Yuri Orlov examines states of consciousness in relation to true or false assertions about the nature of reality and deduces that:

the appearance of statements “known to be false” (from the viewpoint of a classical observer), . . . gives a key to the understanding of creative thinking, when a person states or depicts “what in fact does not exist.” According to our approach, the person potentially “sees” several versions simultaneously without completely realizing any of them, and then one version “pops up” (materializes) as the result of a free choice.²¹

Orlov suggests that this nebulous stage of creative perception could be termed “wave thinking”,²² a designation that can be metaphorically appropriated to define the creative principle in Shelley’s coalescence of thought and emotion. Indeed this concept of “wave thinking” perfectly explains the dynamics of the visualization technique where Shelley sees “a manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object.” Creative perception is significant to the Hellenic spirit of freedom that presides over the drama.²³ In view of the poem’s affirmation that “words / Have power” (811-12), it is reasonable to conjecture that Shelley’s anxiety to have the drama published quickly may partly be attributed to his belief that Hellas could exert a decisive effect on the “final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement” (PP, 408). In this way Hellas would influence “the curtain of futurity which falls upon the unfinished scene” (PP, 408). Shelley wrote to his publisher, Charles Ollier, on 11 November 1821:

I send you the Drama of Hellas . . .—What little interest this Poem may ever excite, depends upon its immediate publication; I entreat you therefore to have the goodness to send the Ms. instantly to a Printer, & the moment you get a proof, dispatch it to me by the Post. (LS II, 365)

Certainly Shelley took care to eliminate any impediment that might delay publication by giving Ollier editorial discretion over the notes, with—the “liberty to suppress” (LS II, 365) any suggestion that could be construed as subversive in the notes.

Noticeably next to “Passion” in the draft to Hellas, Shelley initially considered and then crossed out “art” (HN, E. 7, p. 116, 2) as one of the “quick elements” (796) which combine to unfold futurity. Accordingly Shelley’s artistic rendering of Greek victory and his prophecy that “Islam must fall” (887), generated under the inspiration of “a moment of enthusiasm” (PW, 481), could in themselves be instrumental in affecting the Greek cause. Indeed earlier, in A

Defence of Poetry, Shelley makes the creative avowal that poetry precipitates regeneration: poetry “creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration” (PP, 505-6). Shelley annihilates the idea of Turkish victory. In his second note to Hellas Shelley states that:

it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity, let him be permitted to have conjectured the condition of that futurity towards which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality. (PW, 478)

Shelley’s insistent vision of Greek victory against seemingly certain defeat is a conjecturing of futurity which exemplifies Orlov’s theoretical exposition of “wave thinking.” Indeed Shelley frequently reiterates the crucial factor of focused human consciousness upon the determination of events. Mary Shelley’s note to Hellas reveals Shelley’s strong adherence to a vision of success: “Almost against reason, as it appeared to him, he resolved to believe that Greece would prove triumphant” (PW, 481). Mary Shelley also draws attention to other poetic precedents of Shelley “prophesying” victory: “Shelley had hymned the dawn of liberty in Spain and Naples, in two odes dictated by the warmest enthusiasm” (PW, 481).

In relation to the creation of futurity, Mahmud effectively formulates the drama’s most imperative question:

but the unborn hour,
Cradled in fear and hope, conflicting storms,
Who shall unveil? (752-4)

These lines are cleverly contrived to encapsulate the underlying chaos, “storms” of opposing emotions, “fear and hope,” from which the future will emerge. Surprisingly, this deep metaphysical understanding of creation, which elicits Ahasuerus’s conceptions about the nature of existence is spoken by Mahmud, before the “sulphurous mist is raised” (830) from his ideologically distorted vision. However, although Mahmud realises that the fundamental issue is who or what determines destiny, his rhetoric expounds a pre-determined fatalism which is disempowering: he affirms that “device, or God, / Can make the future present—let it come!” (758-9). Mahmud’s perception of reality is conditioned by the Islamic world-view which demands submission to God’s supremacy: “God has sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. He has power over all things.”²⁴ Humanity is perceived as being separate from creation and plays a non-participatory role. Consequently Mahmud tells Ahasuerus that “Nor thou, nor I, nor any / Mighty or wise” (754-5) can reveal the future. Here Mahmud is propounding a divine determinism which was prevalent in antiquity and central to Aeschylus’ The Persians. Parallels between Mahmud’s philosophy in Hellas and the Aeschylean drama are evident in relation to the prophetic importance of dreams and the concept of divine intervention controlling events whose outcome is beyond mortal reach. The Persians opens with the Chorus of Elders doubting whether humanity has the power to escape divine will:

Yet, while Heaven with tortuous plan
Works its will, what mortal man
Can elude immortal guile?²⁵

Similarly in The Koran “Men cannot forestall their doom, nor can they retard it.”²⁶ The primacy of “immortal guile” is consistent throughout The Persians with the Ghost of Darius likewise declaring that “heaven takes part, for good or ill, with man’s own zeal.”²⁷ Accordingly,

humanity has no option but “to trust / Divine Prophecy, which shall be fulfilled / To the last jot.”²⁸ Hence Queen Atossa realizes that prescience can be attained simply by reaching a correct interpretation of dreams:

O vivid dream that lit the darkness of my sleep,
 How clearly you forewarned me of calamity!
 And, Councillors, how lightly you interpreted!²⁹

There is a crucial difference between Atossa’s dream and Mahmud’s: Atossa has a clear recollection of her vision; Mahmud’s repeated nightmare leaves a strong residue of fear making him “strangely moved” (124), but he is unable to decipher the content: the dream leaves “no figure upon memory’s glass” (131). However, even though Mahmud has no conscious recall of his dream, the psychological consequences are immense, virtually sundering his being:

Thrice has a gloomy vision hunted me
 As thus from sleep into the troubled day,
 It shakes me as the tempest shakes the sea. (128-30)

That Shelley intended to portray Mahmud as deeply disturbed is supported by the following cancelled lines from The “Hellas” Notebook: “~~And—B ewild ers me—&—darkens me,—&—fills—/ My d ay with—s hadow~~” (HN, E. 7, p. 61, 10-11). Additionally the replacement of “haunted” in the draft (HN, E. 7, p. 61, 21) with “hunted” in the drama intensifies the terror. Such a devastating impact of fear and confusion on Mahmud’s consciousness is crucial to the mental action in Hellas. Indeed this emotional turmoil can be seen as the decisive point from which Turkish power begins to decline. Jung’s psychoanalytical investigations confer a validity on dreams equal to that of physical experiences; he places “dreams on a plane with

physiological fact."³⁰ Moreover, in Jung's view, dreams are unanticipated and reveal a degree of knowledge that the dreamer may be unwilling to concede in a rational waking state: dreams are "the expression of an involuntary psychic process not controlled by the conscious outlook. It presents the subjective state as it really is."³¹ Here it would be germane to conjecture that a vision of Greek victory appears in Mahmud's dream, but he is reluctant to concede this possibility. An examination of The "Hellas" Notebook together with Hellas demonstrates the precise attention that Shelley gave to the inherent spiritual and metaphysical principles underlying the political events of the time. Evidence to substantiate the significance of dreams is found in the Chorus of Greek Captive Women:

Breathe low, low!

The spell of the mighty mistress now

When Conscience lulls her sated snake

And Tyrants sleep, let Freedom wake.

Breathe! Low —low

The words which like secret fire shall flow

Through the veins of the frozen earth—low, low! (27-33)

Here the onomatopoeic diction artfully entices drowsiness, but it is an unnatural drug-induced slumber, strewn with "opiate flowers" (1). Unsurprisingly, Mahmud offers some resistance by tossing on his "restless pillow" (2). The Indian slave's lyrics, interspersed with the opening chorus, present a challenge in interpretation. Edward Larrissy conveys little discernment regarding Shelley's abhorrence of slavery and deems that "The Indian slave is devoted to the Sultan," and "If Mahmud is capable of inspiring such devotion, perhaps he is not all bad."³² The sincerity of the slave's loyalty is questionable; subservience to tyranny is an anathema to Shelley's political views, especially in a poem which reverberates with a call for

liberation and condemnation of bondage: "O Slavery! thou frost of the world's prime" (676). "Hell, Sin, and Slavery" (218) are the triad of evils which destroyed the paradisaical "golden years" (238). Nevertheless the Indian's tenderness cannot be overlooked and is evident in the lines "I touch thy temples pale / I breathe my soul on thee!" (21-2). But perhaps there is an ironic intent to this tenderness; it is when "Tyrants sleep" that "Freedom" awakes (30). Mahmud's exploitation and destruction of humanity result in his alienation from creation, similar to Jupiter's estrangement prior to his dispossession in Prometheus Unbound. Hassan informs Mahmud that "Nature from all her boundaries is moved / Against" him and that "the Earth rebels" (441-2, 443).

The gender of the Indian slave is not revealed in the published poem, but an earlier draft shows that Shelley initially attributed the first two stanzas of the slave's lyrics to a female named "F atima" (HN, E. 7, p. 63, 1-18). A discarded lyrical fragment, written concurrently with Hellas, "Judith loved not her enslaver" (HN, E. 7, p. 92), reveals Shelley's interest in the intense negative feelings originating from enforced servitude. A pointed similarity between the two compositions is that both slaves share the same cultural inheritance: Judith is also Asian, depicted as "Soft Indian" (HN, E. 7, p. 92, 10). The repeated deletions in the draft shows Shelley's detestation of captivity: "enslaver", "foe", "~~oppressor~~" and "tyrant" all reinforce this condemnation (HN, E. 7, p. 92, 1, 2, 13). The lyric affirms one of the most insistent themes in Shelley's writing; love is only possible with total sexual and political equality:

Yet Love him, – no love can be

him

Holy between thee & thee

Loves live only with the free . .

(HN, E. 7, p. 92, 24-8)

There are distinct echoes from Laon and Cythna where Shelley composes a vision of freedom reliant on sexual equality. Life is corrupted in its foundations if “Woman as the bond-slave dwells / Of man a slave” (CP, 3314-5). The subservience of women is enshrined in the Koranic revelations: “Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other . . .”³³ In Hellas, Mahmud is the personification of patriarchal authority in its most tyrannical form; he endorses the violation of human life with the destruction of women and children when he asks Daood,

Are there no Grecian virgins

Whose shrieks and spasms and tears they may enjoy?

No infidel children to impale on spears? (242-4)

Shelley took every opportunity to denounce the invidious gender relations of domination and subordination; the opening of Hellas with its chorus of Greek captive women and Indian slave reiterates this passionate censure. Shelley’s portrayal of the slave’s seeming devotion has undertones of ironic cunning. One of the many erased phrases in “The Hellas Notebook” indicates that Shelley considered the slave’s betrayal: “One kiss false slave” (HN, E. 7, p. 59, 13). But this suggestion of betrayal appears counteracted a few lines later in a confused passage: “I see ~~true no false~~ / All false like Greeks . . . thou here true Fatima / One kiss_ go drown thy self . . .” (HN, E. 7, pp. 59-60, 33-4, 1). As these lines precede Mahmud’s awakening, it is possibly his perception of events that is becoming obscured. This mental confusion helps to expedite Ahasuerus’ mission to challenge and transform Mahmud’s perception of reality. Certainly in the finished poem there appears to be collusion between the Indian and the Chorus to lure Mahmud into a restful state where he “might’st win one hour of quiet sleep” (26). The Indian’s lyric evokes the notion of death: “Soft as love, and calm as death, / Sweet as a summer night without a breath” (12-13). This suggestion is echoed by the

Chorus, "That calm sleep / Whence none may wake, where none shall weep" (19-20). The reiteration of rhymes such as "sleep" "deep" and "weep", between the Chorus and the Indian's lyrics, provides a linguistic connection that conveys a sense of conspiracy. Certainly Mahmud's sleep is essential as his dream precipitates the sequential dialogue with Ahasuerus. This interpretation of complicity ratifies Mahmud's intuitive fear of defeat and desire to avert looming disaster: "To stem the torrent of descending time" (350).

III

Dreams operate as complex structures of perception in Hellas and exemplify Shelley's philosophical concept of unity. Montague Ullman's exposition of dream experience draws on David Bohm's "implicate order" of reality to suggest that "while dreaming, we seem able to transcend individual boundaries to move toward our place in a larger whole."³⁴ It is during a conscious waking state that our sense of disconnection to the world occurs: "Awake, we are mired in our own discreteness."³⁵ In the psychoanalytic tradition, Jung's ideas about artistic creativity suggest a penetration into deeper levels of being with the artist's "re-immersion in the state of participation mystique":

He has plunged into the healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche, where man is not lost in the isolation of consciousness and its errors and sufferings, but where all men are caught in a common rhythm which allows the individual to communicate his feelings and strivings to mankind as a whole.

(SMA, 105)

Ullman's research suggests that dreams are crucial to our existence, as they are primarily and collectively "concerned with the survival of the species."³⁶ Ullman and Jung's theories

illuminate the way in which Shelley utilizes dreams to promote the concept of a unified field of consciousness in Hellas. Shelley's vision is assuredly "participation mystique"; he searches for the origins of creation to recreate imaginatively a paradisaal age for humanity whilst simultaneously lamenting the absence of this state:

Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep
 From one whose dreams are Paradise
 Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
 And Day peers forth with her blank eyes;
 So fleet, so faint, so fair,
 The Powers of the earth and air
 Fled from the folding star of Bethlehem;
 Apollo, Pan, and Love,
 And even Olympian Jove
 Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them;
 Our hills and seas and streams,
 Dispeopled of their dreams,
 Their waters turn to blood, their dew to tears,
 Wailed for the golden years. (225-38)

In this choral lyric, "dreams are Paradise" and waking precipitates loss. Once the world is "Dispeopled of their dreams" the golden age is lost and death and destruction ensue. But because existence is cyclical in Hellas the tone of regret, "Wailed for the golden years" (238), turns full circle towards the end of the poem with an optimistic affirmation of renewal:

The world's great age begins anew,

The golden years return,
 The earth doth like a snake renew
 Her winter weeds outworn;
 Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
 Like wrecks of a dissolving dream. (1060-5)

The "Prologue to Hellas" equates the perfection in the golden age with the origin and purity of thought, which provided a cerebral prototype for Greece's glory:

Within the circuit of this pendent orb
 There lies an antique region, on which fell
 The dews of thought in the world's golden dawn,
 Earliest and most benign, and from it sprung
 Temples and cities and immortal forms
 And harmonies of wisdom and of song,
 And thoughts, and deeds worthy of thoughts so fair.

(PW, 31-7)

Shelley celebrates prophets and poets who have the visionary capacity to transcend the temporal socio-historical concerns. They are, like Isaiah and Virgil, "ardent spirits overleaping the actual reign of evil which we endure and bewail" because they can mentally create a society of harmony and perfection "in which the lion shall lie down with the lamb" (PW, pp. 479-80).

Dream is employed in Hellas to signify awareness beyond ordinary human parameters. For instance Ahasuerus' obscure origins are not within the consensus of factual knowledge: "others dream / He was a preadamite" (152-3). "Preadamite" takes the reader out of historical time with "dream" serving as the gateway to the mythical past. Dreams are privileged states of

awareness imparting wisdom and prophecy, and allow access to deeper levels of being. Mahmud acknowledges this significance with his comment that “’tis said his tribe / Dream, and are wise interpreters of dreams” (135-6). Shelley’s preference for “tribe” rather than “nation” suggests a remoteness and rarity to this visionary mode of apprehending. But this directly contrasts with the universal claim that Ahasuerus’ “natural magic” is “susceptible of being exercised in a degree by any one” (PW p. 479). Here lies one of the irresolvable paradoxes in Shelley’s work; ideas that are universally applicable and intended to benefit humanity are expressed so profoundly that they are realizable by a minority élite. In Hellas Shelley suggests that ultimately power is not political, but invested in the individual’s development and mastery of their mind. Ahasuerus convincingly demonstrates his supremacy, accomplished by:

Deep contemplation, and unwearied study
 In years outstretched beyond the date of man,
 May have attained to sovereignty and science
 Over those strong and secret things and thoughts
 Which others fear and know not. (157-61)

Such a degree of intellectual mastery is, in part, a Shelleyan self-portrait, but it is also reminiscent of Socrates’ wisdom. Ahasuerus willingly submits to extreme deprivation, “dreadful abstinence / And conquering penance of the mutinous flesh” (155-6). Similarly, “there were none who could sustain hunger like Socrates”, he endured “incredible hardships” and even “walked barefoot upon the ice” (PS, 457). But it is the art of composition that Shelley most effectively appropriates from his study of Plato. Ahasuerus’ skill in tempting Mahmud to reassess his views on the nature of existence resembles the adept maneuverings of a Platonic Dialogue.

Ontologically dreams appear to construct a view of reality in which subconscious realms have dominion over the phenomenal world.³⁷ In relation to the significance accorded to dreams as the primary mode of apprehension in Shelley's poetry, Hellas is a notable precursor to The Triumph of Life in which vision unfurls from a "trance of wondrous thought" (41).

¹ Pat Rogers, ed., Alexander Pope, Oxford Authors Ser. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), Epistle I, 267-8; hereafter referred to as Pope.

² Pope, Epistle I, p. 271.

³ Pope, Epistle I, 23-4.

⁴ N. J. Dawood, trans., The Koran (1956; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 287; hereafter referred to as The Koran.

⁵ Elsewhere, I have made a similar point about Shelley's use of "confused" in relation to Epipsychidion. Here the envisioned coition between the poet and Emily is seen as one of total blending, when "The fountains of our deepest life, shall be / Confused in passion's golden purity" (570-1), Morris, MA Diss., 80.

⁶ Bohm, Thought as a System, 39.

⁷ See Chapter Six, Prometheus Unbound, 174-5.

⁸ Plato, The Last Days of Socrates: "Euthyphro", "The Apology", "Crito", "Phaedo", trans. H. Tredennick (1954; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), 131.

⁹ Plato, Timaeus and Critias, trans. Desmond Lee (1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 97.

¹⁰ Blake, p. 615.

¹¹ For an analysis of Bohm's teleological account of existence see Chapter One, 24-5.

¹² Bohm states that "Mind and matter are inseparable, in the sense that everything is permeated with meaning . . . at no stage are mind and matter ever separated. There are different levels of mind. Even the electron is informed with a certain level of mind", QI, 443.

¹³ The Koran, 284.

¹⁴ Earl Wasserman perceives that "tyranny is for Shelley a spirit, a disposition of the soul, not external events, and the guarantee of its overthrow is not the progress of the war but the waning of the internal spirit which is tyranny's source", SCR, 386.

¹⁵ Knight, The Starlit Dome, 247.

¹⁶ This realization occurs as Ahasuerus has penetrated to the deepest levels of Mahmud's being, both emotional and mental. In his discussion of "A Sort of Natural Magic" Dawson suggests that "As in mesmeric therapy, Mahmud is forced to look for the answers he seeks within himself. His reactions to Ahasuerus' words register the other's hypnotic influence . . .", Dawson, 24.

¹⁷ "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", 52.

¹⁸ The Koranic revelation reads thus: "The Greeks have been defeated in a neighbouring land. But in a few years they shall themselves gain victory: such being the will of God before and after", The Koran, 284.

¹⁹ The ideological critique of Jerome McGann examines the notion of displacement in the Romantic vision. Following his discussion of Adonais, McGann accounts for Shelley's "implacable futurism" as "a displaced reflection of his immediate (frustrated) 'hopes'", Jerome J. McGann, The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), 123. Although McGann's critique intends to avoid "debunking or deconstructing the actual works themselves", (1) his perspective of poetry as "ideological products" (3) imposes a reductionism which undermines the Romantic vision as one of illusion: "Romantic Poetry pursued the illusions of its own ideas and Ideals in order to avoid facing the truths of immediate history and its own Purgatorial blind" (134); hereafter referred to as McGann.

²⁰ My contention that Shelley's poetic vision allows us to have a deeper understanding about the nature of existence is in contradistinction to McGann's view. He surmises that "our present culture has advanced . . . well beyond those forms of consciousness which came to dominance in the Romantic Period", McGann, 13.

²¹ Y. Orlov, "The Wave Logic of Consciousness: A Hypothesis", International Journal of Theoretical Physics, 21, 1, 1982, 45; hereafter referred to as Orlov. Danah Zohar discusses Orlov's hypothesis in QS, 62, but her selected citation omits a point that is of special relevance to my argument. Namely Orlov's suggestion "of statements 'known to be false'

(from the viewpoint of the classical observer)", that is from a Newtonian perspective, which I think encapsulates Shelley's visionary technique of focusing on victory, rather than the current reality of oppression.

²² Orlov, 45.

²³ However the spirit of freedom in Hellas is not unchallenged: "Shelley's affirmations are tinged by anxiety" that death will return, LL, 153.

²⁴ The Koran, 92.

²⁵ Aeschylus, "Prometheus Bound." "The Suppliants." "Seven Against Thebes." "The Persians." trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 125; hereafter referred to as Aeschylus, The Persians.

²⁶ The Koran, 183.

²⁷ Aeschylus, The Persians, 143.

²⁸ Aeschylus, The Persians, 145.

²⁹ Aeschylus, The Persians, 137.

³⁰ C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, trans. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (1933; London: Ark-Routledge, 1990), 6; hereafter referred to as Jung, Modern Man.

³¹ Jung, Modern Man, 6.

³² Edward Larrissy, "Ahasuerus-Xerxes: Hellas as Allegory of Dissemination", Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Readings, ed. Kelvin Everest, Essays and Studies, 45 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 92.

³³ The Koran, 64.

³⁴ Ullman, 393. For an earlier discussion of Ullman's ideas on "Wholeness and Dreaming" see Chapter Six, Prometheus Unbound, 182.

³⁵ Ullman, 393.

³⁶ Ullman, 386.

³⁷ Timothy Webb traces the literary influences on Shelley's philosophical ideas in Prometheus Unbound and suggests that his "natural tendencies towards idealism were apparently confirmed and enriched by his acquaintance with Calderón", The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 218. Calderón's metaphysical apprehension of existence in Life is a Dream (La vida es sueño), has a resonance with Shelley's ideas on the interrelationship between dreams and reality in Hellas. Segismundo's soliloquy, "It is a singular world . . ." from La vida es sueño, opens with the experiential premise that "life / Experience has taught me one thing alone that / Is made of strange unconnected dreams" (1-3). Having seen life as "A phantom haunted frenzy" (18), a vision of existence is reached in which "All life and being are but dreams and dreams / Themselves are but the dreams of other dreams" (21-2), The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts. Vol. XIX. The "Faust" Draft Notebook. MS. Shelley adds. e. 18., ed. Nora Crook and Timothy Webb (New York: Garland, 1997), p. 60 rev. Whether this transcription is written by Thomas Medwin or Edward Williams, and Shelley's own relationship to this translation, are currently unresolved critical questions. For a discussion of the various implications see the introduction in BSM XIX, pp. lxiv- lxvi.

Chapter 8

Shelley's "Enchanted Heart": Love Lyrics to Jane Williams

*Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.¹*

(Keats)

*'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now.²*

(Byron)

I

This chapter focuses on the imaginative and psychological processes at work in Shelley's lyrics to Jane Williams. To interpret the undercurrent of emotional intrigue, where Shelley insinuates himself between Jane and Edward, my analysis develops a metaphorical model of quantum holism. Communication in this quantum paradigm focuses on the free-flowing movement of thoughts and feelings and their subtle, yet permeating, influences on Shelley's immediate circle. Chapter One, "A Poetics of Being", outlined an all-embracing quantum view of existence where mind and matter intermesh in an indivisible way. Quantum holism was shown to negate the possibility of detached spectators of reality since its a priori principle is one of creative engagement; interrelationship with both the world and others is fundamental. With this principle of seamless unity life is understood as a dynamically creative act arising from an overlapping interweaving reciprocity "between mind, and matter, psyche and soma" (UU, 386).

My inclusion of biographical evidence serves to illuminate the reciprocal interconnections between Shelley's personal life and his literary compositions. However biographical information needs a sensitive handling to avoid "the censorious moralizing to which his private life has been subjected by ultra-Tories and radical feminists alike" (MYR, p. 351). Shelley's creative technique was inspired by portraying actualities from his own life. Moreover, his ideas about the nature of existence arose from and were modified according to his own experiences."³ Shelley's expression of personal feeling, rather than abstract conceptualizing, gave his theories an authenticity and a cogent viability. The creative dialogue between artistic and personal consciousness validates Shelley's metaphysical belief that thoughts empowered by intense emotions crystallize into tangible reality the very experiences that have been previously envisioned. For David Bohm, it is not meaningful to see a separation between consciousness and the world; he posits the necessity for "a view in which the thought itself is part of the reality" (UM, 92).⁴ Furthermore Bohm envisaged that fundamental changes occur within our state of being and subsequent experience of reality when we "really see something deeply with great energy" (UM, 94). It is precisely this combination of innovative thought-forms and passion that propels Shelley's poetry and creates a new vision of the world. In his "Speculations on Metaphysics", Shelley had pointed out the erroneous mistake of neglecting our inner nature:

We do not attend sufficiently to what passes within ourselves. We combine words, combined a thousand times before . . . Our whole style of expression and sentiment is infected with the tritest plagiarisms. Our words are dead, our thoughts are cold and borrowed. (Julian V11, 62)

What characterizes the lyrics to Jane is a moment—by—moment emotional topography of Shelley's inner state of being. Here my reading is diametrically opposed to Medwin who

sought to disestablish any notion of reciprocity between lyric utterance and lived experiences. Medwin terms love poetry “(like the Epipsychidion) mere idealisms,—as ‘exercises on amatory matters.’”⁵ Not surprisingly, perhaps since Medwin is Shelley’s cousin, he attempts to defuse the emotional intrigue by painting a pristine portrait of Jane, and attributing an emotional detachment to Shelley:

But a purer being than Mrs. Williams cannot exist. Not a breath of scandal could possibly attach to her fame. The verses addressed to her always passed through the hands of Williams himself, and who had too much confidence in the virtue of one devotedly his, to harbour for a moment any jealousy of an attachment the most innocent and disinterested. Effusions such as these must not be interpreted literally.⁶

In a similar vein to Medwin’s “Platonic aspirations”,⁷ Stephen Behrendt sees Shelley’s liaison with Jane as “an idealized, platonic sort of reciprocal relationship, and perhaps little more than a dalliance on Shelley’s part.”⁸ I investigate how Shelley’s thoughts and emotions transgress the boundaries of friendship into love. In view of Shelley’s creative metaphysics, far from being purely “platonic”, my interpretation focuses on the underlying dynamics of consciousness and exposes the depth of the psychological undercurrents that inevitably existed. The bonds of relationship are primarily established metaphysically. As soon as Shelley entertains amatory feelings for Jane they are released into the field of consciousness at the level of quantum potentiality. Recurrent lyrical disclosure energizes his romantic vision of Jane to a point where personal life and poetic expression cohere into a concatenation of tangible circumstances. Initially Shelley’s comments about Jane were recorded in an almost observational tone: he remarks that Jane is as an “extremely pretty & gentle woman—apparently not very clever. I like her very much” (LS II, 256-7). Nearly a year later, after

some misgivings,⁹ Jane becomes the centre of Shelley's focus: "Mrs. W., more amiable and beautiful than ever, and a sort of spirit of embodied peace in our circle of tempests. So much for first impressions!" (LS II, 376). Generically, Shelley's lyrics to Jane appear "confessionally modern" with "the implication that Shelley has transferred his utopian hopes onto a particular, named person" (MYR, p. xxii). But this focus on an individual also makes the poems vehicles of his philosophical creed. If Shelley's theoretical speculations on the power of love to enact a transformation in society are to work at the level of mass consciousness, then they must also operate with interpersonal relationships. Interposed towards the end of Shelley's composition of The Triumph of Life in his notebook are the words "Alas I kiss you [?]" (BSM I, f. 52v, 19). At this crucial moment in the manuscript the name is maddeningly illegible and two probable nominees arise: either Shelley wrote Jane referring to Jane Williams, or Julie alluding to Rousseau's heroine from La Nouvelle Héloïse. Both possibilities are of significance to his theories on love and merit detailed comment.

Textual support for the choice of Jane is suggested by Michael O'Neill who makes a tentative comparison with a word that is scrawled in smaller print in the corner of a letter to Edward Williams (MYR, pp. 414-6). From the position of "Alas I kiss you [?]" in the Bodleian Shelley Manuscript the moment seems to be of dire consequence; the preceding line from The Triumph of Life reads, "And ~~sank~~ fell, as I have fallen by the / way side" (BSM I, f. 52v, 17-18). In Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse, Saint-Preux experiences ungovernable feelings after kissing Julie: "My-senses are disordered; all my faculties are disturbed by that fatal kiss."¹⁰ After subsequently kissing Julie's cousin, Saint-Preux analyzes his responses with the remark that "sensations are nothing but what the heart makes them."¹¹ And Saint-Preux's heart was given to Julie long before he touched her. Whether Shelley embraced Jane Williams is of consequence to his ideas on love which state that "The sexual impulse, . . . serves, from its obvious and external nature, as a kind of type or expression of the rest, as a common basis, an acknowledged and visible link" (PS, 408). Intimate physical contact is the

moment when idealized love is rendered into actual experience with release of repressed emotions. In "We Meet Not As We Parted" Shelley depicts a clandestine liaison: "We feel more than all may see" (PW, 2).¹² The illicit "moment" of passion, recollected four times in the short lyric, precipitates "a life of pain" (PW, 12): "Sweet lips, could my heart have hidden / That its life was crushed by you," (PW, 16-17). The emotions aroused in this lyric, where "One moment has bound the free" (PW, 5), are opposed to Shelley's theoretical idea of love which is an elevating and freeing experience. But such suffering captivity appears willingly chosen in the playful coda: "Methinks too little cost / For a moment so found, so lost!" (PW, 24-25).

With regard to the creative process, William Keach appropriately remarks that "Shelley uses Rousseau to make himself and his readers think about the mutual entanglements of writing and living. He might also have used Byron. But he did not dare." (SS, 234). In The Triumph of Life the figure of Rousseau hauntingly conveys a post-mortal awareness that literary creation has physical reverberations.

I sung wrote

Have suffered what they paint, or viler pain! - -

So have my words been seeds of misery

And so were But I

Thus have my words been seeds of misery - - - - . (BSM I, f. 33r, 19-23)

Reiman and Powers gloss these lines with the following interpretation: "Rousseau acted out his passions before writing them, so that his writings lack tranquillity, and therefore they enflame others as ill considered actions do" (PP, 463, n. 6). Certainly Rousseau's "writings lack tranquillity" and would have a stirring effect on his reader's consciousness. But my concern is

with a prior consideration; to discover why scenes from Rousseau's novels literally shaped his subsequent experiences. Before I discuss Shelley's lyrics to Jane Williams in detail, it is illuminating to reflect on Rousseau's artistic technique, especially since he is central to The Triumph of Life, which Shelley was writing concurrently with these lyrics.

Shelley's admiration for Rousseau is expressed in A Defence of Poetry when he describes Rousseau as being "essentially a poet" (PP, 502 n. 8). Rousseau is also confirmed as one of the immortal writers who "have celebrated the dominion of love, planting as it were trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory over sensuality and force" (PP, 497). More specifically in 1816 Shelley had praised "the divine beauty of Rousseau's imagination, as it exhibits itself in Julie" (LS I, 480). But in The Triumph of Life Shelley's Rousseau is "one of that deluded crew" (184) whose proclivity to despondency is apparent in the summation: "I feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and died" (200). Emotion is pivotal in this disclosure, and the way in which passions are channelled through the human spirit either results in dispiriting scenes of destruction, or scenes of redemptive love and harmony.¹³

Rousseau's historical contextualization in an epoch of turmoil is of relevance and, according to Edward Duffy, a primary consideration: "the 'Rousseau' in Shelley's poem is unintelligible if divorced from his implication in the blood, mire and controversy of recent European experience."¹⁴ But it is my contention that the forlorn figure of Rousseau also illustrates Shelley's deepest intuitions about the reciprocal nature of art and life. In this way, the shade of Rousseau voices an acutely perceptive statement about the nature of creativity that is philosophically more Shelleyan than Rousseauian: "I / Am one of those who have created, even / 'If it be but a world of agony.'—" (293-5). With the emphatic "I / Am" there is a sense of challenging defiance: ultimate value is invested in the ability to create; "even / If" mediates a partial exoneration for the tragic consequences. In The Triumph of Life Shelley's Rousseau is delineated as a complex persona, and as Michael O'Neill rightly discerns, with

the explanation of his fall there is not “a cut-and-dried moral perspective” but a “blurring of moral responses” (HMI, 184-5).

Perhaps the greatest affinity between Rousseau and Shelley is their extreme sensitivity to, and artistic expression of, fervent feelings. Rousseau, like Shelley, claimed he was naturally endowed with an acute sensibility: “I felt before I thought: which is the common lot of man, though more pronounced in my case than in another’s” (C, 19). But for Shelley feeling has a primacy that is more than a reaction against the Enlightenment emphasis on reason, or an authentic articulation of one’s inner state of being. Feeling has a central role in Shelley’s philosophical creed: intense passion kindles imaginative conceptions and facilitates their enactment. I examine Shelley’s conviction that passionate visions precipitate experiences by comparing the intriguing similarities between Rousseau’s fictional creation of Julie and his subsequent love for Sophie d’Houdetot.

An experience of existence which gives primacy to feelings was poeticized by Shelley in Hellas: “Nought is but that which feels itself to be” (785). Contrary to popular epistemological misconceptions, it must be understood that Shelley did not advocate a position of subjectivism. Conceptually he advances a view of being that unites the human spirit with matter in a creative reciprocity between the self and a definite universe, albeit a transient world. Some quantum theorists validate Shelley’s poetic insights: Danah Zohar’s physics of consciousness explains the way in which a distinct form is elicited from the underlying potentiality of conceivable forms:

At the moment of observation, some dialogue between the quantum wave function and the observer (be this man or machine) evokes, and thus gives concrete form to, one of the many possible realities inherent within that wave function. But there is already the potential for some very definite sort of reality there . . . (QS, 32)

Notably Zohar cautions that: "Nothing in quantum theory itself suggests that observation or the observer 'creates' reality (the properties of subatomic particles)" (QS, 31-2). But perhaps, as Shelley thought, emotion is decisive in eliciting an underlying potentiality from the realm of the imaginary and materializing it into the physical world. Certainly the interconnections between Rousseau's life and writing point to a supposition that human consciousness and emotions maybe the potent energies essential to the manifestation of "one of the many possible realities." From The Confessions it is evident that Rousseau's life followed parallel patterns to those of his literary creations.¹⁵ The following discussion offers a theoretical explanation as to why these correspondences occur.

In The Confessions the interiority gained through Rousseau's meticulous examination of his thoughts and emotions conveys a vivid portrayal of his inner life. But his reliability as a narrator is contentious on several issues. Rousseau readily admits that his details may be inaccurate: "I may omit or transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates" (C, 262). Nevertheless for the period covering his love for Sophie d'Houdetot, Rousseau states that he has "sure information in a collection of transcripts from original letters in the care of M. du Peyrou" (C, 262). Rousseau's factual imprecisions, although significant, are subordinate to an account which he terms "the history of my soul" and is authenticated by emotional exposition: "I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or about what my feelings have led me to do; and these are the chief subjects of my story" (C, 262). Of greater consequence is that Rousseau earlier writes that his version of reality is only clarified through reflection and therefore modified by hindsight: "I do not know how to see what is before my eyes; I can only see clearly in retrospect, it is only in my memories that my mind can work" (C, 114). Moreover his perceptions were distorted by an excessive fear of "worldly terrors" and can appropriately be attributed to the cognitive state now designated "persecution-mania."¹⁶ In relation to Rousseau's autobiographical quest, to convey access to an unmediated self, David

Marshall's understanding of "Sympathy" encapsulates the multiple perspectives to be carefully negotiated in interpretation:

The Confessions teaches us to read the self as a layering of double illusions which combine and overlap in continual self-eclipse—and which must be reproduced in the reactions and representations of other minds.¹⁷

Even with these complexities, tracing the correlations between Rousseau's devouring emotions and their sequential events gives a cogent insight into how art and life become mutually inspiring.

Rousseau's self-questioning reveals a conscious quest for love born of overwhelming desire: "How could it be that with such inflammable feelings, with a heart entirely moulded for love, I had not at least once burned with love for a definite object?" (C, 396). At the peak of fervid feeling, Rousseau transmutes unquenchable personal desire into imaginative vision:

The impossibility of attaining the real persons precipitated me into the land of chimeras; and seeing nothing that existed worthy of my exalted feelings, I fostered them in an ideal world which my creative imagination soon peopled with beings after my own heart . . . In my continual ecstasies I intoxicated myself with draughts of the most exquisite sentiments that have ever entered the heart of a man. (C, 398)

What emerges from Rousseau's penetrating analysis is that his world of inner vision is given greater clarity and brilliance than external reality. Once the imaginary world saturates Rousseau's consciousness, he describes an overwhelming sense of psychic enthrallment in terms of being "seduced" by his visions and experiencing a complete loss of autonomy: "I was

no longer master of myself even for a moment, the delirium never left me" (C, 404). This intense energy needs an outlet and, almost against Rousseau's reason, is channelled into literary composition: "Being completely captivated, I was forced to submit" (C, 405) to the creative impulse. From a psycho-analytical perspective, Jung explains that the literary work emanates from the subconscious and becomes a controlling power, even determining the artist's existence:

Whenever the creative force predominates, life is ruled and shaped by the unconscious rather than by the conscious will, and the ego is swept along on an underground current, becoming nothing more than a helpless observer of events. The progress of the work becomes the poet's fate and determines his psychology. It is not Goethe that creates Faust, but Faust that creates Goethe. (SMA, 103).

Similarly "the progress" of La Nouvelle Héloïse can be seen to "create" Rousseau, but it is a creation that was initially instigated through his own choice, albeit more of an unwitting rather than conscious intent. Rousseau imagines an ideal society, the creation of which dominates his apprehensions: "Altogether ignoring the human race, I created for myself societies of perfect creatures celestial in their virtue and in their beauty . . . I spent countless hours and days at it, losing all memory of anything else" (C, 398). Rousseau's experience of "fantastic amours" with their "fatal consequences" are prefigured by the creation of a character, Saint-Preux, consciously drawn with his inherent pre-dispositions: "I identified myself as far as I could with the lover and friend. But I made him young and pleasant, whilst endowing him also with the virtues and faults that I felt in myself" (C, 400-1). To confuse further the boundaries of art and life Rousseau chooses his favourite locus, Vevey at Lake Geneva, as a setting to foster "the illusion of real existence" (C, 401). Rousseau so interrelated facts from his own life with imaginative visions that they coalesced in his thought

processes. Through obsessive re-enactment vision is given a stability analogous to real life: "This fiction, by constant repetition, finally assumed greater consistency and took a fixed and definite shape in my brain" (C, 401).¹⁸ In Shelleyan terms Rousseau has "a mind so powerfully bright as to cast a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality" (LS I, 485). Rousseau's creative fantasies merge the internal realm of consciousness with the external world to achieve a sense of total integration. A vivid account of this process appears in Rousseau's Reveries of the Solitary Walker, when

Emerging from a long and happy reverie, seeing myself surrounded by greenery, flowers and birds, and letting my eyes wander over the picturesque far-off shores which enclosed a vast stretch of clear and crystalline water, I fused my imaginings with these charming sights, and finding myself in the end gradually brought back to myself and my surroundings, I could not draw a line between fiction and reality.

(RSW, 90-1)

The Rousseauian heritage of an interaction with nature in the emergence of self-definition and self-expression is a pervasive influence in Romantic poetry. The creative act is one of externalization arising from the depths of the writer's being. In this way "Rousseau immensely enlarged the scope of the inner voice. We now can know from within us, from the impulses of our own being, what nature marks as significant."¹⁹ Moreover an inclusive apprehension of an interaction with the natural world is the apotheosis of the Romantic vision; in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Byron questions, "Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part / Of me and of my soul, as I of them?" (BP II, III. 707-8). Physically, this seems literally true in view of Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall's quantum suppositions that

The dynamics of both our bodies and our minds emerge from the same laws and forces that move the sun and the moon or that bind atoms together.

There is just one reality, and we are all part of it. Physics tells us about the processes of creativity and transformation in the natural world. The physics of consciousness tells us about those same processes within ourselves and our society. If we understand the actual physical basis of transformation, perhaps we can align ourselves with it. (QS0, xi.)

Artistically Rousseau sets up a triangular situation, but with two women rather than two men: "I gave one of them a lover to whom the other was a tender friend and even something more" (C, 400). The *ménage à trois* is an implicit feature in Rousseau's emotional psychology²⁰ and his attraction to Sophie d'Houdetot is increased by her prior romantic involvement: "Her intimacy with M. de Saint-Lambert . . . made her still more interesting to me" (C, 402). Similarly Rousseau also narrates that Sophie d'Houdetot could conceive of an "intimate and delightful trio" (C, 411) if Rousseau could regain greater self-possession in her presence.

Passionate imaginings precede and most possibly conspire to determine Rousseau's romantic encounter with Sophie d'Houdetot at the Hermitage.²¹ Indeed a materialization of Rousseau's creative fantasies occurs at the climatic point of vision: "At the height of my reveries I received a visit from Mme d'Houdetot, the first she had made me in all her life . . ." (C, 402). Later Rousseau outlines another synchronism between literary creation and a sequential occurrence in his life. In an "ecstatic state" fueled by an "amorous delirium" and "erotic transports" whilst writing *La Nouvelle Héloïse* fiction collapses into actual experience. Rousseau explains that "At precisely this same time I received a second unexpected visit from Mme d'Houdetot" (C, 408). With his mental and emotional being seized by passion,

Rousseau falls hopelessly in love with Sophie d'Houdetot leaving him with "a terrible and indelible memory" (C, 408). Art and life then become chaotically confused in Rousseau's consciousness: "when trying to think of Julie I was surprised to find that I could only think of Mme d'Houdetot" (C, 410).

Philosophically Rousseau's outlook appears to be passively fatalistic; he does not acknowledge an active role in the unfolding of his destiny. In his search for love Rousseau deems "that fate owed me something she had never given me" (C, 397). So often Rousseau sees himself as a victim, his future determined by exterior circumstances: "my unlucky star prevailed" (C, 400). But Rousseau's complicity in his despair is outlined in an admission from his Reveries of the Solitary Walker; he augments fear through frenzied analysis, "My fevered imagination builds them [fears] up, works on them, magnifies them and inspects them from every angle" (RSW, 29). These destructive imaginings are projected into impending events and render Rousseau's worse apprehensions self-fulfilling prophecies. A poet's understanding of creativity is often penetrating and, in relation to Rousseau, Byron's appraisal in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III is germane: "His life was one long war with self-sought foes" (BP II, III. 752). Byron shows how Rousseau's inspiration emanates from frenzied despair:

Here the self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau,
 The apostle of affliction, he who threw
 Enchantment over passion, and from woe
 Wrung overwhelming eloquence, first drew
 The breath which made him wretched; yet he knew
 How to make madness beautiful, and cast
 O'er erring deeds and thoughts, a heavenly hue
 Of words, like sunbeams (BP II, III. 725-32)

Even though Rousseau could cast “a heavenly hue / Of words”, the foundation of his creativity emanates “from woe” and inevitably attracts despair. Rousseau’s engrossed self-obsessiveness allows no perspective for detached comment. Goethe’s hero Werther, similarly ensnared in despair, conveys a psychological truth when he remarks “that the pains people endure would be less if only . . . they did not put so much imaginative energy into recalling the memory of past misfortune. . . .”²² Even when Werther’s mind becomes unbalanced by self-inflicted despair, he still recognizes that his fate is one of self-determination: “I feel all too clearly that . . . the source of my wretchedness lies within myself, as the source of all my joy once did.”²³

In his amorous liaison Rousseau rhetorically protests a helpless innocence; he assigns culpability for his anguish equally to Saint-Lambert and Sophie d’Houdetot:

Was it I who had sought out his mistress? Was it not he who had sent her to me?
Was it not she who had come to seek me? Could I avoid receiving her? What
could I do? They alone had done the mischief, and it was I who had suffered by it.

(C, 429)

This accusatory tone and self-exoneration read as psychologically naïve, especially since Rousseau earlier confesses how he imaginatively conjures a scene of romantic seduction:

as I walked I dreamt of her I was about to see, of the affectionate welcome she
would give me, and of the kiss, that fatal kiss, even before I received it [emphasis
added]. It so fired my blood that my head was dizzy, my eyes were dazzled and
blind, and my trembling knees could no longer support me. I had to stop and sit
down; my whole bodily mechanism was in utter disorder; I was on the point of
fainting. (C, 414)²⁴

Given the friendship between Rousseau and Sophie d'Houdetot, intimate embrace would have been within the realm of potentiality. And perhaps Rousseau's unwavering focus gives his emotive vision a heightened intensity that crystallizes her kiss into tangible reality. Certainly from his account vision and thought precipitate actual experience. An explanation of Rousseau's "utter disorder" can be found in David Bohm's panpsychist paradigm of existence where consciousness and matter interpenetrate: "The mental and the physical are one. A change in the mental is a change in the physical, and a change in the physical is a change in the mental" (UM, 95). Consequently, as Rousseau's experience affirms, this unified field manifests in bodily chemical reactions as the "intellect, emotion and the whole state of the body are in a similar flux of fundamental participation" (UU, 386). With vague thoughts and little emotion only, subtle, almost imperceptible, changes occur. But Rousseau's potent visions provide a dynamic example; his emotional intensity yields an excessive physical stimulation that is overtly demonstrable to "the point of fainting." Not only does the nature of Rousseau's being change, but the whole field of consciousness is impregnated with his emotive thoughts. A way in which thoughts and emotions are all pervading is extolled by Saint-Preux in La Nouvelle Héloïse: "My charming Julie! I see you, I feel you everywhere, I breathe you in with the air that you have breathed; you penetrate my entire being." ²⁵

There are similarities between Shelley's relationship with Jane and Edward and Rousseau's with Sophie d'Houdetot and M. de Saint-Lambert. Rousseau's emotional involvement could also apply to Shelley's situation with Jane and Edward Williams: "We were both intoxicated with love—hers for her lover, and mine for her" (C, 413). In The Confessions Rousseau recognizes an ethics that advocates self-restraint in love and values, amongst other considerations, "morality and marital fidelity, which are at the root of all social order" (C, 405). Conversely Shelley's conception of love is founded on a freedom to unite. Commitment to a single partner with the exclusion of future liaisons is delineated as life-denying in Epipsychidion (1821):

I never was attached to that great sect,
 Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
 Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
 And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
 To cold oblivion. . . . (149-53)

Under the impulse of intense emotion Rousseau's need to communicate with Sophie d'Houdetot is compelling: "I was calmer for having spoken. A love known to the person who inspires it becomes more bearable" (C, 411). Similarly, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the stimulus to write emanates from unquellable feelings which, as Saint-Preux illustrates, become mitigated through articulation: "What good fortune to have found ink and paper! I am expressing my feelings in order to temper their excess; I moderate my ecstasy by describing it."²⁶ A similar mediation of desire is a major reason for Shelley giving his lyrics to Jane Williams. Both William Keach and Susan Wolfson examine Shelley's conscious motivations behind the lyrics. Their appraisals are valuable and taken as a point of reference, but my concern is also with the sub-conscious workings that fuel Shelley's creativity, and generate interrelations between art and life. Chapter One, "A Poetics of Being", explored how poetry elicited an emotional engagement which re-defined the sense of being. Accordingly, if, as Shelley thought, poetry "compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know" (PP, 505), then he was fully aware that his lyrics would have a profound effect upon Jane, one that was enhanced with each subsequent reading. With the lyrics to Jane Shelley's reliance on experiential knowledge tests his concepts to their ultimate extreme, and his theoretical conception of love falters with actual experience. Shelley's encounter with Jane confounds his elevated vision of love. Significantly Jane has a "lack of literary refinement" (LS II, 435) and is, in Shelley's estimation, "not very clever" (LS II, 257). Here Shelley's maturing ideas on love depart from his earlier insistence on a complete empathetic fulfillment: "a communion . . .

of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive" (PS, 408). Indeed the lyrics show how states of feeling become pre-eminent in Shelley's vision.

Like Rousseau Shelley was accomplished at imaginatively conjuring and then physically meeting his metaphysical conceptions. His encounter with Jane Williams has a notable literary antecedent which Shelley himself recognized: Jane is "a most delightful person—whom we all agree is the exact antitype of the lady I described in the Sensitive plant—though this must have been a pure anticipated cognition as it was written a year before I knew her" (LS II, 438). Ostensibly "pure anticipated cognition" seems to imply a prescient view of futurity. But this correlation between artistic representation and subsequent physical occurrence has a deeper signification. With Shelley's creative technique, poetic expression and personal ideals are so interrelated that he linguistically inscribes his deepest desires into an evolving archetypal image of woman. Originally the Countess of Mountcashel "was the source of the inspiration of his Sensitive Plant."²⁷ In the poem the Lady's compassionate nature is powerfully projected to the flowers: "I doubt not they felt the spirit that came / From her glowing fingers through all their frame" (II. 31-2). It is no mere coincidence that Shelley himself should subsequently encounter a woman who possessed these very qualities. Jane's beneficent healing ability is captured in "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient": "And from my fingers flow / The powers of life, and like a sign, / Seal thee from thine hour of woe" (MYR, p. 399, 9-11).²⁸

II

Shelley's emotional state in 1822 appears at a level of heightened sensitivity, and this affective state of being emanates from his previous artistic imaginings. The unequivocal choice between "Death and Love" had dominated Alastor, prefaced Laon and Cythna, was a major theme in Julian and Maddalo, and is implicitly woven into other poems. In the Preface to Shelley's elegiac tribute to Keats, Adonais, death and love coalesce in his poetic vision. Shelley

reflects on the alluring beauty of the Protestant cemetery in Rome where his son William is buried: "It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place" (PP, 390). Death as a means of unification permeates Adonais: "Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!" (464-5). Shelley's reasoning is persuasively argued, but raises concern with its hurried rashness: "'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither, / No more let Life divide what Death can join together" (476-7).

Shelley's letter to Trelawny in June 1822, requesting some "Prussic Acid, or essential oil of bitter almonds" (LS II, 433), reveals a suicidal leaning that is probably more gesture than firm resolve. If resolute, it is doubtful that Shelley would engage an intermediary to procure the means for his demise. Poison is intended as an anodyne against anticipated emotional suffering: "I need not tell you I have no intention of suicide at present,—but I confess it would be a comfort to me to hold in my possession that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest" (LS II, 433). However a note of desperation is evident in Shelley's remark, "I would give any price for this medicine" (LS II, 433). "Medicine" is a curious choice since it is usually taken as a curative rather than to precipitate fatal consequences. In "The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise" Shelley is seeking peace and death might provide a welcome obliteration of consciousness: "Doubtless there is a place of peace / Where my weak heart and all its throbs will cease" (47-8). The interlinking of death and medicine appears in "Lines written in the Bay of Lerici": "As if to some Elysian star / They sailed for drink to medicine / Such sweet and bitter-pain as mine" (42-4). In relation to the unfolding of futurity, death is firmly established at the level of quantum possibility, and frequently given greater clarity by Shelley's concentrated attention. By confusing the boundaries of art and life, was Shelley unwittingly inscribing his own death into his poetic compositions? If, as Shelley's theories state, emotive thoughts materialize into manifest existence, perhaps, through passionate poetic expression, he literally held "that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest" (LS II, 433). Was Shelley unconsciously, or even studiedly, preparing the scenario of his own death? Given

Shelley's views on the interconnections between art and life, continually inscribing the death of the author into his texts seems a hazardous exercise, as in the Preface to *Epipsychidion*, "The Writer of the following Lines died at Florence, as he was preparing for a voyage to one of the wildest of the Sporades" (PP, 373). The cancelled Preface II gives another fatalistic version: "[The following Poem was found in the PF. of a young Englishman, who died on his passage from Leghorn to the Levant]" (PW, p. 425).

As Michael O'Neill points out "No one was more vividly and tragically aware than PBS himself of the 'rashness' of his emotional adventures" (MYR, p. 351). But Shelley's interest in Jane Williams is not a sudden impulsive venture; it is a gradual attraction pursued with a studied sophistication. To attain Jane's surrender, Shelley deploys his metaphysical theories with great dexterity: thought, imagination and passion are masterfully woven together in a complex emotional strategy. Far from being the "Serpent" excluded from "Paradise", Shelley is emotionally coiled around Jane seeking both to occupy the primary position in her consciousness and to elicit a sense of sympathy by disturbing her equanimity: "These verses were too sad / To send to you, but that I know, / Happy yourself, you feel another's woe" (54-6). Shelley seeks to elicit feelings from Jane that will become entangled with his own emotions. Yet at times this ploy is almost sabotaged when Shelley's emotions are aroused to a conflicting chaos and focus on despair.

Richard Holmes declares that "Almost telepathically, Claire chose this moment to burst in again on Shelley's life from Florence" (SP, 701). But sudden synchronistic connections are understandable when consciousness is understood as an open interactive field, and Claire's real name is actually Jane. Such telepathy was hardly surprising considering that Mary had been removed from any idea of happy fulfillment in Shelley's emotional life. "When Passion's Trance Is Overpast" conveys a mood of despondency which "strongly reflects Shelley's estrangement from Mary during their last years together" (PP, 442 n. 4). In this lyric, Shelley laments the absence of "tenderness and truth" (2) and finds this loss of intimacy unbearable:

“Could thou but be what thou hast been!” (10). Indeed in an endeavour to recapture Mary’s affection Shelley is willing to bridge this chasm partly through his imagination fueled by emotion:

It were enough to feel, to see
 Thy soft eyes gazing tenderly . . .
 And dream the rest—and burn and be
 The secret food of fires unseen. (6-9)

But Shelley’s poetic gaze did not linger on Mary; it was transferred to Jane. Poignantly in his last letter Shelley thinks of giving Jane delight: “I only write these lines for the pleasure of tracing what will meet your eyes” (LS II, 445).

Shelley’s disaffinity with Mary is more openly addressed in a letter to John Gisborne: “I only feel the want of those who can feel, and understand me . . . Mary does not. The necessity of concealing from her thoughts that would pain her, necessitates this, perhaps” (LS II, 435). In “The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise”, instead of dreaming and lyrically revitalizing his love for Mary, Shelley is focused on his abject circumstances: the current reality of his “cold home” (25) and “Of acting a forced part in life’s dull scene” (28). The Jane lyrics are poems of intense feeling and from the drafts Shelley appears to be in a desperate triangular situation. As Geoffrey Matthews remarks, his love for Jane-Williams “was the most profoundly disturbing personal experience of Shelley’s whole maturity.”²⁹

Stendhal’s shrewd understanding of human sentiments is of relevance to Shelley’s impasse with Jane: “It should be remembered that a person under the stress of strong emotions seldom has time to notice the emotions of whoever is causing them.”³⁰ Although Jane is the focal point, for the release of Shelley’s emotions, there is also some unattainable ideal beyond humanity, which conveys a sense of spiritual homelessness in the physical world. In “The Zucca”,

Shelley's aspirations soar towards an unknowable goal that is paradoxically sensed as elusively omnipresent:

I loved—oh, no, I mean not one of ye,
 Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
 As human heart to human heart may be;—
 I loved, I know not what — but this low sphere
 And all that it contains, contains not thee,
 Thou, whom, seen nowhere, I feel everywhere. (PW, 17-22)

Given the intensely private nature of "Lines written in the Bay of Lerici" one can not avoid a disquieting sense of voyeurism when engaging with the poet's intimate reflections. But access to Shelley's thoughts can be justified for the unique insight into the way in which he deftly employs the metaphysical elements of thought, passion and imagination to possess Jane Williams aesthetically. In solitude Shelley lapses into a pensive mood:

She left me, and I staid alone
 Thinking over every tone,
 Which though now silent to the ear
 The enchanted heart could hear. (15-18)

As the external scene gives way to reflective contemplation, emotion pervades the poet's being and quickens vision:

And feeling ever—O too much—
 The soft vibrations of her touch

As if her gentle hand even now

Lightly trembled on my brow. (21-4)

Sensation is cleverly manipulated to signify tangible presence. "Lightly trembled"³¹ does little to dissuade the reader that this is not current experience, but evoked from an interweaving of recollection and imaginative vision. Moreover "even now" conveys a dramatic immediacy that virtually renders the absent Jane present. This poetic evocation resembles a personal moment of heightened awareness in 1814: Shelley visualized his ideal beloved with such fervour that "ideas almost acquired the intensity of sensations."³² Lyrically Shelley's "enchanted heart" seeking "The soft vibrations of her touch" recalls his ideas in On Love: "if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own" (PP, 473). Furthermore in defining one of the "sensations" of love Shelley details a state of mutual resonance, an interrelationship "with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own . . ." (PP, 474). In "Lines written in the Bay of Lerici" passionate feeling hovers waveringly between insubstantial chimera and tangible actuality until desire collapses this distinction when vision supersedes external reality:

And thus although she absent were

Memory gave me all of her

That even fancy dares to claim.— . (25-27)

These lines read as an act of imaginative coition, and the erotic implication of fulfilled desire, in "gave me all of her", is substantiated in the draft. Originally Shelley chose "Fancy" (BSM I, f. 35v, 5) intimating a figurative rather than a literal surrender. Subsequently he changed "Fancy" to "Memory" which suggests the reminiscence of an accomplished act. Here

the interplay between past and future blurs the distinction between actuality and creative fantasy melding the scene into a timeless moment. Given the intimacy that these lines establish, the depth of emotion is most likely love, especially since Shelley censured loveless coition. Desire must be consummated either physically or imaginatively because love “when individualised, becomes an imperious necessity, only to be satisfied by the complete or partial, actual or supposed, fulfilment of its claims” (PS, 408). The artistic control and aesthetic distance achieved in “That even fancy dares to claim” was wrought from constant refinement. Revealingly Shelley initially drafted a more active role for himself: ~~‘I dare—to / That fate / I dare [d] to~~ (BSM I, f. 35v, 6-8). From the draft one can discern how the lyrics literally manifest, render into tangible form, a complex nexus of thoughts and emotions. Technically, by the social mores of the Christian value system, the poem reads as a spiritual and imaginative adultery by Shelley. As Geoffrey Matthews suggests “Life was what he had sought with Jane Williams, not peace.”³³ The poet is only able to allow free reign to his sensual feelings when alone as “Her presence had made weak and tame / All passions” (28-9). Here there are faint echoes of Dante’s angelic conception of Beatrice: “Thus by her merest glance I am unmanned.”³⁴ But for Dante, Beatrice is an intermediary in his aim to reach God: Shelley’s goal is a deeper relationship with Jane. William Keach considers whether lines 28-9 mean that Shelley “felt no passion” with Jane or “spent his passion in her presence” (SS, 230). The nature of these “passions” is elaborated in the draft: “All passion, and / ~~Desire—& fear . . .~~” (BSM I, f. 35v, 19-20). Paradoxically Shelley undermines his own philosophical creed here: unremitting hope conceived through love is creative; fear breeds despair and has a destructive potential. Whatever emotion may be quelled in Jane’s company is reinvigorated when the poet is alone:

But soon, the guardian angel gone,

The demon reassumed his throne

In my faint heart . . . I dare not speak

My thoughts; but thus disturbed and weak. (33-6)

In the draft, immediately preceding these lines Shelley wrote and then crossed through, "~~But now I desired, I dare not~~" (BSM I, f. 35v, 28). This undercurrent of illicit feelings is barely contained and surfaces in the final composition: "I dare not speak / My thoughts" (35-6). Herein lies the poem's artistic and Shelley's personal dilemma: "The crisis on which 'Lines' founders challenges, at a preemptive level, the possibility of communication, even with one's own thoughts."³⁵ The reason for this "crisis" in Shelley's authorial role emanates from a deeper understanding of his metaphysical belief that literary expression can be tantamount to physical incarnation. Again and again, Shelley had poetically reiterated his faith in the power of language to create life's experiences. In Laon and Cythna, Shelley warned that "Much must remain unthought, and more untold, / In the dark Future's ever-flowing urn" (CP, 344-5). Furthermore Shelley invested power in articulation, when he affirmed that "great is the strength / Of words" (CP, 1569-70). A year before writing "Lines written in the Bay of Lerici" Shelley was theoretically able to separate, at some level, the consequences of art and life when he communicated to the Gisbornes the depth of "painful emotions" which generated the poetry of Adonais and stated that:

The poet & the man—are two different natures: though they exist together they may be unconscious of each other, & incapable of deciding upon each other's powers & effects by any reflex act.— (LS II, 310)

It is precisely an awareness of the reciprocal "powers & effects" between "The poet & the man" that is called into question in "Lines written in the Bay of Lerici." The poem is fraught with anguish over revealing the extent of Shelley's emotional involvement with Jane and

“couples an agitated uncertainty about desire and personal relationships with an agitated uncertainty about writing, about verbal representation” (SS, 233). This agitation arises from Shelley’s belief that the combination of thought, imagination and passion is procreative. Accordingly, to “claim” Jane Williams poetically is, as Shelley is consciously aware, a stage in his anticipated physical seduction.

Once the imaginative vision of Shelley’s union with Jane is complete, he depicts a scene of furtive ensnarement that is psychologically revealing:

And the fisher with his lamp
 And spear, about the low rocks damp
 Crept, and struck the fish who came
 To worship the delusive flame. (51-4)

Keach’s reading of these lines is perceptively acute; he does not see Shelley merely as the passive “helpless fish” but “perhaps as both fisher and fish – luring the reader, Jane and himself towards a grim ending” (SS, 232). Indeed it is reasonable to assume that had Shelley lived he would not have been content solely with an artistic possession of Jane.

The sympathetic interpenetration of one consciousness with another, to effect a state of spiritual and physical healing, is explored in “The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient.” For Shelley magnetism was attractive as its underlying philosophical assumption about the structure of the world is based on unity: “Mesmerism, as Morse explains, saw the world in terms of continuity and harmony, while Lavoisier . . . held to a conception of science which was based on analysis and division.”³⁶ Magnetism was a way of stirring and strengthening deep feelings of compassion into a more comprehensive engagement of being. The poem was given to Jane folded, sealed and addressed: “To Jane. / Not to be opened unless you are / alone, or with Williams” (MYR, pp. 396-7). Communication of Shelley’s desire for Jane Williams is

intricately presented because “PBS brings into play the workings of a sensitive, emotionally complex consciousness” (MYR, p. 352). And because the messages are interwoven with his creativity they emanate from what Bohm terms the “implicate order” of reality, that is the deepest level of being, beneath the threshold of conscious awareness.³⁷ Consequently, it is easily conceivable that Shelley was not aware of the extent to which his emotions are exposed. The following letter, addressed to Edward Williams, which accompanies “The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise”, is fascinating for a number of reasons:

My dear Williams

in

Looking over the portfolio ~~from~~ which my friend used

in

to keep his verses, & ~~from~~ when \ich those I sent you the other day were found,— I have lit upon these; which as they are too dismal for me to keep I send them you. ~~who can afford~~

If any of the stanza's should please you, you may read them to Jane, but to no one else, — ~~and yet on second~~ thought I had rather you would not, — [as] [it-] [is] [less] [diplomatic]

[?—] [Your—] [sincere] [Shelley] Yours ever affectionately. P.B.S. (MYR, p. 415).

This message is certainly not “diplomatic” and, as William Keach points out, the writing contains a series of devices: “The blatantly transparent disguise (‘my friend’), divided emotions, insinuatingly underscored pronoun and still legible deletions . . .” (SS, 216). If, as Michael O’Neill tentatively suggests, the cancelled marks at the start of the last line are “Jane” (MYR, pp. 414-6), then she appears tellingly at the moment Shelley is deciding which endearment to close with and consequently the sentiments are dedicated to her not Williams.

Shelley was right to strike out "sincere"; the note's subterfuge is a way of revealing his emotions for Jane and not a declaration of sincerity to Williams. In the first draft preface to Epipsychidion, Shelley writes that "The following Poem was found amongst other papers in the Portfolio of a young Englishman" (PW, p. 424). Epipsychidion is a romantic invitation to Emily, Shelley's "heart's sister" (415) and, as in Williams' note, he uses the idea of a "Portfolio" to convey a token of love, whilst partially concealing his motives.

Through poetic discourse "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient" induces a deepened, soothing state of consciousness to establish a state of receptivity:

"Sleep, sleep on, forget thy pain —

My hand is on thy brow

My Spirit on thy brain

My pity on thy heart, poor friend. (MYR, pp. 398-9, 5-8)

Here there is a threefold integration of the physical, spiritual and emotional levels of being to elicit a compassion that becomes, by the end of the second stanza, heart-rending for Jane: "my heart bleeds / For thine" (MYR, pp. 398-9, 22-23). Disconcertingly Shelley's emotional integrity is regained by causing a divisive anguish in Jane's state of being. In "One Word Is Too Often Profaned", most possibly written for Jane, Shelley intimates that sympathy from the beloved is cherished most: "And pity from thee more dear / Than that from another" (7-8). In "The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise" pity is experienced as the deepest emotion: "hatred", "scorn" and "Indifference" (9, 10) are bearable, "But not to speak of love, Pity alone / Can break a spirit already more than bent" (12-13). The capitalization in "Pity" and its juxtaposition with "alone" underlines the depth of feeling. Keach harshly declares that "self-pity takes a defiant, bitter edge and confronts the limitations of pity" (SS, 217). But this censure underestimates a human vulnerability that is wrestling under artistic restraint. "The

Magnetic Lady to Her patient” ostensibly depicts Jane healing Shelley, but certain lines can also be read from Shelley’s perspective. For instance “from my fingers flow / The powers of life” (MYR, pp. 398-9, 9-10) is Shelley literally penning verses to Jane and thereby establishing a deeper affinity so that his emotional life can become intermingled with hers:

And from my fingers flow
 The powers of life, and like a sign
 Seal thee from thine hour of woe,
 And brood on thee, but may not blend
 With thine. (MYR, p. 398-9, 9-13)

Linguistically these lines are artfully composed. Jane’s refusal of physical intimacy is undermined: “may not” has not the definite refusal of can not and the enjambment in “blend / With thine” intimates union. Significantly “brood” not only connotes a sense of dwelling on, but transports resonances from Epipsychidion where Shelley’s invitation to Emily is presented within the Ovidian myth of Ceyx and Alcyone: “The halcyons brood around the foamless isles” (412). In this context “brood” evokes maternal feelings, appealing to Jane’s deepest instincts, as in Ovid’s myth when “Alcyone broods on the sea, wings outstretched over her nest.”³⁸ Although “Jane herself is made to speak the first four stanzas” (SS, 219) my interpretation resists this complicity. Moreover reading the concluding line of each stanza in succession discloses how it is Jane that is literally spell-bound by Shelley: “With thine”, “For thine”, “Be thine”, “Possess”, “My chain” (MYR, pp. 398-400). Of Shelley’s request, “tempt me not to break / My chain” (MYR, p. 401, 24-5), Judith Chernaik remarks that “chain” has a dual significance: “the chain of life” and “the chain of his marriage.”³⁹ But another meaning, the “chain” of enchantment, that Shelley has so deftly woven around Jane, arises when juxtaposed with Byron’s Manfred (which I discuss a little later). Beneath the level of conscious

awareness, in a state of semi-trance, Shelley is asking Jane to comply with his seduction of her. Shelley's success in establishing emotional bonds between Jane and himself is apparent with her extreme agitation after thinking Shelley passes twice along the terrace when he was elsewhere. As Mary Shelley observes, this behaviour is uncharacteristic of Jane: "the strangest thing is that M^{rs} W. saw him. Now Jane though a woman of sensibility, has not much imagination & is not in the slightest degree nervous —neither in dreams or otherwise."⁴⁰ This visionary experience denotes the depth of Shelley's psychic and emotional link to Jane. Furthermore through her sympathy for Shelley, Jane experiences a more comprehensive and deeper engagement of being. As Shelley states in A Defence of Poetry:

The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror and sorrow . . . (PP, 490)

Jane, as Shelley's current love, can anchor him to mortal existence, a link that is defined in Manfred as "the chain of human ties" (BP IV, II. ii. 102). Shelley has woven such a hypnotic spell around Jane, that it would have been difficult for her to break. Nigel Leask states that "Mesmerism is a form of willed love or 'pity' in Rousseau's sense of a primary social sympathy, when natural or 'free' love is impossible in the polluted garden of patriarchal society."⁴¹ But monogamous relationships in "the polluted garden of patriarchal society" are not an obstacle for Shelley who wrote in Epipsychidion that "Love is like an understanding, that grows bright, / Gazing on many truths" (162-3). In "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient" Shelley's own rejuvenation is instigated primarily at a soul level:

"Like a cloud big with a May shower

My soul weeps healing rain
 On thee, thou withered flower —
 It breathes mute music on thy sleep —
 Its odour calms thy brain —
 Its' light within thy gloomy breast
 Spreads, like a second youth again —
 By mine thy being is to its deep

Possest. — (MYR, p. 401, 8-16)

In this penultimate yet climactic stanza, the “spell” touches the well-springs of Jane’s being, where her “soul weeps healing rain.” Here Shelley has seduced Jane to a point of total spiritual, imaginative and emotional consummation: “By mine thy being is to its deep / Possest.” This level of communion suggests a complicity on Jane’s part, but one that is not necessarily conscious. The desire to “Forget lost health, and the divine / Feelings which fell died in youths brief morn” (MYR, p. 401, 3-5), in the previous stanza, is now overturned: “divine / Feelings”, connoting a sacred completeness, are restored with the “second youth again.” When Jane’s “soul weeps healing rain” it is the emotional release that facilitates rejuvenation. In a similar vein, Shelley appeals to Emily’s tears in *Epipsychidion* to enact a divine purification:

I pray thee that thou blot from this sad song
 All of its much mortality and wrong,
 With those clear drops, which start like sacred dew
 From the twin lights thy sweet soul darkens through,
 Weeping, till sorrow becomes ecstasy:
 Then smile on it, so that it may not die. (35-40)

In Epipsychidion Shelley's envisaged love with Emily was presented as a mutual reciprocity, but in terms of possession: "Possessing and possest by all that is / Within that calm circumference of bliss" (549-50).

Disquietingly, in the Jane poems, love is often portrayed as tortuously binding, as in "With a Guitar. To Jane": "Ariel to Miranda;— Take / This slave of music for the sake / Of him who is the slave of thee" (1-3). In A Defence of Poetry the Troubadours' poetry is enchantingly mesmeric; their "verses are as spells, which unseal the inmost enchanted fountains of the delight which is in the grief of Love" (PP, 497). Spells, enchantment and a sense of captivity permeate these late lyrics and this level of seduction can be elucidated in relation to Byron's Manfred.

In Byron's dramatic poem Manfred, the eponymous protagonist is "A Magian of great power, and fearful skill!" (BP IV, II. iv. 31). Such a powerful hero held an obvious attraction for Shelley whose fascination with the magus-like Ahasuerus had reached its zenith in Hellas. The allure of magic is a dominant theme in the poems to Jane Williams and this is mirrored by a complicity in the natural world. In "To Jane—The Recollection" Shelley writes

We paused amid the pines that stood
 The giants of the waste,
 Tortured by the storms to shapes as rude
 As serpents interlaced. (MYR, p. 387, 2-5)

Trees exerted a quasi-mesmeric effect on Shelley and when forged into "serpents interlaced" import the symbolic power of Mercury's caduceus, the magician's wand.

In Manfred the incantation evokes a spell-binding bondage over its protagonist who becomes ensnared in its "clankless chain" (BP IV, I. i, 259):

When the moon is on the wave,
 And the glow-worm in the grass,
 And the meteor on the grave,
 And the wisp on the morass;
 When the falling stars are shooting,
 And the answer'd owls are hooting,
 And the silent leaves are still
 In the shadow of the hill,
 Shall my soul be upon thine,
 With a power and with a sign. (BP IV, I. i. 192-201)

Shelley's enthusiastically praises the liberated ideals in Byron's dramatic poem: "I have read 'Manfred' with the greatest admiration. The same freedom from common rules that marked the 3rd Canto [of Childe Harold] and 'Chillon' is visible here" (LS I, 547). However Shelley has reservations about the darkness of Manfred's vision which he found "dreadfully melancholy" and led him to question Byron about such despair: "Why do you indulge this despondency?" (LS I, 547). Charles Robinson investigates "evidence of the Alastorian quest in Manfred" (SB, 53) and finds that its aspirations provide "an anti-Shelleyan tract" (SB, 59). As Robinson points out "what evidently violated Byron's sense of decorum was the Poet's passive and futile death and the narrator's failure to question the idealistic premise of the Poet's quest" (SB, 53-4). But Shelley's Alastorian quest is a courageous venture into the nature of being and search for his soul's counterpart, themes which become dominant in his poetic vision.

Like Shelley in the "Magnetic Lady" Manfred is seeking "Forgetfulness" (BP IV, I. i. 136). but a state which only comes through self-annihilation: "Oblivion, self-oblivion—" (BP IV, I. i. 144). Similarly Shelley would need a total loss of consciousness to forget Jane. Manfred's feminine ideal, "The lady Astarte" (BP IV, III. iii. 47) shares his pursuit of arcane wisdom

with “The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind / To comprehend the universe” (BP IV, II. ii.110-11). But her search is crucially tempered with the “gentler powers” of compassion: “Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had not” (BP IV, II. ii. 113). Although her “tenderness” has a benevolent influence which is mirrored in Manfred’s desire for her, he lacks her vital quality of “Humility” (BP IV, II. ii, 114, 115). Manfred is a poem about the wielding and use of supernatural power, which is destructive unless lovingly tempered with wisdom and beneficence. Of his feminine counterpart Manfred states: “I loved her, and destroy’d her!” (BP IV, II. ii. 117). Astarte’s point of vulnerability is not physical, but through the emotional part of her being. Manfred destroys her: “Not with my hand, but heart —Which broke her heart — / It gazed on mine, and withered” (BP II. ii. 118-19). As in Shelley’s Laon and Cythna, the heart is the source of creation and point of destruction.

From the facsimile of “To Jane. The Invitation” Shelley’s writing initially appears fairly faint, “Fine pen-cut; dark brown ink; light tint” (MYR, p. 371), and this delicacy mirrors the opening exaltation of Jane in radiant images of light: “Best & brightest, come away — / Fairer far than this fair day” (MYR, p. 373, 4-5). The words do not proceed along the page horizontally, but the lines slope downwards, the characters become larger and bolder as the poem progresses. With this descent in the style of writing there is a sense of the spiritual qualities receiving a more earthly portrayal. Jane is not rapturously apostrophized and remote like her predecessor Emilia, in Epipsychidion, who was, at times, inaccessibly conceived as “Thou Moon beyond the clouds!” (27) and “Thou Star above the Storm!” (28). Throughout “To Jane. The Invitation” the spiritual intermingles with the physical: “The brightest hour of unborn spring” (MYR, p. 373, 11) effects a transfiguration through cosmic embrace: “Bending from Heaven in azure mirth / It kissed the forehead of the earth” (MYR, p. 373, 15-6). The concluding simile of the first stanza interconnects the natural world with the beloved, “Making the wintry world appear / Like one on whom thou smilest, dear” (MYR, p. 373, 23-4): “thou” suggests a divine elevation, yet this remoteness is counterbalanced by “dear” which conveys

earthly sentiment. In Alastor the narrator voiced an interrelationship with the elements: “Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood” (1). Jane is similarly delineated in cosmic kinship: “Radiant Sister of the day” (MYR, p. 377, 1).

Intriguingly, in the Jane poems, desire is communicated at different levels of conscious awareness. Whereas in “The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient” a deepened state of relaxation was invoked to facilitate hypnotic suggestion, in “To Jane. The Invitation” Shelley’s enticement is explicit:

Away away from men & towns
 To the wild wood & the downs,
 To the silent wilderness
 Where the soul need not repress
 It’s music lest it should not find
 An echo in another’s mind,
 While the touch of Nature’s art
 Harmonizes heart to heart.— (MYR, p. 375, 1-8)

Here Shelley envisages a natural setting for a spiritual and emotional engagement that “Harmonizes heart to heart.” Noticeably, at the heightened moment of erotic implication, Shelley’s writing falters over the word “yields”, bringing it into greater prominence: “I am gone into the fields / “To take what this sweet hour yei\ields” (MYR, p. 375, 11-12). As this manuscript was given to Jane it could denote a private avowal of their intimacy. Equally, the stumble suggests a sense of frustration. Significantly an ink mark appears at the far left of the line “At length I find one moment’s good”, this moment occurring “After long pain —with all your love” (MYR, p. 375, 24-5). Again, perhaps this is a coded admission of their affection: the dash leaves space for a thought which automatically conjures Jane. But the concluding line

intimates that a declaration of Jane's feelings have been withheld: "This you never told me of" (MYR, p. 375, 26). The poem moves quickly to an envisioned synthesis of the elements:

is

And the blue noon ^ over us,

And the multitudinous

Billows murmur at our feet

Where the earth and ocean meet

And all things seem only one

In the universal Sun.— (MYR, pp. 377-9, 23-8)

With "the universal Sun" Shelley gestures towards a sense of unification. "Sun" presents a cosmic image of bestowing life, but in Shelleyan terms also designates the poetic imagination, which he earlier termed "the Sun of life."⁴²

"To Jane—The Recollection" opens as a poem of ir retrievable loss reminiscing on a time which Shelley deems has passed, "The loveliest & the last, is dead" (MYR, p. 385, 6). Accordingly the permeating radiance, "Which scattered from above the sun / A light of Paradise," has now been eclipsed, leaving "The epitaph of glory dead" (MYR, p. 385, 24-5, 9). However a tone of optimism is conveyed as inspiration from cherished experience can be summoned into lyrical expression: "Rise Memory, & write it's praise!" (MYR, p. 385, 7).-

In the first stanza of the lyric Shelley immediately re-invokes a feeling of intimacy with "We" which also commences stanzas two, and four. In the poems to Jane love "veers between implying feelings for a particular person and a more general stance towards reality . . ." (MYR, 351). Indeed Shelley deftly achieves an oscillating movement between focusing on his relationship with Jane and a boundless interpenetration with nature; this apprehension of cosmic fusion was sought with Emily in Epipsychidion:

Let us become the over-hanging day,
 The living soul of this Elysian isle,
 Conscious, inseparable, one. . . . (538-40)

Alastor had opened with the narrator experiencing a personal reciprocity with the natural world: "If our great Mother has imbued my soul / With aught of natural piety to feel / Your love, and recompense the boon with mine" (2-4). But this self-secluded interpenetration ultimately proved to be destructive. In "To Jane—The Recollection" Shelley seeks, through Jane, an interconnection with universal love which he depicts as implicit in all creation:

The breath of peace we drew
 With its soft motion made not less
 The calm that round us grew.—
 There seemed from the remotest seat
 Of the white mountain-waste,
 To the soft flower beneath our feet
 A magic circle traced,
 A spirit interfused around
 A thrilling silent life: / .
 To momentary peace it bound
 Our mortal nature's strife;—

(MYR, pp. 387-9, 20-26, 1-4)

Encompassed by an "inviolable quietness" (MYR, p. 387, 19) Shelley experiences a deep attunement to Jane, a unison felt in "The breath of peace we drew." This accord is experienced as the very rhythm of life; an expansive interconnection to the universal harmony

which in a “momentary peace” temporarily dissolves division or “strife.” Here Shelley’s philosophical vision of unity in On Life appears seamlessly woven into his consciousness and implicit in his poetic expression; he dissolves the boundaries between internal and external reality until they merge into an iridescent glow. Surrender to this serenity engages the innermost state of being:

And still I felt the ee centre of
 The magic circle there
 Was one fair form that filled with love
 life
 The breathless atmosphere. (MYR, p. 389, 5-9)

Following Jane’s earlier depiction as “a sort of spirit of embodied peace” (LS II, 376) she now appears as curiously remote, disembodied and idealized as “one fair form.” Significantly Shelley’s recognition of Jane is not on an outward physical level, but through the pervasive feeling of love that permeates the scene. Jane’s responsive sensitivity to Shelley is life-enhancing. Although partly idealized, Jane’s actual presence is signified in the opening of the fourth stanza: “We paused beside the pools that lie / Under the forest bough—” (MYR, p. 389, 11-12). The poem progresses to a deeper visionary state of apprehension:

And all was interfused beneath
 With an Elysian glow,
 An atmosphere without a breath,
 A softer day below –
 Like one beloved, the scene had lent
 To the dark water’s breast

Its every leaf & lineament

With more than truth exprest. (MYR, p. 391, 6-13)

Seemingly a pantheistic pervading spirit evokes a divine unity where “all was interfused.” Yet a closer reading registers degrees of resistance: “Like one beloved” intimates, yet impairs, fusion. Moreover “lent” evokes the transient nature of such visionary experience. Nature is impregnated with inner subjective qualities rendering a panpsychist view as “imaged in the water’s love” (MYR, p. 391, 4). This apprehension imbues existence with a sentient consciousness: “It’s every leaf & lineament / With more than truth exprest.” In Julian and Maddalo, Julian had rhetorically proposed that human consciousness itself possessed the ultimate ideals: “Where is the love, beauty and truth we seek / But in our mind?” (174-5). Now “love, beauty and truth” are immanent in all existence. Yet this immanence is ephemerally reliant on Jane’s presence; her absence deprives the world of this vitality: “A frown is on the Heaven’s brow” (MYR, p. 385, 11). Shelley ingeniously disrupts the Edenic scene of blissful serenity with atmospheric change:

Until an envious wind crept by,

Like an unwelcome thought

Which from the mind’s too faithful eye

Blots one dear image out.— . (MYR, p. 391, 14-17)

The human referent of “an envious wind” has variously been identified as Mary Shelley, but there is a deeper level of meaning. As Susan Wolfson notes “it is the imagination itself . . . that blots out its dear image.”⁴³ In “Mutability” “One wandering thought pollutes the day” (10), and one would expect a permeating effect from “an envious wind” or “an unwelcome thought” rather than a blot. Pointedly “Blots” is given full weight metrically and denotes an

eclipse which erases visionary apprehension where “all things seem only one / In the universal Sun.”

The closing quatrain provokes critical analysis, especially since the “loaded blank begs for comment.”⁴⁴

Though thou art ever fair and kind
 And forests ever green
 Less oft is peace in ———’s mind
 Than calm in water seen. (MYR, p. 391, 18-21)

In these lines Keach finds that the omission “might be expected to cause suffering, for Shelley to make Jane Williams fill in the missing name” (SS, 216). This undermines what is perhaps a playful stroke; a more perceptive reading of the tone is Michael O’Neill’s suggestion of “the deftest insinuations of disquiet, the most understated of emotional diminuendos” (MYR, p. xxi). Indeed words are chosen for their tranquil connotations and “Less oft” does little to dispel a concluding atmosphere of serenity. However the all-pervading unity becomes fragmented in these lines. Earlier nature was imbued with Jane’s qualities, her fairness being implicated in “that fair forest green” (MYR, p. 391, 5). Now there is a distinct notion of separateness reintroduced by “thou” which re-establishes distance.

In “To Jane [The-keen stars were twinkling]” Shelley successfully creates and sustains an atmosphere of mutual consonance. It is an “ariette”, designed as a duet between Shelley’s poetics and Jane’s musicality, in which he accomplishes a victorious synthesis: “Where moonlight & music & feeling / Are won” (BSM I, f. 38v, 8-9). This draft version is written upside down at the bottom of a page that commences with the following lines from The Triumph of Life:

~~[? There] the creators, near them—a—dr~~

in

Of the destroyers, of one victory

~~Both swell the pageant now~~

~~[? These] hearts were confounded. (BSM I, f. 38v, 6-10)~~

Although Shelley was “trying to conserve his dwindling supply of writing paper” (BSM I, p. 310), there is an interesting parallel in relation to his ideas on creativity. Essentially the “creators” and “destroyers” which “swell the pageant” of life are joined in “one victory” because their “hearts were confounded.” Here “confounded” denotes a fusion where the emotions become inextricably linked. Likewise in “The keen stars”, there is a union between Jane’s singing and Shelley’s depth of feeling which generates the lyric:

Sing again, with your dear voice revealing

A tone

Of some world far from our’s,

Where music & moonlight & feeling

Are one (MYR, p. 437, 23-7).

Susan Wolfson reads Shelley’s initial choice of “Are won” as suggesting a tenable goal: “as if the destination intimated by Jane’s singing could be gained by striving.”⁴⁵ But what might this destination be? The “world far from our’s” is a world of unity that, although not yet physically achievable, is created imaginatively and spiritually. Perhaps, of all the lyrics given to Jane, “The keen stars” is the one in which lyrical expression evokes the greatest degree of emotional closeness. Shelley’s confidential missive to Jane, written along the right-hand side of the lyric, is artfully constructed:

I sate down to write some words for an ariette which might be profane— but it was in vain to struggle with the ruling spirit, who compelled me to speak of things sacred to yours & Wilhelmeister's indulgence— . I commit them to your secrecy & your mercy & will try & do better another time. (MYR, p. 437, 28-31)

This inscription has been seen as “a cryptic and apologetic note” (SS, 228) written to establish a “guilty scenario of ‘secrecy and mercy.’”⁴⁶ In his desire to “do better” there is an element of romantic posturing, but when read in conjunction with his final letter to Jane, one detects Shelley's sense of emotional impoverishment within this relationship: “the absence of one scarcely worth regretting” (LS II, 445). This brief communication is a well-organized attempt to disestablish the intrinsic oneness at the heart of Jane and Edward's relationship by profanely addressing “things sacred” to their “indulgence.” Having thus interceded, Shelley chooses “commit,” a verb rarely found in his poetics,⁴⁷ in an attempt to dispossess Edward by extracting a private understanding from Jane. To sanction his intrusion Shelley cites a compulsion driven by “the ruling spirit”, presumably creative inspiration. There is a volte-face from “The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise” where the poetic impulse had initially led Shelley to withdraw in despair: “I too, must seldom seek again / Near happy friends a mitigated pain” (7-8). Tracing the mercurial nature of Shelley's connection to Jane takes the reader through a succession of intricate manoeuvres. “With a Guitar. To Jane” opened with Ariel in a servile, self-abasing, relationship to Miranda: “the slave of thee” (3). Shelley's persona of Ariel, unique to this poem, pursues a dedicated interest in tracking Miranda and Ferdinand's (Jane and Edward's) “course of love” (33). Having served as a “guardian spirit” (13) and posed with the forlorn demeanor of “deserted Ariel” (26), the creative “sprite” (37) forges metaphoric bonds, so that the lyric culminates by realigning Shelley's own position: “For our beloved Jane” (90) claims an equal share in her affections.

Jane's "taste for music" is endlessly enticing to Shelley: "I listen the whole evening on our terrace to the simple melodies with excessive delight" (LS II, 435). This feeling of "delight" is resplendently conveyed in "The keen stars": "No leaf will be shaken / While the dews of your melody scatter / Delight" (MYR, p. 437, 19-21). Simplicity imparts lyrical grace: "So your voice most tender / To the strings without soul had then given / It's own" (MYR, p. 437, 12-14). The balanced poise achieved in this lyric is highlighted when compared with Shelley's earlier celebration of Claire Clairmont, who had inspired the "consuming extacies" (11) of "To Constantia." Here a tone of enthrallment prevails; Shelley is captivated "By the enchantment of thy strain" (28). Claire's performance is one of spellbinding intoxication: "The blood and life within thy snowy fingers / Teach witchcraft to the instrumental stings" (2-4). Passion veers uncontrollably towards a precipice: "Upon the verge of Nature's utmost sphere" (32). "To Constantia" is energized by a heavy sensuality that leaves an indelible imprint on the poet's emotional life: "Even while I write my burning cheeks are wet— / Such things the heart can feel and learn, but not forget!" (43-44). Constantia stirs an unendurable eroticism, bordering on the demonic: "Cease, cease —for such wild lessons madmen learn" (34). Conversely the emotional intensity in "The keen stars" is masterfully tempered under imaginative control: "Though the sound overpowers / Sing again" (MYR, p. 437, 22-3). Similarly, in "With a Guitar. To Jane" harmony is elicited through a disciplined finesse: "But, sweetly as its answers will / Flatter hands of perfect skill" (87-8).

In Epipsychidion, which is "consciously baptized with a Platonic name" (PS, 279), Shelley envisioned a relationship with Emily that would penetrate the depths of being, to reach "the wells / Which boil under our being's inmost cells, / The fountains of our deepest life" (568-70). Shelley knew that his affection for Emilia Viviani was inevitably "ill-fated", nevertheless he displayed a keen attentiveness with regard to her future: "I am deeply interested in her destiny, & that interest can in no manner influence it" (LS II, 256). But influencing Jane's "destiny" seems an achievable possibility, especially since she is not incarcerated in a convent like

Emilia, but living in close proximity. Certainly the lyrics seek to elicit from Jane a deeper engagement of being; they are “charges of affection, rivalry, and manipulation”,⁴⁸ designed to encompass the emotional spectrum: jealousy, heartfelt compassion, sorrow and joy.

In these last lyrics, what role does Shelley assign to Jane? Evidently, from her primary position of addressee, Jane inspired some of Shelley’s most finely wrought compositions. Although Jane serves as creative muse, she is much less a romantic projection than her precursor Emilia, who Shelley venerated as an anima archetype in Epipsychidion: “Youth’s vision thus made perfect” (42). With its classical origins Epipsychidion is conceived from “the words / Of antique verse and high romance” (209-10). Yet the poem also, in Shelley’s words, reveals aspects of his inner nature, “what I am and have been,” by depicting “an idealized history of my life and feelings” (LS II, 434). In the lyrics to Jane there is little idealization, and an almost palpable sense of human involvement which denotes greater emotional maturity. Conventional romantic appellations such as “thy voice” (BSM I, f. 38v, 4), in the drafting of “The keen stars,” are revised to “your dear voice” (MYR, p. 437, 23) in the final composition, thus showing a more intimate association.

Exclusion from paradise is the presiding atmosphere of these late lyrics; a paradise lost with Mary and one not yet gained with Jane that induces deep emotions: “Griefs that should sleep, and hopes that cannot die” (“The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise”, 20). Milton’s epic appears woven into Shelley’s consciousness; his letters readily draw on allusions from Paradise Lost, and one written to Claire Clairmont, 30 May 1822, situates Jane’s discontent within a Miltonic framework (LS II, 430 n. 2). Whilst writing The Triumph of Life Shelley’s ideas about creativity questioned the authorial role. Milton’s philosophical disquisitions in Paradise Lost are of relevance to Shelley’s ideas of creativity:

In discourse more sweet

(For eloquence the soul, song charms the sense)

Others apart sat on a hill retired,
 In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
 Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
 Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
 And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.⁴⁹

The council of fallen Angels, expelled from paradise and bewildered by this philosophical maze must have engaged Shelley's deepest attention, especially in relation to the dichotomy between "Fixed fate" and "free will." Most significantly the disgraced Angels are unable to extricate a tenable theory concerning the nature of reality, and herein lies the decisive principle in their fall; a principle which Shelley searchingly pursued in his poetic vision. In Paradise Lost a philosophical position of uncompromising free-will is elicited in a complicated deliberation:

So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
 As if predestination overruled
 Their will, disposed by absolute decree
 Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
 Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
 Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
 So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
 Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
 They trespass, authors to themselves in all
 Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
 I formed them free, and free they must remain,

Till they enthrall themselves . . . ⁵⁰

Milton poses a view of self-determination; the fallen Angels are unequivocally pronounced the “authors” of their own destinies. Throughout Paradise Lost “Author” encompasses both the benign and malevolent aspects of creation: Satan is admonished as the “Author of evil” perpetrating “These acts of hateful strife, hateful to all.”⁵¹ The question of authorial creativity was a major issue for Shelley, and, given Rousseau’s warning in The Triumph of Life, that his “words were seeds of misery” (280), it seems almost inconceivable that Shelley should both write and envision Jane in a scene of desolation: “I fear you are solitary & melancholy at Villa Magni . . . I figure to myself the countenance which has been the source of such consolation to me, shadowed by a veil of sorrow” (LS II, 445). Jane’s postscript to this letter shows an intuition that her life might be imperilled in some way: “Why do you talk of never enjoying moments like the past, are you going to join your friend Plato or do you expect I shall do so soon?” (LS II, 445 n.3). Why did Shelley cast not only himself, but also Jane in a tragic role? Shelley’s sense of alienation is often acutely portrayed during his last months; “Remembrance” depicts a desultory loneliness: “As the heart when joy is fled / I am left alone, – alone —” (MYR, p. 357, 9-10). This sense of estrangement is projected onto Jane. “For our beloved Jane, alone.—” (“With a Guitar. To Jane”, 90) simultaneously evokes a sense of her uniqueness, but disconcertingly isolates Jane; an isolation that became a devastating reality following Shelley and Williams’ drowning.

An analysis of Shelley’s “poetry of life” opened this thesis with an holistic paradigm of existence in which poetry was shown to have a fundamentally creative role in shaping conceptions concerning the structure of reality. This concluding chapter has looked more deeply into the nature of poetic creativity by examining its influences on the state of being in relation to Rousseau’s writings and Shelley’s poems to Jane Williams. Close textual readings of Shelley’s lyrics, missives and letters have suggested a reciprocity between art and life; a

reciprocity that was foremost in Shelley's thoughts whilst writing The Triumph of Life. Moreover Shelley's lyrics themselves show an awareness of the complicated interrelations between writing and living. Implicated in these interconnections are philosophical questions concerning the fabric of existence. What influence did Shelley's artistic expression have on the life experiences of his immediate circle? Following Shelley's mature insights into the nature of creativity, expressed through his poetic vision in Hellas and The Triumph of Life, it is certainly plausible that artistic creation engenders "A being more intense" in which we actually gain "The life we image."

¹ "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art", Keats, Poems, 13-14.

² Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, BP II, III. 46-9.

³ As Judith Chernaik has appropriately remarked: "The Romantic poets took private experience, individual consciousness, to be the proper subject for literature, and insisted upon its primacy as a test not only of knowledge but of wisdom and moral truth", The Lyrics of Shelley (Cleveland: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1972), 6; hereafter referred to as Chernaik.

⁴ When conveying his holistic understanding of existence, Heidegger's innovative terminology is antipathetic to concepts which are embedded in entrenched philosophical positions. As David Cooper points out, "'Consciousness' carries too much Cartesian luggage to be used in descriptions free from all traditional prejudices", Existentialism, 67.

⁵ Medwin, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley 1847, introd. H. Buxton Forman (London: Oxford UP, 1913), 319; hereafter referred to as Medwin.

⁶ Medwin, 318-9.

⁷ Medwin, 319.

⁸ Stephen Behrendt, Shelley and his Audiences (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989), 245.

⁹ In a letter to Claire Clairmont, 14 May 1821, Shelley wrote "W. I like & I have got reconciled to Jane", LS II, 292.

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse: Julie, or the New Eloise. Letters of Two Lovers, Inhabitants of a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps, trans. Judith H. McDowell (1968; Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1987), 52; hereafter referred to as Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse.

¹¹ Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse, 53.

¹² Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest point out that "The composition-date of this poem is a mystery" and their examination of textual evidence suggests that it was most probably not written for Jane Williams, but much earlier in 1814, beginning with "That moment is gone forever", The Poems of Shelley (1804-17) vol 1, Longman Annotated English Poets Ser., ed.

Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (London: Longman, 1989), 436-7. However, more significant than the dating of this lyric, or the question of whom it was written for, is the similarity in Shelley's ideas concerning intimate embrace with the beloved.

¹³ In his analysis of The Triumph of Life Donald Reiman states that "Rousseau's spirit . . . possesses natural knowledge and experiential wisdom . . .", Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1965), 39. With regard to my interpretation, Rousseau's "experiential wisdom" is appropriate to illustrate Shelley's understanding of the reciprocity between art and life.

¹⁴ Edward Duffy, Rousseau in England: The Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979), 6.

¹⁵ Shelley's early critique of this work is expressed in a letter to Hogg, 14 May 181: "The Confessions of Rousseau . . . are either a disgrace to the confessor or a string of falsehoods, probably the latter", LS I, 84.

¹⁶ See Cohen's introduction, C, 11.

¹⁷ David Marshall, The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), 174-5.

¹⁸ In his discussion of the imagination Bohm surmises that "there is no fundamental distinction between the processes of imagination and perception." He distinguishes three kinds of imagination: the "primary imagination" which inclusively is the "entire consciousness . . . created by a process which is being guided by information from the senses"; the "creative imagination" which innovates on existing reality; the "reflexive imagination" which comes from the past and is "fancy" or "fantasy." Bohm cautions that the imagination "can be creative and it can also be very destructive, because the fantasy realm can merge with reality and create a resistance to seeing that it is fantasy", Thought as a System, 151-3. What significantly distinguishes Rousseau's confessional experiences and Shelley's conceptions is the emphasis

given to the creative potential of imaginative visions which are deemed to literally create physical experiences.

¹⁹ Taylor, 362.

²⁰ See Ronald Grimsley's discussion in which he states that Rousseau's "dream of a triangular relationship" with Mme d'Houdetot "and Saint-Lambert merely reflected an already deeply implanted tendency in his character", Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Study in Self-Awareness (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1961), 128-9; hereafter referred to as Grimsley.

²¹ "Since Rousseau's passion for Mme d'Houdetot did not really disclose itself until May 1757, it seems likely that the idea of Julie as a wife and mother, as well as that of the recall of Saint-Preux to the Wolmar household, antedate the real-life love affair by some months", Grimsley, 119

²² Goethe, The Sorrows of Young Werther, trans. and introd. Michael Hulse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 25; hereafter referred to as Goethe.

²³ Goethe, 98.

²⁴ Rousseau's experiences can be compared with Shelley's account of visualizing his feminine ideal and subsequently encountering Mary Godwin in Chapter Two, Alastor, 63-5.

²⁵ Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse, 123.

²⁶ Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse, 123

²⁷ Medwin, 265.

²⁸ In my interpretation of Shelley's late lyrics I am quoting the following from the facsimile of manuscript sources: "The Magnetic Lady to Her patient", "To Jane—The Recollection", "To Jane. The Invitation", "To Jane [The keen stars were twinkling]" and "Remembrance." This decision to reproduce the literal transcriptions from MYR is to show what Shelley actually wrote.

²⁹ G. M. Matthews, "Shelley and Jane Williams", The Review of English Studies, vol. XII, 48; hereafter referred to as Matthews.

³⁰ Stendhal, On Love, trans. Gilbert and Suzanne Sale, introd. Jean Stewart and B. C. J. G. Knight (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1975), 80.

³¹ Shelley's drafting of this line reads, "Lightly placed trembles on my brow", BSM I, f. 35r, 31.

³² LS I, 402, see n. 28 above.

³³ Matthews, 47.

³⁴ Dante Alighieri, La Vita Nuova, trans. and introd. Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 78.

³⁵ Susan J. Wolfson, Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 225; hereafter referred to as Wolfson.

³⁶ Dawson, 15.

³⁷ See in particular Chapter One, "A Poetics of Being", 5-8.

³⁸ Ovid, 265.

³⁹ Chernaik, 165.

⁴⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 3vols., ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980-8), 1, 245.

⁴¹ Nigel Leask, "Shelley's 'Magnetic Ladies': Romantic Mesmerism and the Politics of the Body", Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1730-1832, ed. Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992), 70.

⁴² See my discussion of Shelley's idea of the poetic imagination as "the Sun of Life", Chapter One, "A Poetics of being", 20-1.

⁴³ Wolfson, 219.

⁴⁴ Wolfson, 214.

⁴⁵ Wolfson, 221.

⁴⁶ Wolfson, 221.

⁴⁷ There are just four citations of "commit" cited in Ellis' Concordance, A Lexical Concordance to the Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, compiled and arranged, F. S. Ellis (1892; London: Bernard Quaritch, 1967), 117.

⁴⁸ Wolfson, 206.

⁴⁹ John Milton, Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Norton Critical Edition Ser. 2nd ed. Scott Elledge (New York: Norton, 1993), II, 555-61; hereafter referred to as Milton.

⁵⁰ Milton, III, 112-125.

⁵¹ Milton, VI, 262, 264.

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