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SHELLEY

SELECTED POEMS, ESSAYS, AND LETTERS

Selected and Edited by

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PREFACE

The basic text of the poems in this volume is that of Thomas Hutchinson, in the Oxford Standard Authors series. In a number of places, however, I have followed C. D. Locock's admirable edition. The more important of these readings are mentioned in the notes, as are changes (rarely) made on the authority of earlier editors. I have myself introduced a few slight changes in punctuation for the sake of clarity and have corrected a few obvious typographical errors in the Oxford text. The arrangement of the poems is in general chronological.

The Preface to *The Revolt of Islam* also follows the Oxford edition. The text of *The Necessity of Atheism* and *On Love* is that of Forman. For *A Defence of Poetry* I have used Mrs. Shelley's 1852 edition of the *Essays;* this I have collated with the Bodleian Manuscript as edited by A. H. Koszul, from which a few minor changes are introduced. The letters follow the text of the Julian Edition.

The portrait of Shelley reproduced in this volume is that by George Clint, after the original painting by Amelia Curran. It is perhaps the least unsatisfactory of the likenesses of the poet now known to exist. (An exhaustive discussion of these may be found in Newman White's *Shelley,* Appendix V.)

The editorial introduction and notes aim first of all at helping the reader to understand what Shelley means. Second, they offer an evaluation — intended to be suggestive, not dogmatic — of Shelley's character, of his thought, and of his craftsmanship. Third, they point out certain recurrent thoughts and phrases that reveal the characteristic bent of Shelley's mind. Finally, they attempt to trace the relation between Shelley's writings and his reading.

In the notes I have used large Roman numerals to refer to

"books," "cantos," or "parts" of poems, acts of plays, and "books" of prose works by ancient Greek and Roman authors; small Roman numerals to refer to stanzas of poems, scenes of plays, and "chapters" of classical prose works; and Arabic numerals to refer to lines. The exception is Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* the cantos of which are designated by small Roman numerals, the stanzas by Arabic numerals. References to Plato's works are not to the page numbers of any edition but to the section numbers printed beside the text in almost all editions.

The modern editor of Shelley is unpayably in debt to many predecessors; and it is hard to draw the line between what is now common property and what should be acknowledged as due to particular individuals. In general, I have set down matters of fact without reference to the persons who may have first uncovered them; but in regard to interpretation I have tried to credit each suggestion or explanation to the person responsible. The latter procedure has also been generally followed in listing literary parallels; but so many of these have been and will be noted independently that complete consistency is hardly worth striving for.

It remains to record my gratitude to those who have aided me in preparing this volume; especially, to Robert Shafer, for much sound and friendly advice and criticism; to Douglas Bush, whose reading of the Introduction in manuscript is only one of a long series of kindnesses; and to Newman I. White, who generously shared, as far as was relevant to the present undertaking, his unparalleled knowledge of everything pertaining to Shelley, even when it seemed possible that this volume might be published before the appearance of his own great work.

E. B.

March 16, 1944

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INTRODUCTION

I. Shelley the Man

Born on August 4, 1792, a month before the dreadful "September massacres" in Paris, Shelley was a true child of the French Revolution. But by a trick of that ironic and ultimately tragic fate which pursued the younger generation of English Romantic poets, he was also the son of an English country squire who was the epitome of provincial respectability and of mental and moral mediocrity.

Discord, when the son approached manhood, was inevitable. But in the meantime Shelley passed a joyous childhood, surrounded by a circle of adoring sisters, for whom he created a fairy-tale world of pleasantly terrifying monsters. We see, even so early, in his beauty, his wild fancies, and the presence in his character, side by side, of gentleness and high spirits, the same touch of the unearthly which impressed so many of his later acquaintances. But only too soon the rude world of reality forced itself upon him. At the age of ten he was sent to Sion House Academy, where the indignity more than the pain of the customary floggings, together with the general barbarity of his sixty-odd schoolfellows, aroused in him the flame of hatred, never to be quenched, against cruelty and tyranny in whatever form; and doubtless set him dreaming of a world where universal kindness and affection should hold sway. But such dreams were not essentially a retreat from reality; they only strengthened his uncompromising revolt against it.

It was at Eton, whither Shelley went two years later, that this revolt first became notable. There he found a society even more barbarous, existing under a system of government which has been aptly described as "anarchy tempered by despotism." The headmaster during the latter part of Shelley's stay was the

redoubtable Dr. Keate, who is reported on one occasion to have flogged eighty boys without intermission. The bullying to which the older boys had to submit from their teachers they passed on with interest to those younger and weaker than themselves. Such were conditions in a typical English school at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even a generation later, the schooling of Thomas Henry Huxley was such that he could write, "I deliberately affirm that the society I fell into at school was the worst I have ever known."

Shelley would have none of such a system. He defied it especially by refusing to "fag," and his schoolfellows retaliated by organizing "Shelley-baits," in which he fled before the pack until, cornered, he found his beloved books torn from his grasp and hurled to the ground, his clothes disarranged by plucking hands, and his name shouted in derisive tones by the whole mob of his tormentors. Yet "Mad Shelley" eventually won the respect and in some instances even the devoted friendship of his fellows; and it is easy to exaggerate his sufferings. In many ways his life at Eton was pleasant. He reveled in the beauties of the surrounding landscape. He had his own love of wild pranks, and he performed startling experiments in chemistry and physics — a smattering of which, together with astronomy, he had picked up from an itinerant popularizer of science, Adam Walker. His mind quickly mastered and passed beyond the prescribed subject matter of the curriculum, into such diverse fields as the philosophy of Lucretius, the overcharged Gothic romances of "Monk" Lewis and Mrs Radcliffe, and the seemingly rational proposals of William Godwin, in *Political Justice,* for a more or less complete overturn of the social order.

It was the second of these interests that inspired Shelley to his first ambitious literary productions — two prose tales called *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne, or The Rosicrucian.* These fully deserve the epithet which he later applied more carelessly than justly to *Queen Mab* — "villainous trash." Here is raked together all the harrowing stock in trade of those writers who catered to the popular demand for "thrillers"; imprisonment

and torture, seduction and murder (preferably of beautiful and sentimental young "females"), popular science (or pseudo-science), and black magic. Here we have the Shelley who made his bed "in charnels and on coffins," who "sought for ghosts" and "called on poisonous names." We have also, curiously enough, a Shelley who adjures his tearful and prayerful heroines, "Give not up your religion"; and a Shelley whose style is completely destitute of merit.

Shelley himself seems not to have taken these performances too seriously. He probably had some idea of electrifying the public as he had once "electrified" (literally) his blundering tutor. It is true that a reminiscence of Gothic romance runs through all his literary work; but his interest in the *type* was largely erased by his reading of *Political Justice*. It was apparently in the spring of 1810, before his departure from Eton to enter Oxford, that Shelley fell in with Godwin's masterpiece. First published in 1793 and unprosecuted by the Tory government only because, as the story goes, Pitt said that a three-guinea book could never do much harm, the work became quickly and widely famous, and its influence on Shelley was fateful, in more ways than one. It introduced him to the audacious rationalism of those philosophers in whom the French Revolution found its prophets and apologists; and it led eventually to a personal acquaintance with Godwin and with Godwin's daughter Mary, who was to become the poet's second wife.

It seems to have played only an indirect part, however, in bringing to birth the little pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*, which led to Shelley's dismissal from Oxford on March 25, 1811; for Godwin deplored the arousing of passion by specifically religious or theological controversy, in which, on the contrary, his disciple was by age and temper disposed to revel. But Shelley had also been reading John Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, and after that the works of David Hume, in which Locke's premises were pushed to their logical conclusion of thorough scepticism; as well as the writings of Voltaire and later French rationalists. Suddenly, as

has happened to many another youngster, he saw the accepted solid world become doubtful, unsubstantial; saw old unquestioned beliefs go by the board. What do we really know? Perhaps nothing exists but matter. Perhaps, on the other hand, matter does not exist; for we know it only through sensations, and where do these have being but in that strange phenomenon called mind? Many a youth, tasting for the first time this heady wine, becomes more than a little intoxicated. Anything seems possible — save acceptance of the dogmas of orthodox religion and compliance with the stodgy conventions of that great majority of mankind who have, or seem to have, surrendered to the pressure of material things and become content to live by bread alone; like Timothy Shelley, for example, whose politeness to obviously stupid fellow members of Parliament so irritated his son.

With such an awakening goes often a more or less overbearing desire to proselytize, to jostle people out of their complacent and uncritical acceptance of things as they seem. This newborn missionary spirit in Shelley was apparently first directed towards his cousin Harriet Grove, to whom he was informally betrothed. She proved unreceptive, and her parents broke off the match. Somewhat embittered, but still exuberant in his apostleship, he intensified and widened the scope of his campaign. He had a boyish love of argument for its own sake, especially on abstruse subjects, a boyish confidence in his own rightness, and perhaps a boy's desire to shock his elders. He would entice unsuspecting clergymen into correspondence on theological questions and delightedly entangle them in difficulties. With the help of his sole friend at Oxford, the somewhat cynical but loyal Thomas Jefferson Hogg, he brought together all the most crushing arguments against orthodoxy in a "systematic cudgel for Christianity" — the famous *Necessity of Atheism*. But despite the undoubted element of prankishness in the undertaking, the style is serious enough, as it is admirably clear, and makes at least partially credible Shelley's later contention to his father that the aim of the sponsors of the pamphlet was to seek enlightenment concerning honest

religious doubts from men who might be supposed to know something of the subject. At any rate, apparently deciding that it was too good to be wasted on a few individuals, he had it printed and advertised for sale to the public. To make sure that it would go to the right people, moreover, he sent copies (under the pseudonym "Jeremiah Stukeley") to all the heads of colleges at Oxford and all the bishops of the Church of England. What the bishops thought has never become known. But the ruling powers of Oxford were duly outraged — as some college authorities in America would be today; and after all, no one was at that time admitted to either Oxford or Cambridge who was not at least a nominal member of the Established Church. The young assailants of orthodoxy were summarily expelled.

Shelley was shocked by his expulsion, but not crushed. Oxford had been a dull place, anyway, he justly thought. And the campaign against "Intolerance," at whose hands he had now twice suffered, could evidently be carried on more effectively on other fronts. The retraction and the apology demanded by his father were not to be thought of. "I was prepared to make my father every reasonable concession," he wrote later, "but I am not so miserable and degraded a slave as publicly to disavow an opinion which I believe to be true."

But despite his high resolves, he was lonely and at loose ends in London, whither he had gone from Oxford. The only tie with home was surreptitious visits from his sisters, who were attending a girls' school near by. With them came a schoolmate, Harriet Westbrook, beautiful, sympathetic, and sixteen, who impressed Shelley so much that in less than a month he was writing to Hogg that in the crushing of "Intolerance" "Harriet will do for one of the crushers." Instead she became herself a victim of that malign power. Her friendship with Shelley — an Atheist! — brought ostracism from her schoolmates and harsh lectures from her teachers. She could not endure it; death would be preferable, unless — Would Shelley come and take her away? He did. The proposal was indeed "quite ludicrous"; but what else could he do, since all her

troubles were owing to her friendship for him? "Gratitude and admiration all demand that I should love her *for ever.*" And for once in his life he sacrificed a principle, and married her. This was more than she had asked, knowing that he (following Godwin) looked upon marriage as a vicious institution. But he was moved by the thought of the "sacrifice made by the woman, so disproportionate to any which the man can give." His whole course of action was absurd and admirable, and alienated his father more than ever. He would have been willing, the Honourable Member said, to support any number of illegitimate children; but to have his son marry the daughter of a tavern keeper — "God only knows what can be the end of all this disobedience!"

Shelley was not worried. It was inconvenient to have his allowance stopped, but they would manage somehow. In the meantime, there was the Cause — of political liberty, of social equality, of religious tolerance. Looking about to see where reform was most needed, he decided on Ireland. Early in 1812 he and Harriet set out to free the Irish. Godwin, to whom Shelley, discovering his idol to be still alive, had just introduced himself by letter, voiced strong disapproval, but failed completely in his effort to dampen the ardour of the young reformer. The project was fantastic enough, but Shelley's campaign was not quite so naïve as one might be led to think by the familiar story of his dropping revolutionary pamphlets from his hotel window upon the heads of those passers-by who promised by their appearance to furnish good soil for the Shelleyan gospel; a gospel of passive resistance and peaceful reform through education and the efforts of an "Association of Philanthropists." Still, his plea (in capital letters) "O IRISHMEN, REFORM YOURSELVES!" was not likely to make him popular. Moreover, as he wrote to a friend, "More hate me as a freethinker than love me as a votary of freedom." Then too, he found himself alone in advocating a policy based on principle rather than expediency. But perhaps it was the hopeless poverty and vice ("I had no conception of the depth of human misery until now") that most sickened

him — as it had sickened Swift a century before — overwhelmed him with a sense of futility, and sent him back to England and to the writing of *Queen Mab*.

This remarkable poem, written during the summer of 1812 when Shelley was a boy of twenty, privately printed in 1813 to "catch the aristocrats," pirated in 1821 and repeatedly reprinted in spite of continual government prosecutions, was for perhaps half a century the best known work of the poet, and made his name as generally detested and reviled among the supporters of orthodoxy and respectability as it was venerated and praised by the radical reformers in politics and religion. Even in 1888, the noted editor and bibliophile, H. Buxton Forman, could tell the Shelley Society that "to this day, I believe, there are ten who know Shelley as the author of *Queen Mab* for one who knows that he wrote *Prometheus Unbound*."

Such fame was not altogether undeserved. In the two years following the period of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, Shelley's mind had developed almost incredibly. The affectation of a sickly sentimentalism and the tawdry pseudo-poetic prose which characterize those puerile productions give way in *Queen Mab* to a fierce "passion for reforming the world," expressed in a free-flowing and hard-hitting if sometimes too declamatory blank verse. His motto is Voltaire's — *"Ecrasez l'infame!"* — and into his onslaught against what he regards as the abuses of contemporary society he pours all his resources of reason and passion. None of his works illustrates more brilliantly the power of the poet's intellect; an intellect which was, however, assimilative rather than inventive, and subtle (although not particularly so as yet) rather than systematic. *Queen Mab* suggests the magic sack given by Aeolus to Odysseus, into which are gathered, with the thought of a tempestuous letting-loose, all the current "winds of doctrine" — economic and social, ethical and metaphysical; except, of course, those blowing towards conservatism.

Shelley's next long poem was *Alastor*, written in 1815. And again we find a change that is little short of astounding. Here the specific problems of society are far away. Instead of

the tirades against kings and priests that make up much of *Queen Mab,* here is a dream-like narrative of the life and death of a poetic recluse driven vainly to pursue a visioned embodiment in lovely woman-form of the fair ideals of beauty and love by whose presence in his dreams and absence in the outward world of men Shelley himself was to be forever troubled.

This new theme and tone spring unmistakably from an essential trait of Shelley's character and must ultimately have come to the surface under any conditions. But the suddenness of their emergence seems clearly due to the events of the poet's life.

> Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

It is still difficult to decide where the wrong lay in a situation from which several persons suffered. The bald fact — shocking to many people — is that in July, 1814, Shelley left Harriet and eloped to Switzerland with Mary Godwin, then a girl of not quite seventeen. There are other facts, however, which not only explain but extenuate, even if they do not wholly justify, his conduct. For reasons not wholly clear, there had been for some months before his meeting with Mary a growing estrangement between him and Harriet, and she had been living apart from him despite his pleas that she return; although clearly she had no idea of a permanent separation. She had, moreover, allowed herself to be completely dominated by her older sister Eliza (possibly the instigator of the match in the first place), whom she knew Shelley detested. She had also, after the birth of their first child, Ianthe, wholly lost interest in the intellectual pursuits and social crusades which for her husband were the very breath of life, and for which she had once professed an equal enthusiasm. It should be remembered, too, that (whatever the part played by Eliza) Harriet more than Shelley had been responsible for their union and had entered it knowing that he was, on principle, opposed to marriage — that to him a legal union meant nothing when it ceased to

rest upon mutual affection. It may also be urged that Mary was the daughter not only of William Godwin, the man whom he had chosen as his spiritual guide, but also of Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first and most famous — certainly the most winning — of English feminists, whose book *The Rights of Women* was a milestone in the struggle of modern women to achieve the status of human beings, and whose memory therefore Shelley deeply revered. Finally, when his decision had been painfully reached, he told Harriet of it frankly, and made an honest effort to remain her friend and provide for her wants. On the other side it must be said that the separation was against Harriet's wishes, and that at the time she was again with child by Shelley. Moreover, the old assertion that Harriet was unfaithful, or at least that Shelley then thought her to have been so, can no longer be maintained. And then there is the question, perhaps not now answerable, as to what part was played by Mary. With unconscious irony Harriet accused her of entrapping Shelley by means of precisely the same devices that she herself seems to have used so effectively three years before. The simplest, and probably the most charitable, explanation of the whole affair is that Shelley simply outgrew his first wife; and that, realizing that they no longer had anything in common, he resolved to put an end to their relation as man and wife. Even if he had not fallen desperately in love with Mary Godwin, a separation from Harriet would sooner or later have been inevitable.

Shelley, at any rate, felt that his course of action was logical and simple. But there were to be unlooked-for complications. The lovers had allowed Clare Claremont, the daughter of Godwin's second wife by her first husband and hence Mary's step-sister, to accompany them (possibly they could not prevent her), and for the rest of his life Shelley had to be responsible for her — whether Mary liked it or not. The difficulty of his position may be inferred from Clare's statement (as repeated by Godwin) of the terms on which she would return to the Godwin household: "that she should in all situations openly proclaim & earnestly support, a total contempt for the laws & in-

stitutions of society." And then there was Harriet. To Shelley's surprise, she refused to acquiesce in his proposal (which has shocked many people, but which may be fairly regarded as only one more instance of his unique unworldliness and purity of mind) that she still live with him as a sister, yielding to Mary the position of wife. "He had the folly," she exclaimed, "to believe this possible." And to her reproaches were added those of his idolized teacher, Godwin, who, choosing not to reflect that Shelley was only putting into practice the principles advocated in *Political Justice,* never forgave him — nor ceased to importune him for money which he could get only by pawning his future inheritance. For Timothy Shelley, finally, it was the last straw; he outlived his son by twenty-two years, but henceforth he never wavered in his desire to forget and to have the world forget that that son had ever lived.

So when Shelley returned to England, it was to find himself almost a universal outcast, standing in the shadow of a debtor's prison. He had to leave Mary and go into hiding. Actual starvation seemed not far away.

The death early in 1815 of old Sir Bysshe, Shelley's grandfather, brought the poet a measure of financial security, jeopardized though it constantly was by Godwin's shameless demands for money to help him escape the endless series of disasters resulting from his total incompetence in business. But Shelley's experiences had left a mark that was not to be erased. They had taught him a distrust of reasoned systems in which human beings are supposed to act predictably. They had made him aware of inescapable and baffling conflicts of motives and of wills, of indeterminate complexities and invincible perversities in human nature, of an ironic fate which made the best intentions unavailing. They had inclined him to give less consideration to abstractions and more to individual human souls. And they had inspired, or at least intensified, in the depths of his nature that indefinable awareness of "the tears of things" without which no poet can be truly great.

All this, absent in *Queen Mab,* begins to be present in *Alastor.*

But life had further lessons in store for Shelley. The summer of 1816 brought a second and less hectic visit to Switzerland, where in the presence of the Alps he experienced both profound inward stirrings and a profound inward repose, which find expression in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc.* There for the first time he met Byron, like himself a social outcast, and, as always thereafter, Shelley's presence brought to light the most winning traits of Byron's Protean character. Together they read Wordsworth, whose political conservatism they both despised, but whose poetical powers Shelley at least admired: "That such a man should be such a poet!" Together they visited places haunted by memories of Rousseau, Gibbon, Voltaire; and Byron turned the experience to good account in *Childe Harold.* Together on Lake Geneva they satisfied their passion for sailing; and when a storm imperilled them, Shelley, fearing that Byron, who was an excellent swimmer, would risk his own life in trying to save his friend, seated himself "quietly on a locker, and grasping the rings at each end firmly in his hands, declared his determination to go down in that position without a struggle." "If you can't swim," Byron told him later, "beware of Providence." In the evenings, with Mary and Clare and the amiable "Monk" Lewis (for whom they witnessed a will designed to ensure the welfare of the slaves on his Barbados plantations), they joined in reading and telling ghost stories around the fire. Thus was inspired Mary's tale *Frankenstein,* which was to be more famous than Lewis's own horrific masterpiece, *The Monk.*

But the holiday ended, and the return to England was a return to tragedy. Early in the autumn, Fanny, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft by Gilbert Imlay before her marriage to Godwin, a girl more lovable in many ways than either Mary or Clare, committed suicide. The callousness of Godwin and the ill temper of his second wife had made Fanny's existence, after the departure of Mary and Clare with Shelley, intolerable. The death in such a manner, indirectly as a result of his own conduct, of a person who (almost uniquely, it seems) had given and asked of him only simple affection, gave life the

taste of ashes in Shelley's mouth, brought home to him more bitterly his isolation. "Thus much I do not seek to conceal from myself, that I am an outcast from human society; my name is execrated by all who understand its entire import."

Thus Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt a few days before another tragic event of the same sort came to light with the discovery of the body of Harriet in the Serpentine River; she also had found the burden of life too heavy. Here again it is difficult to fix the blame. Posterity has laid much of it on Shelley. He placed most of it on Harriet's family. And indeed she had written as early as January, 1815: "I am still at my father's, which is very wretched. . . . I am so restrained here that life is scarcely worth living." There is conflicting testimony as to how deeply Shelley was moved by Harriet's death. At any rate, one of his first acts thereafter was to legalize his union with Mary through a formal marriage. He then sought to gain possession of his two children by Harriet whom he had left in her care and whom she had left in charge of her father and sister; but after his suit in Chancery to recover them from the Westbrooks had dragged on for more than a year, he was legally judged unfit to care for them. Early in 1818, fearing (perhaps unreasonably) that his two children by Mary might likewise be taken from him, and urged also by poor health, he left England for the "paradise of exiles, Italy."

His last year in England had brought no violent shocks, but Shelley seemed never to be free from troubles. Besides the burden of the lawsuit, there was the presence of Clare, in which Mary never quite willingly acquiesced. And the birth of Allegra as a result of Clare's liaison with Byron gave rise to ugly rumours, which the reviewers later were only too glad to exhume. It was said that Allegra was Shelley's daughter, that he had been living promiscuously with Mary and Clare, and that Godwin had sold the girls to him for a sum of money! Besides these annoyances, ill health was now his constant companion. "The climate," according to Mary, "caused him to consume half his existence in helpless suffering." Yet the summer of 1817 was not wholly unhappy. He lived quietly on

the outskirts of London, entertaining his few friends (including Hogg, Hunt, Peacock, and Horace Smith), aiding the unemployed silk-weavers of the district (whom, as Hunt said, "others gave Bibles to and no help"), and writing the five thousand lines of *The Revolt of Islam,* a fantastic and confused but sometimes moving narrative interspersed with the old fierce denunciation of tyranny and superstition (in other words, of monarchy and Christianity) and with glorification of the Christian virtues of love and forgiveness.

It was in Italy that Shelley's greatest works were written. The mild climate, the brilliant natural surroundings and splendid works of art (so vividly described in the letters to Peacock), the relics everywhere of traditions that had for centuries engaged the passions and imaginations of men — all these contributed to the final flowering of Shelley's genius. *Prometheus Unbound,* his most distinctive and many-sided poetic achievement, was begun a few months after his arrival, and the first three acts were completed in the spring of 1819. In two months more he had turned out his great tragedy, *The Cenci,* which he vainly hoped to have produced. Then, as the tragic events of his own day drew his thoughts away from those of long past centuries, his anger at the brutal "Peterloo Massacre" of workingmen at Manchester flamed forth in *The Mask of Anarchy,* so searing that Hunt dared not print it till thirteen years afterwards. With amazing versatility he brought forth a few weeks later *Peter Bell the Third,* an impromptu but brilliant satire on one of Wordsworth's most absurd poems. The mixture of comedy, invective, and shrewd, detached criticism is suggestive of Byron's *Don Juan,* although the execution can hardly be expected to stand comparison with that of Byron at his best. In a different mood he rose, in the fourth act of *Prometheus* and the *Ode to the West Wind,* to lyric utterances of such triumphantly sustained power as even he never surpassed. Here is the Shelley who later told Trelawny, "I always go on until I am stopped, and I never am stopped."

Yet something stopped, or at least impeded, the surge of

creative power. All the poems that he completed after 1819, even such masterpieces as *Epipsychidion, Adonais,* and *Hellas,* were occasional. Works comparable to *Prometheus,* deliberately planned, were few, and remained unfinished. We hear towards the end of 1820 of "great designs and feeble hopes of ever accomplishing them." And a few months later, speaking of his unfinished drama *Charles the First,* he remarks, "My thoughts aspire to a production of a far higher character; but the execution will take some years." And he adds, "I write what I write chiefly to inquire, by the reception which my writings meet with, how far I am fit for so great a task." The reception, or at least the partial account of it which Shelley received, was scarcely encouraging. Yet still he remained "full of great plans."

That these never came to fulfilment may be laid in part to Shelley's continued ill health. Some strange internal malady was always tormenting him with sudden spasms of such excruciating pain that they sent him rolling on the floor in helpless agony. "I always tell you I am better," he writes to Clare, "and yet I am never well." And just before his death he confides, "I . . . enjoy for the first time these ten years something like health — I find, however, that I must neither think nor feel, or the pain returns to its old nest." "Anything that prevents me from thinking," he had previously said, "does me good. Reading does not occupy me enough [he read the masterpieces of six languages besides English]: the only relief I find springs from the composition of poetry, which necessitates contemplations that lift me above the stormy mist of sensations which are my habitual place of abode." Yet the exhausting labour of composition made such relief only the prelude to greater suffering. Speaking of *Hellas,* which was written in the summer of 1821, the poet says: "It was written in one of those few moments of enthusiasm which now seldom visit me, and which make me pay dear for their visits." It was the last long poem that he completed.

Yet it was perhaps more than anything else the public indifference to his poetry that gave rise to the depression and

weariness which form so strong an undercurrent in his life during the last years. The malignity of the reviewers he could laugh at; but the apathetic reception of his work by the reading public left him without a vocation. "What motives have I to write? I *had* motives, and I thank the God of my own heart that they were totally different from those of the other apes[1] of humanity who make mouths in the glass of time. But what are *those* motives now?" "I wonder why I write verses, for nobody reads them." "If *Adonais* had no success, and excited no interest, what incentive can I have to write?" He might well ask! "Imagine Demosthenes reciting a Philippic to the Atlantic." "I do not write . . . for I cannot hope, with St. John, that *'the light came into the world, and the world knew it not.'*"

This is not self-pity. In Shelley's religion the poet is the prophet, and his creations are divinely inspired. "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man." If none heeds these revelations, then either they are illusions or the world is hopelessly corrupt. In any case, why go on?

To be sure, Shelley was human. He craved and needed human, personal sympathy, the understanding and affection of men and women. The sharing of experience with one's fellow men was another article in his religious creed. He clung almost desperately to anyone who appeared to care for him, and he acknowledged only with reluctance the loosening of friendly ties. "We never hear from England now," he says mournfully in 1821. "Godwin writes no more. Peacock writes no more. Hunt wrote about three months ago, in a strain, however, which gave me pain, because I see he is struggling." The cruelest part of his destiny was that he never found a person, man or woman, who could offer him perfect sympathy and understanding. He bore every one's burdens; there was no one to bear his.

Perhaps the one person of his acquaintance who had the

[1] Ingpen's earlier editions of Shelley's letters read "ages," the Julian Edition, "asses." But Shelley's *p* and double *s* are practically identical, and "apes" obviously best fits the sense.

strength of mind and character to meet Shelley on equal terms was Byron, who suffered also, though responding in a different way, from the lack of real companionship. They met again in Venice in 1818, and as one sees that meeting incomparably brought to life in *Julian and Maddalo,* one understands what their friendship might have meant. But Byron's "many generous and exalted qualities" were mingled with vanity and caprice; he and Mary entertained for each other a polite dislike; and Clare, that unpredictable creature of whim, proud of having induced Byron to accept her as his mistress and vindictive through having failed to make him keep her so, but somehow always able to enlist Shelley's sympathy, put a severe strain on the friendship between the two poets. Nevertheless, their intimacy was renewed in Pisa in 1821 and they became "constant companions"; "no small relief this," adds Shelley, "after the dreary solitude of the understanding and the imagination in which we passed the first years of our expatriation." But at the end they were drifting apart.

In Mary, for a time, Shelley thought that he had found his ideal. Her tendency to be jealous of Clare and her inclination to excessive melancholy and introspection were under the circumstances not unnatural, and they disturbed Shelley as little as the fact remarked by an early observer "that Mary was somewhat too free and exacting in ordering her husband about, which he submitted to with the docility of a child." But eventually he had to acknowledge that her companionship left much to be desired. The death of their two children — one dying in the autumn of 1818 and the other in the early summer of 1819 — plunged Mary into a desperate and prolonged depression which made Shelley's lot so much the harder. Only the birth of another son a few months later restored her in some measure to cheerfulness. Moreover, she seems to have shared to some extent (as did others of his friends) the general opinion regarding his poems. When they failed to win popularity, she urged him to write upon subjects calculated to appeal to the public instead of upon those dictated by his own genius and ideals. "Prithee for this one time," he

pleads wistfully in the prefatory stanzas to *The Witch of Atlas,* "content thee with a visionary rhyme." She longed also for society — the society of respectable, conventional, polite people, whom her husband found intolerably boring. "Poor Mary! . . . she can't bear solitude, nor I society — the quick coupled with the dead." And then there were his friendships with other women, of which the world has heard so much: with Emilia Viviani, the pretty, sentimental Italian girl "imprisoned" in a convent, who recalled the old, unsuccessful quest for a living embodiment of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, and sent Shelley's imagination soaring to the mystical heights of *Epipsychidion;* and, at the last, with the pretty, serene, unintellectual, and unsentimental Jane Williams, who relieved his physical sufferings by means of hypnosis and his mental unrest by strains from her guitar. Might Mary not have seen that it was only in imagination (as he himself was more than half aware) that he was "in love" — and that sooner or later he would have sadly to confess what he had known already — the "error" of "seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal"? No, if she had been capable of seeing, he would never have needed to seek in the sympathetic companionship of other women a moment's half-forgetfulness of his pain, his loneliness, the wreck of his hopes for a better world.

Mary, to be sure, has her own claims on one's sympathy. Years later, as Matthew Arnold tells the story, when some one suggested that Mary's son be sent to school "somewhere where they will teach him to think for himself," Mary cried, "Oh, my God, teach him rather to think like other people!" Wherever one's sympathies may lie, Mary's answer shows how profound and irremediable was the difference in temperament between her and her husband.

Yet in the attempt to understand Shelley's life and character, whoever assumes towards the poet an attitude of pity is certain to miss the mark. Among all who knew him there was none who did not openly or tacitly acknowledge his strength of mind and will, his mastery of persons and circumstances. He was the centre of the "Pisa circle": Byron made him an envoy

to his mistress, the Countess Guiccioli; Clare worried him with wild schemes, but always allowed him to stand between her and misfortune; Mary let him deal with the despicable importunities of Godwin and his wife; would-be men of letters like Medwin and Taafe imposed on his kindness by asking him to criticize the results of their literary labours; the piratical Trelawny stopped his rovings to wonder and worship; Edward Williams, "the best of fellows," joyously accepted his proffered comradeship; to Leigh Hunt he was little less than a benevolent deity, whose death foredoomed to failure the journalistic enterprise — *The Liberal* — which had drawn Hunt to Italy.

And through it all his innate, enchanting, boyish gaiety remained unsubdued to the end. One recalls his mad romp through a convent in the wake of the tiny madcap Allegra, to the consternation of "the spouses of God"; his skylarking jaunt with Mary and Trelawny across the Italian countryside, their gleeful shouts causing the peasants to shake their heads and mutter something about the "mad English"; his dashing rides and all-night talks (what would one not give to have been able to listen!) with Byron; the delight with which he welcomed the boat which was to carry him to his death beneath the storm-darkened waters of the blue Mediterranean.

It was the death above all others, no doubt, that he would have chosen. And perhaps he was not entirely unready to die. Strangers on meeting him were astonished at the clear, boyish beauty of his face. But he himself remarked to Mrs. Hunt on the day before his death, "If I die tomorrow, I shall have lived to be older than my father. I am ninety years of age." Truly, as some one has observed, one cannot imagine the younger generation of Romantic poets as ever growing old.

In the pockets of Shelley's jacket when his body was found were volumes of Sophocles and Keats — fit companions for the last voyage of one who had felt an instinctive kinship with the loftiest spirits of every age. And it was fitting, also, that the fire which he had loved — "Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is" — should have consumed all that the sea which he

had loved gave back of the body which had seemed to him so often to be nothing more than a living grave.

* * *

"We ought as justly to regret the decease of the Devil. . . . Percy Byssche [*sic*] Shelley is a fitter subject for a penitentiary dying speech, than for a lauding elegy; for the muse of the rope, rather than that of the cypress." Thus, at the end of 1822, some six months after Shelley's death, did a writer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* pass judgement on the poet; and although such glib vindictiveness was far from universal, it fairly represents the sentiments of a large section of the press and the public. But those who had really known him had a different story to tell. Trelawny says no more than the truth when he defends the lavishness of his own praise of Shelley by declaring "that all on knowing him sang the same song." Leigh Hunt, for one, affirmed over and over, in varying words but always in the same spirit, the *credo* that "if there was ever a man upon earth, of a more spiritual nature than ordinary, partaking of the errors and perturbations of his species, but seeing and working through them with a seraphical purpose of good, such an one was Percy Bysshe Shelley." If any one wishes to discount Hunt's tribute because Shelley gave him money, there is the testimony of the London banker Horace Smith, with whom the account stood the other way, and who found Shelley always "a *gentleman* . . . even in the most exalted acceptation of the word . . . gentle, generous, accomplished, brave"; who "could hardly trust the evidence of his senses" when he saw "a man so utterly self-denying and unworldly." "When I recalled," says Smith, "his exquisite genius, his intellectual illumination, his exuberant philanthropy, his total renunciation of self, the courage and grandeur of his soul, combined with a feminine delicacy and purity, and an almost angelic amenity and sweetness, I could almost fancy that I had been listening to a spirit from some higher sphere, who had descended upon earth to inculcate a self-realizing confidence in the lofty destinies of mankind." And Byron, the

egotist, the cynic, the incorrigible and ruthless satirist of human meanness and vanity and folly, could find no flaw in Shelley's character. "He is, to my knowledge, the least selfish and mildest of men — a man who has made more sacrifices of his fortunes and feelings for others than any I ever heard of." "You do not know how mild, how tolerant, how good he was." "You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison." "He was the most gentle, most amiable, and least worldly-minded person I ever met, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius, joined to simplicity, as rare as it is admirable. He had formed to himself a *beau ideal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble; and he acted up to this ideal, even to the very letter." We need not doubt that the testimony of these witnesses presents "the real Shelley."

II. Shelley the Thinker

The general interest in Shelley has doubtless always been centred in his life and character rather than in his philosophy. "We of today," says a recent reviewer, "know Shelley only as a supreme lyric poet"; and it is to be feared that the statement is largely true. Yet it is hard to name another great English poet, except Milton and, possibly, Keats, who possessed in equal measure with Shelley the urge and power to deal with abstract ideas as well as with actual experience; to analyze deliberately the subtlest and most profound of human thoughts and feelings and to relate these to the external world and its events. "I am formed," he declared, "if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind, to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us, and to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole." This analysis is essentially correct. Shelley was not content to describe or mirror the world. He tried to understand it. And when he concluded at last that there are certain "riddles" of which the "solution is not

attainable by us," he at least understood the grounds upon which that conclusion rested.

And Shelley wished not only to understand the world, but also to change it. The brief consideration already given to *Queen Mab* and *Alastor* has indicated that Shelley's mind and poetry are dominated by these two aims — each of which is to him an end in itself. On the one hand, there is his "passion for reforming the world," his humanitarianism, with its sometimes almost overwhelming sense of duty to the oppressed and poverty-stricken multitudes of struggling human atoms whose sufferings no revolution seems able to alleviate. Here are disease, poverty, crime, — and punishment often more hateful than crime itself. Such things ought not to — they must not — be allowed to continue without some effort to remove them. On the other hand, there is the urgent impulsion to learn the ultimate truth of our existence. What do we *really* know? Is it men themselves who are responsible for their sufferings, or is it the environment in which they involuntarily find themselves? How can the world as we behold it be reconciled with the profound inward conviction, known to so many men, of the existence of an all-pervading and all-good Spirit? What part of our experience is illusion, what part is real? Is it not wiser to seek peace within oneself through study and meditation, rather than to expend one's energy in a perhaps futile effort to improve the external world? What sensitive person has not known in some measure the feeling of John Ruskin, "tormented between the longing for rest and lovely life, and the sense of this terrible call of human crime for resistance and of human misery for help"?

So it was with Shelley. Despite his imaginative flights to seemingly insubstantial realms, the causes so ardently championed in *Queen Mab* were not forgotten. Rarely did he fail, even in the midst of crowding personal troubles, to keep his finger on the pulse of the age. From the time of his letter to Leigh Hunt in 1811, on the occasion of Hunt's acquittal in a government prosecution growing out of an article in *The Examiner* on military flogging, the course of public events

never for long escaped his attention. The execution of three ignorant labourers for participating in a riot to which, as Shelley and many other liberal-minded persons believed, they had been incited by government agents for no other purpose than to stir up mob feeling against all opponents of Tory tyranny, called forth, in the prose *Address on the Death of the Princess Charlotte,* an utterance worthy of Edmund Burke. The "Peterloo Massacre" inspired *The Mask of Anarchy.* The sordid divorce case of George IV against Queen Caroline, which was made a political football, brought to birth the satirical drama *Oedipus Tyrannus,* which, although humorously intended and held by critics generally to be a grossly overdrawn picture of the England of that day, at least does not fail of application to present-day politics in several regions of the earth. *Hellas* celebrates the Greek war for independence. The *Ode to Liberty* and the *Ode to Naples,* among shorter poems, were offerings on the altar of political freedom. No less timely, and admirable besides for their moderation and common sense, are *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote* and the unfinished *A Philosophical View of Reform,* two essays setting forth specifically Shelley's views on social and political problems.

Exactly what those views were is obviously of the first importance. On this question, however, critics have radically disagreed. Yet it seems reasonably clear that Shelley's philosophy, after the *Queen Mab* days, did not involve, as is sometimes said, the belief that the complete overthrow of government and other institutions — in a word, authority — and the equalization of property would prove a cure-all for social ills. Even as early as 1811 we find Shelley saying, in his *Address to the Irish People:* "Before the restraints of government are lessened, it is fit that we should lessen the necessity for them. Before government is done away with, we must reform ourselves." Political reform is "founded on the reform of private men, and without individual amendment it is vain and foolish to expect the amendment of a state or government." Surely this is strange talk for a revolutionist who was, as is widely believed, "against everything." What would happen to a political leader in America today who should dare to preach such con-

servative doctrine? To be sure, Shelley contradicts himself on the next page, where his own judgement yields to the *a priori* theorizings of the Revolutionary rationalists who were at that time his acknowledged masters. And the same contradiction is present in *Queen Mab*. The evils which men endure are in some places declared to be the result of artificial and vicious institutions, something imposed upon man from without; and elsewhere, to be the offspring, along with the institutions themselves, of innate evil tendencies in human nature, like "suicidal selfishness," "mean lust," treachery, and hate. Man, says the poet,

> fabricates
> The sword which stabs his peace; he cherisheth
> The snakes that gnaw his heart; he raiseth up
> The tyrant, whose delight is in his woe.

Men would not suffer from tyrants if they were not naturally slaves.

In his later writings Shelley asserts time after time, with ever-increasing conviction, that in the last analysis society can be bettered only by the moral and spiritual regeneration of its individual members. "Equality of possessions," for example, "must be the last result of the utmost refinements of civilization." For men are not "naturally good"; the contrary is so far true that "uncivilized man is the most pernicious and miserable of beings." Man is such that the "immediate emotions of his nature, especially in its most inartificial state, prompt him to inflict pain and arrogate dominion. . . . He is revengeful, proud, and selfish." In the light of such comments *Prometheus Unbound* reveals as its theme the struggle of man to conquer his own lower nature and thereby escape from bondage to evils which, whatever their ultimate origin, he has himself permitted.

And let it be emphasized that this escape is presented as being no easy task. Shelley believed, says Mary in one of her notes, that "man had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none." But does Christian or any other traditional morality teach otherwise? To say that man by an

act of will can destroy evil — is not this to say that evil now exists solely as a result of that same will's being perverted from righteous ends? How such perversion first came about, we are not told; in more than one place Shelley confesses that problem to be insoluble. But what is clear beyond any reasonable doubt is that in his mature years he never believed that any alteration, however radical, in the outward forms alone of human life would bring into being a millennium of universal happiness. As early as 1817 he declared in the Preface to *The Revolt of Islam* that the intellectual and moral enlightenment which the early partisans of the French Revolution hoped for, and which its enemies blamed it for not producing, must be "the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced 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." The paradise described at the end of the third act of *Prometheus* does not descend upon earth over night. And in fact, it is doubtful whether, according to Shelley's later views, it will ever descend upon the earth at all; whether it is not less akin to any conceivable earthly paradise than to that city "not built with hands, eternal in the heavens"; whether, that is, the happiness to which the human soul aspires must not necessarily belong, in its perfection, to another level of being than the physical world. More and more, as Shelley grew older, he came to feel the essential unreality of the realm of matter and of everything contingent upon it. In *Hellas*, the last long poem that he completed and the last concerned with political events, the "good society" of the future is not only indefinitely postponed but practically acknowledged to be forever incapable of perfect realization on earth.

> If Greece must be
> A wreck, yet shall its fragments reassemble,
> And build themselves again impregnably
> In a diviner clime,
> To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime,
> Which frowns above the idle foam of Time.

Yet the ideal, though banished, remains — indestructible, ever present to inspirit the thin-ranked indomitable company of whom the poet speaks in *Peter Bell the Third,* and among whom, to the end, he kept his place.

> And some few, like we know who,
> Damned — but God alone knows why —
> To believe their minds are given
> To make this ugly Hell a heaven;
> In which faith they live and die.

The social theories and atttiudes that have just been sketched depend directly upon Shelley's metaphysical beliefs, and comprehension of these is indispensable to a clear understanding of the poet's work.

Some interpreters of Shelley have erred through not recognizing the vast difference, both in tone and content, between *Queen Mab* and his mature work. This error is responsible for the common and misleading application to this phase of his philosophy of such terms as *pantheism, optimism,* and *necessitarianism.* It is true that in his first long poem he sometimes professes an optimistic determinism, asserting that

> Nature soon, with recreating hand,
> Will blot in mercy from the book of earth

all present human suffering; that this Nature, or Necessity, governs absolutely not only the movements of matter but also the minds of men, and comprehends within itself both the "fair oak" and the "poison tree," both the "virtuous man" and the "slave" of "horrible lusts"; and that "there is no God" except "a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe." It is also true that he never ceased to denounce Christian *orthodoxy,* and only once, in a note to *Hellas,* carelessly allowed himself to speak of "Christianity" as something good. Yet there is no conclusive evidence that he was ever an unqualified materialist or atheist; and by 1816, at least, even *pantheism* has ceased to describe accurately his metaphysical views. In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* we find him acknowledging his over-

whelming intuitive belief in the existence of a supernatural Spirit of Beauty that sheds its light upon the "dark slavery" of "this world," alone making it tolerable and giving man hope of ultimate escape from it.

This faith in a spiritual reality, "a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," with which we feel a mystical kinship, is the central fact of what may be called Shelley's theology. The rationalistic doctrines of his first teachers, set forth in *Queen Mab,* he soon decisively rejected, as he would have rejected the naturalism whose rise and triumph was even then impending. Instead, he takes his stand with traditional morality, with Plato and Christ, and asserts, as an experienced fact, the presence in the world of evil opposed to good, between which each individual soul must choose, consciously and deliberately; and he affirms with a power and persuasiveness rarely equalled in English poetry the spiritual supremacy of the good.

Such sweeping statements call for elaboration. And first, we must realize the intensity of Shelley's awareness of the evil in the world.

> *Me* — who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
> The else unfelt oppressions of this earth —

Here is unmistakably a cry from the heart of the poet himself. Nor was it his own sufferings, undeserved as he felt them to be, that chiefly preoccupied him; for these he took but as a type of those endured in even greater measure by unnumbered multitudes of fellow human beings. No lash upon the back of any cringing slave but likewise fell upon his own; no "drops of bloody agony" from humanity's martyred saviours but seared while strengthening his spirit; and (what sets him apart from the mass of mere reformers) no passion of envy or hate, of greed or cruelty or lust, no pang of loneliness or doubt or despair, in human creatures no matter how mean, passed by without piercing his "heart of hearts." For to him physical suffering was not primary, was not the cause of spiritual deformity; rather the contrary must be ultimately true. Only

the inward life is real. By Prometheus' own mind and will are created the chains that bind and the demons that torture him upon his lonely rock; it is "envy and calumny and hate" far more than physical pain whose shadow Adonais has happily outsoared; it is from unchecked desire for delusive phantoms of worldly good that the swarm of shadows are born whose falling transforms so horribly the marchers in that dreadful pageant which Shelley called *The Triumph of Life.*

But Shelley did not face this terrifying spectacle, from which his almost morbid sensitiveness so rarely suffered him to escape, without some measure of sustaining hope. If evil is primarily spiritual, the result of forces at work within the souls of individual men (as the poet certainly believed when he came to maturity), and if man's will is free to govern his inward, real self, then he has power to liberate himself from the tyranny of evil. And it is Shelley's final and clear conviction that man does possess such freedom and such power. He describes himself in the Preface to *Julian and Maddalo* as "passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind"; and in the poem he declares that

> it is our will
> That thus enchains us to permitted ill —

and goes on to urge:

> 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.

In the same high strain are these lines from the *Ode to Liberty:*

> He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever
> Can be between the cradle and the grave
> Crowned him the King of Life. Oh, vain endeavour!
> If on his own high will, a willing slave,
> He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor.

In the sonnet entitled *Political Greatness* we find the same creed.

Man who man would be,
Must rule the empire of himself; in it
Must be supreme, establishing his throne
On vanquished will, quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears, being himself alone.

Yet Shelley is a mystic as well as a moralist; haunted by "the awful shadow of some unseen Power," passionately convinced of the living presence of "that Light whose smile kindles the universe," he hastens to assert an intimate relation between this "interfused and over-ruling Spirit" and the souls of individual human beings. Man does not have to stand alone. "I vowed," he cries in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,*

that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine—

The "phantoms of a thousand hours" are called to bear witness

that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery.

To the same "Great Spirit, deepest Love!" he prays in the *Ode to Naples,*

Be man's high hope and unextinct desire
The instrument to work thy will divine!

With the workings of this Spirit, he would say, the will of the individual is to be brought into perfect harmony. Man is described in *Prometheus Unbound* as being "the wreck of his own will," and the thought is continued in the Earth's hymn of rejoicing:

His will, with all mean passions, bad delights,
And selfish cares, its trembling satellites,
A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey.

This will, then, must cease to centre itself in the limited personality of the individual and must yield itself—but *freely*—to the "one Spirit" of Goodness, of Beauty, of Love, which the

poet celebrates so constantly and under so many names; not seldom, in the later poems, under the name of God.

Exactly how this ruling Spirit is conceived by Shelley is too complicated a problem to be fully analyzed here. The old stigma of atheism has finally been discarded, but the question of pantheism or theism is still debated. No doubt the disagreement is partly a matter of definition. If by *pantheism* we mean, as many persons seem to mean, the belief in a "pervading Spirit" immanent in the universe and its operations, such as Wordsworth describes in *Tintern Abbey*—

> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things—

then no one can deny that Shelley is a pantheist. But if *pantheism* is defined more strictly as belief that God is merely to be *identified with* the sum of existence—a belief whose necessary corollaries are optimism and fatalism—then to call Shelley a pantheist is absurd. Evil *is* a reality in this world. From the time when the primordial chaos began to take ordered shape, he tells us in the great first canto of *The Revolt of Islam*, two Spirits have been continually locked in strife; and always the Spirit of Evil has triumphed. In the *Essay on Christianity* he declares that "according to the indisputable facts of the case, some evil spirit has dominion in this imperfect world." The later essay *On the Devil and Devils* contains the statement: "The Manichean philosophy concerning the origin and government of the world, if not true, is at least an hypothesis conformable to the experience of actual facts." And he continues: "The supposition that the good spirit is, or hereafter will be, superior, is a personification of the principle of hope, and that thirst for improvement without which, present evil would be intolerable." Such a supposition he was willing to make. What he refused to suppose was that his own moral ideals might be illusory; to grant, as the pantheist must, that whatever is, is right. Precisely this issue, in fact, was the basis of the most damning item in his indictment of Christianity: that

men had sacrificed their own consciences in obeying the imagined, arbitrary dictates of a purely capricious being. To be and to do good, and good only, and good in a definitely human sense — this is the primary attribute of the Spirit that is Shelley's God. In the *Essay on Christianity,* where the poet seems clearly bent on identifying the teachings of Jesus (which, of course, he held to have been perverted by the churches) with his own beliefs, we read:

The perfection of the human and the divine character is thus asserted to be the same. Man, by resembling God, fulfils most accurately the tendencies of his nature; and God comprehends within itself all that constitutes human perfection . . . the *abstract* perfection of the human character is the type of the *actual* perfection of the divine.

Shelley's whole way of looking at things, in fact, is incompatible with anything that can accurately be called pantheism.

On the other hand, any assertion that Shelley believed in a "personal" Deity must be definitely qualified. It is true that the Spirit of Good *is* good in a strictly human sense, is limited and opposed and at present frustrated by evil, is the object of immediate, intuitive knowledge, is a power working, in the human world as elsewhere, for harmony, beauty, righteousness; and by virtue of all this is undeniably a legitimate object of worship. But the poet's passion for perfection stands in the way of his belief in a personal God. Personality involves limitation, separateness, change; and it was by precisely these things that Shelley was perpetually tormented, and it was these things that he sought to transcend. Unity and permanence seemed to him to be the necessary attributes of perfect being — that is, of *reality.* Time and Change, "this imperfect world and the dark grave" — the context in which personality exists — are for him illusions, the source of error and pain, from which the human soul forever strives to escape.

> The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly.

From the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* to *The Triumph of Life* Shelley draws an ever darker picture of man's subjection to his temporal self. Only the deep-felt presence of the transcendent "Spirit of Beauty" lifts human perceptions and thoughts beyond the imprisoning barriers of "doubt, chance, and mutability," "gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream." He defends "poetry" (which, as we shall see, is only another name for the same Spirit) because it has power to lift men "out of the dull vapours of the little world of self," so that "self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe." "The error," he wrote to John Gisborne, speaking of *Epipsychidion,* "consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal." But he had not really fallen into the error. Emilia is not so much a woman as "an image of some bright Eternity"; her beauty is but a reflection of the Beauty "which penetrates and clasps and fills the world." "Talk no more," says Ahasuerus in *Hellas,*

> Of thee and me, the Future and the Past;
> But look on that which cannot change—the One,
> The unborn and the undying.

Personality is an attribute of life in time and, like time itself, is ultimately unreal. It cannot exist in the spiritual realm which Shelley envisions as flooded with "the white radiance of Eternity." Yet, as has been said, the "one Spirit" which rules that world works also in the world of time, "torturing th'unwilling dross . . . to its own likeness" and becoming an object of man's knowledge and worship. But how it can be thus infinite and finite at once is a problem which human reason cannot solve; and which therefore the truly religious mind acknowledges and passes by.

This uncompromising transcendentalism, which denies ultimate reality to temporal and spatial existence and to personality, is central. From it spring Shelley's views on the immortality of the soul, on love, and on poetry.

To Shelley, throughout his life, the problem of immortality was of engrossing interest. The "necessity of atheism" evidently

did not involve the necessity of denying a future life, for the fashioning of the "systematic cudgel for Christianity" went hand in hand with at least as ardent an absorption in Plato's spacious myths concerning the destiny of souls. His exuberant confidings to the sometime "sister of his soul," Elizabeth Hitchener, are full of speculations as to the likelihood of another life; and while writing *Queen Mab* he was planning, when he had finished, to "draw a picture of Heaven." But after 1814, when for the first time "shades of the prison house" began to close upon him, a darker mood apparently led him to either sceptical or definitely pessimistic views. *Alastor* and *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* reveal the temper of this period. Only in his last years does Shelley venture again to affirm, tentatively perhaps in *Prometheus* and *Epipsychidion,* unequivocally in *Adonais* and *Hellas,* a belief that "eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being." But even here he puts it only on the basis of faith, asserting that man's "inextinguishable thirst for immortality" is the only real argument, and declaring all other reasons to be "wretched sophisms which disgrace the cause." Yet while deprecating all dogmatism, he allows himself to speculate along Platonic lines concerning "a progressive state of more or less exalted existence, according to the degree of perfection which each distinct intelligence may have attained." What the end of this process is, is not entirely clear; but evidently it is not immortality in time, but *eternity,* which the poet claims as the soul's inheritance; and hence ordinary conceptions of "personal immortality" are beside the point.

Yet to say that Shelley's faith is therefore deprived of meaning and consolation for the individual is to fail to comprehend, even superficially, the mystical attitude. To Shelley, the abandonment of personality does not mean the loss of self-consciousness; it means rather the inexpressible expansion and intensification of it, in union with the Divine. For if we must talk of death, he would have said, surely it is our limited and unsatisfying existence on earth that deserves the name, not that realm into which even now we have on occasion transient

glimpses, glimpses which overwhelm us with the conviction that the external world is an illusion — that here only, in this flash of intuition, is experience deserving to be called *real.*

> Death is the veil which those who live call life;
> They sleep, and it is lifted.

So Adonais has "outsoared the shadow of our night":

> Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep —
> He hath awakened from the dream of life —
> 'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
> With phantoms an unprofitable strife.

We are Plato's prisoners in the cavern, seeing only inexplicable shadows on the wall; but one day the fetters of those who are pure in heart shall fall away, and turning, they shall find themselves face to face with

> That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,

that "sustaining Love" which is invisibly woven through all "the web of being," then radiantly revealed to the soul's sight.

Love is a name which Shelley often, as here, gives to the Spirit which he worships as God. But *love* is a dangerous word. Are there not, it may be asked, other passages in Shelley's writings — not to mention his life — in which *love* stands for something less purely spiritual? Shelley's master, Plato, be it remembered, distinguishes between two antithetical Loves — the heavenly, or Uranian, and the earthly, or Pandemian; does Shelley always succeed in keeping them distinct? What of his attacks on marriage and chastity in *Queen Mab?* What of *Epipsychidion* and the lyrics addressed to Jane Williams towards the end of his life? Is there not some justification for Matthew Arnold's characterization of the poet as "extremely inflammable"? Was not love for him too often merely an ephemeral passion, mood, or sentiment, rather than an enduring and selfless devotion to an ideal, transcending the allurements of sense and self-indulgence? Is not the actual

if unconscious tendency of his imaginative flights rather to deify the human than to humanize the Divine?

To these questions varying answers will doubtless always be given. In the nature of the case, it seems impossible to prove beyond dispute that any one set of answers is correct and all others false. It ought to be agreed, however, that Shelley's personal life is less relevant to the problem than it is sometimes made to appear; for if we discount what have been proved to be slanders and what have never been proved to be more than idle rumours, there is nothing in Shelley's relations with women, except his elopement with Mary and the events immediately connected with it, that is at all shocking or sensational, even by conventional standards. No convincing evidence has ever been produced, for instance, to show that Shelley was at any time "unfaithful" to Mary.[2]

So the answers to our questions must be sought in Shelley's writings. Of these, *Queen Mab* calls for only brief comment. It is easy to see, even at this distance, why contemporary readers were outraged; but we can also see clearly enough that the poet's alternative to marriage is not libertinism and promiscuity: that what Shelley says in this poem is essentially what Milton had said a century and three-quarters before in his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. Marriage is ideally a spiritual relation; when it ceases to rest upon mutual affection and respect, upon common aims and sympathies, it becomes a lie, dictated by convenience or appetite, which no just law can maintain.

It is a similar doctrine, extended and modified under the guidance of Plato and Dante, which finds expression in certain passages of *Epipsychidion*.

> True love in this differs from gold and clay,
> That to divide is not to take away.
> . . . 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.

[2] On this point see the introductory note to *Epipsychidion* and to the group of lyrics addressed to Jane Williams.

This again is not to be construed as a preachment of "free love." Personality is an illusion, "the many change and pass," "Earth's shadows fly." If love is to endure, it cannot be centred in this or that particular person, however beautiful and good that person may be.

Alas! if Love, whose smile makes this obscure world splendid,
Can change with its false times and tides . . .
Alas for Love!

And it *must* change — how unforgettably had Shelley learned that lesson! — as long as its object is "a mortal image"; until, with Plato, one learns "to ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful towards that which is beauty itself." Shelley is a true Platonist in this, that his worship is directed, consciously yet also by some unquestionable inward compulsion, never towards this or that particular person or physical object as such, but towards the transcendent Spirit of Beauty and Goodness by which for the moment that person or object may be irradiated. And if sometimes that Spirit withdrew itself, and in his loneliness he sought a substitute in the warm tenderness and sympathy of a living, breathing woman, why should we wish to see in such an act more than a "touch of nature" that brings home his kinship with his less inspired fellow mortals?

And always he is true to his Uranian Love.

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.

Yet he *does* know — only the knowledge is not such as can be put into words for the world to understand. It can only be shadowed forth in symbols, most often as a visioned woman-form of indescribable beauty, like the "veilèd maid" of *Alastor*, Asia in *Prometheus Unbound* ("Life of Life" and "Lamp of Earth"), the beatified Emilia of *Epipsychidion*, the first Vision of Rousseau in *The Triumph of Life*.

In the Power thus symbolized lies the hope of salvation for humanity. It is "the bond and sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists."

> The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
> In love and worship, blends itself with God.

"In love and worship," in self-surrender to the Divine, as felt immediately and as perceived at times in the outward world of nature and of man — *there* is to be found the life for which we yearn. And being won away from this impulse, to follow "the cold, bright car" of earthly "Life," being led to seek a selfish satisfaction in wealth or passion or worldly honour, we are swept remorselessly to oblivion.

Yet this devotion to the ideal does not exclude human affection or genuine sympathy even for the unexalted masses of human beings; rather the opposite. And so, without professing that all-enfolding compassion which only a Christ or a Buddha can truly feel, Shelley consistently stood for economic justice and for political and religious freedom, acted unfailingly in private life the part of the Good Samaritan, and sought to create in his poems "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and hope, and trust, and endure, reasoned principles of 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."

That the purpose of poetry should be so loftily conceived reflects not only Shelley's intense moral convictions, but also his belief that "poetry" — by which he rather means the power which inspires or creates poetry and which he also calls "Imagination" — is only another manifestation of Love, only another of God's attributes and ways of working.

> Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
> Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
> Imagination! which from earth and sky,
> And from the depths of human fantasy,
> As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills

> The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
> Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
> Of its reverberated lightning.

And it is not merely, or even chiefly, intellectual error which is thus attacked, but the great moral error of selfishness. "Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world." "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. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry ministers to the effect by acting upon the cause." Not greater knowledge, but the will to act for righteous ends, is what is needed for the regeneration of the world. "There is no want of knowledge respecting morals, government, and political economy, or at least, what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. But . . . 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." And this "poetry" is unmistakably a transcendental power, of which the poet is the privileged servant and not the master. "It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own." "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man." It is the essence of that self-consciousness whose complete realization is nothing else than the destined union of the individual with "the One" to which Shelley so passionately aspired. So Apollo, the poet-god, the light of the world, Imagination incarnate, is made to prophesy:

> I am the eye with which the Universe
> Beholds itself, and knows itself divine.

III. Shelley the Artist

Shelley's art must receive less comment than has been given to his thought. He was a philosopher before he was a poet, and to the close of his career, although his mastery of technique be-

came ever surer, poetry remained chiefly a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The duty and privilege of the poet, he held, is not to mirror impartially in his work earth's often deformed though often lovely shadows underneath the "dome of many-coloured glass," but to bear witness to that "light of heaven" which he knows to be present in the world for its redemption, although the world knows it not. Not actuality, but ideals, born of and irradiated by an undoubted inward vision, are the proper subject matter of the poet.

From Shelley's constant adherence to this creed arises what many readers, living (like the overwhelming majority of human beings) in and for the actual, tangible, temporal world, naturally regard as narrowness of imaginative scope, thinness of style and substance. Hazlitt declared that Shelley made his poetry out of nothing. A more accurate statement of the case is that he often — in such lyrics, say, as "Life of Life" from *Prometheus Unbound* — asks of his medium what that medium, almost by definition, is incapable of; he tries to express the inexpressible. It is clearly with reference to his own experience that he writes: "There is a mood which language faints beneath." Not only does he regard all sense perceptions, and perhaps even all rational concepts, as merely symbols, but he shows a constant desire to abandon or escape from them entirely. "How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being." How often, having been lifted to the most glorious pinnacle of song, does the poet break off with a confession of weakness, hopeless of ever finding words to express the fullness of his experience! Of how many others of his poems might he have written, as he wrote of *Epipsychidion,* that to a certain class of readers "it must ever remain incomprehensible, from a defect of a common organ of perception for the ideas of which it treats"!

Yet an examination of Shelley as a stylist in the narrow sense, as a dramatist, and as a lyrist, will show his art to be less limited than might be supposed. And let us begin by freely acknowledging the stylistic shortcomings of his verse. It is undeniable that his diction and imagery lack the rich, full-

blooded variety of the Elizabethans, or even of such a nineteenth-century poet as Browning, to whom the pageant of life was for the most part a brilliant and absorbing reality instead of (as so often to Shelley) a painful illusion. Too often to suit their taste do many readers of his poetry meet "a bright Omnipresence," "a shape all light"; or are confronted, "on an imagined shore," by a Being confessedly unbeheld even by the poet because "robed in such exceeding glory"—a glory which becomes, a page or two farther on, "Soft as an Incarnation of the Sun, When light is changed to love."

Such a way of writing is of course not an absolute poetic defect. For a few persons always, and for many persons in certain moods, such a manner has its own appeal. Less defensible is Shelley's not infrequent tendency to diffuseness and repetition, which permits him to follow an apt and vigorous epithet or image with one that is time-worn or intrinsically prosaic. Language that may have seemed to him in the moment of inspiration to be alive with warmth and color becomes cold and commonplace in the light of day; or perhaps an admitted hasty makeshift, a mere signpost pointing towards the vision that was always vanishing even as the poet strove to record it, was sometimes through weariness or indifference allowed to remain. So in the last act of *Prometheus Unbound* the flawless music of the ecstatic love duet between Moon and Earth falls in one passage into irredeemable flatness:

> So when thy shadow falls on me,
> Then am I mute and still, by thee
> Covered; of thy love, Orb most beautiful,
> Full, oh, too full!

Not less disturbing to the sensitive reader is a mannerism that seems to suggest, again, that the poet's resources of language were inadequate to embody his imaginative conceptions. This is the too frequent repetition of words or figures so unusual that they could be used with complete effectiveness but once or twice in the whole course of the poet's work. *Interlunar,* for instance, a favourite adjective which Shelley doubtless

with in Milton, is at first impressive, but is spoiled by overuse.

Yet these last defects appear only occasionally. In general, Shelley's diction and imagery have great and unique merits. The insubstantiality, so often charged against his descriptions of nature and against his images drawn from natural forms and processes, is apparent rather than real. What master of "realistic" writing could surpass these lines from *Marenghi?*

> There is a point of strand
> Near Vado's tower and town; and on one side
> The treacherous marsh divides it from the land,
> Shadowed by pine and ilex forests wide,
> And on the other, creeps eternally,
> Through muddy weeds, the shallow sullen sea.

Clearly he wrote, to a degree which few poets have exceeded, with his eye on the object. Only, he chooses oftener than other poets to write of objects that are always in motion, always changing. Clouds, winds, rivers, and rainbows, the lightning flash "brief even as bright," the eternally restless ocean, dead leaves in fantastic flight, the half-heard mist of song drifting down from the unseen skylark — such evanescent lights and shadows on the face of nature is the poet always endeavouring to arrest and fix in words. The solidity and permanence which most of us unconsciously attribute to the physical world were not there for Shelley. And we see, when we brush away the "film of familiarity" by which our eyes are dimmed, that Shelley is right, that his pictures of nature are almost scientifically accurate.

Yet these pictures are not therefore devoid of light and colour. On the contrary, there is perhaps no other English poet save Keats who can spread such glowing hues with so sure a hand. The sweep and freedom and brilliance of his word-painting suggest the canvases of Turner. If Keats's colours are richer and deeper, Shelley's have the peculiar soft radiance of spring dawns and sunsets, and over them is diffused a "clear and tender light" at once intense and serene.

The point of one white star is quivering still
Deep in the orange light of widening morn
Beyond the purple mountains . . .
'Tis lost! and through yon peaks of cloudlike snow
The roseate sunlight quivers: hear I not
The Aeolian music of her sea-green plumes
Winnowing the crimson dawn?

"The poet of light" — surely none deserves better than Shelley this appellation.

Often, as has been said, the forms and objects of nature are used as symbols of metaphysical truths; so too are figures from ancient myths and legends. Some of these it is easy to pass without heeding, but others challenge even the incurious reader. The radiant maiden of so many a dream, the fierce and ever renewed conflict between snake and eagle, the sombre, unearthly figure of the Wandering Jew, the lonely voyage in a magic boat along a mysterious river, the "painted veil," the cave, the steady mirror-image beneath the rippled surface, within the changing substance, of stream or sea — all these seem endowed by the poet, consciously or otherwise, with profound symbolic meanings. This aspect of Shelley's poetry, baffling as well as fascinating, has yet to be fully explored; but the more deeply one ponders, the more strongly one comes to feel that here is perhaps an avenue to the inmost recesses of the poet's mind.

When we turn from the diction and imagery to the metrical and stanzaic forms used by Shelley, we find him even more a master craftsman. Only one notable verse form, the sonnet, whose demands for compression and restraint he apparently never cared to meet, did he fail to use with complete success. No English poet has employed with more assured ease and power so great a variety of metres and stanzas; only Chaucer, Spenser, Keats, and possibly Swinburne can be compared to him. The blank verse of *Alastor* places him at once among the half-dozen English masters of the non-dramatic use of this most exacting of verse forms; Miltonic and Wordsworthian echoes only accentuate the individual tone. Never lacking in

dignity, at times splendidly sonorous, the verse elsewhere becomes almost lyric in its swiftness and melody; and continually one meets with passages which, whatever their tempo, set vibrating deep, persistent, haunting overtones:

> Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom
> Of leaden-coloured even, and fiery hills
> Mingling their flames with twilight, on the verge
> Of the remote horizon.

The instrument thus subdued to his hand was to be employed again, not less nobly, in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas.* But for his next great poetic venture, *The Revolt of Islam,* Shelley adopted the Spenserian stanza, because in blank verse "there is no shelter for mediocrity; you must either succeed or fail." The result is a medley, in which brilliant passages, splendid in their sweep and power, are interspersed with comparatively arid wastes of facile rhetoric. Yet the lover of poetry must be thankful for a poem strewn with such passages as this:

> To hear the restless multitude for ever
> Around the base of that great Altar flow,
> As on some mountain-islet burst and shiver
> Atlantic waves; and solemnly and slow
> As the wind bore that tumult to and fro,
> To feel the dream-like music, which did swim
> Like beams through fleeting clouds on waves below
> Falling in pauses, from that Altar dim
> As silver-sounding tongues breathed an aërial hymn.

And four years later, when he returned to the measure in *Adonais,* his technique was nearly faultless. It is not the measure of *The Faerie Queene* nor of *Childe Harold,* but in its union of fluidity and concentration, of grace and spaciousness, of ease and intensity, it is the perfect medium for Shelley's most passionate confession of faith.

The pentameter couplet was another form which Shelley made his own. The closed, or heroic, couplet of the Neoclassicists held no appeal for him, but the run-on form, first

used by Chaucer, takes on new life and variety in his hands. In the *Letter to Maria Gisborne* and the first part of *Julian and Maddalo* the verse has a suppleness and simplicity, an easy directness, illumined by gleams of gaiety and beauty, that make it unique in English poetry.

> 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,
> None slow enough for sadness.

In *Epipsychidion* the same metre is adapted to a style that, now soaring and now caressing, is everywhere informed by a piercing sweetness; whether the theme be the beauty of nature or the glory of the ideal, there arise unceasingly "as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music."

> The blue Aegean girds this chosen home,
> With ever-changing sound and light and foam,
> Kissing the sifted sands, and caverns hoar.

There is the tetrameter couplet, used in the *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* as only Milton had used it before. And one must mention the Italian metres: the *ottava rima* of *The Witch of Atlas* and the translation of the so-called Homeric *Hymn to Mercury* (Shelley's translations of this and the other *Hymns* have been described by a competent and discriminating critic as "often better than the originals"), playful, tender, iridescent, so different from the tremendous surge and devastating anticlimax by which it is characterized in Byron's masterpieces; and the *terza rima* of the *Ode to the West Wind* and *The Triumph of Life,* which, while not an exact reproduction of the metre of Dante's *Divine Comedy,* has a power and a glory of its own. Finally we have, in the *Ode to Naples,* modelled after the Greek Pindaric ode, what is certainly one of the most astonishing specimens of metrical virtuosity in the whole range of English poetry. And all this leaves still unmentioned the infinite variety of the shorter lyrics.

There is no space to discuss Shelley's translations (of Plato, Euripides, and the "Homeric" *Hymns,* of Calderón and of Goethe), which, tossed off in moments too uninspired for the composition of original poetry, have in some instances never been surpassed. But we must not pass by his achievement as a dramatic artist. In *The Cenci,* his sole bid for popularity (in which, he says with almost incredible naïveté, "there is nothing beyond what the multitude are contented to believe that they can understand, either in imagery, opinion, or sentiment"), he lays aside for a moment his "own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just," and contents himself with presenting "a sad reality." Later he spoke slightingly of it, and only once thereafter attempted a similar work, *Charles the First;* from which he turned away to the writing of the most obscure and mystical of all his poems, *The Triumph of Life.*

Shelley wrote *The Cenci* with a view to its being acted. But the story with which it deals was much too shocking to suit the taste of the time. We smile today at the frantic abuse which the more rabid reviewers (for the play had its defenders, and many acknowledged its power while deploring its theme) hastened to heap upon the work. Yet it must be admitted that the abnormal and the horrible had for Shelley a peculiar fascination. His youthful enthusiasm for Gothic romance seems never to have quite deserted him. In this, of course, he is akin to many other authors of the Romantic period, both in England and on the Continent; yet the presence in Shelley of such a trait is from many points of view incongruous. His very hatred of cruelty and deformity seems somehow to have transformed a not unhealthy boyish curiosity about ghosts and evil spirits into a more or less persistent preoccupation with passion, pain, and death in their more violent and unnatural forms. From *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life* this tendency is present in his poetry in greater or less degree, although treated with increasing restraint. Even into such a gay and gleaming fantasy as *The Sensitive Plant* it makes an infelicitous intrusion. The tremendous curses of Prometheus upon Jupiter and of Count Cenci upon his daughter, although

not without dramatic efficacy, are unexpected achievements for one among the tenderest and most lovable of English poets. And there can be no question of deliberate sensationalism. Dreadful as are the character and acts of Count Cenci, they are so presented as to offer a minimum of appeal to coarse or common or morbid natures. But to find the true explanation of this element in Shelley's poetry is difficult. Of course, in a dualistic world (and Shelley is a thorough dualist, in ethics at least) ugliness stands always opposite to beauty; intense love and worship of the latter involve almost inevitably an equally intense abhorrence of the former; and the poet's vision, to be metaphysically, ethically, or aesthetically adequate, must include both. "The light that never was on sea or land" is perhaps seen only as over against a more than physical darkness. The works of all the great English poets reflect a more than ordinarily intense apprehension of the horrible. But the extreme ideality of Shelley's philosophy and art led him, not to reproduce the intermingling in the actual world of beauty and its opposite, but rather to juxtapose the lovely and the loathsome.

Despite this tendency, *The Cenci* has been widely and highly praised. Swinburne called it the "greatest tragedy that the world has seen since the death of Webster," and perhaps his notorious love of hyperbole did not in this instance lead him much beyond the truth. Certainly it is a remarkable achievement for a man of twenty-seven, without practical dramatic training. Yet one may feel that he was also lacking in dramatic instinct. There is too much talk and too little action; and too much of the talk is concerned with psychological analysis. The dramatist tries too hard, perhaps, to make his characters rationally consistent, and although he generally succeeds, he does so at the cost of immediate dramatic appeal. Then too, the action tends to fall apart in the fourth act. And a sophisticated reader is likely to be disturbed by a feeling that, despite Shelley's realistic intentions and his refusal to justify his heroine's crime, the action reflects too clearly the poet's old favourite theme of a cosmic struggle between superhuman evil

and unearthly good, here exemplified in the ruin visited by institution and authority on the right-minded individual.

"You might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me," wrote Shelley two years later; and it seems clear that his idealizing temper must have made any realistic presentation of human life a *tour de force.* We ought perhaps to except the lively, whimsical, and perfectly unforced realism of the first part of *Julian and Maddalo* and the whole of the *Letter to Maria Gisborne,* but at least the judgement will hold for formal, large-scale compositions. In "the capacity of forming and following-up a plot," says Mrs. Shelley, "he fancied himself to be defective. . . . He asserted that he was too metaphysical and abstract, too fond of the theoretical and the ideal, to succeed as a tragedian"; and surely he was correct in his self-analysis. *The Witch of Atlas,* which Mary did not like, may not be so great a work as *The Cenci* — or it may. But what reader does not feel that in the rainbow-lighted, spirit-peopled land of dreams where dwells the lovely Witch, far more than on the gloomy earth where once the sombre history of the Cenci was enacted, Shelley is free, and happy, and at home?

Shelley nevertheless achieves in *The Cenci* two great triumphs. One is the language. Avoiding "with great care" "the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry," he fashioned an instrument far better adapted to his need than one would have thought possible: a blank verse quite unaffected and direct, yet strong and flexible; so readable, and even "talkable," that although a blank verse play has been more or less an anachronism in English literature since the middle of the seventeenth century, some modern readers may not unreasonably prefer Shelley's manner to the exuberant rhetoric of the old dramatists. The second triumph is the extraordinary union of emotional power with intellectual subtlety and refinement in the portrayal of Beatrice, as she staggers beneath the insupportable horror of that nightmare which is her life. Nothing in English drama more resistlessly overwhelms

the imagination than her soliloquies after being violated by her father and after receiving the sentence of death.

> Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
> No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world;
> The wide, gray, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!

Different in kind, but equally beyond praise, is the final scene, in which the tides of pain and passion and terror ebb away and are followed by a flood of unruffled tenderness and trust, as Beatrice's weary spirit goes to its release.

Shelley's lyrics must have a closing word, but a brief one. The many appreciations, some brilliant, which have been showered upon them leave no need for another attempt in that direction. As for detailed critical analysis, undertaken in the hope of discovering the secret of an appeal which even the poet's severest critics have never denied, one might as reasonably hope to reach the end of a rainbow. For, despite the infinitely subtle rhythms which Shelley could employ with such seeming ease, the distinctive quality of his lyrics is not primarily a matter of technique. His notebooks reveal, it is true, that often he laboured long and arduously to achieve perfection of phrasing; but he never qualified his repeated assertions, apparently based on personal experience, that poetry is in essence the result of "inspiration"; that the poet is the voice of that transcendent Spirit of Beauty and Goodness from which springs all that is noblest in human life. And certainly Shelley's lyrics seem to be so inspired. Only the presence of this Spirit, one would say, could have lifted him to such ecstatic heights of joy, only its absence could have plunged him into such measureless depths of melancholy as are revealed in his poems. It is as if the happiness of all humanity, the sorrows of all men, were given voice in Shelley's songs. The world can perhaps choose to ignore the poet's subtler philosophizings and his remoter dreams. It cannot ignore his power of transmuting into music the responses of suffering, aspiring, inarticulate millions of fellow-beings to the elemental facts of

life and death, of beauty and decay, of love and hate, of hope and longing unquenchable by the inevitable disillusionments of mortality. For by these things Shelley was always haunted, as all truly human beings sometimes are, and he clothed them in undying "music and splendour." True, there are those who have seen behind the veil of exquisite beauty only an unconsoling self-pity.

> Inheritors of thy distress
> Have restless hearts one throb the less?

was Matthew Arnold's query. But surely Leigh Hunt had shown a juster insight long before in the epitaph which he chose for his friend: *Cor Cordium* — "Heart of Hearts."

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following list is of course far from complete. Section I includes only editions that are most likely to be of immediate practical use. Section III lists most recent items of importance, exclusive of highly specialized or technical studies, but only the more significant among earlier titles (especially before 1900). Section IV is even more limited. The scholarly journals are cluttered with articles on various works of Shelley, most of which seem to aim only at elaborating or controverting the obvious. Supplementary bibliographies may be found in the *Cambridge History of English Literature,* Vol. XII; in Ernest Bernbaum's *Guide Through the Romantic Movement* (New York: Nelson, 1929), Vol. I; in *Poetry and Prose of the Romantic Movement,* ed. by G. B. Woods (Chicago: Scott Foresman; recent editions bring the bibliography up to 1928); and in the items by Barnard, Bush, Sharp, Stovall, and Weaver listed below. H. Buxton Forman's *The Shelley Library* (London: Reeves, 1886) contains a descriptive account of nearly all editions of Shelley's own works published up to that time. For a nearly exhaustive list of works by and about Shelley, the student may consult the recently published *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature.*

Many of the items have undergone numerous revisions and reprintings. Some essays appeared first in periodicals, later in book form; others appeared originally in a book with one title, later in a volume with a different title. Ordinarily the most recent publication is referred to, with mention of the earliest date where it seems important. When books have been published in both America and Great Britain, the American edition alone is regularly given. It has not seemed worth while, however, to aim at complete consistency in these matters.

I. Works of Shelley

The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. Julian Edition. 10 vols. New

York: Scribner, 1926–30. The only edition that comes near being complete. The last three volumes, containing the letters, are especially valuable, although they must be supplemented by *Shelley's Lost Letters to Harriet,* ed. by Leslie Hotson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1930; first published in the *Atlantic Monthly,* Jan.–March, 1930). Unfortunately, this was a limited and expensive edition, and it is rarely accessible to the general reader. The misfortune is mitigated by the fact that the text of the poems is not always reliable.

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The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. by George Edward Woodberry. Cambridge Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1901. Has an excellent biographical sketch; the explanatory notes and critical comments on the longer poems are exceptionally illuminating.

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respondence, ed. by John Murray (2 vols. London: John Murray, 1922), and *Shelley's Lost Letters to Harriet,* it is fairly satisfactory. A new edition of Shelley's letters, within the reach of the general reading public, is much to be desired.

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A Philosophical View of Reform, ed. by T. W. Rolleston. Oxford University Press, 1920. Shelley's longest prose discussion (although unfinished) of political and social problems, not previously published, and otherwise available only in the Julian Edition.

II. Works Chiefly Biographical

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Blunden, Edmund, *Leigh Hunt and His Circle.* New York: Harper, 1930. Much space devoted to a sympathetic portrayal of Shelley.

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sentimental, for which Lady Shelley, the poet's daughter-in-law, can be partly blamed. The revised one-volume edition lacks the full documentation which is the most valuable part of the original work. It may be said for the massive Victorian biographies, which it is now the fashion to deride, that they at least provide the reader with enough first-hand materials (even though some are suppressed) that he may form his own judgement, instead of being forced (as in so many current biographies) to take on faith the writer's interpretation.

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wood's; asserting that Shelley's "overweening self-trust . . . left him almost inhuman," that his mind had been "debauched by false ideas and vain reading," and that his poetry (*e.g., Adonais*) is unreadable because of "the insurmountable exclusions of taste."

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Todhunter, J., "Notes on *The Triumph of Life.*"

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QUEEN MAB

[*Editor's Note.* — The circumstances surrounding the composition of *Queen Mab* have been discussed to some extent in the general introduction. The poem was begun early in 1812 and finished in the spring of 1813, when Shelley was still in the first flush of his revolutionary enthusiasm; and, as Woodberry says, he "emptied his mind" into the work. The interest is therefore mainly historical (reflecting a certain stage both in Shelley's development and in the development of European social philosophy) rather than intrinsic.

The imaginative framework of the poem is slight. Queen Mab (who seems oddly out of place here and who in a later partial revision of the poem becomes more fittingly the "Daemon of the World") transports the Spirit of the beautiful and tender Ianthe (doubtless Harriet Shelley as her husband then saw her) to certain "aerial mansions" where "matter, space, and time . . . cease to act," and delivers a sort of stereoptican lecture on the past, present, and future state of the earth and its inhabitants. The past and present are pictured as being almost wholly evil, the future as wholly good. As Harriet remarks in a letter, the poem is "against every existing establishment." Perhaps the most furious assault is against religion in general and orthodox Christianity in particular. In Canto VII Queen Mab evokes Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew (the episode offers an interesting comparison with a similar one in *Hellas*), who delivers a 200-line exposition of the philosophical absurdity of Christian faith and the atrocities of historical Christian practice. A 3500-word prose "note" reinforces the argument. Only a little less fierce is the indictment, along with "priests," of "kings and statesmen," who are roundly abused as the enemies of virtue and the virtuous; as bloated tyrants who grind the faces of the poor and are moved to begin and carry on wars by nothing more than personal greed, vanity, or *ennui*. In a strain more familiar to present-day readers is the impassioned plea for what are now spoken of as the "re-

distribution of wealth" and the abolition of the "profit-motive"; commerce should be motivated, not by "mean lust" or "suicidal selfishness," but by pure altruism. A long note on the incidental remark that "even love is sold" assails the institution of marriage as the cause of prostitution, not to mention innumerable sordid and corrosive jealousies, bitternesses, and hates. A further reform necessary to bring about the millennium is declared to be the universal adoption of vegetarianism; man's original sin (said Shelley's friend John Newton, who led him into a number of odd alleys of thought) had been the eating of meat, whence had sprung all manner of disease and of moral as well as physical corruption and decay. The "note" on this topic was formidable enough to be published as a separate pamphlet.

Throughout the work Shelley insists, like Rousseau, on the benevolence and purity of "Nature" and its promptings, in contrast to the cruelty and degradation forced upon human beings by "society." But the remedy is at hand. "Nature" is "Necessity"—an omnipotent and impersonal but benevolent Power whose dictates nothing can resist: no man or atom "acts but as it must and ought to act." Let no one be disturbed by the fact that man seems for the moment to have got out of step with Nature.

> This is no unconnected misery,
> Nor stands uncaused, and irretrievable.

Everything has a cause; to remove evils, man has only to remove the causes of those evils—for example, "kings, and priests, and statesmen." Whether these causes must not in their turn be caused, as well as why man should heat himself in the strife for reforms which Nature will shortly attend to much more effectively, are questions which it does not occur to the poet to ask.

The work displays a considerable knowledge not only of contemporary social theory and abstract philosophy in general but also of the natural science of the time. Mr. Carl H. Grabo, in *A Newton Among Poets,* insists that this apparent scientific bent in Shelley is of primary importance, and that it strongly influenced such later works as *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas.* To the present editor, however, it seems that Shelley's interest in science is no stronger than is natural to any

inquiring and cultivated mind, and that his general outlook on the world and life is definitely moral and humanistic rather than scientific.

The list of authorities quoted or referred to in the notes is rather impressive — especially as Shelley seems to have known most of the works at first hand — and will give the reader some idea of the general background of the poem: Nicholson's *Encyclopedia,* Godwin's *Enquirer* and *Political Justice,* Ecclesiastes, Homer's *Iliad,* Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura,* Rousseau's *De l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* and *Émile,* Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* D'Holbach's *Système de la Nature,* Laplace's *Système du Monde,* Cabanis's *Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme,* Bailly's *Lettres sur les Sciences, à Voltaire,* Sale's "Preliminary Discourse" to the *Koran,* Sir Isaac Newton, Bacon's *Essays,* Pliny's *Historiae Naturalis,* Sir William Drummond's *Academical Questions,* Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* Hume's *Essay* (probably either the *Treatise of Human Nature* or *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*), Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding,* Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain,* John Newton's *Return to Nature, or Defence of Vegetable Regimen* (which has an extensive bibliography of its own).[1] These titles by no means exhaust the sources of the poem, which have been discussed in numerous articles and are summarized in not always convincing detail by Mr. W. E. Peck, in *Shelley: His Life and Work,* I, 303–308. Works not mentioned above which probably had some influence on *Queen Mab* are Volney's *Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les Révolutions des Empires,* the Abbé Barruel's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinism,* James Lawrence's *The Empire of the Nairs,* Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason;* among poems, Southey's long narratives *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama,* Peacock's *The Genius of the Thames* and *Palmyra,* Walter Savage Landor's *Gebir,* Coleridge's *Religious Musings* and *The Destiny of Nations,* and perhaps Sir William Jones's *The Palace of Fortune.* Probably the greatest single influence was Godwin's.

The work was privately printed in 1813. The first, second,

[1] For further information concerning the nature and extent of Shelley's reading at this period, see his letter to Thomas Hookham dated July 24, 1812, his letter to Clio Rickman dated December 24, 1812, and another letter to Hookham dated December 17, 1812.

eighth, and ninth cantos were reworked in the years immediately following, and part of this revision was published in the *Alastor* volume of 1816 with the title *The Daemon of the World*. The original work was first published in 1821, when a pirated edition appeared and was widely and furiously denounced by the reviewers. Government prosecutions failed to prevent its reappearance in numerous editions; fourteen pirated editions in England and America between 1821 and 1852 are listed by Forman in *The Shelley Library*. Shelley in 1821 publicly repudiated the poem (see Letter IV in the present volume), but privately, while disparaging the work as "written . . . in the most furious style, with long notes against Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the king, and Bishops, and marriage, and the Devil knows what," he expressed amusement at the furore which it apparently caused.]

V

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

3–15. Compare *Ode to the West Wind*.

Twin-sister of religion, selfishness!
Rival in crime and falsehood, aping all
The wanton horrors of her bloody play;
Yet frozen, unimpassioned, spiritless,
Shunning the light, and owning not its name,
Compelled, by its deformity, to screen
With flimsy veil of justice and of right,
Its unattractive lineaments, that scare
All, save the brood of ignorance: at once
The cause and the effect of tyranny;
Unblushing, hardened, sensual, and vile;
Dead to all love but of its abjectness,
With heart impassive by more noble powers
Than unshared pleasure, sordid gain, or fame;
Despising its own miserable being,
Which still it longs, yet fears to disenthrall.

"Hence commerce springs, the venal interchange
Of all that human art or nature yield;
Which wealth should purchase not, but want demand,
And natural kindness hasten to supply
From the full fountain of its boundless love,
For ever stifled, drained, and tainted now.
Commerce! beneath whose poison-breathing shade
No solitary virtue dares to spring,
But Poverty and Wealth with equal hand
Scatter their withering curses, and unfold
The doors of premature and violent death
To pining famine and full-fed disease,
To all that shares the lot of human life,
Which poisoned, body and soul, scarce drags the chain,
That lengthens as it goes and clanks behind.

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34. "Impassive," impassable [Locock].

46. The personification of abstractions which is so frequent in *Queen Mab* is a notorious stylistic mannerism of neo-classic poetry. In style as in content *Queen Mab* belongs to the eighteenth century rather than to the nineteenth. — The thought of the passage comes from Godwin's *Political Justice*, Book I.

51–52. Compare *Julian and Maddalo*, ll. 302–303:

> To drag life on, which like a heavy chain
> Lengthens behind with many a link of pain! —

"Commerce has set the mark of selfishness,
The signet of its all-enslaving power
Upon a shining ore, and called it gold:
Before whose image bow the vulgar great,
The vainly rich, the miserable proud,
The mob of peasants, nobles, priests, and kings,
And with blind feelings reverence the power
That grinds them to the dust of misery.
But in the temple of their hireling hearts
Gold is a living god, and rules in scorn
All earthly things but virtue.

"Since tyrants, by the sale of human life,
Heap luxuries to their sensualism, and fame
To their wide-wasting and insatiate pride,
Success has sanctioned to a credulous world
The ruin, the disgrace, the woe of war.
His hosts of blind and unresisting dupes
The despot numbers; from his cabinet
These puppets of his schemes he moves at will,
Even as the slaves by force or famine driven,
Beneath a vulgar master, to perform
A task of cold and brutal drudgery;—
Hardened to hope, insensible to fear,
Scarce living pulleys of a dead machine,
Mere wheels of work and articles of trade,
That grace the proud and noisy pomp of wealth!

"The harmony and happiness of man
Yields to the wealth of nations; that which lifts
His nature to the heaven of its pride,
Is bartered for the poison of his soul;
The weight that drags to earth his towering hopes,
Blighting all prospect but of selfish gain,
Withering all passion but of slavish fear,
Extinguishing all free and generous love
Of enterprise and daring, even the pulse
That fancy kindles in the beating heart
To mingle with sensation, it destroys,—
Leaves nothing but the sordid lust of self,
The grovelling hope of interest and gold,

Unqualified, unmingled, unredeemed
Even by hypocrisy.
And statesmen boast
Of wealth! The wordy eloquence, that lives
After the ruin of their hearts, can gild
The bitter poison of a nation's woe,
Can turn the worship of the servile mob
To their corrupt and glaring idol, Fame,
From Virtue, trampled by its iron tread,
Although its dazzling pedestal be raised
Amid the horrors of a limb-strewn field,
With desolated dwellings smoking round.
The man of ease, who, by his warm fireside,
To deeds of charitable intercourse,
And bare fulfilment of the common laws
Of decency and prejudice, confines
The struggling nature of his human heart,
Is duped by their cold sophistry; he sheds
A passing tear perchance upon the wreck
Of earthly peace, when near his dwelling's door
The frightful waves are driven, — when his son
Is murdered by the tyrant, or religion
Drives his wife raving mad. But the poor man,
Whose life is misery, and fear, and care;
Whom the morn wakens but to fruitless toil;
Who ever hears his famished offspring's scream,
Whom their pale mother's uncomplaining gaze
For ever meets, and the proud rich man's eye
Flashing command, and the heart-breaking scene
Of thousands like himself; — he little heeds
The rhetoric of tyranny; his hate
Is quenchless as his wrongs; he laughs to scorn
The vain and bitter mockery of words,
Feeling the horror of the tyrant's deeds,
And unrestrained but by the arm of power,
That knows and dreads his enmity.

"The iron rod of Penury still compels
Her wretched slave to bow the knee to wealth,

113. Shelley in a note declares that he is familiar with one such case and adds: "A parallel case is, I believe, within the experience of every physician."

And poison, with unprofitable toil,
A life too void of solace to confirm
The very chains that bind him to his **doom.**
Nature, impartial in munificence,
Has gifted man with all-subduing will.
Matter, with all its transitory shapes,
Lies subjected and plastic at his feet,
That, weak from bondage, tremble as they tread.
How many a rustic Milton has passed by,
Stifling the speechless longings of his heart,
In unremitting drudgery and care!
How many a vulgar Cato has compelled
His energies, no longer tameless then,
To mould a pin, or fabricate a nail!
How many a Newton, to whose passive ken
Those mighty spheres that gem infinity
Were only specks of tinsel, fixed in Heaven
To light the midnights of his native town!

"Yet every heart contains perfection's germ:
The wisest of the sages of the earth,
That ever from the stores of reason drew
Science and truth, and virtue's dreadless tone,
Were but a weak and inexperienced boy,
Proud, sensual, unimpassioned, unimbued
With pure desire and universal love,
Compared to that high being, of cloudless brain,
Untainted passion, elevated will,
Which Death (who even would linger long in awe
Within his noble presence, and beneath
His changeless eyebeam) might alone subdue.
Him, every slave now dragging through the filth
Of some corrupted city his sad life,

130. Rossetti and Locock place a comma after "solace"; but the meaning may be a continuation of the thought of ll. 120–26: that his life is so "void of solace" that he refuses to "confirm" his chains by submitting to them *willingly*.

133. Contrast this assertion of the power of the human will (see also ll. 155, 171, and 226) with the unqualified necessitarianism of the following canto. Such contradictions are frequent in *Queen Mab*.

156. Godwin had expressed in *Political Justice* the belief that men would in the future become capable of lengthening their lives indefinitely.

Pining with famine, swoln with luxury,
Blunting the keenness of his spiritual sense
With narrow schemings and unworthy cares,
Or madly rushing through all violent crime,
To move the deep stagnation of his soul,—
Might imitate and equal.
But mean lust
Has bound its chains so tight around the earth,
That all within it but the virtuous man
Is venal: gold or fame will surely reach
The price prefixed by selfishness, to all
But him of resolute and unchanging will;
Whom, nor the plaudits of a servile crowd,
Nor the vile joys of tainting luxury,
Can bribe to yield his elevated soul
To Tyranny or Falsehood, though they wield
With blood-red hand the sceptre of the world.

"All things are sold: the very light of Heaven
Is venal; earth's unsparing gifts of love,
The smallest and most despicable things
That lurk in the abysses of the deep,
All objects of our life, even life itself,
And the poor pittance which the laws allow
Of liberty, the fellowship of man,
Those duties which his heart of human love
Should urge him to perform instinctively,
Are bought and sold as in a public mart
Of undisguising selfishness, that sets
On each its price, the stamp-mark of her reign.
Even love is sold; the solace of all woe
Is turned to deadliest agony, old age
Shivers in selfish beauty's loathing arms,
And youth's corrupted impulses prepare
A life of horror from the blighting bane
Of commerce; whilst the pestilence that springs
From unenjoying sensualism, has filled
All human life with hydra-headed woes.

"Falsehood demands but gold to pay the pangs
Of outraged conscience; for the slavish priest

Sets no great value on his hireling faith:
A little passing pomp, some servile souls,
Whom cowardice itself might safely chain,
Or the spare mite of avarice could bribe
To deck the triumph of their languid zeal,
Can make him minister to tyranny.
More daring crime requires a loftier meed:
Without a shudder, the slave-soldier lends
His arm to murderous deeds, and steels his heart,
When the dread eloquence of dying men,
Low mingling on the lonely field of fame,
Assails that nature, whose applause he sells
For the gross blessings of a patriot mob,
For the vile gratitude of heartless kings,
And for a cold world's good word, — viler still!

"There is a nobler glory, which survives
Until our being fades, and, solacing
All human care, accompanies its change;
Deserts not virtue in the dungeon's gloom,
And, in the precincts of the palace, guides
Its footsteps through that labyrinth of crime;
Imbues his lineaments with dauntlessness,
Even when, from Power's avenging hand, he takes
Its sweetest, last and noblest title — death;
— The consciousness of good, which neither gold,
Nor sordid fame, nor hope of heavenly bliss
Can purchase; but a life of resolute good,
Unalterable will, quenchless desire
Of universal happiness, the heart
That beats with it in unison, the brain,
Whose ever wakeful wisdom toils to change
Reason's rich stores for its eternal weal.

"This commerce of sincerest virtue needs
No mediative signs of selfishness,
No jealous intercourse of wretched gain,

220–23. "His" and "he" have no antecedent; the "virtuous man" is to be understood. Locock takes "its" to mean "virtue's," but I see no reason why it may not mean "Power's." "The consciousness of good" is in apposition with "glory" in l. 214.

No balancings of prudence, cold and long;
In just and equal measure all is weighed,
One scale contains the sum of human weal,
And one, the good man's heart.
How vainly seek
The selfish for that happiness denied
To aught but virtue! Blind and hardened, they,
Who hope for peace amid the storms of care,
Who covet power they know not how to use,
And sigh for pleasure they refuse to give,—
Madly they frustrate still their own designs;
And, where they hope that quiet to enjoy
Which virtue pictures, bitterness of soul,
Pining regrets, and vain repentances,
Disease, disgust, and lassitude, pervade
Their valueless and miserable lives.

"But hoary-headed Selfishness has felt
Its death-blow, and is tottering to the grave:
A brighter morn awaits the human day,
When every transfer of earth's natural gifts
Shall be a commerce of good words and works;
When poverty and wealth, the thirst of fame,
The fear of infamy, disease and woe,
War with its million horrors, and fierce hell
Shall live but in the memory of Time,
Who, like a penitent libertine, shall start,
Look back, and shudder at his younger years."

VI

All touch, all eye, all ear,
The Spirit felt the Fairy's burning speech.
O'er the thin texture of its frame,
The varying periods painted changing glows,
As on a summer even,
When soul-enfolding music floats around,

1. The metre of this and other lyric passages in the poem is imitated from Southey's *Thalaba*.
2. The "Spirit" is that of Ianthe.
4. "Periods," sentences.

The stainless mirror of the lake
Re-images the eastern gloom,
Mingling convulsively its purple hues
With sunset's burnished gold.

Then thus the Spirit spoke:
"It is a wild and miserable world!
Thorny, and full of care,
Which every fiend can make his prey at will.
O Fairy! in the lapse of years,
Is there no hope in store?
Will yon vast suns roll on
Interminably, still illuming
The night of so many wretched souls,
And see no hope for them?
Will not the universal Spirit e'er
Revivify this withered limb of Heaven?"

The Fairy calmly smiled
In comfort, and a kindling gleam of hope
Suffused the Spirit's lineaments.
"Oh! rest thee tranquil; chase those fearful doubts,
Which ne'er could rack an everlasting soul,
That sees the chains which bind it to its doom.
Yes! crime and misery are in yonder earth,
Falsehood, mistake, and lust;
But the eternal world
Contains at once the evil and the cure.
Some eminent in virtue shall start up,
Even in perversest time:
The truths of their pure lips, that never die,
Shall bind the scorpion falsehood with a wreath
Of ever-living flame,
Until the monster sting itself to death.

"How sweet a scene will earth become!
Of purest spirits a pure dwelling-place,
Symphonious with the planetary spheres;
When man, with changeless Nature coalescing,
Will undertake regeneration's work,
When its ungenial poles no longer point

To the red and baleful sun
That faintly twinkles there.

"Spirit! on yonder earth,
Falsehood now triumphs; deadly power
Has fixed its seal upon the lip of truth!
Madness and misery are there!
The happiest is most wretched! Yet confide,
Until pure health-drops, from the cup of joy,
Fall like a dew of balm upon the world.
Now, to the scene I show, in silence turn,
And read the blood-stained charter of all woe,
Which Nature soon, with re-creating hand,
Will blot in mercy from the book of earth.
How bold the flight of Passion's wandering wing,
How swift the step of Reason's firmer tread,
How calm and sweet the victories of life,
How terrorless the triumph of the grave!
How powerless were the mightiest monarch's arm,
Vain his loud threat, and impotent his frown!
How ludicrous the priest's dogmatic roar!
The weight of his exterminating curse
How light! and his affected charity,
To suit the pressure of the changing times,
What palpable deceit! — but for thy aid,
Religion! but for thee, prolific fiend,
Who peoplest earth with demons, Hell with men,
And Heaven with slaves!

"Thou taintest all thou look'st upon! — the stars,
Which on thy cradle beamed so brightly sweet,

45. The Pole Star. Shelley suggests in a note that the earth's axis will eventually become perpendicular to the plane of the ecliptic, and that this change will accompany the approach of the Millennium.

72–110. The ideas of this interesting passage reappear not many years later in the philosophy of August Comte. In setting forth his famous "law of the three stages" in the development of human thought, Comte describes the first, or "theological," stage as falling in turn into three periods: namely, animism, polytheism, and monotheism. This is exactly Shelley's account of the matter in the present passage, which may be compared with *The Revolt of Islam*, VIII, iv–viii.

Were gods to the distempered playfulness
Of thy untutored infancy: the trees,
The grass, the clouds, the mountains, and the sea,
All living things that walk, swim, creep, or fly,
Were gods: the sun had homage, and the moon
Her worshipper. Then thou becam'st, a boy,
More daring in thy frenzies: every shape,
Monstrous or vast, or beautifully wild,
Which, from sensation's relics, fancy culls;
The spirits of the air, the shuddering ghost,
The genii of the elements, the powers
That give a shape to Nature's varied works,
Had life and place in the corrupt belief
Of thy blind heart: yet still thy youthful hands
Were pure of human blood. Then manhood gave
Its strength and ardour to thy frenzied brain;
Thine eager gaze scanned the stupendous scene,
Whose wonders mocked the knowledge of thy pride:
Their everlasting and unchanging laws
Reproached thine ignorance. Awhile thou stoodst
Baffled and gloomy; then thou didst sum up
The elements of all that thou didst know;
The changing seasons, winter's leafless reign,
The budding of the Heaven-breathing trees,
The eternal orbs that beautify the night,
The sunrise, and the setting of the moon,
Earthquakes and wars, and poisons and disease,
And all their causes, to an abstract point
Converging, thou didst bend and called it God!
The self-sufficing, the omnipotent,
The merciful, and the avenging God!
Who, prototype of human misrule, sits
High in Heaven's realm, upon a golden throne,

101–102. My interpretation of this confusing and much discussed passage is that "bend" should be taken as transitive, its object being "causes" etc. (even though it is redundant after "converging"), and that "called" is an error (of a kind common in Shelley) for "calledst." In the *Alaster* volume (1816), where the passage is reprinted, with some variations, the reading is:

> Converging, thou didst give it name, and form,
> Intelligence, and unity, and power.

Even like an earthly king; and whose dread work,
Hell, gapes for ever for the unhappy slaves
Of fate, whom He created, in his sport,
To triumph in their torments when they fell!
Earth heard the name; Earth trembled, as the smoke
Of His revenge ascended up to Heaven,
Blotting the constellations; and the cries
Of millions, butchered in sweet confidence
And unsuspecting peace, even when the bonds
Of safety were confirmed by wordy oaths
Sworn in His dreadful name, rung through the land;
Whilst innocent babes writhed on thy stubborn spear,
And thou didst laugh to hear the mother's shriek
Of maniac gladness, as the sacred steel
Felt cold in her torn entrails!

"Religion! thou wert then in manhood's prime:
But age crept on: one God would not suffice
For senile puerility; thou framedst
A tale to suit thy dotage, and to glut
Thy misery-thirsting soul, that the mad fiend
Thy wickedness had pictured might afford
A plea for sating the unnatural thirst
For murder, rapine, violence, and crime,
That still consumed thy being, even when
Thou heardst the step of Fate; — that flames might light
Thy funeral scene, and the shrill horrent shrieks
Of parents dying on the pile that burned
To light their children to thy paths, the roar
Of the encircling flames, the exulting cries
Of thine apostles, loud commingling there,
    Might sate thine hungry ear
    Even on the bed of death!

"But now contempt is mocking thy gray hairs;
Thou art descending to the darksome grave,

107–110. The incompatibility of belief in the existence of Hell with faith in an all-powerful and all-good God is insisted on throughout Shelley's work.

125. "A tale to suit thy dotage," the dogmas (such as the Incarnation and the Atonement) of Christianity.

Unhonoured and unpitied, but by those
Whose pride is passing by like thine, and sheds,
Like thine, a glare that fades before the sun
Of truth, and shines but in the dreadful night
That long has lowered above the ruined world.

"Throughout these infinite orbs of mingling light,
Of which yon earth is one, is wide diffused
A Spirit of activity and life,
That knows no term, cessation, or decay;
That fades not when the lamp of earthly life,
Extinguished in the dampness of the grave,
Awhile there slumbers, more than when the babe
In the dim newness of its being feels
The impulses of sublunary things,
And all is wonder to unpractised sense:
But, active, steadfast, and eternal, still
Guides the fierce whirlwind, in the tempest roars,
Cheers in the day, breathes in the balmy groves,
Strengthens in health, and poisons in disease;
And in the storm of change, that ceaselessly
Rolls round the eternal universe, and shakes
Its undecaying battlement, presides,
Apportioning with irresistible law
The place each spring of its machine shall fill;
So that when waves on waves tumultuous heap
Confusion to the clouds, and fiercely driven
Heaven's lightnings scorch the uprooted ocean-fords,
Whilst, to the eye of shipwrecked mariner,
Lone sitting on the bare and shuddering rock,
All seems unlinked contingency and chance:
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,

146. The following lines, to the end of the canto, are the most explicit statement of Shelley's youthful optimism, based on a pantheistic conception of the world.

157–59. These lines have a definite eighteenth-century ring. Compare Pope's *Essay on Man*, I, 271–72. Shelley quotes from Pope's poem in a note to *Queen Mab*, and there seem to be a number of echoes.

That in an April sunbeam's fleeting glow
Fulfils its destined, though invisible work,
The universal Spirit guides; nor less,
When merciless ambition, or mad zeal,
Has led two hosts of dupes to battlefield,
That, blind, they there may dig each other's graves,
And call the sad work glory, does it rule
All passions: not a thought, a will, an act,
No working of the tyrant's moody mind,
Nor one misgiving of the slaves who boast
Their servitude, to hide the shame they feel,
Nor the events enchaining every will,
That from the depths of unrecorded time
Have drawn all-influencing virtue, pass
Unrecognized, or unforeseen by thee,
Soul of the Universe! eternal spring
Of life and death, of happiness and woe,
Of all that chequers the phantasmal scene
That floats before our eyes in wavering light,
Which gleams but on the darkness of our prison,
    Whose chains and massy walls
    We feel, but cannot see.

"Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,
Necessity! thou mother of the world!
Unlike the God of human error, thou
Requir'st no prayers or praises; the caprice
Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee
Than do the changeful passions of his breast
To thy unvarying harmony: the slave,

182. "Will" here is evidently thought of as a mere intermediate link between a cause and its necessary effect, when that effect is a human act; yet, as already pointed out, Shelley elsewhere uses the term in its ordinary sense, as an independent entity in which originate actions otherwise uncaused. Compare ll. 200–201 below: "the caprice of man's weak will" etc. According to the view just set forth, "caprice" is impossible, and to talk about "will" as "strong" or "weak" is meaningless. Compare *Political Justice*, Book IV, Chapter VII: "In the life of every human being there is a chain of events, generated in the lapse of ages which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act in any instance otherwise than he has acted."

Whose horrible lusts spread misery o'er the world,
And the good man, who lifts, with virtuous pride,
His being, in the sight of happiness,
That springs from his own works; the poison-tree,
Beneath whose shade all life is withered up,
And the fair oak, whose leafy dome affords
A temple where the vows of happy love
Are registered, are equal in thy sight:
No love, no hate thou cherishest; revenge
And favouritism, and worst desire of fame
Thou know'st not: all that the wide world contains
Are but thy passive instruments, and thou
Regard'st them all with an impartial eye,
Whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel,
  Because thou hast not human sense,
  Because thou art not human mind.

"Yes! when the sweeping storm of time
Has sung its death-dirge o'er the ruined fanes
And broken altars of the almighty Fiend
Whose name usurps thy honours, and the blood
Through centuries clotted there, has floated down
The tainted flood of ages, shalt thou live
Unchangeable! A shrine is raised to thee,
  Which, nor the tempest-breath of time,
  Nor the interminable flood,
  Over earth's slight pageant rolling,
    Availeth to destroy,—
The sensitive extension of the world.
  That wondrous and eternal fane,
Where pain and pleasure, good and evil join,
To do the will of strong necessity,
  And life, in multitudinous shapes,
Still pressing forward where no term can be,
  Like hungry and unresting flame
Curls round the eternal columns of its strength."

231. This phrase apparently means "extended body or space" (Locock), such as can be perceived through the senses. There is much in this passage to suggest the influence of Spinoza, who is quoted in a note to the following canto. There is no clear evidence, however, that Shelley ever gained a thorough knowledge of Spinoza's philosophy.

IX

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

"Genius has seen thee in her passionate dreams,
And dim forebodings of thy loveliness
Haunting the human heart, have there entwined
Those rooted hopes of some sweet place of bliss
Where friends and lovers meet to part no more.
Thou art the end of all desire and will,
The product of all action; and the souls
That by the paths of an aspiring change
Have reached thy haven of perpetual peace,
There rest from the eternity of toil
That framed the fabric of thy perfectness.

"Even Time, the conqueror, fled thee in his fear;
That hoary giant, who, in lonely pride,
So long had ruled the world, that nations fell
Beneath his silent footstep. Pyramids,

1–22. These lines are perhaps the finest poetry in the whole work. It is interesting that even in this, the first of Shelley's many efforts to picture a perfect world, there is some question as to whether or not it is an earthly paradise to which the poet looks forward. Perhaps the solution of this seeming difficulty, which also presents itself in *Prometheus Unbound*, is that for Shelley, "Heaven" is not a place, but, as one critic has said, "a state of mind," or perhaps a *quality* of consciousness; it is not "the world" that is to be perfected, but the minds, or spirits, or souls, of its inhabitants.

24–36. These lines are taken, some without change, from a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener dated February 24, 1812, where they are written as prose.

That for millenniums had withstood the tide
Of human things, his storm-breath drove in sand
Across that desert where their stones survived
The name of him whose pride had heaped them there.
Yon monarch, in his solitary pomp,
Was but the mushroom of a summer day,
That his light-wingèd footstep pressed to dust:
Time was the king of earth: all things gave way
Before him, but the fixed and virtuous will,
The sacred sympathies of soul and sense,
That mocked his fury and prepared his fall.

"Yet slow and gradual dawned the morn of love;
Long lay the clouds of darkness o'er the scene,
Till from its native Heaven they rolled away:
First, Crime triumphant o'er all hope careered
Unblushing, undisguising, bold and strong;
Whilst Falsehood, tricked in Virtue's attributes,
Long sanctified all deeds of vice and woe,
Till done by her own venomous sting to death,
She left the moral world without a law,
No longer fettering Passion's fearless wing,
Nor searing Reason with the brand of God.
Then steadily the happy ferment worked;
Reason was free; and wild though Passion went
Through tangled glens and wood-embosomed meads,
Gathering a garland of the strangest flowers,
Yet like the bee returning to her queen,
She bound the sweetest on her sister's brow,
Who meek and sober kissed the sportive child,
No longer trembling at the broken rod.

"Mild was the slow necessity of death:
The tranquil spirit failed beneath its grasp,
Without a groan, almost without a fear,
Calm as a voyager to some distant land,
And full of wonder, full of hope as he.
The deadly germs of languor and disease
Died in the human frame, and Purity

29–30. Compare *Ozymandias.*

Blessed with all gifts her earthly worshippers.
How vigorous then the athletic form of age!
How clear its open and unwrinkled brow!
Where neither avarice, cunning, pride, nor care,
Had stamped the seal of gray deformity
On all the mingling lineaments of time.
How lovely the intrepid front of youth!
Which meek-eyed courage decked with freshest grace;
Courage of soul, that dreaded not a name,
And elevated will, that journeyed on
Through life's phantasmal scene in fearlessness,
With virtue, love, and pleasure, hand in hand.

"Then, that sweet bondage which is Freedom's self,
And rivets with sensation's softest tie
The kindred sympathies of human souls,
Needed no fetters of tyrannic law:
Those delicate and timid impulses
In Nature's primal modesty arose,
And with undoubted confidence disclosed
The growing longings of its dawning love,
Unchecked by dull and selfish chastity,
That virtue of the cheaply virtuous,
Who pride themselves in senselessness and frost.
No longer prostitution's venomed bane
Poisoned the springs of happiness and life;
Woman and man, in confidence and love,
Equal and free and pure together trod
The mountain-paths of virtue, which no more
Were stained with blood from many a pilgrim's feet.

"Then, where, through distant ages, long in pride
The palace of the monarch-slave had mocked
Famine's faint groan, and Penury's silent tear,
A heap of crumbling ruins stood, and threw
Year after year their stones upon the field,
Wakening a lonely echo; and the leaves
Of the old thorn, that on the topmost tower
Usurped the royal ensign's grandeur, shook
In the stern storm that swayed the topmost tower
And whispered strange tales in the Whirlwind's ear.

"Low through the lone cathedral's roofless aisles
The melancholy winds a death-dirge sung:
It were a sight of awfulness to see
The works of faith and slavery, so vast,
So sumptuous, yet so perishing withal!
Even as the corpse that rests beneath its wall.
A thousand mourners deck the pomp of death
To-day, the breathing marble glows above
To decorate its memory, and tongues
Are busy of its life: to-morrow, worms
In silence and in darkness seize their prey.

"Within the massy prison's mouldering courts,
Fearless and free the ruddy children played,
Weaving gay chaplets for their innocent brows
With the green ivy and the red wallflower,
That mock the dungeon's unavailing gloom;
The ponderous chains, and gratings of strong iron,
There rusted amid heaps of broken stone
That mingled slowly with their native earth:
There the broad beam of day, which feebly once
Lighted the cheek of lean Captivity
With a pale and sickly glare, then freely shone
On the pure smiles of infant playfulness:
No more the shuddering voice of hoarse Despair
Pealed through the echoing vaults, but soothing notes
Of ivy-fingered winds and gladsome birds
And merriment were resonant around.

"These ruins soon left not a wreck behind:
Their elements, wide scattered o'er the globe,
To happier shapes were moulded, and became
Ministrant to all blissful impulses:
Thus human things were perfected, and earth,
Even as a child beneath its mother's love,
Was strengthened in all excellence, and grew
Fairer and nobler with each passing year.

"Now Time his dusky pennons o'er the scene
Closes in steadfast darkness, and the past
Fades from our charmèd sight. My task is done:

Thy lore is learned. Earth's wonders are thine own,
With all the fear and all the hope they bring.
My spells are passed: the present now recurs.
Ah me! a pathless wilderness remains
Yet unsubdued by man's reclaiming hand.

"Yet, human Spirit, bravely hold thy course,
Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue
The gradual paths of an aspiring change:
For birth and life and death, and that strange state
Before the naked soul has found its home,
All tend to perfect happiness, and urge
The restless wheels of being on their way,
Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,
Bicker and burn to gain their destined goal:
For birth but wakes the spirit to the sense
Of outward shows, whose unexperienced shape
New modes of passion to its frame may lend;
Life is its state of action, and the store
Of all events is aggregated there
That variegate the eternal universe;
Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
And happy regions of eternal hope.
Therefore, O Spirit! fearlessly bear on:
Though storms may break the primrose on its stalk,
Though frosts may blight the freshness of its bloom,
Yet Spring's awakening breath will woo the earth,
To feed with kindliest dews its favourite flower,

155. In *The Daemon of the World,* Part II, probably done in 1815 or 1816, this line is replaced by the following:

> For birth but wakes the universal mind
> Whose mighty streams might else in silence flow
> Thro' the vast world, to individual sense . . .

161. Shelley soon came to take a less positive view concerning a future life, as is shown by his prose essay *On a Future State,* as well as by numerous references in his poems. Although he allowed these lines to remain in *The Daemon of the World,* they are soon followed by the cryptic utterance,

> For what thou art shall perish utterly,
> But what is thine may never cease to be.

That blooms in mossy banks and darksome glens,
Lighting the greenwood with its sunny smile.

"Fear not then, Spirit, Death's disrobing hand,
So welcome when the tyrant is awake,
So welcome when the bigot's hell-torch burns;
'Tis but the voyage of a darksome hour,
The transient gulf-dream of a startling sleep.
Death is no foe to Virtue: earth has seen
Love's brightest roses on the scaffold bloom,
Mingling with Freedom's fadeless laurels there,
And presaging the truth of visioned bliss.
Are there not hopes within thee, which this scene
Of linked and gradual being has confirmed?
Whose stingings bade thy heart look further still,
When, to the moonlight walk by Henry led,
Sweetly and sadly thou didst talk of death?
And wilt thou rudely tear them from thy breast,
Listening supinely to a bigot's creed,
Or tamely crouching to the tyrant's rod,
Whose iron thongs are red with human gore?
Never: but bravely bearing on, thy will
Is destined an eternal war to wage
With tyranny and falsehood, and uproot
The germs of misery from the human heart.
Thine is the hand whose piety would soothe
The thorny pillow of unhappy crime,
Whose impotence an easy pardon gains,
Watching its wanderings as a friend's disease:
Thine is the brow whose mildness would defy
Its fiercest rage, and brave its sternest will,
When fenced by power and master of the world.
Thou art sincere and good; of resolute mind,
Free from heart-withering custom's cold control,
Of passion lofty, pure and unsubdued.
Earth's pride and meanness could not vanquish thee,
And therefore art thou worthy of the boon
Which thou hast now received: Virtue shall keep
Thy footsteps in the path that thou hast trod,

183. "Henry," evidently Ianthe's lover, hitherto unmentioned.

And many days of beaming hope shall bless
Thy spotless life of sweet and sacred love.
Go, happy one, and give that bosom joy
Whose sleepless spirit waits to catch
Light, life and rapture from thy smile."

The Fairy waves her wand of charm.
Speechless with bliss the Spirit mounts the car,
That rolled beside the battlement,
Bending her beamy eyes in thankfulness.
Again the enchanted steeds were yoked,
Again the burning wheels inflame
The steep descent of Heaven's untrodden way.
Fast and far the chariot flew:
The vast and fiery globes that rolled
Around the Fairy's palace-gate
Lessened by slow degrees and soon appeared
Such tiny twinklers as the planet orbs
That there attendant on the solar power
With borrowed light pursued their narrower way.

Earth floated then below:
The chariot paused a moment there;
The Spirit then descended:
The restless coursers pawed the ungenial soil,
Snuffed the gross air, and then, their errand done,
Unfurled their pinions to the winds of Heaven.

The Body and the Soul united then,
A gentle start convulsed Ianthe's frame:
Her veiny eyelids quietly unclosed;
Moveless awhile the dark blue orbs remained:
She looked around in wonder and beheld
Henry, who kneeled in silence by her couch,
Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love,
And the bright beaming stars
That through the casement shone.

STANZAS — APRIL, 1814[1]

Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon,
Rapid clouds have drank the last pale beam of even:
Away! the gathering winds will call the darkness soon,
And profoundest midnight shroud the serene lights of heaven.

Pause not! The time is past! Every voice cries, Away!
Tempt not with one last tear thy friend's ungentle mood:
Thy lover's eye, so glazed and cold, dares not entreat thy stay:
Duty and dereliction guide thee back to solitude.

Away, away! to thy sad and silent home;
Pour bitter tears on its desolated hearth;
Watch the dim shades as like ghosts they go and come,
And complicate strange webs of melancholy mirth.

The leaves of wasted autumn woods shall float around thine head:
The blooms of dewy spring shall gleam beneath thy feet:
But thy soul or this world must fade in the frost that binds the dead,
Ere midnight's frown and morning's smile, ere thou and peace may meet.

[1] Published with *Alastor* in 1816. This poem is interesting, not only as the first in which Shelley shows himself a great lyric poet, but as shedding light on his relations with Harriet. The poet is addressing himself, on ending a visit at the home of Mrs. Boinville and her daughter, Cornelia Turner, with whom he had been friendly for some months, and who had been teaching him Italian. The poem proves that Peacock's statement is inaccurate, and that Shelley was to some extent estranged from Harriet at least two months before meeting Mary Godwin. The second stanza suggests that Mrs. Turner was putting an end to an intimacy between herself and Shelley which she perhaps wisely regarded as being, under the circumstances, perilous.

8. "Solitude" is perhaps to be taken figuratively rather than literally, since when Harriet left Shelley about the middle of April (as related in Mrs. Boinville's letter to Hogg), it was apparently for only a short time; and their frequent separations during the next two months seem to have been due mainly to Shelley's (or Godwin's) financial affairs, which demanded Shelley's presence in London.

16. Compare *To Jane: The Recollection*, ll. 87–88, written in 1822. And with the next stanza compare *To Edward Williams*, Stanza vi (1821).

The cloud shadows of midnight possess their own repose,
For the weary winds are silent, or the moon is in the deep:
Some respite to its turbulence unresting ocean knows;
Whatever moves, or toils, or grieves, hath its appointed sleep.

Thou in the grave shalt rest — yet till the phantoms flee
Which that house and heath and garden made dear to thee erewhile,
Thy remembrance, and repentance, and deep musings are not free
From the music of two voices and the light of one sweet smile.

ALASTOR

OR

THE SPIRIT OF SOLITUDE

[*Editor's Note.* — *Alastor,* written in the autumn of 1815, is the utterance of another Shelley than the author of *Queen Mab:* not the embattled reformer, but the recluse, the dreamer, the explorer of the most remote borderlands of consciousness, the persistent although wistful and sometimes weary seeker for something perfect and permanent amid a world of flux. The storm and stress of the summer of 1814, relieved by a brief glimpse of the magnificent scenery of the Alps; the thought of coming death when "an eminent surgeon pronounced that he was dying rapidly of a consumption"; the presence by his side of one whom as yet he found able to "feel, and understand" him; the sudden outward serenity after four tumultuous years; all these contributed to the temper of the poem.

There has been wide discussion of Shelley's dominant aim or motive in composing *Alastor.* Mrs. Shelley's note asserts that "the poem ought rather to be considered didactic than narrative"; but this is perhaps only a re-statement of Shelley's own remarks in the Preface. And what the poem is supposed to teach is not quite clear. Why does the poet die? Shelley's answer is that he is "blasted by his disappointment" at failing

to find "a prototype" of the ideal, perfect Being with whom, in imagination, he is in love. "The furies of an irresistible passion," we are told two sentences later, thus "avenged" his "self-centered seclusion." In line with this moral is Peacock's statement that Shelley "was at a loss for a title, and I proposed that which he adopted: 'Alastor; or the Spirit of Solitude.'" The word means in Greek, he says, "an evil genius"; and "the poem treated the spirit of solitude as a spirit of evil." Nothing else in the Preface, however, indicates that the hero is to be condemned for his course; and a good part of it is devoted to glorifying him in contrast to "those meaner spirits," "those unforeseeing multitudes," who do not pursue such a Vision. In the poem itself, only one brief passage (ll. 203–05) suggests that the hero is being punished for any error or sin. On the whole, it seems not unreasonable to accept the theory advanced by Mr. Raymond D. Havens that Shelley himself had no single aim clearly in mind. "The first thing he wished to do," says Mr. Havens, "was to narrate the wanderings (ending in death) of an ideal youth; the second, to describe the scenery through which the youth passes; the third, to point out his neglect of human love through his fondness for solitude; and the fourth, to recount his dream of an ideal mate and his attempted union with her through death." These are the things, at any rate, which Shelley *does*. It may be added that the hero is undoubtedly in some degree an idealized portrait of Shelley himself; but such an identification can easily be pushed too far.— One may perhaps say in summing up that *Alastor* is romantic in more senses of that myriad-meaninged word than any other of Shelley's long poems.

Elaborate studies of the sources of the poem have succeeded chiefly in emphasizing, for the discriminating reader, its essential originality. Reminiscences may still be found of Southey's *Thalaba,* Landor's *Gebir,* and Volney's *Les Ruines,* already mentioned as having contributed to *Queen Mab;* and Miss Owenson's highly coloured tale, *The Missionary,* which had aroused Shelley's enthusiasm in 1811, is also still remembered. The chief new "influences" (most evident in the astonishing improvement in style) are Milton, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, the last of whom is several times quoted verbatim. To his reading of Wordsworth, also, may be attributed in part the poet's delight in picturing natural scenery for its own sake;

although this was stimulated by his visit to the Alps and voyage down the Rhine in 1814 and by a boating trip up the Thames shortly before *Alastor* was written.

Alastor was published in 1816, and attracted almost no attention except for a brief notice in *The Examiner*. In sending a copy to Southey, Shelley described it as "my first serious attempt to interest the best feelings of the human heart." His later references to it are casual and infrequent.]

PREFACE

THE poem entitled *Alastor* may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind. It represents a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted. So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture. The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings. The Poet is represented as uniting these requisitions, and attaching them to a single image. He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.

The picture is not barren of instruction to actual men. The

Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin. But that Power which strikes the luminaries of the world with sudden darkness and extinction, by awakening them to too exquisite a perception of its influences, dooms to a slow and poisonous decay those meaner spirits that dare to abjure its dominion. Their destiny is more abject and inglorious as their delinquency is more contemptible and pernicious. They who, deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition,[1] loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. They languish, because none feel with them their common nature. They are morally dead. They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country. 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. All else, selfish, blind, and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world. Those who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave.

"The good die first,
And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust,
Burn to the socket!" [2]

December 14, 1815.

Nondum amabam, et amare amabam, quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare. — *Confess. St. August.*[3]

[1] This phrase gives evidence of a notable modification of Shelley's unqualified condemnation of superstition in *Queen Mab.* — The remainder of the Preface may be compared with the essay *On Love.*

[2] From *The Excursion,* I, 519–21, "those" being misquoted for "they."

[3] From Book III, near the beginning, with several clauses omitted in the middle. Pusey's translation is: "I loved not yet, yet I loved to love . . . I sought what I might love, in love with loving."

EARTH, ocean, air, belovèd brotherhood!
If our great Mother has imbued my soul
With aught of natural piety to feel
Your love, and recompense the boon with mine;
If dewy morn, and odorous noon, and even,
With sunset and its gorgeous ministers,
And solemn midnight's tingling silentness;
If autumn's hollow sighs in the sere wood,
And winter robing with pure snow and crowns
Of starry ice the grey grass and bare boughs;
If spring's voluptuous pantings when she breathes
Her first sweet kisses, have been dear to me;
If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast
I consciously have injured, but still loved
And cherished these my kindred; then forgive
This boast, belovèd brethren, and withdraw
No portion of your wonted favour now!

Mother of this unfathomable world!
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
In charnels and on coffins, where black death
Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
Thy messenger, to render up the tale
Of what we are. In lone and silent hours,
When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness,
Like an inspired and desperate alchymist

3. "Natural piety" is from Wordsworth's little poem beginning "My heart leaps up when I behold." The whole passage is Wordsworthian in spirit.

20–29. Compare *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, Stanza v. Evidence that this is literal autobiography is given by Hogg.

26. "Obstinate questionings" is borrowed from Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, l. 145.

30. Concerning Shelley's use of "own," Locock says: "I have collected nearly fifty examples of similar phrases from Shelley's poems, all of them containing the notion of something *paradoxically automatic*." Compare ll. 153, 165, 175, 295, etc.

31. Compare l. 682.

Staking his very life on some dark hope,
Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks
With my most innocent love, until strange tears
Uniting with those breathless kisses, made
Such magic as compels the charmèd night
To render up thy charge: . . . and, though ne'er yet
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,
Enough from incommunicable dream,
And twilight phantasms, and deep noon-day thought,
Has shone within me, that serenely now
And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre
Suspended in the solitary dome
Of some mysterious and deserted fane,
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.

There was a Poet whose 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: —
A lovely youth, — no mourning maiden decked
With weeping flowers, or votive cypress wreath,
The lone couch of his everlasting sleep: —
Gentle, and brave, and generous, — no lorn bard
Breathed o'er his dark fate one melodious sigh:
He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude.
Strangers have wept to hear his passionate notes,
And virgins, as unknown he passed, have pined
And wasted for fond love of his wild eyes.
The fire of those soft orbs has ceased to burn,
And Silence, too enamoured of that voice,
Locks its mute music in her rugged cell.

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42. The lyre or, more especially, the Aeolian harp, is Shelley's favorite symbol for the poet. This symbolism rests, of course, on his theory as to the nature of poetic inspiration. Compare l. 667 below; *Ode to the West Wind*, l. 57; and *Essay on Christianity*.

54. "Waste wilderness" is from Milton's *Paradise Regained*, I, 7.

By solemn vision, and bright silver dream,
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air,
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
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. When early youth had passed, he left
His cold fireside and alienated home
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.
Many a wide waste and tangled wilderness
Has lured his fearless steps; and he has bought
With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men,
His rest and food. Nature's most secret steps
He like her shadow has pursued, where'er
The red volcano overcanopies
Its fields of snow and pinnacles of ice
With burning smoke, or where bitumen lakes
On black bare pointed islets ever beat
With sluggish surge, or where the secret caves
Rugged and dark, winding among the springs
Of fire and poison, inaccessible
To avarice or pride, their starry domes
Of diamond and of gold expand above
Numberless and immeasurable halls,
Frequent with crystal column, and clear shrines
Of pearl, and thrones radiant with chrysolite.
Nor had that scene of ampler majesty
Than gems or gold, the varying roof of heaven
And the green earth, lost in his heart its claims
To love and wonder; he would linger long
In lonesome vales, making the wild his home,
Until the doves and squirrels would partake
From his innocuous hand his bloodless food,
Lured by the gentle meaning of his looks,
And the wild antelope, that starts whene'er
The dry leaf rustles in the brake, suspend

71. "Divine philosophy" is from Milton's *Comus*, l. 476.
85. Shelley had read in *Thalaba* (V, 22) of "Ait's bitumen-lake."
101. Shelley was at this time a vegetarian.

Her timid steps to gaze upon a form
More graceful than her own.
His wandering step
Obedient to high thoughts, has visited
The awful ruins of the days of old:
Athens, and Tyre, and Balbec, and the waste
Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers
Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,
Memphis and Thebes, and whatsoe'er of strange
Sculptured on alabaster obelisk,
Or jasper tomb, or mutilated sphynx,
Dark Aethiopia in her desert hills
Conceals. Among the ruined temples there,
Stupendous columns, and wild images
Of more than man, where marble daemons watch
The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men
Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around,
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.

Meanwhile an Arab maiden brought his food,
Her daily portion, from her father's tent,
And spread her matting for his couch, and stole
From duties and repose to tend his steps: —

108 ff. This passage is doubtless based on Volney's *Les Ruines*. Balbec, or Baalbek, the Greek Heliopolis, was an ancient city near Damascus, in Syria. Thebes is of course the Egyptian and not the Greek city. — In ll. 109–15 Shelley shows something of Milton's genius for making poetry out of names.

118. "Daemons" in Greek mythology were spirits intermediate between men and gods.

119. Shelley is doubtless referring to a representation of the Zodiac in the "temple of Denderah in Upper Egypt," mentioned in *Les Ruines*, and since removed to the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris. According to Peacock, Shelley's vegetarian friend, John Newton, had aroused the poet's interest in Zodiacal mythology.

Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe
To speak her love: — and watched his nightly sleep,
Sleepless herself, to gaze upon his lips
Parted in slumber, whence the regular breath
Of innocent dreams arose: then, when red morn
Made paler the pale moon, to her cold home
Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned.

The Poet wandering on, through Arabie
And Persia, and the wild Carmanian waste,
And o'er the aërial mountains which pour down
Indus and Oxus from their icy caves,
In joy and exultation held his way;
Till in the vale of Cashmire, far within
Its loneliest dell, where odorous plants entwine
Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower,
Beside a sparkling rivulet he stretched
His languid limbs. A vision on his sleep
There came, a dream of hopes that never yet
Had flushed his cheek. He dreamed a veilèd maid
Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.

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141. The "wild Carmanian waste" is the desert of Kerman, in south-eastern Iran [Persia]. The "aërial mountains" of the next line are the Hindu Kush, in Afghanistan. It has been noted that there is some correspondence between this part of the poet's journey and the route of Alexander the Great in his invasion of India; Shelley is following Arrian's *Expedition of Alexander*. But the significance of the wanderings of Shelley's hero is scarcely geographical; his journey is really through "countries of the mind."

151. The meaning of the poem as a whole turns in large measure on the interpretation of this vision of the poet, the first and one of the most baffling of a series which ends only in *The Triumph of Life*. Critics are generally agreed, however, that the "veilèd maid" is the Alastor, or Spirit of Solitude, sent by "the spirit of sweet human love" (l. 203) to "avenge" "the Poet's self-centered seclusion." Thereafter he is driven to seek unceasingly, not, apparently, despite what Shelley says in the Preface, a human "prototype of his conception," but a spiritual union with the Vision through death. Alastor thus becomes an illustration of Shelley's profound concern, first, with the fact that the poet's highest intuition of the beautiful and the good is not, and in the nature of things cannot be, embodied in a "mortal image"; and then with the question, Is this intuition therefore an illusion, or (and this question, to the mystic, is not meaningless) does it bring us in contact with "reality" in another world? To this question, when he wrote *Alastor*, Shelley was seemingly not ready to give a definite answer.

Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought; its music long,
Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held
His inmost sense suspended in its web
Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues.
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: wild numbers then
She raised, with voice stifled in tremulous sobs
Subdued by its own pathos: her fair hands
Were bare alone, sweeping from some strange harp
Strange symphony, and in their branching veins
The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale.
The beating of her heart was heard to fill
The pauses of her music, and her breath
Tumultuously accorded with those fits
Of intermitted song. Sudden she rose,
As if her heart impatiently endured
Its bursting burthen: at the sound he turned,
And saw by the warm light of their own life
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 excess
Of love. He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled

175–187. This is the least satisfying passage in the poem. One is disturbed — almost shocked — by the incongruous mixture of ideal and sensuous elements. Mrs. Campbell has admirably expressed the feeling of any sensitive reader, in declaring that the passage contains "something hectic, almost offensive; for the description is much too earthly and realistic: she who should have been but a symbol of the soul's desire steps out of the land of imagery like some scantily dressed beauty of a society ball" (*Shelley and the Unromantics*, p. 190). The point is reinforced if one compares the splendid scene in *The Revolt of Islam* (VI, xxxiv–xxxvii) in which Laon and Cythna consummate their love; for here both persons are real, and their passion (which does indeed point beyond itself) is in itself legitimate. — Some readers feel a similar uneasiness in regard to the close of *Epipsychidion* (especially ll. 560–72).

His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
Her panting bosom: . . . she drew back a while,
Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.
Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night
Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep,
Like a dark flood suspended in its course,
Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain.

Roused by the shock he started from his trance —
The cold white light of morning, the blue moon
Low in the west, the clear and garish hills,
The distinct valley and the vacant woods,
Spread round him where he stood. Whither have fled
The hues of heaven that canopied his bower
Of yesternight? The sounds that soothed his sleep,
The mystery and the majesty of Earth,
The joy, the exultation? His wan eyes
Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven.
The spirit of sweet human love has sent
A vision to the sleep of him who spurned
Her choicest gifts. He eagerly pursues
Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade;
He overleaps the bounds. Alas! Alas!
Were limbs, and breath, and being intertwined
Thus treacherously? Lost, lost, for ever lost,
In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep,
That beautiful shape! Does the dark gate of death
Conduct to thy mysterious paradise,
O Sleep? Does the bright arch of rainbow clouds,
And pendent mountains seen in the calm lake,
Lead only to a black and watery depth,
While death's blue vault, with loathliest vapours hung,

211–19. This passage not only illustrates the "Gothic" element in Shelley's work, but introduces a line of speculation frequently recurrent in his poetry. If (as experience teaches) the natural world with all its beauty is impermanent and deceptive, may not death, which seems so repugnant, lead likewise to its opposite? Compare especially the Conclusion to *The Sensitive Plant* and *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iii, 113–14.

Where every shade which the foul grave exhales
Hides its dead eye from the detested day,
Conducts, O Sleep, to thy delightful realms?
This doubt with sudden tide flowed on his heart,
The insatiate hope which it awakened, stung
His brain even like despair.
While daylight held
The sky, the Poet kept mute conference
With his still soul. 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. — As an eagle grasped
In folds of the green serpent, feels her breast
Burn with the poison, and precipitates
Through night and day, tempest, and calm, and cloud,
Frantic with dizzying anguish, her blind flight
O'er the wide aëry wilderness: thus driven
By the bright shadow of that lovely dream,
Beneath the cold glare of the desolate night,
Through tangled swamps and deep precipitous dells,
Startling with careless step the moonlight snake,
He fled. Red morning dawned upon his flight,
Shedding the mockery of its vital hues
Upon his cheek of death. He wandered on
Till vast Aornos seen from Petra's steep
Hung o'er the low horizon like a cloud;
Through Balk, and where the desolated tombs

219. Most editors change "conduct," given in the first edition, to "conducts," to agree with the subject "vault." It seems probable, however, that Shelley, who was not always careful about grammar, actually wrote "conduct." He probably thought of it as parallel to "lead" in l. 215, "while" being regarded as equivalent to "and, on the contrary."

227. The combat between an eagle and a serpent is a recurrent image in Shelley's poetry (compare l. 325), and later becomes a symbol of cosmic strife between good (the serpent) and evil (the eagle). See especially *The Revolt of Islam*, I, viii–xiv; also *Prometheus Unbound*, III, i, 72–74.

240. Aornos and Petra, mentioned by Arrian, have been identified with Mount Mahabunn and the Sogdian rock, in Afghanistan. In the *Ode to Naples*, l. 40, Aornos is the Greek name (Shelley is remembering Strabo's *Geography*) for Lake Avernus.

242. Balk, or Balkh, the ancient Bactria, is also in Afghanistan. — The tombs of the kings of Parthia (in northeastern Iran) were looted by the Roman Emperor Caracallus.

Of Parthian kings scatter to every wind
Their wasting dust, wildly he wandered on,
Day after day a weary waste of hours,
Bearing within his life the brooding care
That ever fed on its decaying flame.
And now his limbs were lean; his scattered hair
Sered by the autumn of strange suffering
Sung dirges in the wind; his listless hand
Hung like dead bone within its withered skin;
Life, and the lustre that consumed it, shone
As in a furnace burning secretly
From his dark eyes alone. The cottagers,
Who ministered with human charity
His human wants, beheld with wondering awe
Their fleeting visitant. The mountaineer,
Encountering on some dizzy precipice
That spectral form, deemed that the Spirit of wind
With lightning eyes, and eager breath, and feet
Disturbing not the drifted snow, had paused
In its career: the infant would conceal
His troubled visage in his mother's robe
In terror at the glare of those wild eyes,
To remember their strange light in many a dream
Of after-times; but youthful maidens, taught
By nature, would interpret half the woe
That wasted him, would call him with false names
Brother, and friend, would press his pallid hand
At parting, and watch, dim through tears, the path
Of his departure from their father's door.

At length upon the lone Chorasmian shore
He paused, a wide and melancholy waste
Of putrid marshes. A strong impulse urged
His steps to the sea-shore. A swan was there,
Beside a sluggish stream among the reeds.
It rose as he approached, and with strong wings
Scaling the upward sky, bent its bright course
High over the immeasurable main.

272. "Chorasmian shore," "properly the Aral Sea, but Shelley apparently intends the Caspian Sea" (Woodberry).

His eyes pursued its flight. — "Thou hast a home,
Beautiful bird; thou voyagest to thine home,
Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
With thine, and welcome thy return with eyes
Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.
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?" A gloomy smile
Of desperate hope wrinkled his quivering lips.
For sleep, he knew, kept most relentlessly
Its precious charge, and silent death exposed,
Faithless perhaps as sleep, a shadowy lure,
With doubtful smile mocking its own strange charms.

Startled by his own thoughts he looked around.
There was no fair fiend near him, not a sight
Or sound of awe but in his own deep mind.
A little shallop floating near the shore
Caught the impatient wandering of his gaze.
It had been long abandoned, for its sides
Gaped wide with many a rift, and its frail joints
Swayed with the undulations of the tide.
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.

280. Compare *To Edward Williams,* ll. 41–43.

290. "A gloomy smile . . . lips," characterized by Locock as "probably the worst lines outside Shelley's juvenile poems." The "desperate hope" is of reunion with the Vision through death.

299. The "little shallop" and the following underground voyage have been traced to Southey's *Thalaba.* Shelley's passionate love of boating carried over into his poetry; see *The Revolt of Islam,* I and XII, Asia's song in *Prometheus Unbound,* II, v, and *The Witch of Atlas.* These voyages are evidently — and probably intentionally — symbolic. The following passage from a letter to Peacock (July 17, 1816) may furnish a clue to the symbolism: "rivers are not like roads, the work of the hands of man; they imitate mind, which wanders at will over pathless deserts, and flows through nature's loveliest recesses, which are inaccessible to anything besides."

The day was fair and sunny, sea and sky
Drank its inspiring radiance, and the wind
Swept strongly from the shore, blackening the waves.
Following his eager soul, the wanderer
Leaped in the boat, he spread his cloak aloft
On the bare mast, and took his lonely seat,
And felt the boat speed o'er the tranquil sea
Like a torn cloud before the hurricane.

As one that in a silver vision floats
Obedient to the sweep of odorous winds
Upon resplendent clouds, so rapidly
Along the dark and ruffled waters fled
The straining boat. — A whirlwind swept it on,
With fierce gusts and precipitating force,
Through the white ridges of the chafèd sea.
The waves arose. Higher and higher still
Their fierce necks writhed beneath the tempest's scourge
Like serpents struggling in a vulture's grasp.
Calm and rejoicing in the fearful war
Of wave ruining on wave, and blast on blast
Descending, and black flood on whirlpool driven
With dark obliterating course, he sate:
As if their genii were the ministers
Appointed to conduct him to the light
Of those belovèd eyes, the Poet sate
Holding the steady helm. Evening came on,
The beams of sunset hung their rainbow hues
High 'mid the shifting domes of sheeted spray
That canopied his path o'er the waste deep;
Twilight, ascending slowly from the east,
Entwined in duskier wreaths her braided locks
O'er the fair front and radiant eyes of day;
Night followed, clad with stars. On every side
More horribly the multitudinous streams
Of ocean's mountainous waste to mutual war
Rushed in dark tumult thundering, as to mock
The calm and spangled sky. The little boat

327. For a similar use of "ruining," see *A Vision of the Sea*, l. 6.
338. Compare *To Night:* "Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day." There may be a faint echo of *Paradise Lost*, IV, 598 ff.

Still fled before the storm; still fled, like foam
Down the steep cataract of a wintry river;
Now pausing on the edge of the riven wave;
Now leaving far behind the bursting mass
That fell, convulsing ocean: safely fled—
As if that frail and wasted human form,
Had been an elemental god.
At midnight
The moon arose: and lo! the ethereal cliffs
Of Caucasus, whose icy summits shone
Among the stars like sunlight, and around
Whose caverned base the whirlpools and the waves
Bursting and eddying irresistibly
Rage and resound for ever.—Who shall save?—
The boat fled on,—the boiling torrent drove,—
The crags closed round with black and jaggèd arms,
The shattered mountain overhung the sea,
And faster still, beyond all human speed,
Suspended on the sweep of the smooth wave,
The little boat was driven. A cavern there
Yawned, and amid its slant and winding depths
Ingulfed the rushing sea. The boat fled on
With unrelaxing speed.—"Vision and Love!"
The Poet cried aloud, "I have beheld
The path of thy departure. Sleep and death
Shall not divide us long!"

The boat pursued
The windings of the cavern. Daylight shone
At length upon that gloomy river's flow;
Now, where the fiercest war among the waves
Is calm, on the unfathomable stream
The boat moved slowly. Where the mountain, riven,
Exposed those black depths to the azure sky,
Ere yet the flood's enormous volume fell
Even to the base of Caucasus, with sound

369. *I.e.*, "shall unite us soon." Compare *Adonais*, l. 477.

374. Again the scene is traced to a description in *Thalaba*—which is, however, perfectly intelligible, whereas the present editor must confess his total inability to visualize the scene which Shelley describes.

That shook the everlasting rocks, the mass
Filled with one whirlpool all that ample chasm;
Stair above stair the eddying waters rose,
Circling immeasurably fast, and laved
With alternating dash the gnarlèd roots
Of mighty trees, that stretched their giant arms
In darkness over it. I' the midst was left,
Reflecting, yet distorting every cloud,
A pool of treacherous and tremendous calm.
Seized by the sway of the ascending stream,
With dizzy swiftness, round, and round, and round,
Ridge after ridge the straining boat arose,
Till on the verge of the extremest curve,
Where, through an opening of the rocky bank,
The waters overflow, and a smooth spot
Of glassy quiet mid those battling tides
Is left, the boat paused shuddering. — Shall it sink
Down the abyss? Shall the reverting stress
Of that resistless gulf 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, and, hark!
The ghastly torrent mingles its far roar,
With the breeze murmuring in the musical woods.
Where the embowering trees recede, and leave
A little space of green expanse, the cove
Is closed by meeting banks, whose yellow flowers
For ever gaze on their own drooping eyes,
Reflected in the crystal calm. The wave
Of the boat's motion marred their pensive task,
Which nought but vagrant bird, or wanton wind,
Or falling spear-grass, or their own decay
Had e'er disturbed before. The Poet longed
To deck with their bright hues his withered hair,
But on his heart its solitude returned,
And he forbore. Not the strong impulse hid
In those flushed cheeks, bent eyes, and shadowy frame
Had yet performed its ministry: it hung

Upon his life, as lightning in a cloud
Gleams, hovering ere it vanish, ere the floods
Of night close over it.
The noonday sun
Now shone upon the forest, one vast mass
Of mingling shade, whose brown magnificence
A narrow vale embosoms. There, huge caves,
Scooped in the dark base of their aëry rocks
Mocking its moans, respond and roar for ever.
The meeting boughs and implicated leaves
Wove twilight o'er the Poet's path, as led
By love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death,
He sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank,
Her cradle, and his sepulchre. More dark
And dark the shades accumulate. The oak,
Expanding its immense and knotty arms,
Embraces the light beech. The pyramids
Of the tall cedar overarching, frame
Most solemn domes within, and far below,
Like clouds suspended in an emerald sky,
The ash and the acacia floating hang
Tremulous and pale. Like restless serpents, clothed
In rainbow and in fire, the parasites,
Starred with ten thousand blossoms, flow around
The grey trunks, and, as gamesome infants' eyes,
With gentle meanings, and most innocent wiles,
Fold their beams round the hearts of those that love,
These twine their tendrils with the wedded boughs
Uniting their close union; the woven leaves
Make net-work of the dark blue light of day,
And the night's noontide clearness, mutable
As shapes in the weird clouds. Soft mossy lawns
Beneath these canopies extend their swells,
Fragrant with perfumed herbs, and eyed with blooms
Minute yet beautiful. One darkest glen
Sends from its woods of musk-rose, twined with jasmine,

418. One of Shelley's many references to lightning. It is probably referred to in his poetry more frequently than any other phase or phenomenon of nature. Concerning Shelley's interest in electricity, see Carl H. Grabo, *A Newton Among Poets.*

A soul-dissolving odour, to invite
To some more lovely mystery. Through the dell,
Silence and Twilight here, twin-sisters, keep
Their noonday watch, and sail among the shades,
Like vaporous shapes half seen; beyond, a well,
Dark, gleaming, and of most translucent wave,
Images all the woven boughs above,
And each depending leaf, and every speck
Of azure sky, darting between their chasms;
Nor aught else in the liquid mirror laves
Its portraiture, but some inconstant star
Between one foliaged lattice twinkling fair,
Or painted bird, sleeping beneath the moon,
Or gorgeous insect floating motionless,
Unconscious of the day, ere yet his wings
Have spread their glories to the gaze of noon.

Hither the Poet came. His eyes beheld
Their own wan light through the reflected lines
Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
Sees its own treacherous likeness there. He heard
The motion of the leaves, the grass that sprung
Startled and glanced and trembled even to feel

453. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 109–10, 451–52.

457. Shelley seems to have been fascinated by the reflection in water of the world above. Compare the *Ode to Liberty*, ll. 76–79, *Evening: Ponte al Mare*, Pisa, ll. 13–16, *The Witch of Atlas*, ll. 513–16, *To Jane: The Recollection*, ll. 53 ff. And in a prose fragment he writes: "Why is the reflection in that canal more beautiful than the objects it reflects? The colours are more vivid, and yet blended with more harmony; the openings from within into the soft and tender colours of the distant wood, and the intersection of the mountain lines, surpass and misrepresent truth." Half-consciously, it seems, Shelley came to think of this water-world as a symbol of that perfect and eternal though unseen other world for which he longed.

472. Compare *On a Future State* (probably written in the same year): "This desire to be forever as we are; the reluctance to a violent and unexperienced change, which is common to all the animated and inanimate combinations of the universe, is, indeed, the secret persuasion which has given birth to the opinions of a future state."

476. "Startled," "glanced," and "trembled" are grammatically parallel with "sprung."

An unaccustomed presence, and the sound
Of the sweet brook that from the secret springs
Of that dark fountain rose. A Spirit seemed
To stand beside him — clothed in no bright robes
Of shadowy silver or enshrining light
Borrowed from aught the visible world affords
Of grace, or majesty, or mystery; —
But, undulating woods, and silent well,
And leaping rivulet, and evening gloom
Now deepening the dark shades, for speech assuming,
Held commune with him, as if he and it
Were all that was, — only . . . when his regard
Was raised by intense pensiveness, . . . two eyes,
Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought
And seemed with their serene and azure smiles
To beckon him.

Obedient to the light
That shone within his soul, he went, pursuing
The windings of the dell. — The rivulet
Wanton and wild, through many a green ravine
Beneath the forest flowed. Sometimes it fell
Among the moss with hollow harmony
Dark and profound. Now on the polished stones
It danced; like childhood laughing as it went:
Then, through the plain in tranquil wanderings crept,
Reflecting every herb and drooping bud
That overhung its quietness. — "O stream!

479. The Spirit is considered by Woodberry to be "an embodiment of Nature evoked by and reflecting the mood of death-melancholy in the poet." One may perhaps suggest in accepting this note that "Nature" is to be identified with the "great Mother" of Shelley's own invocation at the beginning of the poem. — Compare *The Revolt of Islam*, l, xlv, and *Epipsychidion*, ll. 200 ff.

484. *I.e.*, the Spirit communicates with the Poet by assuming (or using) for speech, not words, but natural objects — "undulating woods," "silent well," etc.

490. The "two starry eyes" apparently do not belong to the Spirit, but to the first Vision, which still haunts him.

502 ff. These lines are in execution among the most impressive in the poem; the agnosticism expressed in them is no doubt that of Shelley himself at this period. Mr. Peck suggests comparison with the *Speculations on Metaphysics* (Section III). A similarity to the conclusion of Book III of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* has also been pointed out.

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 gulfs,
Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
Have each their type in me: and the wide sky,
And measureless ocean may declare as soon
What oozy cavern or what wandering cloud
Contains thy waters, as the universe
Tell where these living thoughts reside, when stretched
Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs shall waste
I' the passing wind!"

Beside the grassy shore
Of the small stream he went; he did impress
On the green moss his tremulous step, that caught
Strong shuddering from his burning limbs. As one
Roused by some joyous madness from the couch
Of fever, he did move; yet, not like him
Forgetful of the grave, where, when the flame
Of his frail exultation shall be spent,
He must descend. With rapid steps he went
Beneath the shade of trees, beside the flow
Of the wild babbling rivulet; and now
The forest's solemn canopies were changed
For the uniform and lightsome evening sky.
Grey rocks did peep from the spare moss, and stemmed
The struggling brook: tall spires of windlestrae
Threw their thin shadows down the rugged slope,
And nought but gnarlèd roots of ancient pines
Branchless and blasted, clenched with grasping roots
The unwilling soil. A gradual change was here,
Yet ghastly. For, as fast years flow away,
The smooth brow gathers, and the hair grows thin

528. "Windlestrae," crested dog's-tail grass (*Cynosurus cristatus*).

530. "Roots" is obviously the wrong word, and one can only guess what Shelley intended. "Ghosts" would be characteristic; but the metre calls for a word of two syllables, unless "gnarled" be pronounced "gnarlèd."

532. Compare Keats's description of Moneta in *The Fall of Hyperion*, especially ll. 259–60: "a constant change which happy death Can put no end to." Compare also Shelley's description of Rousseau in *The Triumph of Life*, ll. 185–88.

And white, and where irradiate dewy eyes
Had shone, gleam stony orbs: — so from his steps
Bright flowers departed, and the beautiful shade
Of the green groves, with all their odorous winds
And musical motions. Calm, he still pursued
The stream, that with a larger volume now
Rolled through the labyrinthine dell; and there
Fretted a path through its descending curves
With its wintry speed. On every side now rose
Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,
Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
In the light of evening, and, its precipice
Obscuring the ravine, disclosed above,
Mid toppling stones, black gulfs and yawning caves,
Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues
To the loud stream. Lo! where the pass expands
Its stony jaws, the abrupt mountain breaks,
And seems, with its accumulated crags,
To overhang the world: for wide expand
Beneath the wan stars and descending moon
Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams,
Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom
Of leaden-coloured even, and fiery hills
Mingling their flames with twilight, on the verge
Of the remote horizon. The near scene,
In naked and severe simplicity,
Made contrast with the universe. A pine,
Rock-rooted, stretched athwart the vacancy
Its swinging boughs, to each inconstant blast
Yielding one only response, at each pause
In most familiar cadence, with the howl

543 ff. An obscure and much discussed passage. Possibly a line has dropped out after l. 547. I follow Hutchinson's punctuation, and take "disclosed" to be the past tense, active, parallel with "lifted," having for its subject "which"; and the "gulfs" and "caves" to be objects of "disclosed." "Its" probably refers to "stream," as in ll. 542, 543, and the construction "its . . . ravine" is parenthetical. Locock's analysis is slightly different, but his general interpretation may stand: "The stream's precipitous cliffs, while overhanging and darkening the stream below, disclosed, through a rift above, gulfs and echoing caves surrounded by toppling stones."

564. Shelley regularly accents "response" on the first syllable.

565. "In most familiar cadence" is to be taken with "mingling."

The thunder and the hiss of homeless streams
Mingling its solemn song, whilst the broad river,
Foaming and hurrying o'er its rugged path,
Fell into that immeasurable void
Scattering its waters to the passing winds.

Yet the grey precipice and solemn pine
And torrent, were not all; — one silent nook
Was there. Even on the edge of that vast mountain,
Upheld by knotty roots and fallen rocks,
It overlooked in its serenity
The dark earth, and the bending vault of stars.
It was a tranquil spot, that seemed to smile
Even in the lap of horror. Ivy clasped
The fissured stones with its entwining arms,
And did embower with leaves for ever green,
And berries dark, the smooth and even space
Of its inviolated floor, and here
The children of the autumnal whirlwind bore,
In wanton sport, those bright leaves, whose decay,
Red, yellow, or ethereally pale,
Rivals the pride of summer. 'Tis the haunt
Of every gentle wind, whose breath can teach
The wilds to love tranquillity. One step,
One human step alone, has ever broken
The stillness of its solitude: — one voice
Alone inspired its echoes; — even that voice
Which hither came, floating among the winds,
And led the loveliest among human forms
To make their wild haunts the depository
Of all the grace and beauty that endued
Its motions, render up its majesty,
Scatter its music on the unfeeling storm,
And to the damp leaves and blue cavern mould,
Nurses of rainbow flowers and branching moss,
Commit the colours of that varying cheek,
That snowy breast, those dark and drooping eyes.

583. Compare the opening stanza of the *Ode to the West Wind.*
588. "One step," the Poet's.
594. "Their" refers to "winds."

The dim and hornèd moon hung low, and poured
A sea of lustre on the horizon's verge
That overflowed its mountains. Yellow mist
Filled the unbounded atmosphere, and drank
Wan moonlight even to fulness: not a star
Shone, not a sound was heard; the very winds,
Danger's grim playmates, on that precipice
Slept, clasped in his embrace.—O storm of death!
Whose sightless speed divides this sullen night:
And thou, colossal Skeleton, that, still
Guiding its irresistible career
In thy devastating omnipotence,
Art king of this frail world; from the red field
Of slaughter, from the reeking hospital,
The patriot's sacred couch, the snowy bed
Of innocence, the scaffold and the throne,
A mighty voice invokes thee. Ruin calls
His brother Death. A rare and regal prey
He hath prepared, prowling around the world;
Glutted with which thou mayst repose, and men
Go to their graves like flowers or creeping worms,
Nor ever more offer at thy dark shrine
The unheeded tribute of a broken heart.

When on the threshold of the green recess
The wanderer's footsteps fell, he knew that death
Was on him. Yet a little, ere it fled,
Did he resign his high and holy soul
To images of the majestic past,
That paused within his passive being now,
Like winds that bear sweet music, when they breathe
Through some dim latticed chamber. He did place
His pale lean hand upon the rugged trunk
Of the old pine. Upon an ivied stone

602 ff. Mary Shelley's Journal (Dowden, *Life of Shelley*, I, 451) has this passage: "The evening was most beautiful: the horned moon hung in the light of sunset, which threw a glow of unusual depth of redness above the piny mountains and the dark deep valleys. . . . The moon becomes yellow, and hangs close to the woody horizon."

610. "Sightless," invisible. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, III, ii, 27 and IV, 248.

611. "Colossal Skeleton," Death. In the following passage, as Locock remarks, Shelley reverts to "the style of *Queen Mab* at its best."

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. Hope and despair,
The torturers, slept; no mortal pain or fear
Marred his repose, the influxes of sense,
And his own being unalloyed by pain,
Yet feebler and more feeble, calmly fed
The stream of thought, till he lay breathing there
At peace, and faintly smiling: — his last sight
Was the great moon, which o'er the western line
Of the wide world her mighty horn suspended,
With whose dun beams inwoven darkness seemed
To mingle. Now upon the jaggèd hills
It rests, and still as the divided frame
Of the vast meteor sunk, the Poet's blood,
That ever beat in mystic sympathy
With nature's ebb and flow, grew feebler still:
And when two lessening points of light alone
Gleamed through the darkness, the alternate gasp
Of his faint respiration scarce did stir
The stagnate night: — till the minutest ray
Was quenched, the pulse yet lingered in his heart.
It paused — it fluttered. But when heaven remained
Utterly black, the murky shades involved
An image, silent, cold, and motionless,
As their own voiceless earth and vacant air.
Even as a vapour fed with golden beams
That ministered on sunlight, ere the west
Eclipses it, was now that wondrous frame —
No sense, no motion, no divinity —
A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings
The breath of heaven did wander — a bright stream
Once fed with many-voicèd waves — a dream
Of youth, which night and time have quenched for ever,
Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered now.

671. *I.e.*, "the lute is still, the stream is dark and dry, the dream is unremembered."

672. "Medea," in Greek mythology, a powerful sorceress, the wife of Jason. She restored the youth of her husband's father, Aeson, by means of a magic brew, which also produced the effects which Shelley describes.

O, for Medea's wondrous alchemy,
Which wheresoe'er it fell made the earth gleam
With bright flowers, and the wintry boughs exhale
From vernal blooms fresh fragrance! O, that God,
Profuse of poisons, would concede the chalice
Which but one living man has drained, who now,
Vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels
No proud exemption in the blighting curse
He bears, over the world wanders for ever,
Lone as incarnate death! 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! But thou art fled
Like some frail exhalation; which the dawn
Robes in its golden beams, — ah! thou hast fled!
The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful,
The child of grace and genius. Heartless things
Are done and said i' the world, and many worms
And beasts and men live on, and mighty Earth
From sea and mountain, city and wilderness,
In vesper low or joyous orison,
Lifts still its solemn voice: — but thou art fled —
Thou canst no longer know or love the shapes
Of this phantasmal scene, who have to thee
Been purest ministers, who are, alas!
Now thou art not. Upon those pallid lips
So sweet even in their silence, on those eyes
That image sleep in death, upon that form
Yet safe from the worm's outrage, let no tear
Be shed — not even in thought. Nor, when those hues
Are gone, and those divinest lineaments,

675. "God" here, as in the first version of *The Revolt of Islam* (*Laon and Cythna*), is the monster which Shelley believed to be the object of orthodox Christian worship. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 9 n.

677. "One living man," Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew. See *Queen Mab*, VII. A juvenile poem in the style of Scott, entitled *The Wandering Jew*, which Medwin claimed to have had a hand in, is now generally regarded as entirely Shelley's.

682. "Visioned," "peopled with visions" [Locock].

689–703. These lines foreshadow some passages in *Adonais*.

Worn by the senseless wind, shall live alone
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 shows o' the world are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade.
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.

HYMN TO INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY[1]

I

THE AWFUL shadow of some unseen Power
Floats though unseen among us, — visiting
This various world with as inconstant wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower, —
Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
It visits with inconstant glance
Each human heart and countenance;
Like hues and harmonies of evening, —
Like clouds in starlight widely spread, —

713. "Too deep for tears" is the concluding phrase of Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality.*

[1] Composed in the summer of 1816, which Shelley and Mary spent in Switzerland, largely in the company of Byron and Clare Claremont; first published by Leigh Hunt in *The Examiner,* January 19, 1817. Shelley wrote to Hunt that "the poem was composed under the influence of feelings which agitated me even to tears, so that I think it deserves a better fate than the being linked with so stigmatised and unpopular a name (so far as it is known) as mine." It is characteristic of Shelley in that it expresses a passionately felt rather than reasoned conviction of the transience and unreality of the physical world, except as informed by some transcendental Spirit of Beauty and Goodness; in which, be it noted (Stanza vi), he places his hope for any real advance by humanity.

Like memory of music fled, —
Like aught that for its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.

II

Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
Of human thought or form, — where art thou gone?
Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?
Ask why the sunlight not for ever
Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain-river,
Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,
Why fear and dream and death and birth
Cast on the daylight of this earth
Such gloom, — why man has such a scope
For love and hate, despondency and hope?

III

No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
To sage or poet these responses given —
Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven,
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells — whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
From all we hear and all we see,
Doubt, chance, and mutability.
Thy light alone — like mist o'er mountains driven,
Or music by the night-wind sent
Through strings of some still instrument,
Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

IV

Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds depart
And come, for some uncertain moments lent.
Man were immortal, and omnipotent,

24. A striking expression of Shelley's acceptance of an ethical dualism.
25. Shelley is here rejecting any dogmatic, revealed religion. Compare *Queen Mab*, VI, 72 ff.
31. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iv, 201.
33. Compare *Alastor*, l. 42 and n.
37. "Self-esteem," here and elsewhere spoken of by Shelley as a

Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.
Thou messenger of sympathies,
That wax and wane in lovers' eyes—
Thou—that to human thought art nourishment,
Like darkness to a dying flame!
Depart not as thy shadow came,
Depart not—lest the grave should be,
Like life and fear, a dark reality.

V

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;
I was not heard—I saw them not—
When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming,—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

VI

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow?
With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
Of studious zeal or love's delight
Outwatched with me the envious night—
They know that never joy illumed my brow

virtue, implies a just recognition of man's *potential*, though as yet unrealized, spiritual greatness, with acceptance of the attendant responsibility. It is opposed to "self-contempt, bitterer to drink than blood" (*Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 25; compare also I, 8, and *Rosalind and Helen*, l. 479).

49–54. Compare *Alastor*, l. 20, n.

55–62. Compare the Dedication to *The Revolt of Islam*, Stanzas iii and iv. Compare also Wordsworth's account of a similar experience in *The Prelude* (not published until 1850), IV, 377–82.

Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou — O awful LOVELINESS,
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.

VII

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past — there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm — to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all human kind.

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82. Here may as well be inserted a note on the much discussed and disputed question of Shelley's Platonism. Since probably no two independent thinkers have ever agreed, or are ever likely to agree, in defining the term, any extended discussion by the present editor as to what Platonism is or how far it is present in Shelley's poetry seems rather pointless. These problems the serious student will wish to investigate and settle for himself. The following comments, however, will perhaps be helpful. (1) The belief in an immaterial order, either opposed to or only imperfectly reflected in the physical world, is not necessarily Platonic, although it perhaps finds in Plato its most explicit statement. Not only is such a belief common to all mystics, but it may almost be said to be *natural* to all truly imaginative persons. (2) On the other hand, Shelley knew Plato well — read his work constantly from his Oxford period on, and admired it with increasing fervour. His remark in 1820 that "Plato and Calderón [the great Spanish dramatist] have been my gods" is characteristic. Besides the *Symposium*, a knowledge of which may be considered to be indispensable to the student of Shelley (he himself translated it — very accurately, it is said), the works of Plato which most obviously come in question are the *Phaedrus*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*, especially Books VI, VII, and X. (3) Whatever relation Shelley's ideas may have to Plato's, it is to be remembered that they are in any case *his own;* that the question is one not of "sources," "influences," or "indebtedness," but of the similarities and dissimilarities between the convictions and sympathies of two great minds.

MONT BLANC[1]

LINES WRITTEN IN THE VALE OF CHAMOUNI

I

THE EVERLASTING universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark — now glittering — now reflecting gloom —
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters, — with a sound but half its own,
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

II

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve — dark, deep Ravine —
Thou many-coloured, many-voicèd vale,
Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne,
Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
Of lightning through the tempest; — thou dost lie,

[1] Composed in Switzerland in July, 1816. First published in 1817 with the prose *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, where Shelley describes it as "an undisciplined overflowing of the soul." Nevertheless, it contains a good deal of Shelleyan metaphysics, the best exposition of which is perhaps to be found in Locock's notes. It reflects his study of Locke (whose *Essay on the Human Understanding* is listed by Mary among Shelley's readings for this year), Berkeley, Hume, and Sir William Drummond, as well as Wordsworth. Its general theme seems to be the relation between the external world, the universal Mind (symbolized by the ravine), and the individual human mind; if indeed there is a real distinction between the first two, for such a distinction is denied in the prose essay *On Life* and in *Speculations on Metaphysics* (which the student should read). Still a different element seems to be the "Power," "the secret Strength of things," symbolized by Mont Blanc. It is likely enough that the poet himself was not entirely clear on these matters. It is interesting to compare this poem with Coleridge's *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni.*

Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
Children of elder time, in whose devotion
The chainless winds still come and ever came
To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging
To hear — an old and solemn harmony;
Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
Of the aethereal waterfall, whose veil
Robes some unsculptured image; the strange sleep
Which when the voices of the desert fail
Wraps all in its own deep eternity; —
Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unresting sound —
Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate fantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around;
One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
Seeking among the shadows that pass by —
Ghosts of all things that are — some shade of thee,
Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
From which they fled recalls them, thou art there!

III

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep, — that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live. — I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled

37–38. Compare Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*, ll. 106–07.
44. The "witch Poesy" will reappear as the Witch of Atlas.
49. The linking of death and sleep, the relation between dreams and waking experience, and the thought that life is but a dream and death the awakening to higher life, is a constant theme in Shelley's work.

The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessibly
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales!
Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears, — still, snowy, and serene —
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated steeps;
A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
And the wolf tracks her there — how hideously
Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
Ghastly, and scarred, and riven. — Is this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
None can reply — all seems eternal now.
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
But for such faith, with nature reconciled;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

IV

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,
Ocean, and all the living things that dwell

79. The Boscombe MS. reads "In such a faith," which makes the passage more readily intelligible. The printed text is probably the right one, however, "faith" being used here, as often in the poet's early work, in a derogatory sense; *i.e.*, as equivalent to superstition, which, although seen by civilized minds to be opposed to truth and Nature, is nevertheless inspired in primitive minds *by* Nature. Compare *Queen Mab*, VI, 72 ff.

Within the daedal earth; lightning, and rain,
Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
The torpor of the year when feeble dreams
Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
Holds every future leaf and flower; — the bound
With which from that detested trance they leap;
The works and ways of man, their death and birth,
And that of him and all that his may be;
All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
Are born and die; revolve, subside, and swell.
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,
On which I gaze, even these primaeval mountains
Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep
Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice,
Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower
And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewing
Its destined path, or in the mangled soil
Branchless and shattered stand; the rocks, drawn down
From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
The limits of the dead and living world,
Never to be reclaimed. The dwelling-place
Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
So much of life and joy is lost. The race
Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
And their place is not known. Below, vast caves
Shine in the rushing torrents' restless gleam,
Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling
Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,

86. "Daedal earth" perhaps echoes the "daedala tellus" of Lucretius (for whom Shelley during his early manhood had great admiration). See *De Rerum Natura*, I, 228. Shelley uses the adjective often.

The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever
Rolls its loud waters to the ocean-waves,
Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air.

v

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: — the power is there,
The still and solemn power of many sights,
And many sounds, and much of life and death.
In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
Or the star-beams dart through them: — Winds contend
Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
Over the snow. The secret Strength of things
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind's imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

OZYMANDIAS[1]

I MET a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

142–44. The thought seems to be that as the individual human mind can create an imaginary world of its own, so the Universal Mind creates the world of Nature. If so, Shelley is here close to the Berkeleyan view that the forms of Nature are ideas in the mind of God.

[1] Published by Hunt in *The Examiner*, January, 1818. It was written in a friendly poetical contest with Horace Smith. The theme, frequently recurrent in Shelley's verse, is the transience of human life and achievement in the material world. Ozymandias has been identified with Ramses II of Egypt. For a full discussion of Shelley's sources, see White, *The Best of Shelley*, p. 476.

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

LINES WRITTEN AMONG THE EUGANEAN HILLS[1]

OCTOBER, 1818

MANY a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of Misery,
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on —
Day and night, and night and day,
Drifting on his dreary way,
With the solid darkness black
Closing round his vessel's track;
Whilst above the sunless sky,
Big with clouds, hangs heavily,
And behind the tempest fleet
Hurries on with lightning feet,
Riving sail, and cord, and plank,
Till the ship has almost drank
Death from the o'er-brimming deep;
And sinks down, down, like that sleep
When the dreamer seems to be
Weltering through eternity;
And the dim low line before
Of a dark and distant shore
Still recedes, as ever still
Longing with divided will,

[1] For an extremely fine appreciation of this poem see Oliver Elton, *A Survey of English Literature, 1780–1880*, II, 194–95. It was composed at Este in 1818.

But no power to seek or shun,
He is ever drifted on
O'er the unreposing wave
To the haven of the grave.
What, if there no friends will greet;
What, if there no heart will meet
His with love's impatient beat;
Wander wheresoe'er he may,
Can he dream before that day
To find refuge from distress
In friendship's smile, in love's caress?
Then 'twill wreak him little woe
Whether such there be or no:
Senseless is the breast, and cold,
Which relenting love would fold;
Bloodless are the veins and chill
Which the pulse of pain did fill;
Every little living nerve
That from bitter words did swerve
Round the tortured lips and brow,
Are like sapless leaflets now
Frozen upon December's bough.

On the beach of a northern sea
Which tempests shake eternally,
As once the wretch there lay to sleep,
Lies a solitary heap,
One white skull and seven dry bones,
On the margin of the stones,
Where a few gray rushes stand,
Boundaries of the sea and land:
Nor is heard one voice of wail
But the sea-mews, as they sail
O'er the billows of the gale;
Or the whirlwind up and down
Howling, like a slaughtered town,
When a king in glory rides
Through the pomp of fratricides:
Those unburied bones around

43. The verb should be singular. Shelley's poetry contains a number of instances of this error.

There is many a mournful sound;
There is no lament for him,
Like a sunless vapour, dim,
Who once clothed with life and thought
What now moves nor murmurs not.

Ay, many flowering islands lie
In the waters of wide Agony:
To such a one this morn was led,
My bark by soft winds piloted:
'Mid the mountains Euganean
I stood listening to the paean
With which the legioned rooks did hail
The sun's uprise majestical;
Gathering round with wings all hoar,
Through the dewy mist they soar
Like gray shades, till the eastern heaven
Bursts, and then, as clouds of even,
Flecked with fire and azure, lie
In the unfathomable sky,
So their plumes of purple grain,
Starred with drops of golden rain,
Gleam above the sunlight woods,
As in silent multitudes
On the morning's fitful gale
Through the broken mist they sail,
And the vapours cloven and gleaming
Follow, down the dark steep streaming,
Till all is bright, and clear, and still,
Round the solitary hill.

Beneath is spread like a green sea
The waveless plain of Lombardy,
Bounded by the vaporous air,
Islanded by cities fair;
Underneath Day's azure eyes
Ocean's nursling, Venice lies,
A peopled labyrinth of walls,
Amphitrite's destined halls,

97. Amphitrite was the wife of Poseidon, or Neptune, and one of the fifty Nereids, or daughters of Nereus, a minor sea deity.

Which her hoary sire now paves
With his blue and beaming waves.
Lo! the sun upsprings behind,
Broad, red, radiant, half-reclined
On the level quivering line
Of the waters crystalline;
And before that chasm of light,
As within a furnace bright,
Column, tower, and dome, and spire,
Shine like obelisks of fire,
Pointing with inconstant motion
From the altar of dark ocean
To the sapphire-tinted skies;
As the flames of sacrifice
From the marble shrines did rise,
As to pierce the dome of gold
Where Apollo spoke of old.

Sun-girt City, thou hast been
Ocean's child, and then his queen;
Now is come a darker day,
And thou soon must be his prey,
If the power that raised thee here
Hallow so thy watery bier.
A less drear ruin then than now,
With thy conquest-branded brow
Stooping to the slave of slaves
From thy throne, among the waves
Wilt thou be, when the sea-mew
Flies, as once before it flew,
O'er thine isles depopulate,
And all is in its ancient state,
Save where many a palace gate
With green sea-flowers overgrown
Like a rock of Ocean's own,
Topples o'er the abandoned sea
As the tides change sullenly.

114. The oracle of Apollo at Delphi.
116. At the height of Venice's greatness, an annual ceremony, at which a ring was thrown into the sea, celebrated the marriage of Venice to the Adriatic.

The fisher on his watery way,
Wandering at the close of day,
Will spread his sail and seize his oar
Till he pass the gloomy shore,
Lest thy dead should, from their sleep
Bursting o'er the starlight deep,
Lead a rapid masque of death
O'er the waters of his path.

Those who alone thy towers behold
Quivering through aëreal gold,
As I now behold them here,
Would imagine not they were
Sepulchres, where human forms,
Like pollution-nourished worms,
To the corpse of greatness cling,
Murdered, and now mouldering:
But if Freedom should awake
In her omnipotence, and shake
From the Celtic Anarch's hold
All the keys of dungeons cold,
Where a hundred cities lie
Chained like thee, ingloriously,
Thou and all thy sister band
Might adorn this sunny land,
Twining memories of old time
With new virtues more sublime;
If not, perish thou and they! —
Clouds which stain truth's rising day
By her sun consumed away —
Earth can spare ye: while like flowers,
In the waste of years and hours,
From your dust new nations spring
With more kindly blossoming.

Perish — let there only be
Floating o'er thy hearthless sea

152. The Celtic Anarch is Austria, or perhaps more particularly the Emperor. "Celt" was used among the Romans to refer to the northern barbarians. — For Shelley's use of "Anarch," see *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 47 n.

167–205. This is perhaps the finest tribute to Byron — some would

As the garment of thy sky
Clothes the world immortally,
One remembrance, more sublime
Than the tattered pall of time,
Which scarce hides thy visage wan; —
That a tempest-cleaving Swan
Of the songs of Albion,
Driven from his ancestral streams
By the might of evil dreams,
Found a nest in thee; and Ocean
Welcomed him with such emotion
That its joy grew his, and sprung
From his lips like music flung
O'er a mighty thunder-fit,
Chastening terror: — what though yet
Poesy's unfailing River,
Which through Albion winds forever
Lashing with melodious wave
Many a sacred Poet's grave,
Mourn its latest nursling fled?
What though thou with all thy dead
Scarce can for this fame repay
Aught thine own? oh, rather say
Though thy sins and slaveries foul
Overcloud a sunlike soul?
As the ghost of Homer clings
Round Scamander's wasting springs;
As divinest Shakespeare's might
Fills Avon and the world with light
Like omniscient power which he
Imaged 'mid mortality;
As the love from Petrarch's urn,
Yet amid yon hills doth burn,
A quenchless lamp by which the heart

call it excessive — that is to be found in English poetry. It is characteristic that Shelley, although at a later date he made a number of sharp remarks about Byron personally, was invariably generous in his praise of Byron's poetry, and never gave the slightest sign of jealousy. See Letter VI in the present volume.

192. Byron's life in Venice is notorious for its dissipation; which, however, was probably not so lurid as it has often been painted.

Sees things unearthly; — so thou art,
Mighty spirit — so shall be
The City that did refuge thee.

Lo, the sun floats up the sky
Like thought-wingèd Liberty,
Till the universal light
Seems to level plain and height;
From the sea a mist has spread,
And the beams of morn lie dead
On the towers of Venice now,
Like its glory long ago.
By the skirts of that gray cloud
Many-domèd Padua proud
Stands, a peopled solitude,
'Mid the harvest-shining plain,
Where the peasant heaps his grain
In the garner of his foe,
And the milk-white oxen slow
With the purple vintage strain,
Heaped upon the creaking wain,
That the brutal Celt may swill
Drunken sleep with savage will;
And the sickle to the sword
Lies unchanged, though many a lord,
Like a weed whose shade is poison,
Overgrows this region's foison,
Sheaves of whom are ripe to come
To destruction's harvest-home:
Men must reap the things they sow,
Force from force must ever flow,
Or worse; but 'tis a bitter woe
That love or reason cannot change
The despot's rage, the slave's revenge.

Padua, thou within whose walls
Those mute guests at festivals,
Son and Mother, Death and Sin,
Played at dice for Ezzelin,

231–33. A constant theme in Shelley's writing.
239. Ezzelin III, a petty ruler of Padua and the vicinity in the first

Till Death cried, "I win, I win!"
And Sin cursed to lose the wager,
But Death promised, to assuage her,
That he would petition for
Her to be made Vice-Emperor,
When the destined years were o'er,
Over all between the Po
And the eastern Alpine snow,
Under the mighty Austrian.
Sin smiled so as Sin only can,
And since that time, ay, long before,
Both have ruled from shore to shore,—
That incestuous pair, who follow
Tyrants as the sun the swallow,
As Repentance follows Crime,
And as changes follow Time.

In thine halls the lamp of learning,
Padua, now no more is burning;
Like a meteor, whose wild way
Is lost over the grave of day,
It gleams betrayed and to betray:
Once remotest nations came
To adore that sacred flame,
When it lit not many a hearth
On this cold and gloomy earth:
Now new fires from antique light
Spring beneath the wide world's might;
But their spark lies dead in thee,
Trampled out by Tyranny.
As the Norway woodman quells,
In the depth of piny dells,
One light flame among the brakes,
While the boundless forest shakes,

half of the 13th century, and an ally of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, was possessed by what seems to have been an insane lust to inflict upon his enemies torture and death in their most horrible forms. At last, having been wounded and taken prisoner, he committed suicide by tearing off his bandages. — There is a strong reminiscence here of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, ll. 195–98.

256–57. During the Middle Ages Padua was renowned for its university.

And its mighty trunks are torn
By the fire thus lowly born:
The spark beneath his feet is dead,
He starts to see the flames it fed
Howling through the darkened sky
With a myriad tongues victoriously,
And sinks down in fear: so thou,
O Tyranny, beholdest now
Light around thee, and thou hearest
The loud flames ascend, and fearest:
Grovel on the earth; ay, hide
In the dust thy purple pride!
Noon descends around me now:
'Tis the noon of autumn's glow,
When a soft and purple mist
Like a vaporous amethyst,
Or an air-dissolvèd star
Mingling light and fragrance, far
From the curved horizon's bound
To the point of Heaven's profound,
Fills the overflowing sky;
And the plains that silent lie
Underneath, the leaves unsodden
Where the infant Frost has trodden
With his morning-wingèd feet,
Whose bright print is gleaming yet;
And the red and golden vines,
Piercing with their trellised lines
The rough, dark-skirted wilderness;
The dun and bladed grass no less,
Pointing from this hoary tower
In the windless air; the flower
Glimmering at my feet; the line
Of the olive-sandalled Apennine
In the south dimly islanded;
And the Alps, whose snows are spread
High between the clouds and sun;
And of living things each one;
And my spirit which so long
Darkened this swift stream of song,—
Interpenetrated lie

By the glory of the sky:
Be it love, light, harmony,
Odour, or the soul of all
Which from Heaven like dew doth fall,
Or the mind which feeds this verse
Peopling the lone universe.

Noon descends, and after noon
Autumn's evening meets me soon,
Leading the infantine moon,
And that one star, which to her
Almost seems to minister
Half the crimson light she brings
From the sunset's radiant springs:
And the soft dreams of the morn
(Which like wingèd winds had borne
To that silent isle, which lies
Mid remembered agonies,
The frail bark of this lone being)
Pass, to other sufferers fleeing,
And its ancient pilot, Pain,
Sits beside the helm again.

Other flowering isles must be
In the sea of Life and Agony:
Other spirits float and flee
O'er that gulf: even now, perhaps,
On some rock the wild wave wraps,
With folded wings they waiting sit
For my bark, to pilot it
To some calm and blooming cove,

315–19. The exact meaning is not clear; it may be: "Whether that glory be in essence born of physical phenomena [although love, light, etc. may be intended to be symbolic] or of some Spirit like that of the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, or of a Universal Mind [Locock] like that in *Mont Blanc*."

331. "This lone being" is a characteristic reference to the poet himself.

342 ff. Compare the island paradise at the end of *Epipsychidion*. This was evidently a favorite daydream of Shelley's. In 1821, after one particularly painful revelation of the vileness of human nature, he wrote to Mary: "My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in

Where for me, and those I love,
May a windless bower be built,
Far from passion, pain, and guilt,
In a dell mid lawny hills,
Which the wild sea-murmur fills,
And soft sunshine, and the sound
Of old forests echoing round,
And the light and smell divine
Of all flowers that breathe and shine:
We may live so happy there,
That the Spirits of the Air,
Envying us, may even entice
To our healing Paradise
The polluting multitude;
But their rage would be subdued
By that clime divine and calm,
And the winds whose wings rain balm
On the uplifted soul, and leaves
Under which the bright sea heaves;
While each breathless interval
In their whisperings musical
The inspired soul supplies
With its own deep melodies,
And the love which heals all strife
Circling, like the breath of life,
All things in that sweet abode
With its own mild brotherhood:
They, not it, would change; and soon
Every sprite beneath the moon
Would repent its envy vain,
And the earth grow young again.

the sea . . ." No less characteristic, however, is the desire expressed in the present poem to share such a paradise with the rest of mankind — when they shall have ceased to be a "polluting multitude." — And of course the island is essentially symbolic — of an inward and spiritual purity and peace.

371. "Sprite," an archaic form of "spirit" (meaning *"human* spirit"); compare *Adonais,* l. 23.

JULIAN AND MADDALO[1]

A CONVERSATION

PREFACE

The meadows with fresh streams, the bees with thyme,
The goats with the green leaves of budding Spring,
Are saturated not — nor Love with tears. — VIRGIL'S *Gallus*.[2]

COUNT MADDALO is a Venetian nobleman of ancient family and of great fortune, who, without mixing much in the society of his countrymen, resides chiefly at his magnificent palace in that city. He is a person of the most consummate genius, and capable, if he would direct his energies to such an end, of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country. But it is his weakness to be proud: he derives, from a comparison of his own extraordinary mind with the dwarfish intellects that sur-

[1] *Julian and Maddalo* was written soon after Shelley's visit to Byron at Venice in the autumn of 1818 — just at the beginning of its author's greatest creative period. The importance and appeal of the poem lie, first, in the sympathetic but searching analysis — one of the most convincing ever offered — of Byron's (Maddalo's) character and the unrivalled dramatic evocation of Byron in the flesh; second, in Shelley's self-characterization through the portrait of Julian, and the explicit statement of certain fundamental tenets of his philosophy; and third, in the faultless handling of a most difficult style — one familiar yet still imaginative, which flings the magic cloak of poetry over the most casual conversation no less than over the most gorgeous description or the most passionate confession of faith.

These achievements belong almost exclusively to the first part of the poem, which is printed here. A much longer section, devoted to the harrowing and not always intelligible story of the Maniac, has less appeal. It does indeed show Shelley's characteristic intense sympathy with his outcast and unfortunate fellows —

Me who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth —

and is interesting as an early specimen of the dramatic monologue; but the tone is rather high-pitched, and the significance of the story is very obscure. For these reasons, and because it has scarcely any connection with the earlier part of the poem, this latter section is omitted from the present volume.

[2] *I.e.*, the *Tenth Eclogue*. The passage is a rather loose paraphrase of ll. 29–30.

round him, an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life. His passions and his powers are incomparably greater than those of other men; and, instead of the latter having been employed in curbing the former, they have mutually lent each other strength. His ambition preys upon itself, for want of objects which it can consider worthy of exertion. I say that Maddalo is proud, because I can find no other word to express the concentered and impatient feelings which consume him; but it is on his own hopes and affections only that he seems to trample, for in social life no human being can be more gentle, patient, and unassuming than Maddalo. He is cheerful, frank, and witty. His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication; men are held by it as by a spell. He has travelled much; and there is an inexpressible charm in his relation of his adventures in different countries.

Julian is an Englishman of good family, passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may be yet susceptible. Without concealing the evil in the world, he is for ever speculating how good may be made superior. He is a complete infidel, and a scoffer at all things reputed holy; and Maddalo takes a wicked pleasure in drawing out his taunts against religion. What Maddalo thinks on these matters is not exactly known. Julian, in spite of his heterodox opinions, is conjectured by his friends to possess some good qualities. How far this is possible the pious reader will determine. Julian is rather serious.

Of the Maniac I can give no information. He seems, by his own account, to have been disappointed in love. He was evidently a very cultivated and amiable person when in his right senses. His story, told at length, might be like many other stories of the same kind: the unconnected exclamations of his agony will perhaps be found a sufficient comment for the text of every heart.

I RODE one evening with Count Maddalo
Upon the bank of land which breaks the flow
Of Adria towards Venice: a bare strand
Of hillocks, heaped from ever-shifting sand,
Matted with thistles and amphibious weeds,
Such as from earth's embrace the salt ooze breeds,
Is this; an uninhabited sea-side,
Which the lone fisher, when his nets are dried,
Abandons; and no other object breaks
The waste, but one dwarf tree and some few stakes
Broken and unrepaired, and the tide makes
A narrow space of level sand thereon,
Where 'twas our wont to ride while day went down.
This ride was my delight. I love all waste
And solitary places; where we taste
The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be:
And such was this wide ocean, and this shore
More barren than its billows; and yet more
Than all, with a remembered friend I love
To ride as then I rode; — for the winds drove
The living spray along the sunny air
Into our faces; the blue heavens were bare,
Stripped to their depths by the awakening north;
And, from the waves, sound like delight broke forth
Harmonising with solitude, and sent
Into our hearts aëreal merriment.
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,
None slow enough for sadness: till we came
Homeward, which always makes the spirit tame.
This day had been cheerful but cold, and now
The sun was sinking, and the wind also.
Our talk grew somewhat serious, as may be
Talk interrupted with such raillery
As mocks itself, because it cannot scorn
The thoughts it would extinguish: — 'twas forlorn,

2. The "bank of land" is the Lido — not now, of course, "a bare strand."

Yet pleasing, such as once, so poets tell,
The devils held within the dales of Hell
Concerning God, freewill and destiny:
Of all that earth has been or yet may be,
All that vain men imagine or believe,
Or hope can paint or suffering may achieve,
We descanted, and I (for ever still
Is it not wise to make the best of ill?)
Argued against despondency, but pride
Made my companion take the darker side.
The sense that he was greater than his kind
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind
By gazing on its own exceeding light.
Meanwhile the sun paused ere it should alight,
Over the horizon of the mountains; — Oh,
How beautiful is sunset, when the glow
Of Heaven descends upon a land like thee,
Thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!
Thy mountains, seas, and vineyards, and the towers
Of cities they encircle! — it was ours
To stand on thee, beholding it: and then,
Just where we had dismounted, the Count's men
Were waiting for us with the gondola. —
As those who pause on some delightful way
Though bent on pleasant pilgrimage, we stood
Looking upon the evening, and the flood
Which lay between the city and the shore,
Paved with the image of the sky . . . the hoar
And aëry Alps towards the North appeared,
Through mist, an heaven-sustaining bulwark reared
Between the East and West; and half the sky
Was roofed with clouds of rich emblazonry
Dark purple at the zenith, which still grew
Down the steep West into a wondrous hue
Brighter than burning gold, even to the rent
Where the swift sun yet paused in his descent
Among the many-folded hills: they were

40. "Poets," Milton. See *Paradise Lost*, II, 555 ff.

68. I follow Woodberry and Locock in taking "appeared" to mean "seemed," and therefore follow it with a comma. But it might mean "came into view."

Those famous Euganean hills, which bear,
As seen from Lido thro' the harbour piles,
The likeness of a clump of peakèd isles —
And then — as if the Earth and Sea had been
Dissolved into one lake of fire, were seen
Those mountains towering as from waves of flame
Around the vaporous sun, from which there came
The inmost purple spirit of light, and made
Their very peaks transparent. "Ere it fade,"
Said my companion, "I will show you soon
A better station" — so, o'er the lagune
We glided; and from that funereal bark
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.
I was about to speak, when — "We are even
Now at the point I meant," said Maddalo,
And bade the gondolieri cease to row.
"Look, Julian, on the west, and listen well
If you hear not a deep and heavy bell."
I looked, and saw between us and the sun
A building on an island; such a one
As age to age might add, for uses vile,
A windowless, deformed and dreary pile;
And on the top an open tower, where hung
A bell, which in the radiance swayed and swung;
We could just hear its hoarse and iron tongue:
The broad sun sunk behind it, and it tolled
In strong and black relief. — "What we behold
Shall be the madhouse and its belfry tower,"
Said Maddalo, "and ever at this hour
Those who may cross the water, hear that bell
Which calls the maniacs, each one from his cell,
To vespers." — "As much skill as need to pray
In thanks or hope for their dark lot have they
To their stern maker," I replied. "O ho!
You talk as in years past," said Maddalo.

101. Browning is quoted by Rossetti as saying that Shelley is really describing the penitentiary on San Clemente instead of the madhouse on San Servolo.

" 'Tis strange men change not. You were ever still
Among Christ's flock a perilous infidel,
A wolf for the meek lambs — if you can't swim
Beware of Providence." I looked on him,
But the gay smile had faded in his eye.
"And such," — he cried, "is our mortality,
And this must be the emblem and the sign
Of what should be eternal and divine! —
And like that black and dreary bell, the soul,
Hung in a heaven-illumined tower, must toll
Our thoughts and our desires to meet below
Round the rent heart and pray — as madmen do
For what? they know not, — till the night of death
As sunset that strange vision, severeth
Our memory from itself, and us from all
We sought and yet were baffled." I recall
The sense of what he said, although I mar
The force of his expressions. The broad star
Of day meanwhile had sunk behind the hill,
And the black bell became invisible,
And the red tower looked gray, and all between,
The churches, ships and palaces were seen
Huddled in gloom; — into the purple sea
The orange hues of heaven sunk silently.
We hardly spoke, and soon the gondola
Conveyed me to my lodging by the way.
  The following morn was rainy, cold and dim:
Ere Maddalo arose, I called on him,
And whilst I waited, with his child I played;
A lovelier toy sweet Nature never made,
A serious, subtle, wild, yet gentle being,
Graceful without design, and unforeseeing,
With eyes — Oh speak not of her eyes! — which seem
Twin mirrors of Italian Heaven, yet gleam
With such deep meaning, as we never see
But in the human countenance: with me
She was a special favourite: I had nursed
Her fine and feeble limbs when she came first
To this bleak world; and she yet seemed to know

143. Allegra, who had been sent to Byron immediately on the Shelleys' arrival in Italy. See Letter VII in the present volume.

On second sight her ancient playfellow,
Less changed than she was by six months or so;
For after her first shyness was worn out
We sate there, rolling billiard balls about,
When the Count entered. Salutations past—
"The word you spoke last night might well have cast
A darkness on my spirit—if man be
The passive thing you say, I should not see
Much harm in the religions and old saws
(Tho' *I* may never own such leaden laws)
Which break a teachless nature to the yoke:
Mine is another faith"—thus much I spoke
And noting he replied not, added: "See
This lovely child, blithe, innocent and free;
She spends a happy time with little care,
While we to such sick thoughts subjected are
As came on you last night—it is our will
That thus enchains us to permitted ill—
We might be otherwise—we might be all
We dream of happy, high, majestical.
Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek
But in our mind? and if we were not weak
Should we be less in deed than in desire?"
"Ay, if we were not weak—and we aspire
How vainly to be strong!" said Maddalo:
"You talk Utopia." "It remains to know,"
I then rejoined, "and those who try may find
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—
So taught those kings of old philosophy
Who reigned, before Religion made men blind;
And those who suffer with their suffering kind
Yet feel their faith, religion." "My dear friend,"

170. The passage beginning here is very important to any study of Shelley's philosophy, and is evidence of the final abandonment of the doctrine of Necessity set forth in *Queen Mab*.

Said Maddalo, "my judgement will not bend
To your opinion, though I think you might
Make such a system refutation-tight
As far as words go. I knew one like you
Who to this city came some months ago,
With whom I argued in this sort, and he
Is now gone mad, — and so he answered me, —
Poor fellow! but if you would like to go
We'll visit him, and his wild talk will show
How vain are such aspiring theories."
"I hope to prove the induction otherwise,
And that a want of that true theory, still,
Which seeks a 'soul of goodness' in things ill
Or in himself or others, has thus bowed
His being — there are some by nature proud,
Who patient in all else demand but this —
To love and be beloved with gentleness;
And being scorned, what wonder if they die
Some living death? this is not destiny
But man's own wilful ill."

* * * * *

STANZAS

WRITTEN IN DEJECTION, NEAR NAPLES [1]

I

THE SUN is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and bright,
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
The purple noon's transparent might,
The breath of the moist earth is light,
Around its unexpanded buds;
Like many a voice of one delight,
The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,
The City's voice itself, is soft like Solitude's.

[1] First published in the *Posthumous Poems*, where it is dated December, 1818. Justly one of the most famous of Shelley's lyrics, it gives consummate expression to a characteristic mood or attitude, which many readers find objectionable as "self-pity." It is doubtless what Arnold had

II

I see the Deep's untrampled floor
  With green and purple seaweeds strown;
I see the waves upon the shore,
  Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown:
  I sit upon the sands alone,—
The lightning of the noontide ocean
  Is flashing round me, and a tone
Arises from its measured motion,
How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion.

III

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
  Nor peace within nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
  The sage in meditation found,
  And walked with inward glory crowned—
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.

in mind when he spoke of Shelley's "lovely wail" and coined the phrase which has done so much to wrap about Shelley's reputation a cloud of ineffectual angelicism. The question is in large measure one of individual taste, but a few editorial comments may be made. First, as Mrs. Shelley points out in her note, Shelley was at this time—as throughout his last years—in ill health, suffering from a strange malady which may have been of nervous origin, and which, while not dangerous, caused frequent attacks of intense pain. Second, he was isolated even from his few friends in England, such as Hogg, Peacock, Hunt, and Horace Smith. And although he laughed at the vicious abuse of the reviews (he seems never to have seen the favourable ones), he could not but feel bitterly the undeserved hatred of his countrymen and, what may have been even more discouraging, in spite of his refusal to seek popularity, the almost complete neglect of his works by the reading public. Moreover, he had at last been forced to realize that even in Mary he had not found the ideal companion of whom he had always dreamed, who could perfectly share his sufferings and his aspirations. Bearing everyone's burdens, he could find no one to help bear his, and turned to verse as a means whereby he could put from him the moods of sorrow and despair which too frequently besieged him, and, by thus objectifying them, triumph over them. In this, according to the testimony of his friends, he succeeded. See, in this connection, Mrs. Shelley's "Note on Poems of 1818"; and, for a striking elaboration of Stanza iii, Benjamin P. Kurtz, *The Pursuit of Death*, pp. 151–53.

IV

Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
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,
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.

V

Some might lament that I were cold,
As I, when this sweet day is gone,
Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,
Insults with this untimely moan;
They might lament — for I am one
Whom men love not, — and yet regret;
Unlike this day, which, when the sun
Shall on its stainless glory set,
Will linger, though enjoyed, like joy in memory yet.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

A LYRICAL DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

Audisne haec Amphiarae, sub terram abdite?[1]

[*Editor's Note.* — The composition of *Prometheus Unbound* was begun at Este early in the autumn of 1818. Act I was completed by October 8; most of Acts II and III were written

41–45. These lines are obscure in both construction and meaning. A possible interpretation is: "Some might lament [perhaps because the poet had died before retrieving any of the errors and sins imputed to him "whom men love not"; or perhaps "some might" is emphatic, implying "only a few, if any"] and continue ["yet"] to feel only regret; whereas, although I lament the passing of 'this sweet day,' I shall still, after it is past, find pleasure in remembering it." At any rate, Locock is right in putting a semicolon rather than a comma after "regret."

[1] "Doest thou not hear, Amphiaraus, hidden beneath the earth?" Amphiaraus was one of the Seven against Thebes, who was swallowed up by the earth as he was fleeing from the battlefield. He was gifted with prophecy, and had foretold the failure of the enterprise.

at Rome in the early spring of 1819. Act IV was an afterthought, composed towards the end of the year. The work was published in 1820.

The writing of *Prometheus* marks the arrival at complete maturity of Shelley's poetic powers, and the poem is generally regarded as his greatest achievement. It is probably not the most often read of the poet's works, but it has certainly been the most written about. The best introduction, however, is still Shelley's Preface and Mrs. Shelley's Note, of which the most significant part follows.

"The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled. This also forms a portion of Christianity: God made earth and man perfect, till he, by his fall,

'Brought death into the world and all our woe.'

Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none. It is not my part in these Notes to notice the arguments that have been urged against this opinion, but to mention the fact that he entertained it, and was indeed attached to it with fervent enthusiasm. That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. And the subject he loved best to dwell on was the image of One warring with the Evil Principle, oppressed not only by it, but by all — even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity; a victim full of fortitude and hope and the spirit of triumph emanating from a reliance in the ultimate omnipotence of Good. Such he had depicted in his last poem, when he made Laon the enemy and the victim of tyrants. He now took a more idealized image of the same subject. He followed certain classical authorities in figuring Saturn as the good principle, Jupiter the usurping evil one, and Prometheus as the regenerator, who, unable to bring mankind back to primitive innocence, used knowledge as a weapon to defeat evil, by leading mankind, beyond the state wherein they are sinless through ignorance, to that in which they are virtuous through wisdom. Jupiter punished the temerity of the Titan

by chaining him to a rock of Caucasus, and causing a vulture to devour his still-renewed heart. There was a prophecy afloat in heaven portending the fall of Jove, the secret of averting which was known only to Prometheus; and the god offered freedom from torture on condition of its being communicated to him. According to the mythological story, this referred to the offspring of Thetis, who was destined to be greater than his father. Prometheus at last bought pardon for his crime of enriching mankind with his gifts, by revealing the prophecy. Hercules killed the vulture, and set him free; and Thetis was married to Peleus, the father of Achilles.

"Shelley adapted the catastrophe of this story to his peculiar views. The son greater than his father, born of the nuptials of Jupiter and Thetis, was to dethrone Evil, and bring back a happier reign than that of Saturn. Prometheus defies the power of his enemy, and endures centuries of torture; till the hour arrives when Jove, blind to the real event, but darkly guessing that some great good to himself will flow, espouses Thetis. At the moment, the Primal Power of the world drives him from his usurped throne, and Strength, in the person of Hercules, liberates Humanity, typified in Prometheus, from the tortures generated by evil done or suffered. Asia, one of the Oceanides, is the wife of Prometheus — she was, according to other mythological interpretations, the same as Venus and Nature. When the benefactor of mankind is liberated, Nature resumes the beauty of her prime, and is united to her husband, the emblem of the human race, in perfect and happy union. In the Fourth Act, the Poet gives further scope to his imagination, and idealizes the forms of creation — such as we know them, instead of such as they appeared to the Greeks. Maternal Earth, the mighty parent, is superseded by the Spirit of the Earth, the guide of our planet through the realms of sky; while his fair and weaker companion and attendant, the Spirit of the Moon, receives bliss from the annihilation of Evil in the superior sphere.

"Shelley develops, more particularly in the lyrics of this drama, his abstruse and imaginative theories with regard to the Creation. It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague.

It was his design to write prose metaphysical essays on the nature of Man, which would have served to explain much of what is obscure in his poetry; a few scattered fragments of observations and remarks alone remain. He considered these philosophical views of Mind and Nature to be instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry."

Some commentators (*e.g.,* John Todhunter, *A Study of Shelley,* London, 1880; W. M. Rossetti, "Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* Its Meaning and Personages," in *Shelley Society Papers,* Part I, 1888; and Vida D. Scudder in her edition of the poem, Boston, 1892) have wished to push the allegorical interpretation of the poem farther than Mrs. Shelley cared to. Such attempts are often fascinating, but may also be misleading (see N. I. White, "Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* or Every Man His Own Allegorist," *Publications of the Modern Language Association,* XL (1925), 172 ff.), and are in any case not necessary to an understanding of what the poet had most at heart.

Such an understanding will be aided by the following brief general discussion of the action and the characters. Chief of these, of course, is Prometheus, in the story of whose suffering the poet embodies his most searching analysis of the evil by which, he felt, man is so fearfully and ceaselessly beset; and which man may triumph over (such is the significance of Prometheus' victory) through suffering, renunciation, forgiveness, love. The theme is of course essentially Christian, and Shelley emphasizes the parallel.

The play is thus a spiritual drama. To approach it as if it had been written for the stage, as a "realistic" presentation of actual human characters, is to miss the point entirely. Shelley himself declared to Peacock that it was "a drama, with characters and mechanism of a kind yet unattempted." There is almost no physical action; the struggle, in fact, is not even between Prometheus and Jupiter, but between the nobler and the baser elements of the Titan's own mind. For Jupiter retains his power only through Prometheus' moral weakness. The Titan's defiance and hatred of his oppressor, although seeming to sustain him, are in truth the chain that binds his limbs and the vulture that tears at his heart. When, after "three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours" of suffering, he has learned the folly of hatred and is ready to recall his curse, the

hour of his deliverance is at hand. But first the strength of resolution, the genuineness of his renunciation, must be tested by stronger tortures. In the light of his hard-won wisdom he sees in their true deformity the distorted creations of consciousness (of "thought, passion, reason, will, imagination" — *his* gift to men) when it is perverted, through Jupiter's malign influence, to evil ends. Foiled in direct assault, these Furies conjure up two visions, in which the life of Christ and the French Revolution are seen not merely as failures, but as emblems of the dreadful seeming truth that

> those who do endure
> Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
> Thousandfold torment on themselves and him.

Yet through this worst of tortures Prometheus remains himself; and in the face of his unwavering compassion, the source at once of his suffering and strength, the Furies vanish; and a chorus of "subtle and fair spirits" come to comfort him with songs of love and hope.

This is the end of the first and most dramatic act. The second is devoted to Shelleyan fantasies and philosophizings — enchanting, elusive, aspiring, expressed in lovely verse, but in no possible sense of the word, *dramatic*. Here we meet Asia, Prometheus' feminine counterpart, the embodiment of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, whose "footsteps pave the world with loveliness." As Prometheus seems to stand for the soul or spiritual essence of Man, so Asia represents the *spirit* of Nature; and it is perhaps to be expected that she should be less human, less definitely realized than he. Formerly married to Prometheus, now long separated from him, she feels that the day of their reunion is at hand, and descends to the cave of Demogorgon to question him. This mysterious, shadowy being, "ungazed upon and shapeless," yet felt to be a "living Spirit," is apparently, as Mrs. Shelley says, the "Primal Law" of the universe; the personification of the "Necessity" of Plato (rather than the Necessity of Shelley's own *Queen Mab*), or of the Hindu and Buddhist "Karma"; the ultimate guarantee that there is *order* in the world; that, for instance, Prometheus' fortitude and forgiveness must ultimately give birth to good, and that Jupiter's tyranny must be at last self-destructive. Demogorgon is "the eternal X which the human spirit always

assumes when it is at a loss to balance its equations. Demogorgon is, because if It were not, our strivings would be a battle in the mist, with no clear trumpet-note that promised triumph" (H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle*, p. 229). It is, says Woodberry, "the ultimate of being conceivable by man's imagination." Yet Demogorgon is not merely the personification of an abstraction; even to the Primal Law, Shelley feels that he must attribute self-consciousness and some real though inexpressible kinship with other "living Spirits." Demogorgon cannot, however, fully answer Asia's questions, for words are lacking; he can only confirm her trust in the ultimate triumph of Love.

At the beginning of the third act there is a brief return to drama. Jupiter, exulting in his triumph over all things except "the soul of man," prophesies that that shall soon be overcome by a child whom he, Jupiter, has begotten. But even as he speaks, Demogorgon arrives, not to complete his triumph, but to hurl him from his throne, according to the ancient prophecy. This climax, which some critics have found puzzling, is clearly the dramatic complement of Prometheus' attainment of moral and spiritual perfection. The Titan's curse upon Jupiter comes true when it is recalled. Some of the same critics have wished to see in Jupiter merely a symbol of those social evils against which Shelley had stormed in *Queen Mab*, and to regard his fall as the overthrow of government and religion, of custom and superstition, which Shelley had once believed to be the way to universal happiness. Such an interpretation makes no allowance for the change in Shelley's views between 1812 and 1819; and, as a matter of fact, the play itself offers hardly any evidence to support it. Jupiter represents simply the sum of evil, of all kinds (including, of course, unjust laws and false religions), which exists in the world. It exists because man permits it to exist; but its ultimate origin, or cause, remains a mystery. To Asia's specific question on this point Demogorgon is unable to give an adequate answer.

At this point the action really ends, for the unbinding of Prometheus follows as a matter of course. But Shelley characteristically was unwilling to regard the poem as complete until he had pictured the Earthly Paradise that Jupiter's fall must usher in. The ancient wisdom of all tellers of fairy tales, who dismiss the reader with the assurance that the Prince and the

Princess lived happily ever after, was not Shelley's. He was racked too cruelly and constantly by "the else unfelt oppressions of this earth" — he apprehended too poignantly the intangible tendernesses and affections which now too rarely take us beyond ourselves, into communion with other selves and with something greater than self — ever to be satisfied with such an ending. And so we are given an elaborate picture of a world in which all men and women are wholly pure in heart.

The passage does not deserve the abuse that many critics have heaped upon it. Yet if Shelley had fully realized the difficulties which he faced, he might have hesitated in his attempt. No poet has yet succeeded in making perfect goodness and perfect happiness wholly appealing, save in brief retrospect or anticipation. In his long defiance of Jupiter, Prometheus is magnificent; his renunciation of that defiance and his forgiveness of his enemy recall another example of renunciation and forgiveness that has gripped men's hearts for nearly two thousand years; but his retirement to a cave with Asia, there to "sit and talk of time and change," is an anticlimax. Still, in a world become perfect, what else is there for him to do? The difficulty is perhaps that "perfect happiness" is a self-contradictory term, to which it is impossible for man in his present state to attach any definite conception; that in neither a changing nor a static order, in neither the struggle to achieve nor the satisfaction of completed achievement, can man be wholly happy. It may be worth remarking that Godwin's doctrine of "perfectibility," as set forth in *Political Justice,* involves "perpetual improvement" and not attainment of perfection, to which it is expressly opposed; and the philosopher adds that "absolute perfection" is scarcely conceivable. Shelley might reply, of course, that to the dwellers in his regenerate world, who have been "born again" to a deeper insight and a heightened consciousness, such a difficulty would not be present. But his readers are still inhabitants of an unregenerate earth.

Another obstacle in the poet's path is that the essential quality of his perfect society is inward and spiritual; it is really, as one critic has remarked, "a state of mind"; *being* rather than *doing* is its concern. By its very nature, therefore, it resists the poet's attempt to make it concrete. "What has thought," he asks in *Hellas,* "to do with time, or place, or circumstance?" He must resort either to generalities or to symbols. And

Shelley, of whom it has been remarked by one of his most penetrating and sympathetic critics, G. E. Woodberry, "that his faculty of creative imagination seems . . . to exceed immeasurably his ability to execute conception," was not able wholly to overcome the difficulties which he faced.

And finally, the question arises as to whether Shelley believed that such a society as he pictures could ever achieve an objective existence on earth. He tells us in the Preface that he is not trying to draw a blueprint for any "planned society," but that he is trying only to create "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" by which men and women of "highly refined imagination" may be inspired to live the good life. Is not the true significance of the story of Prometheus (as of the story of Christ) that perfect purity can come only through an agony and a triumph like theirs? Does not Shelley say as much in the last lines of the poem? And can there ever be salvation, on such terms, for a whole society? And although Shelley implies, in describing man as still subject to "chance, and death, and mutability," that his paradise is still earthly, must we not say with Santayana that "an earth really made perfect is hardly distinguishable from a posthumous heaven: so profoundly must everything in it be changed, and so angel-like must everyone in it become"? (See *Winds of Doctrine,* p. 167.) May we not perhaps go even further? "Wherever or whenever this consummation may take place, it will be in no atmosphere breathed by men. When earthly considerations intervene, the note of disillusion is sounded. 'Fear and self-contempt and barren hope'—this is the epitome of all earthly existence" (Marjorie Bald, *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association,* XIII, 117). Already in this poem one feels that Shelley was haunted by "the scorn of the narrow good we can attain in our present state" to which he confesses a few months before his death.

In the fourth act, where the spiritual powers of the universe join in a great hymn of rejoicing at Prometheus' victory, we find that Shelley moves once more in his true element and proves himself equal to his task; for here he need not even pretend to write a drama of actual human life; his work becomes a symphony in which the world that we are accustomed to call real is dissolved in a whelming tide of singing spirit voices. In sustained lyric power, this act is approached by nothing else

in English poetry. And no more fitting close could have been devised for the poem than the final world chorus, climaxed by Demogorgon's august pronouncement of the significance of the Titan's trial and triumph; a final affirmation of the indestructible reality and power of the moral ideals to which Shelley's life and poetry were dedicated.

Little need be said about the sources of the poem. The indebtedness to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,* which is largely limited to Prometheus' speeches in Act I and Asia's long speech in II, iv, is obvious (the parallels are listed by Woodberry in the Cambridge Edition and by Locock); yet there is comparatively little real imitation. Even in using Aeschylus' phraseology, Shelley puts it into a different context or gives it a different twist of meaning. His conception of Prometheus, likewise, even at the beginning, is far different from that of the Greek dramatist, whose hero is a much less refined and ideal, but more human person; capable, for instance, of sarcastic humor such as would be quite alien to the protagonist of Shelley's poem. On the whole, Shelley was justified in declaring to Trelawny that his play had "no resemblance to the Greek drama."

Of English poets, Milton probably contributed most. Shelley himself points out in his Preface that his hero and Milton's Satan are much alike, especially in their defiance of Jupiter and the Almighty respectively. As for the philosophy, the poem has been called "Godwin's greatest work"; but the fact is that the influence of Godwin's teachings is almost negligible, except where these coincide with the doctrines of Shelley's real master, Plato (Shelley translated the *Symposium* soon after completing *Prometheus*). The pervasive Platonism goes hand in hand, of course, with the teachings of Christ, as Shelley interpreted them, and likewise with the Book of Job, which raises so strikingly the problem of evil, and which Shelley long intended to make the subject of a play similar to *Prometheus Unbound.* Echoes from the Roman authors Lucan, Lucretius, and Virgil have also been pointed out; and there may be an occasional reminiscence of Goethe's *Faust.* But to speak of the "sources" of such a poem is misleading. It is simply the fine flowering of a great mind and character which had been nourished on "the best that has been thought and said in the world."

Shelley told his publishers on various occasions that *Prometheus Unbound* was "the most perfect of my productions," "the best thing I ever wrote," "my favourite poem" — adding once with bitter humor: "if I may judge by its merits," it "cannot sell beyond twenty copies." His remark was justified by the event; neither the venomous attacks of the *Quarterly* and other Tory reviews nor the enthusiastic praise of the liberal journals (of which Shelley remained ignorant) were able to arouse public interest. Yet Shelley continued to think well of the work; although he admitted to Byron in 1821 that it was "a very imperfect poem," he later told Trelawny: "If that is not durable poetry, tried by the severest test, I do not know what is." Few critics today would challenge this judgement.]

PREFACE

THE Greek tragic writers, in selecting as their subject any portion of their national history or mythology, employed in their treatment of it a certain arbitrary discretion. They by no means conceived themselves bound to adhere to the common interpretation or to imitate in story as in title their rivals and predecessors. Such a system would have amounted to a resignation of those claims to preference over their competitors which incited the composition. The Agamemnonian story was exhibited on the Athenian theatre with as many variations as dramas.

I have presumed to employ a similar licence. The *Prometheus Unbound* of Aeschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis. Thetis, according to this view of the subject, was given in marriage to Peleus, and Prometheus, by the permission of Jupiter, delivered from his captivity by Hercules. Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus; an ambition which, if my preference to this mode of treating the subject had incited me to cherish, the recollection of the high comparison such an attempt would challenge might well abate. But, in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that

of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary. The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan,[2] because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost,* interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling it engenders something worse. But Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends.

This Poem was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla,[3] among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees, which are extended in ever winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air. The bright blue sky of Rome, and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life with which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication, were the inspiration of this drama.

The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed.[4] This is unusual in modern poetry, although Dante

[2] Many critics would disagree with this judgement. But it is perfectly in harmony with Shelley's idealizing temper as expressed in the next to the last paragraph of the Preface.

[3] At Rome.

[4] I have been unable to find in the poem much imagery of the kind which Shelley here describes.

and Shakespeare are full of instances of the same kind: Dante indeed more than any other poet, and with greater success. But the Greek poets, as writers to whom no resource of awakening the sympathy of their contemporaries was unknown, were in the habitual use of this power; and it is the study of their works (since a higher merit would probably be denied me) to which I am willing that my readers should impute this singularity.

One word is due in candour to the degree in which the study of contemporary writings may have tinged my composition, for such has been a topic of censure with regard to poems far more popular, and indeed more deservedly popular, than mine. It is impossible that any one who inhabits the same age with such writers as those who stand in the foremost ranks of our own, can conscientiously assure himself that his language and tone of thought may not have been modified by the study of the productions of those extraordinary intellects. It is true, that, not the spirit of their genius, but the forms in which it has manifested itself, are due less to the peculiarities of their own minds than to the peculiarity of the moral and intellectual condition of the minds among which they have been produced. Thus a number of writers possess the form, whilst they want the spirit of those whom, it is alleged, they imitate; because the former is the endowment of the age in which they live, and the latter must be the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind.[5]

The peculiar style of intense and comprehensive imagery which distinguishes the modern literature of England, has not been, as a general power, the product of the imitation of any particular writer. The mass of capabilities remains at every period materially the same; the circumstances which awaken it to action perpetually change. If England were divided into forty republics, each equal in population and extent to Athens, there is no reason to suppose but that, under institutions not more perfect than those of Athens, each would produce phi-

[5] With this and the following paragraph compare the Preface to *The Revolt of Islam.*

losophers and poets equal to those who (if we except Shakespeare) have never been surpassed. We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion. We owe Milton to the progress and development of the same spirit: the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a republican, and a bold inquirer into morals and religion. The great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring, or is about to be restored.

As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation. Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in nature, but because the whole produced by their combination has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought,[6] and with the contemporary condition of them: one great poet is a masterpiece of nature which another not only ought to study but must study. He might as wisely and as easily determine that his mind should no longer be the mirror of all that is lovely in the visible universe, as exclude from his contemplation the beautiful which exists in the writings of a great contemporary. The pretence of doing it would be a presumption in any but the greatest; the effect, even in him, would be strained, unnatural, and ineffectual. A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one

[6] *I.e.*, "the mind of man" and "nature." This statement may be compared with the opening sentences of *A Defence of Poetry*.

form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape. There is a similarity between Homer and Hesiod, between Aeschylus and Euripides, between Virgil and Horace, between Dante and Petrarch, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Dryden and Pope; each has a generic resemblance under which their specific distinctions are arranged. If this similarity be the result of imitation, I am willing to confess that I have imitated.

Let this opportunity be conceded to me of acknowledging that I have, what a Scotch philosopher [7] characteristically terms, "a passion for reforming the world": what passion incited him to write and publish his book, he omits to explain. For my part I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley [8] and Malthus.[9] But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that 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.[10] Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear

[7] According to Rossetti, the reference is to Forsyth (*Principles of Moral Philosophy*).

[8] William Paley (1743–1805) was in his own time a noted theologian, by means of whose works Timothy Shelley tried to cure his son's "atheism." Shelley read them and was strengthened in his antagonism towards orthodox Christianity.

[9] See Letter IX, Note 7.

[10] This is Shelley's clearest statement of his central belief concerning the function of poetry.

to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Æschylus rather than Plato as my model.

The having spoken of myself with unaffected freedom will need little apology with the candid; and let the uncandid consider that they injure me less than their own hearts and minds by misrepresentation. Whatever talents a person may possess to amuse and instruct others, be they ever so inconsiderable, he is yet bound to exert them: if his attempt be ineffectual, let the punishment of an unaccomplished purpose have been sufficient; let none trouble themselves to heap the dust of oblivion upon his efforts; the pile they raise will betray his grave which might otherwise have been unknown.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PROMETHEUS	ASIA
DEMOGORGON	PANTHEA *Oceanides*
JUPITER	IONE
THE EARTH	HERCULES
OCEAN	THE PHANTASM OF JUPITER
APOLLO	THE SPIRIT OF THE EARTH
MERCURY	THE SPIRIT OF THE MOON

SPIRITS OF THE HOURS
SPIRITS. ECHOES. FAUNS. FURIES

ACT I

SCENE.—*A Ravine of Icy Rocks in the Indian Caucasus.* PROMETHEUS *is discovered bound to the Precipice.* PANTHEA *and* IONE *are seated at his feet. Time, night. During the Scene, morning slowly breaks.*

Prometheus. Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits
But One, who throng those bright and rolling worlds
Which Thou and I alone of living things
Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth
Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou
Requitest for knee-worship, prayer, and praise,

1. "Monarch," Jupiter.
2. "One," Prometheus.

And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,
With fear and self-contempt and barren hope.
Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate,
Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn,
O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge.
Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours,
And moments aye divided by keen pangs
Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,
Scorn and despair, — these are mine empire: —
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!
Almighty, had I deigned to share the shame
Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here
Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,
Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life.
Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!

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

The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears
Of their moon-freezing crystals, the bright chains
Eat with their burning cold into my bones.
Heaven's wingèd hound, polluting from thy lips
His beak in poison not his own, tears up
My heart; and shapeless sights come wandering by,
The ghastly people of the realm of dream,
Mocking me: and the Earthquake-fiends are charged
To wrench the rivets from my quivering wounds
When the rocks split and close again behind:
While from their loud abysses howling throng
The genii of the storm, urging the rage
Of whirlwind, and afflict me with keen hail.

9. "Eyeless in hate" refers to Jupiter and means "unforeseeing through hatred."

And yet to me welcome is day and night,
Whether one breaks the hoar frost of the morn,
Or starry, dim, and slow, the other climbs
The leaden-coloured east; for then they lead
The wingless, crawling hours, one among whom
— As some dark Priest hales the reluctant victim —
Shall drag thee, cruel King, to kiss the blood
From these pale feet, which then might trample thee
If they disdained not such a prostrate slave.
Disdain! Ah no! I pity thee. What ruin
Will hunt thee undefended through wide Heaven!
How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,
Gape like a hell within! I speak in grief,
Not exultation, for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise. The curse
Once breathed on thee I would recall. Ye Mountains,
Whose many-voicèd Echoes, through the mist
Of cataracts, flung the thunder of that spell!
Ye icy Springs, stagnant with wrinkling frost,
Which vibrated to hear me, and then crept
Shuddering through India! Thou serenest Air,
Through which the Sun walks burning without beams!
And ye swift Whirlwinds, who on poisèd wings
Hung mute and moveless o'er yon hushed abyss,
As thunder, louder than your own, made rock
The orbèd world! If then my words had power,
Though I am changed so that aught evil wish
Is dead within; although no memory be
Of what is hate, let them not lose it now!
What was that curse? for ye all heard me speak.

65. "The allusion is to the upper tenuous atmosphere in which the sun's rays, in Shelley's belief, would be conveyed without being visible" (Grabo, *A Newton Among Poets*, p. 152).

73. An interesting question arises here. Shelley accepted unreservedly the Gospel command, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." Forgiveness of injuries is one of the central tenets of his moral creed, as revenge is the cardinal sin. And to a far greater degree than most professed Christians, he lived up to his ideal. But he was human enough to enjoy, on some occasions, prefacing his forgiveness with a ringing denunciation. A striking example is his poem *To the Lord Chancellor*. So in the present poem Shelley is unwilling to omit the curse of Prometheus upon his conqueror; although, since the Titan has forgotten it, some ingenuity is needed to bring it in.

First Voice (from the Mountains)

Thrice three hundred thousand years
O'er the Earthquake's couch we stood:
Oft, as men convulsed with fears,
We trembled in our multitude.

Second Voice (from the Springs)

Thunderbolts had parched our water,
We had been stained with bitter blood,
And had run mute, 'mid shrieks of slaughter,
Thro' a city and a solitude.

Third Voice (from the Air)

I had clothed, since Earth uprose,
Its wastes in colours not their own,
And oft had my serene repose
Been cloven by many a rending groan.

Fourth Voice (from the Whirlwinds)

We had soared beneath these mountains
Unresting ages; nor had thunder,
Nor yon volcano's flaming fountains,
Nor any power above or under
Ever made us mute with wonder.

First Voice

But never bowed our snowy crest
As at the voice of thine unrest.

It is of course not ineffective from a dramatic standpoint; but neither does it seem absolutely necessary.

74. This passage is very similar in some respects to the spirit-songs in the first scene of Byron's *Manfred* (written in 1816 and 1817). Byron's play has songs by seven spirits, four of whom represent mountains, ocean, air, and winds, as do the Voices here. For the first line, however, Shelley is indebted to Coleridge's *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, l. 23: "Thrice three hundred thousand men . . ."

78. "Parched," evaporated. Mr. Grabo (*op. cit.*, p. 137) quotes Pliny's *Natural History*, II, lii.

82–83. Mr. Grabo (*op. cit.*, p. 153) suggests that Shelley here is referring to Newton's discovery "that color resides not in the object but in its ability to absorb and reflect certain of the air-refracted rays of light."

86. Earthquakes were once thought to be caused by violent subterranean winds.

Second Voice

Never such a sound before
To the Indian waves we bore.
A pilot asleep on the howling sea
Leaped up from the deck in agony,
And heard, and cried, "Ah, woe is me!"
And died as mad as the wild waves be.

Third Voice

By such dread words from Earth to Heaven
My still realm was never riven:
When its wound was closed, there stood
Darkness o'er the day like blood.

Fourth Voice

And we shrank back: for dreams of ruin
To frozen caves our flight pursuing
Made us keep silence — thus — and thus —
Though silence is as hell to us.

The Earth. The tongueless Caverns of the craggy hills
Cried, "Misery!" then; the hollow Heaven replied,
"Misery!" And the Ocean's purple waves,
Climbing the land, howled to the lashing winds,
And the pale nations heard it, "Misery!"

Prometheus. I heard a sound of voices: not the voice
Which I gave forth. Mother, thy sons and thou
Scorn him, without whose all-enduring will
Beneath the fierce omnipotence of Jove,
Both they and thou had vanished, like thin mist

105. The rather curious expression "thus — and thus" occurs also in *Julian and Maddalo*, l. 459. Locock also compares Coleridge's *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, l. 17: "Whisper it, sister! so — and so!"

112. Locock remarks: "Though Prometheus here addresses the Earth, it is clear from 151 that he was unaware of her presence. He hears only a vague 'sound of voices,' and does not recognize the voice of the Earth throughout her next four speeches, since Man divorced from Love [*i.e.*, Asia; compare l. 123] is estranged also from Nature. 'Thy sons' evidently signifies the Mountains, Springs, Air and Whirlwinds."

114. The emphasis on will (compare l. 274) is again to be noted. Compare also *Julian and Maddalo*, l. 170 and n.

116. This is perhaps no more than a vigorous figure of speech, reflecting Shelley's characteristic inclination to deny any ultimate reality

Unrolled on the morning wind. Know ye not me,
The Titan? He who made his agony
The barrier to your else all-conquering foe?
Oh, rock-embosomed lawns, and snow-fed streams,
Now seen athwart frore vapours, deep below,
Through whose o'ershadowing woods I wandered once
With Asia, drinking life from her loved eyes;
Why scorns the spirit which informs ye, now
To commune with me? me alone, who checked,
As one who checks a fiend-drawn charioteer,
The falsehood and the force of him who reigns
Supreme, and with the groans of pining slaves
Fills your dim glens and liquid wildernesses:
Why answer ye not, still? Brethren!
The Earth. They dare not.
Prometheus. Who dares? for I would hear that curse again.
Ha, what an awful whisper rises up!
'Tis scarce like sound: it tingles through the frame
As lightning tingles, hovering ere it strike.
Speak, Spirit! from thine inorganic voice
I only know that thou art moving near
And love. How cursed I him?
The Earth. How canst thou hear
Who knowest not the language of the dead?
Prometheus. Thou art a living spirit; speak as they.
The Earth. I dare not speak like life, lest Heaven's fell King
Should hear, and link me to some wheel of pain
More torturing than the one whereon I roll.
Subtle thou art and good, and though the Gods
Hear not this voice, yet thou art more than God,
Being wise and kind: earnestly hearken now.
Prometheus. Obscurely through my brain, like shadows dim,

to the physical world, as such, and to regard the struggle of good and evil in the universe as waged by *spiritual* powers. If, as Mr. Grabo thinks (*Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation,* p. 19), the passage is to be taken literally, then Prometheus must be thought of as "Universal Mind," or something of the sort, of which the physical world is a temporal manifestation.

137. "And love" is probably an error on Shelley's part for "and lovest."

140. "Heaven's fell King," Jupiter; so "God," l. 144, "almighty Tyrant," l. 161, "supreme Tyrant," l. 208, and "the Supreme," l. 216.

Sweep awful thoughts, rapid and thick. I feel
Faint, like one mingled in entwining love;
Yet 'tis not pleasure.
The Earth. No, thou canst not hear:
Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
Only to those who die.
Prometheus. And what art thou,
O melancholy Voice?
The Earth. I am the Earth,
Thy mother; she within whose stony veins,
To the last fibre of the loftiest tree
Whose thin leaves trembled in the frozen air,
Joy ran, as blood within a living frame,
When thou didst from her bosom, like a cloud
Of glory, arise, a spirit of keen joy!
And at thy voice her pining sons uplifted
Their prostrate brows from the polluting dust,
And our almighty Tyrant with fierce dread
Grew pale, until his thunder chained thee here.
Then, see those million worlds which burn and roll
Around us: their inhabitants beheld
My spherèd light wane in wide Heaven; the sea
Was lifted by strange tempest, and new fire
From earthquake-rifted mountains of bright snow
Shook its portentous hair beneath Heaven's frown;
Lightning and Inundation vexed the plains;
Blue thistles bloomed in cities; foodless toads
Within voluptuous chambers panting crawled:
When Plague had fallen on man, and beast, and worm,

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152. At this point, apparently, the Earth, having failed to make Prometheus understand her "inorganic voice," overcomes her fear of Jupiter (l. 140) and yields to the Titan's request to speak as "a living spirit."

157 ff. These lines are inconsistent with the myth as presented elsewhere, according to which Prometheus was older than Jupiter and had been instrumental in the latter's rise to power. Compare l. 381: "I gave all he has."

170. Locock points out that Shelley, like various earlier poets, often uses "blue" in connexion with scenes of death or horror. Compare *Alastor,* l. 216 ("Death's blue vault"), *The Sensitive Plant,* III, 60, etc. Woodberry comments that the following description "recalls especially the sorrow of Demeter [Ceres] after the rape of Persephone [Proserpine] and the woes then visited on the earth in the classic myth."

And Famine; and black blight on herb and tree;
And in the corn, and vines, and meadow-grass,
Teemed ineradicable poisonous weeds
Draining their growth, for my wan breast was dry
With grief; and the thin air, my breath, was stained
With the contagion of a mother's hate
Breathed on her child's destroyer; ay, I heard
Thy curse, the which, if thou rememberest not,
Yet my innumerable seas and streams,
Mountains, and caves, and winds, and yon wide air,
And the inarticulate people of the dead,
Preserve, a treasured spell. We meditate
In secret joy and hope those dreadful words,
But dare not speak them.

Prometheus. Venerable mother!
All else who live and suffer take from thee
Some comfort; flowers, and fruits, and happy sounds,
And love, though fleeting; these may not be mine.
But mine own words, I pray, deny me not.

The Earth. They shall be told. Ere Babylon was dust,
The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,
Met his own image walking in the garden.
That apparition, sole of men, he saw.
For know there are two worlds of life and death:
One that which thou beholdest; but the other
Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit

---

192. Zoroaster was the founder (probably about 1000 B.C.) of the ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, characterized by asceticism, mysticism, and belief in two opposing universal spirits — Ormuzd and Ahriman — of light and darkness, good and evil. It differed from Manichaeism, of which there are many traces in Shelley's work, in its faith that the evil power, Ahriman, would in the end be overcome and destroyed by the good, Ormuzd. The story here alluded to is unknown in connexion with Zoroaster, although it is a common theme in folklore; and Shelley himself had a similar experience shortly before his death. Neither has any definite source been discovered upon which Shelley might have modelled the strange phantom world described in the following lines. Points of contact with Platonic and neo-Platonic myths are obvious, but the details, as far as is yet known, are Shelley's own invention. A similar conception appears in *Hellas*, ll. 852 ff., where Mahmud, with the aid of Ahasuerus, calls up the Phantom of Mahomet the Second; but it seems to have no permanent or definite place in Shelley's philosophy as a whole. Mr. Grabo (*Prometheus Unbound*, pp. 22–27) discusses the passage at length.

The shadows of all forms that think and live
Till death unite them and they part no more;
Dreams and the light imaginings of men,
And all that faith creates or love desires,
Terrible, strange, sublime and beauteous shapes.
There thou art, and dost hang, a writhing shade,
'Mid whirlwind-peopled mountains; all the gods
Are there, and all the powers of nameless worlds,
Vast, sceptred phantoms; heroes, men, and beasts;
And Demogorgon, a tremendous gloom;
And he, the supreme Tyrant, on his throne
Of burning gold. Son, one of these shall utter
The curse which all remember. Call at will
Thine own ghost, or the ghost of Jupiter,
Hades or Typhon, or what mightier Gods
From all-prolific Evil, since thy ruin
Have sprung, and trampled on my prostrate sons.
Ask, and they must reply: so the revenge
Of the Supreme may sweep through vacant shades,
As rainy wind through the abandoned gate
Of a fallen palace.

Prometheus. Mother, let not aught
Of that which may be evil, pass again
My lips, or those of aught resembling me.
Phantasm of Jupiter, arise, appear!

Ione

My wings are folded o'er mine ears:
My wings are crossèd o'er mine eyes:
Yet through their silver shade appears,
And through their lulling plumes arise,

212. "Hades," a Greek name applied to Pluto, god of the underworld, as well as to the underworld itself. "Typhon," a monstrous being, the son of Typhoeus. The latter is mentioned by Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound* as a giant imprisoned by Zeus, or Jupiter, under Mt. Etna. — The last part of the line seems inconsistent with the fact that Jupiter is "the supreme of living things" (II, iv, 113). The following line, however, is in harmony with the implication (II, iv, 110) that Jupiter is the servant of an evil Power greater than himself.

222. Ione and Panthea have been the subject of much comment. There seems to be little real need, however, for the elaborate symbolic meanings that have sometimes been attached to them. They are Oceanides, sisters of Asia, and participate in the exquisite sensitivity and tender-

A Shape, a throng of sounds;
May it be no ill to thee
O thou of many wounds!
Near whom, for our sweet sister's sake,
Ever thus we watch and wake.

Panthea

The sound is of whirlwind underground,
Earthquake, and fire, and mountains cloven;
The shape is awful like the sound,
Clothed in dark purple, star-inwoven.
A sceptre of pale gold
To stay steps proud, o'er the slow cloud
His veinèd hand doth hold.
Cruel he looks, but calm and strong,
Like one who does, not suffers wrong.

Phantasm of Jupiter. Why have the secret powers of this strange world
Driven me, a frail and empty phantom, hither
On direst storms? What unaccustomed sounds
Are hovering on my lips, unlike the voice
With which our pallid race hold ghastly talk
In darkness? And, proud sufferer, who art thou?

Prometheus. Tremendous Image, as thou art must be
He whom thou shadowest forth. I am his foe,
The Titan. Speak the words which I would hear,
Although no thought inform thine empty voice.

The Earth. Listen! And though your echoes must be mute,
Gray mountains, and old woods, and haunted springs,
Prophetic caves, and isle-surrounding streams,
Rejoice to hear what yet ye cannot speak.

Phantasm. A spirit seizes me and speaks within:
It tears me as fire tears a thunder-cloud.

---

ness of her nature. Panthea serves as the bearer of unspoken, mystical communications between her and Prometheus. Ione's function is less clear; but in many scenes both sisters play a part much like that of the Greek chorus, describing settings and characters and commenting on the course of the action. Through their lips come some of Shelley's most enchanting descriptions. No further justification of their presence in the drama is really needed.

Panthea. See, how he lifts his mighty looks, the Heaven Darkens above.

Ione. He speaks! O shelter me!

Prometheus. I see the curse on gestures proud and cold,
And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate,
And such despair as mocks itself with smiles,
Written as on a scroll: yet speak: Oh, speak!

Phantasm

Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind,
All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;
Foul Tyrant both of Gods and Human-kind,
One only being shalt thou not subdue.
Rain then thy plagues upon me here,
Ghastly disease, and frenzying fear;
And let alternate frost and fire
Eat into me, and be thine ire
Lightning, and cutting hail, and legioned forms
Of furies, driving by upon the wounding storms.

Ay, do thy worst. Thou art omnipotent.
O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power,
And my own will. Be thy swift mischiefs sent
To blast mankind, from yon ethereal tower.
Let thy malignant spirit move
In darkness over those I love:
On me and mine I imprecate
The utmost torture of thy hate;
And thus devote to sleepless agony,
This undeclining head while thou must reign on high.

258. "On," *i.e.*, "written on."

273. Compare I, 381 and II, iv, 43 ff. According to the old myth, Prometheus, during the struggle between the Titans and the usurping Olympian Gods, found his fellows scornful of his counsels, and accordingly went over to the enemy and aided Jupiter to triumph in the conflict. What bearing, if any, the statement has on Shelley's immediate philosophical purpose is uncertain. It becomes clear if, with a certain group of critics, we regard Jupiter as standing for an anthropomorphic God and the teachings of dogmatic religion in general. It is perhaps simpler, and more in harmony with the Platonic and Christian doctrines now coming to be dominant in Shelley's thought, to regard Jupiter, here, as the objectification of Prometheus' own weaknesses and evil impulses in times past.

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!
I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse
Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse;
Till thine Infinity shall be
A robe of envenomed agony;
And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain,
To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain.

Heap on thy soul, by virtue of this Curse,
Ill deeds, then be thou damned, beholding good;
Both infinite as is the universe,
And thou, and thy self-torturing solitude.
An awful image of calm power
Though now thou sittest, let the hour
Come, when thou must appear to be
That which thou art internally;
And after many a false and fruitless crime
Scorn track thy lagging fall through boundless space and time.

Prometheus. Were these my words, O parent?

The Earth. They were thine.

Prometheus. 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.

The Earth

Misery, oh misery to me,
That Jove at length should vanquish thee.
Wail, howl aloud, Land and Sea,
The Earth's rent heart shall answer ye.
Howl, Spirits of the living and the dead,
Your refuge, your defence lies fallen and vanquished.

292. Locock compares *Paradise Lost*, I, 214 ff.

294. It is pointed out by Mr. Newman White that this line and Asia's later reference to evil as "the immedicable plague" (II, iv, 101) contradict Mrs. Shelley's statement (based upon the general course of the action) that Shelley believed that evil could be expelled from man's "own nature and from the greater part of the creation."

306. The Earth fails to realize the true significance of Prometheus' words, and instead regards them as indicative of surrender to Jupiter.

First Echo

Lies fallen and vanquishèd!

Second Echo

Fallen and vanquishèd!

Ione

Fear not: 'tis but some passing spasm,
The Titan is unvanquished still.
But see, where through the azure chasm
Of yon forked and snowy hill,
Trampling the slant winds on high
With golden-sandalled feet, that glow
Under plumes of purple dye,
Like rose-ensanguined ivory,
A Shape comes now,
Stretching on high from his right hand
A serpent-cinctured wand.

Panthea. 'Tis Jove's world-wandering herald, Mercury.

Ione

And who are those with hydra tresses
And iron wings that climb the wind,
Whom the frowning God represses
Like vapours steaming up behind,
Clanging loud, an endless crowd —

Panthea

These are Jove's tempest-walking hounds,
Whom he gluts with groans and blood,
When charioted on sulphurous cloud
He bursts Heaven's bounds.

Ione

Are they now led, from the thin dead
On new pangs to be fed?

Panthea

The Titan looks as ever, firm, not proud.

First Fury. Ha! I scent life!
Second Fury. Let me but look into his eyes!

Third Fury. The hope of torturing him smells like a heap
Of corpses, to a death-bird after battle.
First Fury. Darest thou delay, O Herald! take cheer, Hounds
Of Hell: what if the Son of Maia soon
Should make us food and sport — who can please long
The Omnipotent?
Mercury. Back to your towers of iron,
And gnash, beside the streams of fire and wail,
Your foodless teeth. Geryon, arise! and Gorgon,
Chimaera, and thou Sphinx, subtlest of fiends.
Who ministered to Thebes Heaven's poisoned wine,
Unnatural love, and more unnatural hate:
These shall perform your task.
First Fury. Oh, mercy! mercy!
We die with our desire: drive us not back!
Mercury. Crouch then in silence.
Awful Sufferer!
To thee unwilling, most unwillingly
I come, by the great Father's will driven down,
To execute a doom of new revenge.
Alas! I pity thee, and hate myself
That I can do no more: aye from thy sight
Returning, for a season, Heaven seems Hell,
So thy worn form pursues me night and day,
Smiling reproach. Wise art thou, firm and good,
But vainly wouldst stand forth alone in strife
Against the Omnipotent; as yon clear lamps
That measure and divide the weary years
From which there is no refuge, long have taught

345. "Streams of fire and wail," Phlegethon and Cocytus. Compare *Paradise Lost,* I, 579–80.

346–47. All these names are those of mythological monsters, noted for their horrible and unnatural appearance. Compare *Paradise Lost,* II, 628: "Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimaeras dire." The Sphinx was a creature with the body of a lion and the head and breasts of a woman, who proposed to all travellers to Thebes the riddle, "What animal goes on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three at night?" Those who failed to answer correctly were slain. Oedipus gave the correct answer, "Man," and the Sphinx killed herself. In his other actions, however, Oedipus was less fortunate, being led by the Gods or Fate unwittingly to kill his father and to marry his mother. "Heaven's poisoned wine" is a figurative reference to these events.

353. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* Mercury is likewise the herald of Jupiter, but he does not sympathize with Prometheus.

And long must teach. Even now thy Torturer arms
With the strange might of unimagined pains
The powers who scheme slow agonies in Hell,
And my commission is to lead them here,
Or what more subtle, foul, or savage fiends
People the abyss, and leave them to their task.
Be it not so! there is a secret known
To thee, and to none else of living things,
Which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven,
The fear of which perplexes the Supreme:
Clothe it in words, and bid it clasp his throne
In intercession; bend thy soul in prayer,
And like a suppliant in some gorgeous fane,
Let the will kneel within thy haughty heart:
For benefits and meek submission tame
The fiercest and the mightiest.
Prometheus. Evil minds
Change good to their own nature. I gave all
He has; and in return he chains me here
Years, ages, night and day: whether the Sun
Split my parched skin, or in the moony night
The crystal-wingèd snow cling round my hair:
Whilst my belovèd race is trampled down
By his thought-executing ministers.
Such is the tyrant's recompense: 'tis just:
He who is evil can receive no good;
And for a world bestowed, or a friend lost,
He can feel hate, fear, shame; not gratitude:
He but requites me for his own misdeed.
Kindness to such is keen reproach, which breaks
With bitter stings the light sleep of Revenge.
Submission, thou dost know I cannot try:
For what submission but that fatal word,
The death-seal of mankind's captivity,
Like the Sicilian's hair-suspended sword,

387. "Thought-executing," thought-destroying. Locock points out that the epithet is from *King Lear*, III, ii, 4.

391. Locock suggests that "some such words as 'or true sorrow' must be understood after 'gratitude.'"

396. "That fatal word," the secret of averting the prophesied overthrow of Jupiter by his son.

Which trembles o'er his crown, would he accept,
Or could I yield? Which yet I will not yield.
Let others flatter Crime, where it sits throned
In brief Omnipotence: secure are they:
For Justice, when triumphant, will weep down
Pity, not punishment, on her own wrongs,
Too much avenged by those who err. I wait,
Enduring thus, the retributive hour
Which since we spake is even nearer now.
But hark, the hell-hounds clamour: fear delay:
Behold! Heaven lowers under thy Father's frown.
Mercury. Oh, that we might be spared: I to inflict
And thou to suffer! Once more answer me:
Thou knowest not the period of Jove's power?
Prometheus. I know but this, that it must come.
Mercury. Alas!
Thou canst not count thy years to come of pain?
Prometheus. They last while Jove must reign: nor more, nor less
Do I desire or fear.
Mercury. Yet pause, and plunge
Into Eternity, where recorded time,
Even all that we imagine, age on age,
Seems but a point, and the reluctant mind
Flags wearily in its unending flight,
Till it sink, dizzy, blind, lost, shelterless;
Perchance it has not numbered the slow years
Which thou must spend in torture, unreprieved?
Prometheus. Perchance no thought can count them, yet they pass.

398. Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse, punished a courtier named Damocles, who was once talking enviously of the happiness of kings, by seating him at a banquet underneath a sword suspended by a hair.

403. Shelley constantly insists that deliberate infliction of punishment for wrongdoing is a "pernicious mistake," which merely adds another crime to those already committed. Evil, as we are told in I. 480, is its own punishment. On the other hand, he acknowledges that "men must reap the things they sow"; — that there is a Necessity which "evil with evil, good with good must wind." The endless chain of evil can, however, be broken by means of forgiveness, if men are willing to renounce their evil passions, especially the desire for revenge.

417. "Recorded time" is from *Macbeth*, V, v, 21.

Mercury. If thou might'st dwell among the Gods the while
Lapped in voluptuous joy?
Prometheus. I would not quit
This bleak ravine, these unrepentant pains.
Mercury. Alas! I wonder at, yet pity thee.
Prometheus. Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven,
Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene,
As light in the sun, throned: how vain is talk!
Call up the fiends.
Ione. O sister, look! White fire
Has cloven to the roots yon huge snow-loaded cedar;
How fearfully God's thunder howls behind!
Mercury. I must obey his words and thine: alas!
Most heavily remorse hangs at my heart!
Panthea. See where the child of Heaven, with wingèd feet,
Runs down the slanted sunlight of the dawn.
Ione. Dear sister, close thy plumes over thine eyes
Lest thou behold and die: they come: they come
Blackening the birth of day with countless wings,
And hollow underneath, like death.
First Fury. Prometheus!
Second Fury. Immortal Titan!
Third Fury. Champion of Heaven's slaves!
Prometheus. He whom some dreadful voice invokes is here,
Prometheus, the chained Titan. Horrible forms,
What and who are ye? Never yet there came
Phantasms so foul through monster-teeming Hell
From the all-miscreative brain of Jove;
Whilst I behold such execrable shapes,
Methinks I grow like what I contemplate,
And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy.
First Fury. We are the ministers of pain, and fear,

442. There has been some discussion of the meaning of this line. Possibly the Furies, seen from beneath, seemed mere skeletons. Compare l. 768: "hollow Ruin yawned behind."

450. Compare *Prince Athanase,* l. 139 (Part II, l. 15): "The mind becomes that which it contemplates"; and *Marenghi,* l. 135. The idea, as Woodberry says, is common in Shelley.

452. It is characteristic of Shelley to make Prometheus' torture mental and spiritual rather than physical; even the instruments of it would be "shapeless" (and presumably invisible) except for the shadowy form

And disappointment, and mistrust, and hate,
And clinging crime; and as lean dogs pursue
Through wood and lake some struck and sobbing fawn,
We track all things that weep, and bleed, and live,
When the great King betrays them to our will.
Prometheus. Oh! many fearful natures in one name,
I know ye; and these lakes and echoes know
The darkness and the clangour of your wings.
But why more hideous than your loathèd selves
Gather ye up in legions from the deep?
Second Fury. We knew not that: Sisters, rejoice, rejoice!
Prometheus. Can aught exult in its deformity?
Second Fury. The beauty of delight makes lovers glad,
Gazing on one another: so are we.
As from the rose which the pale priestess kneels
To gather for her festal crown of flowers
The aëreal crimson falls, flushing her cheek,
So from our victim's destined agony
The shade which is our form invests us round,
Else we are shapeless as our mother Night.
Prometheus. I laugh your power, and his who sent you here,
To lowest scorn. Pour forth the cup of pain.
First Fury. Thou thinkest we will rend thee bone from bone,
And nerve from nerve, working like fire within?
Prometheus. Pain is my element, as hate is thine;
Ye rend me now: I care not.
Second Fury. Dost imagine
We will but laugh into thy lidless eyes?
Prometheus. I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer,
Being evil. Cruel was the power which called
You, or aught else so wretched, into light.

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which is derived from their victim's sufferings (as, in accounts of occultism and black magic, fresh blood attracts and gives form to evil spirits). — Woodberry suggests that two different conceptions are represented by the Furies: (1) "the suffering brought by sin"; (2) "evil nature active within the soul and assailing it" (ll. 483 ff.), which, he says, "has little pertinence to Prometheus here." But Shelley is probably thinking of Prometheus' torture as typifying the manner in which the human soul is beset by all kinds of evil.

458. Compare III, iv, 180–83 and n.

Third Fury. Thou think'st we will live through thee, one by one,
Like animal life, and though we can obscure not
The soul which burns within, that we will dwell
Beside it, like a vain loud multitude
Vexing the self-content of wisest men:
That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain,
And foul desire round thine astonished heart,
And blood within thy labyrinthine veins
Crawling like agony?
Prometheus. Why, ye are thus now;
Yet am I king over myself, and rule
The torturing and conflicting throngs within,
As Jove rules you when Hell grows mutinous.

Chorus of Furies

From the ends of the earth, from the ends of the earth,
Where the night has its grave and the morning its birth,
Come, come, come!
Oh, ye who shake hills with the scream of your mirth,
When cities sink howling in ruin; and ye
Who with wingless footsteps trample the sea,
And close upon Shipwreck and Famine's track,
Sit chattering with joy on the foodless wreck;
Come, come, come!
Leave the bed, low, cold, and red,
Strewed beneath a nation dead;
Leave the hatred, as in ashes
Fire is left for future burning:
It will burst in bloodier flashes
When ye stir it, soon returning:
Leave the self-contempt implanted
In young spirits, sense-enchanted,
Misery's yet unkindled fuel:

492. This line may be regarded as the keynote of the whole scene.
510–11. Shelley wrote to John Gisborne in 1819: "All of us who are worth anything, spend our manhood in unlearning the follies, or expiating the mistakes, of our youth. We are stuffed full of prejudices; and our natural passions are so managed, that if we restrain them we grow intolerant and precise, because we restrain them not according to reason, but according to error; and if we do not restrain them, we do all sorts of mischief to ourselves and others."

Leave Hell's secrets half unchanted
To the maniac dreamer; cruel
More than ye can be with hate
Is he with fear.
Come, come, come!
We are steaming up from Hell's wide gate
And we burthen the blast of the atmosphere,
But vainly we toil till ye come here.

Ione. Sister, I hear the thunder of new wings.

Panthea. These solid mountains quiver with the sound
Even as the tremulous air: their shadows make
The space within my plumes more black than night.

First Fury

Your call was as a wingèd car
Driven on whirlwinds fast and far;
It rapped us from red gulfs of war.

Second Fury

From wide cities, famine-wasted;

Third Fury

Groans half heard, and blood untasted;

Fourth Fury

Kingly conclaves stern and cold,
Where blood with gold is bought and sold;

Fifth Fury

From the furnace, white and hot,
In which —

A Fury

Speak not: whisper not:
I know all that ye would tell,
But to speak might break the spell
Which must bend the Invincible,
The stern of thought;
He yet defies the deepest power of Hell.

514. "Maniac dreamer" probably means "religious fanatic."

A Fury

Tear the veil!

Another Fury

It is torn.

Chorus

The pale stars of the morn
Shine on a misery, dire to be borne.
Dost thou faint, mighty Titan? We laugh thee to scorn.
Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man?
Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran
Those perishing waters; a thirst of fierce fever,
Hope, love, doubt, desire, which consume him for ever.
One came forth of gentle worth
Smiling on the sanguine earth;
His words outlived him, like swift poison
Withering up truth, peace, and pity.
Look! where round the wide horizon
Many a million-peopled city
Vomits smoke in the bright air.
Hark that outcry of despair!
'Tis his mild and gentle ghost
Wailing for the faith he kindled:
Look again, the flames almost
To a glow-worm's lamp have dwindled:
The survivors round the embers
Gather in dread.
Joy, joy, joy!
Past ages crowd on thee, but each one remembers,
And the future is dark, and the present is spread
Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head.

541. The Furies taunt Prometheus with his own words (see l. 473). Compare Matthew 9:24.

546. "One," Christ.

547. "Sanguine," blood-stained (as often in Shelley).

554. It has been objected that the character of Christ as here presented is lacking in manliness (compare l. 585; also l. 769: "pale youths who perished, unupbraiding"); and it must be acknowledged that Shelley's martyr-heroes are often too patient and pallid to win our complete sympathy. The portrayal of Christ in the *Essay on Christianity* and the *Prologue to Hellas* suggests, however, that the failure in the present scene, so far as it exists, is in artistry rather than in insight.

Semichorus I

Drops of bloody agony flow
From his white and quivering brow.
Grant a little respite now:
See a disenchanted nation
Springs like day from desolation;
To Truth its state is dedicate,
And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;
A legioned band of linkèd brothers
Whom Love calls children —

Semichorus II

'Tis another's:
See how kindred murder kin:
'Tis the vintage-time for death and sin:
Blood, like new wine, bubbles within:
Till Despair smothers
The struggling world, which slaves and tyrants win.
[*All the* FURIES *vanish, except one.*

Ione. Hark, sister! what a low yet dreadful groan
Quite unsuppressed is tearing up the heart
Of the good Titan, as storms tear the deep,
And beasts hear the sea moan in inland caves.
Darest thou observe how the fiends torture him?

Panthea. Alas! I looked forth twice, but will no more.

Ione. What didst thou see?

Panthea. A woful sight: a youth
With patient looks nailed to a crucifix.

Ione. What next?

Panthea. The heaven around, the earth below
Was peopled with thick shapes of human death,
All horrible, and wrought by human hands,
And some appeared the work of human hearts,
For men were slowly killed by frowns and smiles:

566. The line is ironical. The following reference is to the French Revolution. "Disenchanted nation," meaning "a nation freed from evil enchantment," is from Coleridge's *France: On Ode,* l. 28, where the meaning and reference are identical.

586. The following description evidently refers to the effects of Christianity, and not, as one might at first think, to the Revolution, which is described by Prometheus himself in ll. 648 ff.

And other sights too foul to speak and live
Were wandering by. Let us not tempt worse fear
By looking forth: those groans are grief enough.
Fury. Behold an emblem: those who do endure
Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
Thousandfold torment on themselves and him.
Prometheus. Remit the anguish of that lighted stare;
Close those wan lips; let that thorn-wounded brow
Stream not with blood; it mingles with thy tears!
Fix, fix those tortured orbs in peace and death,
So thy sick throes shake not that crucifix,
So those pale fingers play not with thy gore.
O, horrible! Thy name I will not speak,
It hath become a curse. I see, I see
The wise, the mild, the lofty, and the just,
Whom thy slaves hate for being like to thee,
Some hunted by foul lies from their heart's home,
An early-chosen, late-lamented home;
As hooded ounces cling to the driven hind;
Some linked to corpses in unwholesome cells:
Some — Hear I not the multitude laugh loud? —
Impaled in lingering fire: and mighty realms
Float by my feet, like sea-uprooted isles,
Whose sons are kneaded down in common blood
By the red light of their own burning homes.
Fury. Blood thou canst see, and fire; and canst hear groans;
Worse things, unheard, unseen, remain behind.
Prometheus. Worse?
Fury. In each human heart terror survives
The ravin it has gorged: the loftiest fear
All that they would disdain to think were true:
Hypocrisy and custom make their minds

594–96. These lines and the elaboration of them in ll. 618 ff. mark the climax of Prometheus' suffering.

601. "No doubt intentionally the line is almost unpronounceable" (Locock).

607–08. These lines may well be autobiographical, as Locock suggests; but the exact reference is difficult to determine.

618 ff. It is one of the cardinal tenets of Shelley's creed that the forms of evil from which men suffer most are mental and spiritual (fear, hate, desire for revenge, and so on) rather than physical. Compare IV, 404–05.

The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.
They dare not devise good for man's estate,
And yet they know not that they do not dare.
The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
And all best things are thus confused to ill.
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,
But live among their suffering fellow-men
As if none felt: they know not what they do.
Prometheus. Thy words are like a cloud of wingèd snakes;
And yet I pity those they torture not.
Fury. Thou pitiest them? I speak no more! [*Vanishes.*
Prometheus. Ah woe!
Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, for ever!
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
Thy works within my woe-illumèd mind,
Thou subtle tyrant! Peace is in the grave.
The grave hides all things beautiful and good:
I am a God and cannot find it there,
Nor would I seek it: for, though dread revenge,
This is defeat, fierce king, not victory.
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
With new endurance, till the hour arrives
When they shall be no types of things which are.
Panthea. Alas! what sawest thou more?
Prometheus. There are two woes:
To speak, and to behold; thou spare me one.
Names are there, Nature's sacred watchwords, they
Were borne aloft in bright emblazonry;
The nations thronged around, and cried aloud,
As with one voice, Truth, Liberty, and Love!
Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven
Among them: there was strife, deceit, and fear:
Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.
This was the shadow of the truth I saw.
The Earth. I felt thy torture, son; with such mixed joy
As pain and virtue give. To cheer thy state
I bid ascend those subtle and fair spirits,
Whose homes are the dim caves of human thought,
And who inhabit, as birds wing the wind,

Its world-surrounding aether: they behold
Beyond that twilight realm, as in a glass,
The future: may they speak comfort to thee!
Panthea. Look, sister, where a troop of spirits gather,
Like flocks of clouds in spring's delightful weather,
Thronging in the blue air!
Ione. And see! more come,
Like fountain-vapours when the winds are dumb,
That climb up the ravine in scattered lines.
And, hark! is it the music of the pines?
Is it the lake? Is it the waterfall?
Panthea. 'Tis something sadder, sweeter far than all.

Chorus of Spirits

From unremembered ages we
Gentle guides and guardians be
Of heaven-oppressed mortality;
And we breathe, and sicken not,
The atmosphere of human thought:
Be it dim, and dank, and gray,
Like a storm-extinguished day,
Travelled o'er by dying gleams;
Be it bright as all between
Cloudless skies and windless streams,
Silent, liquid, and serene;
As the birds within the wind,
As the fish within the wave,
As the thoughts of man's own mind
Float through all above the grave;
We make there our liquid lair,
Voyaging cloudlike and unpent
Through the boundless element:
Thence we bear the prophecy
Which begins and ends in thee!

Ione. More yet come, one by one: the air around them
Looks radiant as the air around a star.

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661. "Its" refers to "human thought," which apparently both dwells in dim caves and surrounds the world. The seeming inconsistency is perhaps only a figurative way of contrasting the realms of thought and of matter.

First Spirit

On a battle-trumpet's blast
I fled hither, fast, fast, fast,
'Mid the darkness upward cast.
From the dust of creeds outworn,
From the tyrant's banner torn,
Gathering 'round me, onward borne,
There was mingled many a cry —
Freedom! Hope! Death! Victory!
Till they faded through the sky;
And one sound, above, around,
One sound beneath, around, above,
Was moving; 'twas the soul of Love;
'Twas the hope, the prophecy,
Which begins and ends in thee.

Second Spirit

A rainbow's arch stood on the sea,
Which rocked beneath, immovably;
And the triumphant storm did flee,
Like a conqueror, swift and proud,
Between, with many a captive cloud,
A shapeless, dark and rapid crowd,
Each by lightning riven in half:
I heard the thunder hoarsely laugh:
Mighty fleets were strewn like chaff
And spread beneath, a hell of death,
O'er the white waters. I alit
On a great ship lightning-split,
And speeded hither on the sigh
Of one who gave an enemy
His plank, then plunged aside to die.

694. The first four Spirits bring to Prometheus tidings of the continuing existence of Revolution, Self-sacrifice, Wisdom, and Poetry.

703–05. Compare Wordsworth's *To My Sister*, ll. 33:36.

712. "Between," between arch and sea.

717. Most editors leave this line without punctuation and hence unintelligible. I place a comma after "beneath," following the Bodleian MS., and a comma after "death," following Rossetti. According to this punctuation, "spread" is parallel with "strewn," "beneath" is an adverb, and "a hell of death" is in apposition with "fleets."

Third Spirit

I sate beside a sage's bed,
And the lamp was burning red
Near the book where he had fed,
When a Dream with plumes of flame
To his pillow hovering came,
And I knew it was the same
Which had kindled long ago
Pity, eloquence, and woe;
And the world awhile below
Wore the shade, its lustre made.
It has borne me here as fleet
As Desire's lightning feet:
I must ride it back ere morrow,
Or the sage will wake in sorrow.

Fourth Spirit

On a poet's lips I slept
Dreaming like a love-adept
In the sound his breathing kept;
Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
But feeds on the aëreal kisses
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in 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!
One of these awakened me,
And I sped to succour thee.

Ione

Behold'st thou not two shapes from the east and west
Come, as two doves to one beloved nest,
Twin nurslings of the all-sustaining air

737. This stanza shows clearly Shelley's idealistic conception of the nature and function of poetry.

On swift still wings glide down the atmosphere?
And, hark! their sweet, sad voices! 'tis despair
Mingled with love and then dissolved in sound.

Panthea. Canst thou speak, sister? all my words are drowned.
Ione. Their beauty gives me voice. See how they float
On their sustaining wings of skiey grain,
Orange and azure deepening into gold:
Their soft smiles light the air like a star's fire.

Chorus of Spirits

Hast thou beheld the form of Love?

Fifth Spirit

As over wide dominions
I sped, like some swift cloud that wings the wide air's wildernesses,
That planet-crested shape swept by on lightning-braided pinions,
Scattering the liquid joy of life from his ambrosial tresses:
His footsteps paved the world with light; but as I passed 'twas fading,
And hollow Ruin yawned behind: great sages bound in madness,
And headless patriots, and pale youths who perished, unupbraiding,
Gleamed in the night I wandered o'er, till thou, O King of sadness,
Turned by thy smile the worst I saw to recollected gladness.

Sixth Spirit

Ah, sister! Desolation is a delicate thing:
It walks not on the earth, it floats not on the air,

765. In regard to "planet-crested," see *The Revolt of Islam,* I, lvi–lvii. The planet would be the morning star (in *The Revolt of Islam,* Canto I, identified with the Spirit of Good). Compare also *The Mask of Anarchy,* l. 115.

772. The rather curious conception here is traceable to a passage in Plato's *Symposium,* 195, translated by Shelley as follows: "For Homer says, that the goddess Calamity is delicate, and that her feet are tender. 'Her feet are soft,' he says, 'for she treads not upon the ground, but makes her path upon the heads of men.' "

But treads with lulling footstep, and fans with silent wing
The tender hopes which in their hearts the best and gentlest bear;
Who, soothed to false repose by the fanning plumes above
And the music-stirring motion of its soft and busy feet,
Dream visions of aëreal joy, and call the monster, Love,
And wake, and find the shadow Pain, as he whom now we greet.

Chorus

Though Ruin now Love's shadow be,
Following him, destroyingly,
On Death's white and wingèd steed,
Which the fleetest cannot flee,
Trampling down both flower and weed,
Man and beast, and foul and fair,
Like a tempest through the air;
Thou shalt quell this horseman grim,
Woundless though in heart or limb.

Prometheus. Spirits! how know ye this shall be?

Chorus

In the atmosphere we breathe,
As buds grow red when the snow-storms flee,
From Spring gathering up beneath,
Whose mild winds shake the elder brake,
And the wandering herdsmen know
That the white-thorn soon will blow:
Wisdom, Justice, Love, and Peace,
When they struggle to increase,
Are to us as soft winds be
To shepherd boys, the prophecy
Which begins and ends in thee.

778. "Monster," because unreal and deceptive. The echo of Shelley's own frequent disillusionments is clearly perceptible.

780. The primary meaning is that Prometheus' love of mankind has brought suffering upon both him and them.

782. Compare Revelation 6:8: "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him."

785. Compare *Macbeth*, I, i, 10.

787. This is "the prophecy" of l. 706 and l. 799.

Ione. Where are the Spirits fled?
Panthea. Only a sense
Remains of them, like the omnipotence
Of music, when the inspired voice and lute
Languish, ere yet the responses are mute,
Which through the deep and labyrinthine soul,
Like echoes through long caverns, wind and roll.
Prometheus. How fair these airborn shapes! and yet I feel
Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far,
Asia! who, when my being overflowed,
Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine
Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust.
All things are still: alas! how heavily
This quiet morning weighs upon my heart;
Though I should dream I could even sleep with grief
If slumber were denied not. I would fain
Be what it is my destiny to be,
The saviour and the strength of suffering man,
Or sink into the original gulf of things:
There is no agony, and no solace left;
Earth can console, Heaven can torment no more.
Panthea. Hast thou forgotten one who watches thee
The cold dark night, and never sleeps but when
The shadow of thy spirit falls on her?
Prometheus. I said all hope was vain but love; thou lovest.
Panthea. Deeply in truth; but the eastern star looks white,

809. There are a number of suggestions in the play that Shelley had in mind certain ancient myths according to which the physical world is a manifestation in time of the ultimate Spirit. The act of manifestation is regarded as *creative;* and is naturally thought of in terms of sex. The marriage of Prometheus and Asia, then, which is here described in so splendid a figure, would stand for this act of cosmic creation (compare l. 832); their separation would be the consequent coming into existence of a dualism of spirit and matter, of God and Nature; their reunion and retirement to the cave would mark the end of the cycle of manifestation. In at least three places (III, iii, 174, III, iv, 108–09, and IV, 14) Shelley suggests that Time is at an end with Jupiter's fall. And of course Demogorgon calls himself Eternity. It is probably not necessary to assign to such an interpretation any definite place in the philosophical pattern of the poem as a whole, which has only a general and not a detailed consistency. — There have been attempts to relate Shelley's speculations in this direction with those of William Blake, as set forth in the "Prophetic Books." It is unlikely, however, that Shelley was ever aware of Blake's existence.

And Asia waits in that far Indian vale,
The scene of her sad exile; rugged once
And desolate and frozen, like this ravine;
But now invested with fair flowers and herbs,
And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow
Among the woods and waters, from the aether
Of her transforming presence, which would fade
If it were mingled not with thine. Farewell!

END OF THE FIRST ACT

ACT II

SCENE I. — *Morning.*[1] *A lovely Vale in the Indian Caucasus.* ASIA *alone.*

Asia. From all the blasts of heaven thou hast descended:
Yes, like a spirit, like a thought, which makes
Unwonted tears throng to the horny eyes,
And beatings haunt the desolated heart,
Which should have learnt repose: thou hast descended
Cradled in tempests; thou dost wake, O Spring!
O child of many winds! As suddenly
Thou comest as the memory of a dream,
Which now is sad because it hath been sweet;
Like genius, or like joy which riseth up
As from the earth, clothing with golden clouds
The desert of our life.
This is the season, this the day, the hour;
At sunrise thou shouldst come, sweet sister mine,
Too long desired, too long delaying, come!
How like death-worms the wingless moments crawl!
The point of one white star is quivering still
Deep in the orange light of widening morn
Beyond the purple mountains: through a chasm
Of wind-divided mist the darker lake
Reflects it: now it wanes: it gleams again
As the waves fade, and as the burning threads
Of woven cloud unravel in pale air:

[1] This can hardly be the same morning as that of Act I (as some have thought), since Panthea and Ione were present during the torturing of Prometheus by the Furies.

'Tis lost! and through yon peaks of cloud-like snow
The roseate sunlight quivers: hear I not
The Aeolian music of her sea-green plumes
Winnowing the crimson dawn? [PANTHEA *enters.*
I feel, I see
Those eyes which burn through smiles that fade in tears,
Like stars half quenched in mists of silver dew.
Belovèd and most beautiful, who wearest
The shadow of that soul by which I live,
How late thou art! the spherèd sun had climbed
The sea; my heart was sick with hope, before
The printless air felt thy belated plumes.

Panthea. Pardon, great Sister! but my wings were faint
With the delight of a remembered dream,
As are the noontide plumes of summer winds
Satiate with sweet flowers. I was wont to sleep
Peacefully, and awake refreshed and calm
Before the sacred Titan's fall, and thy
Unhappy love, had made, through use and pity,
Both love and woe familiar to my heart
As they had grown to thine: erewhile I slept
Under the glaucous caverns of old Ocean
Within dim bowers of green and purple moss,
Our young Ione's soft and milky arms
Locked then, as now, behind my dark, moist hair,
While my shut eyes and cheek were pressed within
The folded depth of her life-breathing bosom:
But not as now, since I am made the wind
Which fails beneath the music that I bear
Of thy most wordless converse; since dissolved
Into the sense with which love talks, my rest

31. In l. 70 of this scene, Prometheus is represented as calling Panthea the "shadow" of Asia. To each of the separated lovers, she stands for the other. Locock quotes from a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, dated November 23, 1811: "are you not my second self, the stronger shadow of that soul whose dictates I have been accustomed to obey?"

32. *I.e.*, the full circle of the sun had risen above the sea.

50. *I.e.*, "but not *restlessly*, as now, since I *have been* made," etc. In l. 52, "since dissolved" probably means "since *I have been* dissolved," and in l. 54, "was troubled" must stand for "has been troubled."

51. This is a frequent complaint of Shelley himself; compare, for instance, II, v, 70–71, and the close of *Epipsychidion*.

Was troubled and yet sweet; my waking hours
Too full of care and pain.
Asia. Lift up thine eyes,
And let me read thy dream.
Panthea. As I have said
With our sea-sister at his feet I slept.
The mountain mists, condensing at our voice
Under the moon, had spread their snowy flakes,
From the keen ice shielding our linkèd sleep.
Then two dreams came. One, I remember not.
But in the other his pale wound-worn limbs
Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night
Grew radiant with the glory of that form
Which lives unchanged within, and his voice fell
Like music which makes giddy the dim brain,
Faint with intoxication of keen joy:
"Sister of her whose footsteps pave the world
With loveliness — more fair than aught but her,
Whose shadow thou art — lift thine eyes on me."
I lifted them: 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,
Steamed forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere
Which wrapped me in its all-dissolving power,
As the warm aether 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, until it passed,
And like the vapours when the sun sinks down,
Gathering again in drops upon the pines,
And tremulous as they, in the deep night
My being was condensed; and as the rays
Of thought were slowly gathered, I could hear
His voice, whose accents lingered ere they died
Like footsteps of far melody: thy name

71–72. Compare *The Revolt of Islam*, I, lvii.

89. I follow Locock in replacing "weak" with "far," which he thinks is the MS. correction (hardly decipherable) to avoid the repetition in II, ii, 33.

Among the many sounds alone I heard
Of what might be articulate; though still
I listened through the night when sound was none.
Ione wakened then, and said to me:
"Canst thou divine what troubles me to-night?
I always knew what I desired before,
Nor ever found delight to wish in vain.
But now I cannot tell thee what I seek;
I know not; something sweet, since it is sweet
Even to desire; it is thy sport, false sister;
Thou hast discovered some enchantment old,
Whose spells have stolen my spirit as I slept
And mingled it with thine: for when just now
We kissed, I felt within thy parted lips
The sweet air that sustained me, and the warmth
Of the life-blood, for loss of which I faint,
Quivered between our intertwining arms."
I answered not, for the Eastern star grew pale,
But fled to thee.
Asia. Thou speakest, but thy words
Are as the air: I feel them not: Oh, lift
Thine eyes, that I may read his written soul!
Panthea. I lift them though they droop beneath the load
Of that they would express: what canst thou see
But thine own fairest shadow imaged there?
Asia. Thine eyes are like the deep, blue, boundless heaven
Contracted to two circles underneath
Their long, fine lashes; dark, far, measureless,
Orb within orb, and line through line inwoven.
Panthea. Why lookest thou as if a spirit passed?
Asia. There is a change: beyond their inmost depth
I see a shade, a shape: 'tis He, arrayed
In the soft light of his own smiles, which spread
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.
Prometheus, it is thine! depart not yet!

94 ff. "It would seem that while Panthea's individuality was being absorbed into that of Prometheus, Ione was passing through a similar transfiguration in relation to Panthea. Shelley seems to be describing some of the phenomena of occult science; the 'medium' (in this case Panthea) has to borrow from those surrounding her the vital essence which she loses during her trance. The feeling of vague desire experienced by Ione is due to this temporary loss of her normal individuality" [Locock].

120. "He," Prometheus.

Say not those smiles that we shall meet again
Within that bright pavilion which their beams
Shall build o'er the waste world? The dream is told.
What shape is that between us? Its rude hair
Roughens the wind that lifts it, its regard
Is wild and quick, yet 'tis a thing of air,
For through its gray robe gleams the golden dew
Whose stars the noon has quenched not.
Dream. Follow! Follow!
Panthea. It is mine other dream.
Asia. It disappears.
Panthea. It passes now into my mind. Methought
As we sate here, the flower-infolding buds
Burst on yon lightning-blasted almond-tree,
When swift from the white Scythian wilderness
A wind swept forth wrinkling the Earth with frost:
I looked, and all the blossoms were blown down;
But on each leaf was stamped, as the blue bells
Of Hyacinth tell Apollo's written grief,
O, FOLLOW, FOLLOW!
Asia. As you speak, your words
Fill, pause by pause, my own forgotten sleep
With shapes. Methought among these lawns together
We wandered, underneath the young gray dawn,
And multitudes of dense white fleecy clouds
Were wandering in thick flocks along the mountains
Shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind;
And the white dew on the new-bladed grass,
Just piercing the dark earth, hung silently;
And there was more which I remember not:
But on the shadows of the moving clouds
Athwart the purple mountain slope, was written
FOLLOW, O, FOLLOW! as they vanished by;

132. "Mine other dream," *i.e.*, the one not remembered, in l. 61.

140. Hyacinthus was a beautiful boy beloved and accidentally slain by Apollo. The markings on the flower that the ancient Greeks called by his name were supposed to resemble the Greek word *Al* — "Woe." This flower, which has been variously identified, cannot have been the one to which the name is now applied, although Shelley's reference to the "blue bells" indicates that he identified the two.

145–47. Ruskin, in *Modern Painters* (Vol. I, Sec. III, Chap. 2), praises these lines for their descriptive accuracy.

And on each herb, from which Heaven's dew had fallen,
The like was stamped, as with a withering fire;
A wind arose among the pines; it shook
The clinging music from their boughs, and then
Low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts,
Were heard: O, FOLLOW, FOLLOW, FOLLOW ME!
And then I said: "Panthea, look on me."
But in the depth of those belovèd eyes
Still I saw, FOLLOW, FOLLOW!
Echo. Follow, follow!
Panthea. The crags, this clear spring morning, mock our voices
As they were spirit-tongued.
Asia. It is some being
Around the crags. What fine clear sounds! O, list!

Echoes (unseen)

Echoes we: listen!
We cannot stay:
As dew-stars glisten
Then fade away—
Child of Ocean!

Asia. Hark! Spirits speak. The liquid responses
Of their aëreal tongues yet sound.
Panthea. I hear.

Echoes

O, follow, follow,
As our voice recedeth
Through the caverns hollow,
Where the forest spreadeth;

(*More distant*)

O, follow, follow!
Through the caverns hollow,

---

173. The place which Asia and Panthea eventually reach by following the voices is the Cave of Demogorgon, where they learn that Jupiter is about to be overthrown and Prometheus set free. The spirit songs in this and the following scenes are apparently inspired by anticipation of that event.

As the song floats thou pursue,
Where the wild bee never flew,
Through the noontide darkness deep,
By the odour-breathing sleep
Of faint night flowers, and the waves
At the fountain-lighted caves,
While our music, wild and sweet,
Mocks thy gently falling feet,
Child of Ocean!

Asia. Shall we pursue the sound? It grows more faint
And distant.

Panthea. List! the strain floats nearer now.

Echoes

In the world unknown
Sleeps a voice unspoken;
By thy step alone
Can its rest be broken;
Child of Ocean!

Asia. How the notes sink upon the ebbing wind!

Echoes

O, follow, follow!
Through the caverns hollow,
As the song floats thou pursue,
By the woodland noontide dew;
By the forest, lakes, and fountains,
Through the many-folded mountains;
To the rents, and gulfs, and chasms,
Where the Earth reposed from spasms,

184. Compare II, iii, 26, and *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 251.

191. The "voice unspoken" is apparently that of "the snake-like Doom" (of Jupiter) "coiled underneath" the throne of Demogorgon (II, iii, 97), which in turn may be identified with the "spirit with a dreadful countenance" in the following scene (l. 142).

192. This line must mean that the Doom can be released only by Love, personified in Asia; that the latter is now being led to Demogorgon's throne signifies that Prometheus' triumph and the universal reign of Love are at hand. Compare II, iii, 88.

203. Shelley rhymes "chasm" and "spasm" successfully in Act I (ll. 314 and 316), but here he certainly falls into bathos.

On the day when He and thou
Parted, to commingle now;
Child of Ocean!

Asia. Come, sweet Panthea, link thy hand in mine,
And follow, ere the voices fade away.

SCENE II. — *A Forest, intermingled with Rocks and Caverns.* ASIA *and* PANTHEA *pass into it. Two young Fauns are sitting on a Rock listening.*

Semichorus I of Spirits

The path through which that lovely twain
Have passed, by cedar, pine, and yew,
And each dark tree that ever grew,
Is curtained out from Heaven's wide blue;
Nor sun, nor moon, nor wind, nor rain,
Can pierce its interwoven bowers,
Nor aught, save where some cloud of dew,
Drifted along the earth-creeping breeze,
Between the trunks of the hoar trees,
Hangs each a pearl in the pale flowers
Of the green laurel, blown anew;
And bends, and then fades silently,
One frail and fair anemone:
Or when some star of many a one
That climbs and wanders through steep night,
Has found the cleft through which alone

1. This scene has been elaborately discussed by Mr. Grabo (*Prometheus Unbound*, pp. 58–68), who finds in it a philosophy which combines certain aspects of neo-Platonism and of contemporary scientific thought. Some of his suggestions are enlightening, but it may be doubted whether most readers will care to accept his theory in all its ramifications. — The general theme of the lyric is the journey of Asia and Panthea apparently away from the world of matter and sensation toward the ultimate reality (personified in Demogorgon) which underlies it. Woodberry remarks concerning this lyric that "the sequence from nature to emotion and impassioned thought belongs to many of Shelley's poems, and is his natural lyrical form."

10. "Hangs" is probably transitive, its subject being "cloud of dew," and the meaning is "hangs a pearl in each of the pale flowers."

12. "Bends" is intransitive, its subject being "anemone."

Beams fall from high those depths upon
Ere it is borne away, away,
By the swift Heavens that cannot stay,
It scatters drops of golden light,
Like lines of rain that ne'er unite:
And the gloom divine is all around,
And underneath is the mossy ground.

Semichorus II

There the voluptuous nightingales,
Are awake through all the broad noonday.
When one with bliss or sadness fails,
And through the windless ivy-boughs,
Sick with sweet love, droops dying away
On its mate's music-panting bosom;
Another from the swinging blossom,
Watching to catch the languid close
Of the last strain, then lifts on high
The wings of the weak melody,
'Till some new strain of feeling bear
The song, and all the woods are mute;
When there is heard through the dim air
The rush of wings, and rising there
Like many a lake-surrounded flute,
Sounds overflow the listener's brain
So sweet, that joy is almost pain.

Semichorus I

There those enchanted eddies play
Of echoes, music-tongued, which draw,
By Demogorgon's mighty law,
With melting rapture, or sweet awe,
All spirits on that secret way;
As inland boats are driven to Ocean
Down streams made strong with mountain-thaw:
And first there comes a gentle sound
To those in talk or slumber bound,

19. "Cannot stay," because of the turning of the earth on its axis which makes the "swift Heavens" seem to move.
40. Compare *With a Guitar, to Jane*, ll. 7–8 and n.
43. *I.e.*, Love (apparently).

And wakes the destined: — soft emotion
Attracts, impels them; those who saw
Say from the breathing earth behind
There steams a plume-uplifting wind
Which drives them on their path, while they
Believe their own swift wings and feet
The sweet desires within obey:
And so they float upon their way,
Until, still sweet, but loud and strong,
The storm of sound is driven along,
Sucked up and hurrying: as they fleet,
Behind its gathering billows meet
And to the fatal mountain bear
Like clouds amid the yielding air.

First Faun. Canst thou imagine where those spirits live
Which make such delicate music in the woods?
We haunt within the least frequented caves
And closest coverts, and we know these wilds,
Yet never meet them, though we hear them oft:
Where may they hide themselves?
Second Faun. 'Tis hard to tell:
I have heard those more skilled in spirits say,
The bubbles, which the enchantment of the sun
Sucks from the pale faint water-flowers that pave
The oozy bottom of clear lakes and pools,
Are the pavilions where such dwell and float
Under the green and golden atmosphere
Which noontide kindles through the woven leaves;

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50. The first edition has "destined soft emotion, — " but almost all later editions place the stop after "destined," as in the Bodleian MS.

62. *I.e.*, "and to the fatal mountain (beneath which Demogorgon dwells) bear *them*."

64. The MS., according to Locock, shows the remainder of the scene to have been an afterthought. Mr. Grabo takes it as a gloss on the preceding lyrics. The "spirits" spoken of by the fauns are "the elements of which matter is composed," and the "bubbles" of l. 71 are hydrogen gas. The whole scene is taken as presenting an elaborate analogy between "the cyclical history of the hydrogen atom drawn from the sea to the sky and then home again to its source," and "the life history of the souls drawn from the ocean of universal being, individually incarnated, and returning again to their source." To the present editor, such an interpretation seems over-subtle.

And when these burst, and the thin fiery air,
The which they breathed within those lucent domes,
Ascends to flow like meteors through the night,
They ride on them, and rein their headlong speed,
And bow their burning crests, and glide in fire
Under the waters of the earth again.
First Faun. If such live thus, have others other lives,
Under pink blossoms or within the bells
Of meadow flowers, or folded violets deep,
Or in their dying odours, when they die,
Or in the sunlight of the spherèd dew?
Second Faun. Ay, many more which we may well divine.
But, should we stay to speak, noontide would come,
And thwart Silenus find his goats undrawn,
And grudge to sing those wise and lovely songs
Of Fate, and Chance, and God, and Chaos old,
And Love, and the chained Titan's woful doom,
And how he shall be loosed, and make the earth
One brotherhood: delightful strains which cheer
Our solitary twilights, and which charm
To silence the unenvying nightingales.

SCENE III. — *A Pinnacle of Rock among Mountains.* ASIA *and* PANTHEA.

Panthea. Hither the sound has borne us — to the realm
Of Demogorgon, and the mighty portal,
Like a volcano's meteor-breathing chasm,
Whence the oracular vapour is hurled up
Which lonely men drink wandering in their youth,
And call truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy,
That maddening wine of life, whose dregs they drain
To deep intoxication; and uplift,
Like Maenads who cry loud, Evoe! Evoe!
The voice which is contagion to the world.

90–95. Compare Virgil, *Eclogues,* VI, 31–42.

9. Maenads were female worshippers of Dionysus, or Bacchus, who celebrated his festival with orgiastic revels. Anyone meeting a band of them in their intoxicated state was likely to be torn to pieces. Compare III, iii, 154, and IV, 473; also *Ode to the West Wind,* l. 21.

10. "The voice" is perhaps that of Revolution — regarded as beneficent by Shelley and other reformers, and as pestilential by the world in general.

Asia. Fit throne for such a Power! Magnificent!
How glorious art thou, Earth! And if thou be
The shadow of some spirit lovelier still,
Though evil stain its work, and it should be
Like its creation, weak yet beautiful,
I could fall down and worship that and thee.
Even now my heart adoreth: Wonderful!
Look, sister, ere the vapour dim thy brain:
Beneath is a wide plain of billowy mist,
As a lake, paving in the morning sky,
With azure waves which burst in silver light,
Some Indian vale. Behold it, rolling on
Under the curdling winds, and islanding
The peak whereon we stand — midway, around
Encinctured by the dark and blooming forests,
Dim twilight-lawns, and stream-illumèd caves,
And wind-enchanted shapes of wandering mist;
And far on high the keen sky-cleaving mountains
From icy spires of sun-like radiance fling
The dawn, as lifted Ocean's dazzling spray,
From some Atlantic islet scattered up,
Spangles the wind with lamp-like water-drops.
The vale is girdled with their walls, a howl
Of cataracts from their thaw-cloven ravines,
Satiates the listening wind, continuous, vast,
Awful as silence. Hark! the rushing snow!
The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,

13. The "spirit" here referred to may perhaps be identified with the Spirit of the Earth that appears in III, iii, 148. The Platonism of the passage is evident.

19. The following passage is reminiscent of *Mont Blanc.* Locock quotes a passage from Mary's *Journal,* written during their elopement to Switzerland in 1814. Other parallels can be found in the letters written by Shelley to Peacock in 1816.

24. The punctuation is that of Locock, following the Bodleian MS. This editor comments: "The MS. shows that the line was originally left unfinished, the phrase 'midway, around' being inserted with a different pen, — clearly as a makeshift. . . . Possibly Shelley meant that the forests extended halfway up the peak, or that they formed the middle distance, the 'sky-cleaving mountains' being the background; but the simplest sense is 'halfway round.' "

37. Woodberry speaks of the following lines as containing "one of the few sublime images in English poetry."

Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
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.
Panthea. Look how the gusty sea of mist is breaking
In crimson foam, even at our feet! it rises
As Ocean at the enchantment of the moon
Round foodless men wrecked on some oozy isle.
Asia. The fragments of the cloud are scattered up;
The wind that lifts them disentwines my hair;
Its billows now sweep o'er mine eyes; my brain
Grows dizzy; see'st thou shapes within the mist?
Panthea. A countenance with beckoning smiles: there burns
An azure fire within its golden locks!
Another and another: hark! they speak!

Song of Spirits

To the deep, to the deep,
Down, down!
Through the shade of sleep,
Through the cloudy strife
Of Death and of Life;
Through the veil and the bar
Of things which seem and are
Even to the steps of the remotest throne,
Down, down!

While the sound whirls around,
Down, down!
As the fawn draws the hound,
As the lightning the vapour,
As a weak moth the taper;
Death, despair; love, sorrow;

54. This lyric describes the completion of the journey of Asia and Panthea, and expresses more clearly than the poet has yet done his growing sense of the illusory nature of the physical world.

66. In this and the following line Shelley reverses the grammatical order; the meaning is "as the vapour draws the lightning" and "as the taper draws the weak moth." The normal order is then resumed.

Time both; to-day, to-morrow;
As steel obeys the spirit of the stone,
Down, down!

Through the gray, void abysm,
Down, down!
Where the air is no prism,
And the moon and stars are not,
And the cavern-crags wear not
The radiance of Heaven,
Nor the gloom to Earth given,
Where there is One pervading, One alone,
Down, down!

In the depth of the deep,
Down, down!
Like veiled lightning asleep,
Like the spark nursed in embers,
The last look Love remembers,
Like a diamond, which shines
On the dark wealth of mines,
A spell is treasured but for thee alone.
Down, down!

We have bound thee, we guide thee;
Down, down!
With the bright form beside thee;
Resist not the weakness,
Such strength is in meekness
That the Eternal, the Immortal,
Must unloose through life's portal
The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne
By that alone.

74. Compare I, 82–83 and n.
88. Compare II, i, 192 and n.
92. The spirits are addressing Asia; hence the "bright form" is Panthea.
93–94. The "weakness" is perhaps that naturally felt by Asia amid "the lampless caves of unimagined being," into which she is brought in a kind of trance (symbolized by her being bound). The "meekness" I take to be that exemplified by Prometheus in recalling his curse upon Jupiter and in telling the Furies that he wishes "no living thing to suffer pain."
95–98. "The Eternal, the Immortal" is Demogorgon. I agree with

SCENE IV. — *The Cave of* DEMOGORGON. ASIA *and* PANTHEA.

Panthea. What veilèd form sits on that ebon throne?
Asia. The veil has fallen.
Panthea. I see a mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb,
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living Spirit.
Demogorgon. Ask what thou wouldst know.
Asia. What canst thou tell?
Demogorgon. All things thou dar'st demand.
Asia. Who made the living world?
Demogorgon. God.
Asia. Who made all
That it contains? thought, passion, reason, will,

Locock that this Doom is beneficent, involving the fall of Jupiter; and that the resemblance to IV, 564–69 is "deceptive." Mr. Grabo takes the opposite view. — Compare *The Daemon of the World*, I, 96–101, where the Daemon tells the Spirit of Ianthe:

> Therefore from nature's inner shrine,
> Where gods and fiends in worship bend,
> Majestic spirit, be it thine
> The flame to seize, the veil to rend,
> Where the vast snake Eternity
> In charmèd sleep doth ever lie.

1. For the significance of Demogorgon, see the introductory note. The name occurs in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (I, v, 22 and IV, ii, 47) and in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (II, 965). The main source of Shelley's conception is probably a long note in Peacock's *Rhododaphne*, VI, 159.

2–6. Naturally, Demogorgon, as ultimate being, cannot be described. Compare Milton's description of Death in *Paradise Lost*, II, 666–670.

With the "rays of gloom" compare Milton's "darkness visible," in *Paradise Lost*, I, 63.

9. From here to l. 120 Shelley apparently forgets the action of the drama, and simply asks, and answers as best he can, the questions concerning the ultimate nature of things which are uppermost in his own mind. The best commentary is probably his note on *Hellas*, ll. 197 ff. — "God" is here a name for the power in the world that works for good, and may be identified with the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, the Spirit of Good in Canto I of *The Revolt of Islam*, and the "Power," or "One Spirit" of *Adonais*, Stanzas xlii–xliii. In the present poem, considered dramatically, the attributes of this Spirit are divided among Demogorgon, Asia, and Prometheus. — The reader may be further confused by the fact that in

Imagination?
Demogorgon. God: Almighty God.
Asia. Who made that sense which, when the winds of Spring
In rarest visitation, or the voice
Of one belovèd heard in youth alone,
Fills the faint eyes with falling tears which dim
The radiant looks of unbewailing flowers,
And leaves this peopled earth a solitude
When it returns no more?
Demogorgon. Merciful God.
Asia. And who made terror, madness, crime, remorse,
Which from the links of the great chain of things,
To every thought within the mind of man
Sway and drag heavily, and each one reels
Under the load towards the pit of death;
Abandoned hope, and love that turns to hate;
And self-contempt, bitterer to drink than blood;
Pain, whose unheeded and familiar speech
Is howling, and keen shrieks, day after day;
And Hell, or the sharp fear of Hell?

Act I Jupiter is sometimes spoken of as "God." Until about the time of this poem, Shelley regularly applies the name "God" to the incarnation of evil human passion which he regarded as the object of worship of orthodox Christians. Henceforth he more frequently uses the name, as here, to refer to his own God. (See *The Mask of Anarchy,* l. 298, *The Sensitive Plant,* II, 4, *Ode to Naples,* ll. 71 and 99, *Hellas,* l. 47, and *The Triumph of Life,* ll. 230 and 289.) The change indicates a decrease in Shelley's antagonism toward "the popular notions of Christianity," if not toward *organized* Christianity.

10. These five nouns are repeated in *Hellas,* ll. 795–97, where they are declared to be the only things that "cannot die." "Contains" seems to mean "is equivalent to."

12–18. Compare the close of the essay *On Love.* Shelley's writings contain a number of references to such an experience as is here described. "Alone" in l. 14 means "when one is alone." — The syntax of the passage is faulty, since there is only one verb, "fills," for the two clauses that ought to be introduced by "which" and "when." Locock's suggestion is probably correct: "that, since 'fills' would do for either clause, Shelley inadvertently made it do for both."

19. Here Shelley returns to what was for him the central mystery of life — the problem of evil. — The expression of the first five lines is rather confused, but the general thought is not obscure. It may be compared with *The Revolt of Islam,* II, xxxiii:

the chains which life for ever flings
On the entangled soul's aspiring wings.

Demogorgon. He reigns.
Asia. Utter his name: a world pining in pain
Asks but his name: curses shall drag him down.
Demogorgon. He reigns.
Asia. I feel, I know it: who?
Demogorgon. He reigns.
Asia. Who reigns? There was the Heaven and Earth at first,
And Light and Love; then Saturn, from whose throne
Time fell, an envious shadow: such the state
Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway,
As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves
Before the wind or sun has withered them,
And semivital worms; but he refused
The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
The skill which wields the elements, the thought
Which pierces this dim universe like light,
Self-empire, and the majesty of love;
For thirst of which they fainted. Then Prometheus
Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter,
And with this law alone, "Let man be free,"
Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven.
To know nor faith, nor love, nor law; to be

32. This long speech by Asia is based partly on *Prometheus Bound*, ll. 205–62, 414–514. The student who cares to read these passages from Aeschylus, even in translation, will find material for illuminating comparisons and contrasts between the poets as individuals and as representatives of the ages to which they belong. — Detailed comment on the philosophical implications of the passage is impracticable, and perhaps not really necessary. The poet is dealing with the notion of a lost "Golden Age" of innocence and happiness, a notion which occurs in many mythologies and appears in the Christian Scriptures as the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall. — It is to be noted that Shelley does not here, as he does (for purely poetical purposes) in the final chorus of *Hellas*, regard this Age of Saturn as really desirable.

33. Saturn's Greek name, Cronos, was also the word for "time." Locock's paraphrase probably gives the intended meaning: "whose throne cast the malignant shadow which we call Time." Compare I, 809 n. and *The Witch of Atlas*, i.

44. Compare I. 273 and n.

47. This is a common theme in Shelley: that monarchy is really anarchy. "Anarchs" is his regular epithet for kings and emperors. That individual human beings should be made to conform, by force, not to their own consciences but to the arbitrary will of another man (or a God

Omnipotent but friendless is to reign;
And Jove now reigned; for on the race of man
First famine, and then toil, and then disease,
Strife, wounds, and ghastly death unseen before,
Fell; and the unseasonable seasons drove
With alternating shafts of frost and fire,
Their shelterless, pale tribes to mountain caves:
And in their desert hearts fierce wants he sent,
And mad disquietudes, and shadows idle
Of unreal good, which levied mutual war,
So ruining the lair wherein they raged.
Prometheus saw, and waked the legioned hopes
Which sleep within folded Elysian flowers,
Nepenthe, Moly, Amaranth, fadeless blooms,
That they might hide with thin and rainbow wings
The shape of Death; and Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the human heart;
And he tamed fire which, like some beast of prey,
Most terrible, but lovely, played beneath
The frown of man; and tortured to his will
Iron and gold, the slaves and signs of power,
And gems and poisons, and all subtlest forms
Hidden beneath the mountains and the waves.
He gave man speech, and speech created thought,
Which is the measure of the universe;

---

with human limitations) was to Shelley a denial of what he felt to be the whole meaning and purpose of life. Compare *The Mask of Anarchy*, ll. 30–37.

49 ff. Shelley avoids the question of *why* the reign of Jupiter should have brought these evils. The passage seems incompatible with an interpretation of Jupiter as standing for "custom," "government," or "organized religion."

61. "Nepenthe," a drug mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* as having power to bring forgetfulness of suffering. It is mentioned again in III, iv, 163; and by Milton in *Comus*, l. 675. The same poem has a reference (l. 636) to "Moly," which also appears in the *Odyssey* as a magic herb given by Hermes to Odysseus to protect him from the wiles of Circe. "Amaranth" was another mythical herb, whose flower never faded.

64. The Christian symbolism is to be noted. Compare John 15:5: "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

72. It is curious that Shelley should say that "speech created thought," since often he complains (as in his note to the essay *On Love*) of the inadequacy of words to express "thought" — at least if the word be

And Science struck the thrones of earth and heaven,
Which shook, but fell not; and the harmonious mind
Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song;
And music lifted up the listening spirit
Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,
Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound;
And human hands first mimicked and then mocked,
With moulded limbs more lovely than its own,
The human form, till marble grew divine;
And mothers, gazing, drank the love men see
Reflected in their race, behold, and perish.
He told the hidden power of herbs and springs,
And Disease drank and slept. Death grew like sleep.
He taught the implicated orbits woven
Of the wide-wandering stars; and how the sun
Changes his lair, and by what secret spell
The pale moon is transformed, when her broad eye
Gazes not on the interlunar sea:
He taught to rule, as life directs the limbs,
The tempest-wingèd chariots of the Ocean,
And the Celt knew the Indian. Cities then
Were built, and through their snow-like columns flowed
The warm winds, and the azure aether shone,
And the blue sea and shadowy hills were seen.
Such, the alleviations of his state,
Prometheus gave to man, for which he hangs
Withering in destined pain: but who rains down
Evil, the immedicable plague, which, while
Man looks on his creation like a God
And sees that it is glorious, drives him on,
The wreck of his own will, the scorn of earth,
The outcast, the abandoned, the alone?

---

taken in the inclusive sense that it has in *Hellas,* l. 795. Compare also l. 116 below. On the other hand, compare IV, 415–17.

83–84. Swinburne's explanation is: "Women with child gazing on statues (say on the Venus of Melos) bring forth children like them — children whose features reflect the passion of the gaze and perfection of the sculptured beauty; men seeing are consumed with love; 'perish' meaning simply *deperire.*" The lines are perhaps an echo of Socrates' discourse in the *Symposium,* 206–211. Compare III, iii, 49 ff. and also IV, 413–14.

88. "Wide-wandering stars," planets.

89. "Lair," position in the zodiac.

Not Jove: while yet his frown shook Heaven, ay, when
His adversary from adamantine chains
Cursed him, he trembled like a slave. Declare
Who is his master? Is he too a slave?
Demogorgon. All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil:
Thou knowest if Jupiter be such or no.
Asia. Whom calledst thou God?
Demogorgon. I spoke but as ye speak,
For Jove is the supreme of living things.
Asia. Who is the master of the slave?
Demogorgon. If the abysm
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.
Asia. 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.
One more demand; and do thou answer me
As my own soul would answer, did it know
That which I ask. Prometheus shall arise
Henceforth the sun of this rejoicing world:
When shall the destined hour arrive?
Demogorgon. Behold!
Asia. The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds
Which trample the dim winds: in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.
Some look behind, as fiends pursued them there,
And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars:
Others, with burning eyes, lean forth, and drink

110–11. As Rossetti says, this "certainly means that he *is* a slave."

112. Asia refers back to the beginning of the scene. The answer to her question would seem to be the "eternal Love" of l. 120. "Living things" in l. 113 are presumably those subject to "Fate, Time," etc.

132 ff. This description is reminiscent of two passages in a letter to Peacock (March 23, 1819) describing the sculptured figures of Victory on the arch of Constantine at Rome.

With eager lips the wind of their own speed,
As if the thing they loved fled on before,
And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks
Stream like a comet's flashing hair: they all
Sweep onward.
Demogorgon. These are the immortal Hours,
Of whom thou didst demand. One waits for thee.
Asia. A spirit with a dreadful countenance
Checks its dark chariot by the craggy gulf.
Unlike thy brethren, ghastly charioteer,
Who art thou? Whither wouldst thou bear me? Speak!
Spirit. I am the shadow of a destiny
More dread than is my aspect: ere yon planet
Has set, the darkness which ascends with me
Shall wrap in lasting night heaven's kingless throne.
Asia. What meanest thou?
Panthea. That terrible shadow floats
Up from its throne, as may the lurid smoke
Of earthquake-ruined cities o'er the sea.
Lo! it ascends the car; the coursers fly
Terrified: watch its path among the stars
Blackening the night!
Asia. Thus I am answered: strange!
Panthea. See, near the verge, another chariot stays;
An ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire,
Which comes and goes within its sculptured rim
Of delicate strange tracery; the young spirit
That guides it has the dove-like eyes of hope;
How its soft smiles attract the soul! as light
Lures wingèd insects through the lampless air.

Spirit

My coursers are fed with the lightning,
They drink of the whirlwind's stream,
And when the red morning is bright'ning
They bathe in the fresh sunbeam;
They have strength for their swiftness I deem;
Then ascend with me, daughter of Ocean.

145. Asia thinks that this is the charioteer referred to by Demogorgon in l. 141. Instead, it is the Hour of Jupiter's doom. The Hour who "waits for" Asia appears in l. 156.

I desire: and their speed makes night kindle;
I fear: they outstrip the Typhoon;
Ere the cloud piled on Atlas can dwindle
We encircle the earth and the moon:
We shall rest from long labours at noon:
Then ascend with me, daughter of Ocean.

SCENE V.—*The Car pauses within a Cloud on the top of a snowy Mountain.* ASIA, PANTHEA, *and the* SPIRIT OF THE HOUR.

Spirit

On the brink of the night and the morning
My coursers are wont to respire;
But the Earth has just whispered a warning
That their flight must be swifter than fire:
They shall drink the hot speed of desire!

Asia. Thou breathest on their nostrils, but my breath
Would give them swifter speed.
Spirit. Alas! it could not.
Panthea. O Spirit! pause, and tell whence is the light
Which fills this cloud? the sun is yet unrisen.
Spirit. The sun will rise not until noon. Apollo
Is held in heaven by wonder; and the light
Which fills this vapour, as the aëreal hue
Of fountain-gazing roses fills the water,
Flows from thy mighty sister.
Panthea. Yes, I feel—
Asia. What is it with thee, sister? Thou art pale.
Panthea. How thou art changed! I dare not look on thee;
I feel but see thee not. I scarce endure
The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change
Is working in the elements, which suffer
Thy presence thus unveiled. The Nereids tell

18. The "good change" is that described at the close of Act III, following the liberation of Prometheus, of which Asia's transfiguration here is prophetic. With this whole scene compare *Epipsychidion,* ll. 21–32, 77–119.

20 ff. According to one account, Venus, or Aphrodite (here identified with Asia), was born of the sea-foam.

That on the day when the clear hyaline
Was cloven at thine uprise, and thou didst stand
Within a veinèd shell, which floated on
Over the calm floor of the crystal sea,
Among the Aegean isles, and by the shores
Which bear thy name; love, like the atmosphere
Of the sun's fire filling the living world,
Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven
And the deep ocean and the sunless caves
And all that dwells within them; till grief cast
Eclipse upon the soul from which it came:
Such art thou now; nor is it I alone,
Thy sister, thy companion, thine own chosen one,
But the whole world which seeks thy sympathy.
Hearest thou not sounds i' the air which speak the love
Of all articulate beings? Feelest thou not
The inanimate winds enamoured of thee? List! [*Music.*

Asia. Thy words are sweeter than aught else but his
Whose echoes they are: yet all love is sweet,
Given or returned. Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.
Like the wide heaven, the all-sustaining air,
It makes the reptile equal to the God:
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.

Panthea. List! Spirits speak.

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30. "Grief," *i.e.*, for Prometheus' punishment.

43. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 128–29. Shelley has been attacked for this sentiment, which is certainly rather startling if taken at its face value. The preceding line, however, suggests that "makes" is equivalent to "treats (*or* regards) . . . as"; and the thought would then be similar to that in the Essay on Christianity, where Shelley speaks of "that merciful and benignant Power . . . whose influencings are distributed to all whose natures admit of a participation in them — who sends to the weak and vicious creatures of his will all the benefits which they are capable of sharing." "The" before "God" implies that this is not *the* God of the first part of Scene iv, but only one of a high order of "living things."

48. This lyric, describing Asia's transfiguration, perhaps epitomizes better than any other brief passage the essential and distinctive character of Shelley's poetry. To many readers it is likely to seem baffling; Tennyson, for instance, is said to have made a remark to the effect that in

Voice in the Air, singing

Life of Life! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them;
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the cold air fire; then screen them
In those looks, where whoso gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

Child of Light! thy limbs are burning
Through the vest which seems to hide them;
As the radiant lines of morning
Through the clouds ere they divide them;
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

Fair are others; none beholds thee,
But thy voice sounds low and tender
Like the fairest, for it folds thee
From the sight, that liquid splendour,
And all feel, yet see thee never,
As I feel now, lost for ever!

this lyric the poet "seems to go up into the air and burst"! Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Shelley is trying to express an inner experience that to him was incomparably more intense and *real* than any object or event in the external, sensible world. It is, however, to use his own words, "a mood which language faints beneath"; and however urgent the poet's desire, he cannot express the inexpressible. Or rather, perhaps, he cannot communicate the intense power and life which invest, for him, an otherwise perfectly intelligible thought. For it is not true, as a recent critic says, that "the idea conveyed — the notional content — is almost negligible." Like the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, but with greater power, it expresses the poet's passionate intuition of an unseen "Spirit of Beauty," a "sustaining Love," at once revealed and hidden by the physical world (the "veil" of life in time); and that world in turn is glorified by participation in (and at the same time darkened by its resistance to) this divine Spirit. — Woodberry's note in the Cambridge Edition gives an admirable prose paraphrase.

51. "Screen" is parallel with "make," "them" standing for "themselves."

52. Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, Stanza xii.

63. "Liquid splendour" is in apposition with "it," which Locock takes as referring to "atmosphere" or "vest." But the antecedent may be "voice" instead; compare IV, 82.

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

Asia

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 a helm conducting it,
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.
  It seems to float ever, for ever,
  Upon that many-winding river,
  Between mountains, woods, abysses,
  A paradise of wildernesses!
Till, like one in slumber bound,
Borne to the ocean, I float down, around,
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.

  Meanwhile thy spirit lifts its pinions
  In music's most serene dominions;
Catching the winds that fan that happy heaven.
  And we sail on, away, afar,
  Without a course, without a star,
But by the instinct of sweet music driven;
  Till through Elysian garden islets
  By thee, most beautiful of pilots,
  Where never mortal pinnace glided,
  The boat of my desire is guided:
Realms where the air we breathe is love,
Which in the winds and on the waves doth move,
Harmonizing this earth with what we feel above.

71. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 588–91, and *The Triumph of Life*, ll. 386–390.

72. In this lyric Shelley attempts to give a voice to Love incarnate, in the moment of attaining self-realization. The recurrence of the boat-motif needs no comment.

95–97. Compare Shelley's translation of the *Symposium*, 197: "Love . . . creates peace among men, and calm upon the sea, the windless silence of [from] storms."

We have passed Age's icy caves,
And Manhood's dark and tossing waves,
And Youth's smooth ocean, smiling to betray:
Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee
Of shadow-peopled Infancy,
Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day;
A paradise of vaulted bowers,
Lit by downward-gazing flowers,
And watery paths that wind between
Wildernesses calm and green,
Peopled by shapes too bright to see,
And rest, having beheld; somewhat like thee;
Which walk upon the sea, and chant melodiously!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

ACT III

SCENE I. — *Heaven.* JUPITER *on his Throne;* THETIS *and the other Deities assembled.*

Jupiter. Ye congregated powers of heaven, who share
The glory and the strength of him ye serve,
Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.
All else had been subdued to me; alone
The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,

98. It has been suggested (by E. M. W. Tillyard, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 29, 1932, p. 691) that this curious reversal of the time-sequence is taken from a myth in Plato's dialogue *The Statesman*, 270–274; in which, incidentally, there is mention of the Golden Age of Cronos, Prometheus' gift of fire, and some other details mentioned by Shelley in Scene iv — although Plato may himself have been recalling Aeschylus. Shelley might, however, have found sufficient suggestions in the *Phaedrus*, 249–250; and of course the general idea would have been familiar to him from Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*.

110. Locock speaks with justice of the "wretchedly weak conclusion."

1. In this scene, as Mrs. Shelley says, Jupiter, "blind to the real event" (since Prometheus has kept the secret) and instead "darkly guessing that some great good to himself will flow [follow?], espouses Thetis." Jupiter's exultation and overweening pride, in the moment preceding his downfall, is an example of that special kind of dramatic irony called *hubris* by the Greeks, whose tragedians used it with striking effect.

5–17. Many readers will feel that this is a nobler conception of human life than that pictured at the end of the act, which is a state of seemingly uninterrupted serenity and ease. It need only be remarked that each is

Yet burns towards heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt,
And lamentation, and reluctant prayer,
Hurling up insurrection, which might make
Our antique empire insecure, though built
On eldest faith, and hell's coeval, fear;
And though my curses through the pendulous air,
Like snow on herbless peaks, fall flake by flake,
And cling to it; though under my wrath's night
It climbs the crags of life, step after step,
Which wound it, as ice wounds unsandalled feet,
It yet remains supreme o'er misery,
Aspiring, unrepressed, yet soon to fall:
Even now have I begotten a strange wonder,
That fatal child, the terror of the earth,
Who waits but till the destined hour arrive,
Bearing from Demogorgon's vacant throne
The dreadful might of ever-living limbs
Which clothed that awful spirit unbeheld,
To redescend, and trample out the spark.
Pour forth heaven's wine, Idaean Ganymede,

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the outgrowth of a characteristic mood or attitude in Shelley, and that to exaggerate either tendency is fatal to any attempt to understand him. —Incidentally, it has been pointed out that this tribute to the "human soul" is hardly in character.

11. "Pendulous air" is from *King Lear,* III, iv.

18 ff. There is some confusion here as to whether Demogorgon is actually Jupiter's child or not. He says so in l. 54, yet Asia and Panthea have visited him previously, whereas Jupiter's child has been begotten "even now"; and, as Locock says, "Shelley would hardly make 'Eternity' the child of a tyrant whose kingdom was both established and overthrown by Prometheus." Moreover, the reference to "Demogorgon's vacant throne" and the use of "clothed" (past tense) in l. 23 suggest that Jupiter believes that Demogorgon (thought of here as the "Primal Law") has been or is to be slain and his "ever-living limbs" (or powers) usurped by Jupiter's offspring, who will be subject only to his father's will. This belief, however, turns out to be a delusion. The meaning of l. 54 would then be: "I stand in relation to you as you stood in relation to Saturn, in that I am mightier." It is true that the prophecy was that Jupiter should be overthrown by his own child, but Shelley may have felt that this prophecy is carried out in the sense that Demogorgon's appearance was the result of Jupiter's own misdeeds, in accordance with the poet's theory that evil is ultimately self-destructive. Or it may be that these difficulties and inconsistencies never occurred to Shelley at all.

25. Ganymede was the beautiful boy carried off by Zeus from his home on Mt. Ida, in Asia Minor, to be cupbearer to the Gods.

And let it fill the Daedal cups like fire,
And from the flower-inwoven soil divine
Ye all-triumphant harmonies arise,
As dew from earth under the twilight stars:
Drink! be the nectar circling through your veins
The soul of joy, ye ever-living Gods,
Till exultation burst in one wide voice
Like music from Elysian winds.
And thou
Ascend beside me, veilèd in the light
Of the desire which makes thee one with me,
Thetis, bright image of eternity!
When thou didst cry, "Insufferable might!
God! Spare me! I sustain not the quick flames,
The penetrating presence; all my being,
Like him whom the Numidian seps did thaw
Into a dew with poison, is dissolved,
Sinking through its foundations": even then
Two mighty spirits, mingling, made a third
Mightier than either, which, unbodied now,
Between us floats, felt, although unbeheld,
Waiting the incarnation, which ascends,
(Hear ye the thunder of the fiery wheels
Griding the winds?) from Demogorgon's throne.
Victory! victory! Feel'st thou not, O world,
The earthquake of his chariot thundering up
Olympus?

[*The Car of the* HOUR *arrives.* DEMOGORGON *descends, and moves towards the Throne of* JUPITER.

Awful shape, what art thou? Speak!

Demogorgon. Eternity. Demand no direr name.
Descend, and follow me down the abyss.
I am thy child, as thou wert Saturn's child;
Mightier than thee: and we must dwell together
Henceforth in darkness. Lift thy lightnings not.
The tyranny of heaven none may retain,
Or reassume, or hold, succeeding thee:
Yet if thou wilt, as 'tis the destiny

40. "Seps," a poisonous serpent. The allusion is to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Book IX.

Of trodden worms to writhe till they are dead,
Put forth thy might.
Jupiter. Detested prodigy!
Even thus beneath the deep Titanian prisons
I trample thee! thou lingerest?
Mercy! mercy!
No pity, no release, no respite! Oh,
That thou wouldst make mine enemy my judge,
Even where he hangs, seared by my long revenge,
On Caucasus! he would not doom me thus.
Gentle, and just, and dreadless, is he not
The monarch of the world? What then art thou?
No refuge! no appeal!
Sink with me then,
We two will sink on the wide waves of ruin,
Even as a vulture and a snake outspent
Drop, twisted in inextricable fight,
Into a shoreless sea. Let hell unlock
Its mounded oceans of tempestuous fire,
And whelm on them into the bottomless void
This desolated world, and thee, and me,
The conquerer and the conquered, and the wreck
Of that for which they combated.
Ai! Ai!
The elements obey me not. I sink
Dizzily down, ever, for ever, down.
And, like a cloud, mine enemy above
Darkens my fall with victory! Ai, Ai!

SCENE II. — *The Mouth of a great River in the Island Atlantis.* OCEAN *is discovered reclining near the Shore;* APOLLO *stands beside him.*

62. "Titanian prisons," Tartarus, where the Titans (except Prometheus, who had helped Jupiter triumph over them) were imprisoned.

63. This and the following breaks in the text must be assumed to be filled with strife (described at the beginning of the next scene) of such vast proportions that the poet does not even try to render it dramatically.

65 ff. Jupiter's appeal here is not only a tribute to Prometheus, but good logic as well. But even Prometheus is not greater than the Primal Law.

72. Compare *Alastor,* l. 227 and n.

Ocean. He fell, thou sayest, beneath his conqueror's frown?
Apollo. Ay, when the strife was ended which made dim
The orb I rule, and shook the solid stars,
The terrors of his eye illumined heaven
With sanguine light, through the thick ragged skirts
Of the victorious darkness, as he fell:
Like the last glare of day's red agony,
Which, from a rent among the fiery clouds,
Burns far along the tempest-wrinkled deep.
Ocean. He sunk to the abyss? To the dark void?
Apollo. An eagle so caught in some bursting cloud
On Caucasus, his thunder-baffled wings
Entangled in the whirlwind, and his eyes
Which gazed on the undazzling sun, now blinded
By the white lightning, while the ponderous hail
Beats on his struggling form, which sinks at length
Prone, and the aëreal ice clings over it.
Ocean. Henceforth the fields of heaven-reflecting sea
Which are my realm, will heave, unstained with blood,
Beneath the uplifting winds, like plains of corn
Swayed by the summer air; my streams will flow
Round many-peopled continents, and round
Fortunate isles; and from their glassy thrones
Blue Proteus and his humid nymphs shall mark
The shadow of fair ships, as mortals see
The floating bark of the light-laden moon
With that white star, its sightless pilot's crest,
Borne down the rapid sunset's ebbing sea;
Tracking their path no more by blood and groans,
And desolation, and the mingled voice
Of slavery and command; but by the light
Of wave-reflected flowers, and floating odours,
And music soft, and mild, free, gentle voices,
And sweetest music, such as spirits love.
Apollo. And I shall gaze not on the deeds which make
My mind obscure with sorrow, as eclipse
Darkens the sphere I guide; but list, I hear

---

11. The reader must supply the verb "sinks" after "so."
27. "Sightless" — compare *Alastor,* l. 610 and n. With the whole image compare *The Revolt of Islam,* XII, xxi, and *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills,* ll. 322–26; also IV, 206 ff. below.

The small, clear, silver lute of the young Spirit
That sits i' the morning star.
Ocean. Thou must away;
Thy steeds will pause at even, till when farewell:
The loud deep calls me home even now to feed it
With azure calm out of the emerald urns
Which stand for ever full beside my throne.
Behold the Nereids under the green sea,
Their wavering limbs borne on the wind-like stream,
Their white arms lifted o'er their streaming hair
With garlands pied and starry sea-flower crowns,
Hastening to grace their mighty sister's joy.
[*A sound of waves is heard.*
It is the unpastured sea hungering for calm.
Peace, monster; I come now. Farewell.
Apollo. Farewell.

SCENE III. — *Caucasus.* PROMETHEUS, HERCULES, IONE, *the* EARTH, SPIRITS, ASIA, *and* PANTHEA, *borne in the Car with the* SPIRIT OF THE HOUR. HERCULES *unbinds* PROMETHEUS, *who descends.*

Hercules. Most glorious among Spirits, thus doth strength
To wisdom, courage, and long-suffering love,
And thee, who art the form they animate,
Minister like a slave.
Prometheus... Thy gentle words
Are sweeter even than freedom long desired
And long delayed.
Asia, thou light of life,
Shadow of beauty unbeheld: and ye,
Fair sister nymphs, who made long years of pain
Sweet to remember, through your love and care:
Henceforth we will not part. There is a cave,
All overgrown with trailing odorous plants,

10. Although here spoken of as a cave, the place to which Prometheus and Asia retire is really identical with the island paradise described at the end of *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* (compare ll. 342 ff. and n.) and again in *Epipsychidion.* — The frequently repeated criticism (for some typical opinions see the present editor's *Shelley's Religion,* p. 175 n.) that this retirement from the world is an anticlimax is discussed in the introductory note.

Which curtain out the day with leaves and flowers,
And paved with veinèd emerald, and a fountain
Leaps in the midst with an awakening sound.
From its curved roof the mountain's frozen tears
Like snow, or silver, or long diamond spires,
Hang downward, raining forth a doubtful light:
And there is heard the ever-moving air,
Whispering without from tree to tree, and birds,
And bees; and all around are mossy seats,
And the rough walls are clothed with long soft grass;
A simple dwelling, which shall be our own;
Where we will sit and talk of time and change,
As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged.
What can hide man from mutability?
And if ye sigh, then I will smile; and thou,
Ione, shalt chant fragments of sea-music,
Until I weep, when ye shall smile away
The tears she brought, which yet were sweet to shed.
We will entangle buds and flowers and beams
Which twinkle on the fountain's brim, and make
Strange combinations out of common things,
Like human babes in their brief innocence;
And we will search, with looks and words of love,
For hidden thoughts, each lovelier than the last,
Our unexhausted spirits; and like lutes
Touched by the skill of the enamoured wind,
Weave harmonies divine, yet ever new,
From difference sweet where discord cannot be;
And hither come, sped on the charmèd winds,
Which meet from all the points of heaven, as bees
From every flower aëreal Enna feeds,
At their known island-homes in Himera,
The echoes of the human world, which tell
Of the low voice of love, almost unheard,
And dove-eyed pity's murmured pain, and music,

15. "Frozen tears," stalactites.
36. Compare *Alastor*, l. 42 and n.
42. "Enna," the vale in Sicily whence Proserpine was carried off by Pluto.
43. "Himera," an ancient city on a mountain on the north coast of Sicily. Compare *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, l. 317.

Itself the echo of the heart, and all
That tempers or improves man's life, now free;
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.
The wandering voices and the shadows these
Of all that man becomes, the mediators
Of that best worship, love, by him and us
Given and returned; swift shapes and sounds, which grow
More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,
And, veil by veil, evil and error fall:
Such virtue has the cave and place around.
[*Turning to the* SPIRIT OF THE HOUR.
For thee, fair Spirit, one toil remains. Ione,
Give her that curvèd shell, which Proteus old
Made Asia's nuptial boon, breathing within it
A voice to be accomplished, and which thou
Didst hide in grass under the hollow rock.
Ione. Thou most desired Hour, more loved and lovely
Than all thy sisters, this is the mystic shell;
See the pale azure fading into silver

---

49 ff. These lines are full of echoes of the *Symposium*, 205–212. In his assertion of an intimate relation between beauty and goodness and his conception of art as an instrument of the moral and spiritual advancement of mankind, Shelley is in perfect agreement with Plato.

51. The "forms" are the Platonic "Ideas." Compare I, 748: "Forms more real than living man."

57 ff. Compare Plato's *Republic*, Book III, 401. "Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason" [Jowett's translation].

61–62. These lines indicate that man does not at once become perfect after Jupiter's fall. His will, however, has been purified, and henceforth his progress towards perfection is dependent only on increased knowledge.

Lining it with a soft yet glowing light:
Looks it not like lulled music sleeping there?
Spirit. It seems in truth the fairest shell of Ocean:
Its sound must be at once both sweet and strange.
Prometheus. Go, borne over the cities of mankind
On whirlwind-footed coursers: once again
Outspeed the sun around the orbèd world;
And as thy chariot cleaves the kindling air,
Thou breathe into the many-folded shell,
Loosening its mighty music; it shall be
As thunder mingled with clear echoes: then
Return; and thou shalt dwell beside our cave.
And thou, O Mother Earth!—
The Earth. 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,
And through my withered, old, and icy frame
The warmth of an immortal youth shoots down
Circling. Henceforth the many children fair
Folded in my sustaining arms; all plants,
And creeping forms, and insects rainbow-winged,
And birds, and beasts, and fish, and human shapes,
Which drew disease and pain from my wan bosom,
Draining the poison of despair, shall take
And interchange sweet nutriment; to me
Shall they become like sister-antelopes
By one fair dam, snow-white and swift as wind,
Nursed among lilies near a brimming stream.
The dew-mists of my sunless sleep shall float
Under the stars like balm: night-folded flowers

---

85. The following passage introduces the theme that is developed much more elaborately in the Earth's hymn of rejoicing in Act IV. The responsiveness of nature to the spiritual state of man is an ancient mythological theme. Legends associated with the Christian story, for instance, describe nature as suffering, like man, from the original sin in the Garden of Eden; and as rejoicing at the birth of Christ. Such a belief is in harmony with what seems to be Shelley's characteristic view: that evil comes into existence through the perverted will of conscious beings. Such a view in turn would seem to imply that the physical world exists as a manifestation of mind, or consciousness, which is the only reality. Compare IV, 382–84.

Shall suck unwithering hues in their repose:
And men and beasts in happy dreams shall gather
Strength for the coming day, and all its joy:
And death shall be the last embrace of her
Who takes the life she gave, even as a mother
Folding her child, says, "Leave me not again."
Asia. Oh, mother! wherefore speak the name of death?
Cease they to love, and move, and breathe, and speak,
Who die?
The Earth. It would avail not to reply:
Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
But to the uncommunicating dead.
Death is the veil which those who live call life:
They sleep, and it is lifted: and meanwhile
In mild variety the seasons mild
With rainbow-skirted showers, and odorous winds,
And long blue meteors cleansing the dull night,
And the life-kindling shafts of the keen sun's
All-piercing bow, and the dew-mingled rain
Of the calm moonbeams, a soft influence mild,
Shall clothe the forests and the fields, ay, even
The crag-built deserts of the barren deep,
With ever-living leaves, and fruits, and flowers.
And thou! There is a cavern where my spirit
Was panted forth in anguish whilst thy pain
Made my heart mad, and those who did inhale it
Became mad too, and built a temple there,
And spoke, and were oracular, and lured
The erring nations round to mutual war,
And faithless faith, such as Jove kept with thee;
Which breath now rises, as amongst tall weeds
A violet's exhalation, and it fills
With a serener light and crimson air

105. "Her," the Earth.

111. Locock points out that this line is identical with I, 150, but that the sense is somewhat different.

113. *I.e.*, "those who live" (in the physical world and in time) are the victims of illusion; what they call "life" ought to be called "death," since it veils from them the "real world." Compare the last two lines of *The Sensitive Plant*.

124. Whether this cavern is the same one mentioned by Prometheus in l. 10 is not clear.

Intense, yet soft, the rocks and woods around;
It feeds the quick growth of the serpent vine,
And the dark linkèd ivy tangling wild,
And budding, blown, or odour-faded blooms
Which star the winds with points of coloured light,
As they rain through them, and bright golden globes
Of fruit, suspended in their own green heaven,
And through their veinèd leaves and amber stems
The flowers whose purple and translucid bowls
Stand ever mantling with aëreal dew,
The drink of spirits: and it circles round,
Like the soft waving wings of noonday dreams,
Inspiring calm and happy thoughts, like mine,
Now thou art thus restored. This cave is thine.
Arise! Appear! [*A* SPIRIT *rises in the likeness of a winged child.*
This is my torch-bearer;
Who let his lamp out in old time with gazing
On eyes from which he kindled it anew
With love, which is as fire, sweet daughter mine,
For such is that within thine own. Run, wayward,
And guide this company beyond the peak
Of Bacchic Nysa, Maenad-haunted mountain,
And beyond Indus and its tribute rivers,
Trampling the torrent streams and glassy lakes
With feet unwet, unwearied, undelaying,
And up the green ravine, across the vale,
Beside the windless and crystalline pool,
Where ever lies, on unerasing waves,
The image of a temple, built above,
Distinct with column, arch, and architrave,
And palm-like capital, and over-wrought,
And populous with most living imagery,
Praxitelean shapes, whose marble smiles
Fill the hushed air with everlasting love.
It is deserted now, but once it bore
Thy name, Prometheus; there the emulous youths
Bore to thy honour through the divine gloom
The lamp which was thine emblem; even as those

154. "Nysa," a mountain (or city) in India. Compare II, iii, 9 n.
165. Praxiteles was one of the most famous of Greek sculptors. He lived in the fourth century B.C.

Who bear the untransmitted torch of hope
Into the grave, across the night of life,
As thou hast borne it most triumphantly
To this far goal of Time. Depart, farewell.
Beside that temple is the destined cave.

SCENE IV. — *A Forest. In the Background a Cave.* PROMETHEUS, ASIA, PANTHEA, IONE, *and the* SPIRIT OF THE EARTH.

Ione. Sister, it is not earthly: how it glides
Under the leaves! how on its head there burns
A light, like a green star, whose emerald beams
Are twined with its fair hair! how, as it moves,
The splendour drops in flakes upon the grass!
Knowest thou it?

Panthea. It is the delicate spirit
That guides the earth through heaven. From afar
The populous constellations call that light
The loveliest of the planets; and sometimes
It floats along the spray of the salt sea,
Or makes its chariot of a foggy cloud,
Or walks through fields or cities while men sleep,
Or o'er the mountain tops, or down the rivers,
Or through the green waste wilderness, as now,
Wondering at all it sees. Before Jove reigned
It loved our sister Asia, and it came
Each leisure hour to drink the liquid light
Out of her eyes, for which it said it thirsted
As one bit by a dipsas, and with her
It made its childish confidence, and told her

171. "Untransmitted" is explained by Locock as follows: "Prometheus and others like him, who bear throughout their lives that light which is the hope of the world, bear it alone, without aid from others."

174. Does this imply that Time is at an end? Compare I, 809 n.

1. This may or may not be the Spirit summoned by the Earth in l. 148 of the previous scene. Mr. Grabo (see *A Newton Among Poets*, Chap. VIII) has tried to identify the Spirit of the Earth with electricity.

5. Compare Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*, ll. 275–76.

14. Compare *Alastor*, l. 54 and n.

19. "Dipsas," a poisonous serpent mentioned, together with "amphisbaena" (see l. 119 below), by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, X, 524–26. Both these, as well as "seps" (compare III, i, 40 above), are named in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Book IX.

All it had known or seen, for it saw much,
Yet idly reasoned what it saw; and called her —
For whence it sprung it knew not, nor do I —
Mother, dear mother.

The Spirit of the Earth (*running to* ASIA). Mother, dearest mother;
May I then talk with thee as I was wont?
May I then hide my eyes in thy soft arms,
After thy looks have made them tired of joy?
May I then play beside thee the long noons,
When work is none in the bright silent air?

Asia. I love thee, gentlest being, and henceforth
Can cherish thee unenvied: speak, I pray:
Thy simple talk once solaced, now delights.

Spirit of the Earth. Mother, I am grown wiser, though a child
Cannot be wise like thee, within this day;
And happier too; happier and wiser both.
Thou knowest that toads, and snakes, and loathly worms,
And venomous and malicious beasts, and boughs
That bore ill berries in the woods, were ever
An hindrance to my walks o'er the green world:
And that, among the haunts of humankind,
Hard-featured men, or with proud, angry looks,
Or cold, staid gait, or false and hollow smiles,
Or the dull sneer of self-loved ignorance,
Or other such foul masks, with which ill thoughts
Hide that fair being whom we spirits call man;
And women too, ugliest of all things evil,
(Though fair, even in a world where thou art fair,
When good and kind, free and sincere like thee),
When false or frowning, made me sick at heart
To pass them, though they slept, and I unseen.
Well, my path lately lay through a great city

29. *I.e.*, "when the Earth can see its way through space without guidance" (Locock).

49. I have inserted a comma after "frowning," since "made" must serve as the verb for "men" (l. 41) as well as for "women." — The style here, and in some succeeding parts of the scene, suggests that of *Queen Mab* (with the last canto of which the present scene may be compared) and gives the impression of having been written hastily, in the absence of genuine inspiration.

Into the woody hills surrounding it:
A sentinel was sleeping at the gate:
When there was heard a sound, so loud, it shook
The towers amid the moonlight, yet more sweet
Than any voice but thine, sweetest of all;
A long, long sound, as it would never end:
And all the inhabitants leaped suddenly
Out of their rest, and gathered in the streets,
Looking in wonder up to Heaven, while yet
The music pealed along. I hid myself
Within a fountain in the public square,
Where I lay like the reflex of the moon
Seen in a wave under green leaves; and soon
Those ugly human shapes and visages
Of which I spoke as having wrought me pain,
Passed floating through the air, and fading still
Into the winds that scattered them; and those
From whom they passed seemed mild and lovely forms
After some foul disguise had fallen, and all
Were somewhat changed, and after brief surprise
And greetings of delighted wonder, all
Went to their sleep again: and when the dawn
Came, wouldst thou think that toads, and snakes, and efts,
Could e'er be beautiful? yet so they were,
And that with little change of shape or hue:
All things had put their evil nature off:
I cannot tell my joy, when o'er a lake
Upon a drooping bough with nightshade twined,
I saw two azure halcyons clinging downward
And thinning one bright bunch of amber berries,
With quick long beaks, and in the deep there lay
Those lovely forms imaged as in a sky;
So, with my thoughts full of these happy changes,
We meet again, the happiest change of all.

Asia. And never will we part, till thy chaste sister

54. *I.e.,* from the shell.

65 ff. The opposite change is described in *The Triumph of Life,* ll. 516 ff.

77. It must be remembered that this seemingly sudden and easy transformation is the result of Prometheus' slow achievement of moral perfection through thousands of years of suffering.

80. The harmony in nature appears in the fact that "kingfishers have become vegetarians."

Who guides the frozen and inconstant moon
Will look on thy more warm and equal light
Till her heart thaw like flakes of April snow
And love thee.
Spirit of the Earth. What! as Asia loves Prometheus?
Asia. Peace, wanton, thou art yet not old enough.
Think ye by gazing on each other's eyes
To multiply your lovely selves, and fill
With spherèd fires the interlunar air?
Spirit of the Earth. Nay, mother, while my sister trims her lamp
'Tis hard I should go darkling.
Asia. Listen; look!
[*The* SPIRIT OF THE HOUR *enters.*
Prometheus. We feel what thou has heard and seen: yet speak.
Spirit of the Hour. Soon as the sound had ceased whose thunder filled
The abysses of the sky and the wide earth,
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 spherèd world.
My vision then grew clear, and I could see
Into the mysteries of the universe:
Dizzy as with delight I floated down,
Winnowing the lightsome air with languid plumes,
My coursers sought their birthplace in the sun,
Where they henceforth will live exempt from toil,
Pasturing flowers of vegetable fire;
And where my moonlike car will stand within
A temple, gazed upon by Phidian forms
Of thee, and Asia, and the Earth, and me,
And you fair nymphs looking the love we feel,—
In memory of the tidings it has borne,—
Beneath a dome fretted with graven flowers,
Poised on twelve columns of resplendent stone,
And open to the bright and liquid sky.
Yoked to it by an amphisbaenic snake

119. "Amphisbaenic snake," a snake with two heads. Compare *The Revolt of Islam,* VIII, xxi, 8 and the note on l. 19 of the present scene.

The likeness of those wingèd steeds will mock
The flight from which they find repose. Alas,
Whither has wandered now my partial tongue
When all remains untold which ye would hear?
As I have said, I floated to the earth:
It was, as it is still, the pain of bliss
To move, to breathe, to be; 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, and men walked
One with the other even as spirits do,
None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear,
Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
No more inscribed, as o'er the gate of hell,
"All hope abandon ye who enter here";
None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear
Gazed on another's eye of cold command,
Until the subject of a tyrant's will
Became, worse fate, the abject of his own,
Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.
None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines
Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak;
None, with firm sneer, trod out in his own heart
The sparks of love and hope till there remained
Those bitter ashes, a soul self-consumed,
And the wretch crept a vampire among men,
Infecting all with his own hideous ill;
None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk

131 ff. This is perhaps the most explicit and detailed presentation of the democratic ideal that is to be found in Shelley's poetry. The society here pictured has been condemned as anarchistic; and of course it is. But the point that Shelley is making is not that the ideal is to be realized by the abolition of present social sanctions, evil in effect though some of these are, but that such a society of truly free spirits would be possible if individual men and women were to follow the example of Prometheus. — Few thinking persons, I imagine, will today be so bold as to assert that Shelley's indictment of existing society goes beyond the facts.

136. The inscription over the gate of the Inferno in Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

140. "Abject" probably means "slave."

Which makes the heart deny the *yes* it breathes,
Yet question that unmeant hypocrisy
With such a self-mistrust as has no name.
And women, too, frank, beautiful, and kind
As the free heaven which rains fresh light and dew
On the wide earth, passed; 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; nor pride,
Nor jealousy, nor envy, nor ill shame,
The bitterest of those drops of treasured gall,
Spoilt the sweet taste of the nepenthe, love.

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons, — wherein,
And beside which, by wretched men were borne
Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,
Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame,
Which, from their unworn obelisks, look forth
In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors, mouldering round.
These imaged, to the pride of kings and priests,
A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide
As is the world it wasted, and are now

150. *I.e.*, the automatic response (hence "unmeant hypocrisy") to conventional, "polite" conversation, which is nevertheless *felt* to be insincere and therefore debasing. Compare the following, from a letter to Clare Claremont in 1822: "The Baths, I think, do me good, but especially solitude, and not seeing polite human faces, and hearing voices."

153. The emancipation of women (urged by Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin) was always a cardinal principle of Shelley's social philosophy. It is almost the main theme of *The Revolt of Islam* (see, for instance, II, xxxiv-xliv and VIII, xv). Compare also *Peter Bell the Third*, III, x. — The question of "free love" is discussed in the general introduction.

164. The punctuation of the remainder of the scene has been much discussed. The present text follows that of Locock.

173 ff. "These" refers to "shapes" (l. 168), which apparently are the statues of primitive beast-gods. The "dark yet mighty faith" which these represented is probably religious superstition in general, allied to political tyranny. The latest and last "tools and emblems" (ll. 176–77) of this "faith" are the "thrones, altars," etc. of l. 164.

But an astonishment; even so the tools
And emblems of its last captivity,
Amid the dwellings of the peopled earth,
Stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now.
And those foul shapes, abhorred by god and man,
Which, under many a name and many a form,
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable,
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world;
And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love
Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,
And slain amid men's unreclaiming tears,
Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate, —
Frown, mouldering fast, o'er their abandoned shrines:
The painted veil, by those who were, called life,
Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
All men believed or hoped, is torn aside;
The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains, —
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, — but man:

179. This line implies that social reform in general is to follow rather than precede the reformation of individuals. Shelley seems to have been fairly consistent in adhering to this belief during his later years — without ceasing to support any concrete reform that seemed practicable.

180 ff. The "foul shapes" would seem to be all the evil creations of the human mind; degrading superstitions, senseless and cruel customs, unjust institutions. Compare *The Revolt of Islam*, I, xxvii:

> the Spirit of Evil
> One Power of many shapes which none may know,
> One Shape of many names;

also the three succeeding stanzas, and II, vi–viii.

190. The resemblance to III, iii, 113 above is deceptive. There the "veil" seems to mean the whole of physical life. Here it means rather men's false beliefs (embodied in customs, conventions, superstitions, and habits of thought) about life. Compare the sonnet beginning "Lift not the painted veil."

194. The phrase "but man" here and three lines below is rather baffling. Possibly Shelley foresaw the objections of "tough-minded" critics like Sir Leslie Stephen, who comments: "To be 'unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,' and, we may add, without marriage, is to be in the lowest depths of barbarism." The poet's answer is: "Regenerate man does not need these artificial social distinctions to prevent him from relapsing into barbarism. He can be his own master and still be reasonable and just." In the same way, it might be said that to be perfectly "just, gentle, wise" is a state reserved for angels, not to be expected of men. And Shelley's "but man" would be the denial of such a contention.

Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, — the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise, — but man:
Passionless? no: yet free from guilt or pain,
Which were, for his will made, or suffered them,
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
From chance, and death, and mutability,
The clogs of that which else might oversoar
The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

ACT IV

SCENE. — *A Part of the Forest near the Cave of* PROMETHEUS. PANTHEA *and* IONE *are sleeping: they awaken gradually during the first Song.*

Voice of unseen Spirits

The pale stars are gone!
For the sun, their swift shepherd,
To their folds them compelling,
In the depths of the dawn,
Hastes, in meteor-eclipsing array, and they flee
Beyond his blue dwelling,
As fawns flee the leopard.
But where are ye?

A Train of dark Forms and Shadows passes by confusedly, singing.

Here, oh, here:
We bear the bier

198. In IV, 404, Shelley implies that pain still exists, though in milder form. Perhaps there he is thinking of *physical* pain and here of *spiritual* pain (caused by hate, fear, envy, and so on); and for Shelley the mental world is always much more real than the physical.

201. Compare the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, l. 31.

202. "That," the human soul.

1. Woodberry describes this act as having (after the manner of a musical composition) "three movements: the paean of the Hours, the antiphony of the Earth and the Moon, the Invocation of the Universe by Demogorgon."

Of the Father of many a cancelled year!
Spectres we
Of the dead Hours be,
We bear Time to his tomb in eternity.

Strew, oh, strew
Hair, not yew!
Wet the dusty pall with tears, not dew!
Be the faded flowers
Of Death's bare bowers
Spread on the corpse of the King of Hours!

Haste, oh, haste!
As shades are chased,
Trembling, by day, from heaven's blue waste,
We melt away,
Like dissolving spray,
From the children of a diviner day,
With the lullaby
Of winds that die
On the bosom of their own harmony!

Ione

What dark forms were they?

Panthea

The past Hours weak and gray,
With the spoil which their toil
Raked together
From the conquest but One could foil.

14. Compare I, 809 n. The poet here implies that Time is at an end, and that the timeless realm spoken of so eloquently by Plato and the neo-Platonists, and, in fact, by mystics of all periods and persuasions, has now been realized. A world of time is a world of change and imperfection; and Shelley, the passionate seeker for perfection and permanence, is inclined to regard Time as a condition, if not the cause, of illusion, error, and pain. (Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, i, and *Hellas*, ll. 767, 783, and 1007.) Such a world, however, cannot be made intelligible in words, and in trying to make it concrete, the poet inevitably runs into contradictions.

26. *I.e.*, "the future Hours" [Locock].

34. "One" here, as in I, 2, is evidently Prometheus.

Ione

Have they passed?

Panthea

They have passed;
They outspeeded the blast,
While 'tis said, they are fled:

Ione

Whither, oh, whither?

Panthea

To the dark, to the past, to the dead.

Voice of unseen Spirits

Bright clouds float in heaven,
Dew-stars gleam on earth,
Waves assemble on ocean,
They are gathered and driven
By the storm of delight, by the panic of glee!
They shake with emotion,
They dance in their mirth.
But where are ye?

The pine boughs are singing
Old songs with new gladness,
The billows and fountains
Fresh music are flinging,
Like the notes of a spirit from land and from sea;
The storms mock the mountains
With the thunder of gladness.
But where are ye?

Ione. What charioteers are these?
Panthea. Where are their chariots?

Semichorus of Hours

The voice of the Spirits of Air and of Earth
Have drawn back the figured curtain of sleep

47. "Ye" refers again to "the future Hours," who appear after l. 56.
56. "These," the approaching Hours. — I do not understand Panthea's reply.

Which covered our being and darkened our birth
In the deep.

A Voice

In the deep?

Semichorus II

Oh, below the deep.

Semichorus I

An hundred ages we had been kept
Cradled in visions of hate and care,
And each one who waked as his brother slept,
Found the truth —

Semichorus II

Worse than his visions were!

Semichorus I

We have heard the lute of Hope in sleep;
We have known the voice of Love in dreams;
We have felt the wand of Power, and leap —

Semichorus II

As the billows leap in the morning beams!

Chorus

Weave the dance on the floor of the breeze,
Pierce with song heaven's silent light,
Enchant the day that too swiftly flees,
To check its flight ere the cave of Night.

Once the hungry Hours were hounds
Which chased the day like a bleeding deer,

58. Compare *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills*, l. 43 and n.
60. *I.e.*, the realm of Demogorgon. Compare II, iii, 81, and II, iv, 130 ff.
65–67. Woodberry points out that these three lines might be taken as expressing the main themes of the first three acts. — Mr. Grabo raises the question of how these Hours can appear at all, since Time is said to have been transcended, and offers the ingenious explanation that "all the future Hours come to life at once. The whole of futurity is thus manifest in the present instant." Each Hour had previously awakened separately (l. 63).

And it limped and stumbled with many wounds
Through the nightly dells of the desert year.

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.

A Voice

Unite!

Panthea. See, where the Spirits of the human mind
Wrapped in sweet sounds, as in bright veils, approach.

Chorus of Spirits

We join the throng
Of the dance and the song,
By the whirlwind of gladness borne along;
As the flying-fish leap
From the Indian deep,
And mix with the sea-birds half asleep.

Chorus of Hours

Whence come ye, so wild and so fleet,
For sandals of lightning are on your feet,
And your wings are soft and swift as thought,
And your eyes are as love which is veilèd not?

Chorus of Spirits

We come from the mind
Of human kind
Which was late so dusk, and obscene, and blind;
Now 'tis an ocean
Of clear emotion,
A heaven of serene and mighty motion.

79. It is not clear whether or not these "spirits of might and pleasure" are the same as the "Spirits of the human mind" in l. 81. Locock identifies the latter with the "subtle and fair spirits" of I, 658.

93–98. Compare ll. 380–84 below.

From that deep abyss
Of wonder and bliss,
Whose caverns are crystal palaces;
From those skiey towers
Where Thought's crowned powers
Sit watching your dance, ye happy Hours!

From the dim recesses
Of woven caresses,
Where lovers catch ye by your loose tresses;
From the azure isles,
Where sweet Wisdom smiles,
Delaying your ships with her siren wiles.

From the temples high
Of Man's ear and eye,
Roofed over Sculpture and Poesy;
From the murmurings
Of the unsealed springs
Where Science bedews her Daedal wings.

Years after years,
Through blood, and tears,
And a thick hell of hatreds, and hopes, and fears;
We waded and flew,
And the islets were few
Where the bud-blighted flowers of happiness grew.

Our feet now, every palm,
Are sandalled with calm,
And the dew of our wings is a rain of balm;
And, beyond our eyes,
The human love lies
Which makes all it gazes on Paradise.

Chorus of Spirits and Hours

Then weave the web of the mystic measure;
From the depths of the sky and the ends of the earth,
Come, swift Spirits of might and of pleasure,

99. This stanza I take to be descriptive of the mind *in general*, whereas the two following stanzas mention *particular activities* of the mind: love, philosophy, art, and science.

123. "Palm," — compare *Adonais*, l. 212 and n.

Fill the dance and the music of mirth,
As the waves of a thousand streams rush by
To an ocean of splendour and harmony!

Chorus of Spirits

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

We'll pass the eyes
Of the starry skies
Into the hoar deep to colonize:
Death, Chaos, and Night,
From the sound of our flight,
Shall flee, like mist from a tempest's might.

And Earth, Air, and Light,
And the Spirit of Might,
Which drives round the stars in their fiery flight;
And Love, Thought, and Breath,
The powers that quell Death,
Wherever we soar shall assemble beneath.

135. The activity of the Spirits which is described in this chorus seems to be inconsistent with the earlier suggestion of a timeless realm. It is impossible to conceive the building of a new world except in time; and, indeed, the Hours assist in the process (ll. 169–71). Moreover, some of the Hours remain on Earth (l. 162) to accompany its operations. — Another interesting fact about this chorus is the light it casts on Shelley's cosmology. Apparently, like Plato and like Milton, Shelley believed that the universe has been created from some primordial flux, or Chaos, by a creative Intelligence. Compare *The Revolt of Islam,* I, xxv; *Adonais,* ll. 166–67; and *Hellas,* ll. 46–48, 772. On the other hand, some critics have said that Shelley believes Mind to be the only reality. Compare III, iii, 85 n. For a full discussion of the problem, see the present editor's *Shelley's Religion,* pp. 47–54, 88–95.

147. "Earth" here is evidently one of the four elements of the ancient philosophers. The "Spirit of Might" in the next line is of course Newton's principle of gravitation. "Stars" probably means planets; compare ll. 397–99 below. The first part of the stanza refers to the physical powers, the second part to the spiritual powers, both of which must be combined in a "living world."

And our singing shall build
In the void's loose field
A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield;
We will take our plan
From the new world of man,
And our work shall be called the Promethean.

Chorus of Hours

Break the dance, and scatter the song;
Let some depart, and some remain.

Semichorus I

We, beyond heaven, are driven along:

Semichorus II

Us the enchantments of earth retain:

Semichorus I

Ceaseless, and rapid, and fierce, and free,
With the Spirits which build a new earth and sea,
And a heaven where yet heaven could never be.

Semichorus II

Solemn, and slow, and serene, and bright,
Leading the Day and outspeeding the Night,
With the powers of a world of perfect light.

Semichorus I

We whirl, singing loud, round the gathering sphere,
Till the trees, and the beasts, and the clouds appear
From its chaos made calm by love, not fear.

Semichorus II

We encircle the ocean and mountains of earth,
And the happy forms of its death and birth
Change to the music of our sweet mirth.

Chorus of Hours and Spirits

Break the dance, and scatter the song,
Let some depart, and some remain,
Wherever we fly we lead along

In leashes, like starbeams, soft yet strong,
The clouds that are heavy with love's sweet rain.
Panthea. Ha! they are gone!
Ione. Yet feel you no delight
From the past sweetness?
Panthea. As the bare green hill
When some soft cloud vanishes into rain,
Laughs with a thousand drops of sunny water
To the unpavilioned sky!
Ione. Even whilst we speak
New notes arise. What is that awful sound?
Panthea. 'Tis the deep music of the rolling world
Kindling within the strings of the waved air
Aeolian modulations.
Ione. Listen too,
How every pause is filled with under-notes,
Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones,
Which pierce the sense, and live within the soul,
As the sharp stars pierce winter's crystal air
And gaze upon themselves within the sea.
Panthea. But see where through two openings in the forest
Which hanging branches overcanopy,
And where two runnels of a rivulet,
Between the close moss violet-inwoven,
Have made their path of melody, like sisters
Who part with sighs that they may meet in smiles,
Turning their dear disunion to an isle
Of lovely grief, a wood of sweet sad thoughts;
Two visions of strange radiance float upon

180. Woodberry comments: "Panthea and Ione are the spectators and act as the chorus, in the Greek sense, to the other participants. The part of the chorus has from the beginning of the drama threatened to overwhelm the part of the actors; here it does so to such an extent that the Act presents the anomaly (in form) of lyrical passages as the main interest, with the chorus, properly speaking, in blank verse." Locock says justly that "the blank verse marks the highest level attained by Shelley."

202. For the image of "the stream of sound," compare II, ii, 59; II, v, 74; and IV, 505. — The "two visions" represent the Moon and the Earth respectively. The Earth here is probably to be identified with the Spirit of the Earth of III, iv, since the prophecy of Asia (ll. 86–89) concerning the future love between that Spirit and its "chaste sister Who guides the . . . moon" is fulfilled in the present act. Yet the second and third speeches of the Earth contain many suggestions of the Mother Earth of

The ocean-like enchantment of strong sound,
Which flows intenser, keener, deeper yet
Under the ground and through the windless air.
Ione. I see a chariot like that thinnest boat,
In which the Mother of the Months is borne
By ebbing light into her western cave,
When she upsprings from interlunar dreams;
O'er which is curved an orblike canopy
Of gentle darkness, and the hills and woods,
Distinctly seen through that dusk aery veil,
Regard like shapes in an enchanter's glass;
Its wheels are solid clouds, azure and gold,
Such as the genii of the thunderstorm
Pile on the floor of the illumined sea
When the sun rushes under it; they roll
And move and grow as with an inward wind;
Within it sits a wingèd infant, white
Its countenance, like the whiteness of bright snow,
Its plumes are as feathers of sunny frost,
Its limbs gleam white, through the wind-flowing folds
Of its white robe, woof of ethereal pearl.
Its hair is white, the brightness of white light

Act. I. — Mr. Grabo in *A Newton Among Poets* (see particularly Chap. IX) argues that Shelley's main purpose in the following description of the "two visions" is to poetize a certain body of scientific theory derived from Sir Humphrey Davy, Erasmus Darwin, and others. To the present editor, however, the parallels cited are often unconvincing. It is true that Shelley in his youth was greatly attracted by sensational or striking scientific experiments and theories; but the records of his later life offer practically no evidence that he remained so, or that the use in his poetry of the information which he had earlier acquired was more than incidental. Nor is it clear that Mrs. Shelley's statement in her note on *Prometheus Unbound* — that "Shelley develops more particularly in the lyrics of this drama, his abstruse and imaginative theories with regard to the Creation" — is to be applied to the kind of theory which Mr. Grabo discusses. Need we look in the present instance for any deeper motive than the desire to express, through the appearance as well as the speech of the spirits who personify the Earth and the Moon, the intense beauty and exaltation of the spiritual life which waits upon such an achievement as that of Prometheus? — Incidentally, some of the passages which Mr. Grabo traces to Shelley's scientific reading may have been suggested by Plato's *Timaeus*.

219. The repetition of the word "white" is extraordinarily effective. The Moon has not yet felt the transforming power of love, and hence is represented as a frozen world. Compare l. 356.

Scattered in strings; yet its two eyes are heavens
Of liquid darkness, which the Deity
Within seems pouring, as a storm is poured
From jaggèd clouds, out of their arrowy lashes,
Tempering the cold and radiant air around,
With fire that is not brightness; in its hand
It sways a quivering moonbeam, from whose point
A guiding power directs the chariot's prow
Over its wheelèd clouds, which as they roll
Over the grass, and flowers, and waves, wake sounds,
Sweet as a singing rain of silver dew.

Panthea. And from the other opening in the wood
Rushes, with loud and whirlwind harmony,
A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,
Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass
Flow, as through empty space, music and light:
Ten thousand orbs involving and involved,
Purple and azure, white, and green, and golden,
Sphere within sphere; and every space between
Peopled with unimaginable shapes,
Such as ghosts dream dwell in the lampless deep,
Yet each inter-transpicuous, and they whirl
Over each other with a thousand motions,
Upon a thousand sightless axles spinning,
And with the force of self-destroying swiftness,

225–30. Mr. Grabo thinks that this is a reference to the invisible heat rays discovered by Herschel, who suggested that the moon might reflect such rays as well as light rays (*A Newton Among Poets,* p. 155). But compare the *Timaeus,* 45: "So much fire as would not burn, but gave a gentle light, they [the gods] formed into a substance akin to the light of every-day life; and the pure fire which is within us and related thereto they made to flow through the eyes in a stream smooth and dense" (Jowett's translation, as below).

238 ff. Mr. Grabo (*op. cit.,* pp. 141–42) traces this passage to theories of matter advanced by Darwin and Davy. But it has a good deal in common with Plato's description of the cosmos in the *Timaeus,* 40.

242. These colors are mentioned, among others, in a theory of vision discussed in the *Timaeus,* 68. In the same place, Plato advances theories concerning the nature of odours and sounds. Compare also the *Phaedo,* 110.

248. "Sightless," — compare *Alastor,* l. 610 and n.

249. "The idea seems to be that the movement of the component parts of the sphere is so rapid that its speed as a whole is lessened, perhaps by friction" [Locock]. Compare l. 259.

Intensely, slowly, solemnly roll on,
Kindling with mingled sounds, and many tones,
Intelligible words and music wild.
With mighty whirl the multitudinous orb
Grinds the bright brook into an azure mist
Of elemental subtlety, like light;
And the wild odour of the forest flowers,
The music of the living grass and air,
The emerald light of leaf-entangled beams
Round its intense yet self-conflicting speed,
Seem kneaded into one aëreal mass
Which drowns the sense. Within the orb itself,
Pillowed upon its alabaster arms,
Like to a child o'erwearied with sweet toil,
On its own folded wings, and wavy hair,
The Spirit of the Earth is laid asleep,
And you can see its little lips are moving,
Amid the changing light of their own smiles,
Like one who talks of what he loves in dream.
Ione. 'Tis only mocking the orb's harmony.
Panthea. And from a star upon its forehead, shoot,
Like swords of azure fire, or golden spears
With tyrant-quelling myrtle overtwined,
Embleming heaven and earth united now,
Vast beams like spokes of some invisible wheel
Which whirl as the orb whirls, swifter than thought,
Filling the abyss with sun-like lightenings,
And perpendicular now, and now transverse,

256. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 109–10.

270. Mr. Grabo, with more plausibility than usual, argues (pp. 145 ff.) that Shelley in this passage is describing various electrical phenomena, including the aurora borealis, or northern lights. He adds, "If the interpretation given is not granted, the lines are merely fanciful description and Shelley is no more than a 'pretty poet.'" Why is it necessarily a more attractive alternative to be — not "a Newton among poets," but — a versifier of scientific theories picked up at second or third hand? — With the "star upon its forehead" compare I, 765: "planet-crested shape"; also *The Revolt of Islam*, I, lvii.

272. Woodberry says that "the reference is to Harmodius and Aristogiton," rebels against the Athenian tyrant Hippias in the sixth century B.C., who came to be regarded as heroes by the democratic party. They concealed their daggers in branches of myrtle. "Tyrant-quelling" is from Coleridge's *France: An Ode*, l. 37.

Pierce the dark soil, and as they pierce and pass,
Make bare the secrets of the earth's deep heart;
Infinite mines of adamant and gold,
Valueless stones, and unimagined gems,
And caverns on crystàlline columns poised
With vegetable silver overspread;
Wells of unfathomed fire, and water springs
Whence the great sea, even as a child, is fed,
Whose vapours clothe earth's monarch mountain-tops
With kingly, ermine snow. The beams flash on
And make appear the melancholy ruins
Of cancelled cycles; anchors, beaks of ships;
Planks turned to marble; quivers, helms, and spears,
And gorgon-headed targes, and the wheels
Of scythèd chariots, and the emblazonry
Of trophies, standards, and armorial beasts,
Round which death laughed, sepulchred emblems
Of dead destruction, ruin within ruin!
The wrecks beside of many a city vast,
Whose population which the earth grew over
Was mortal, but not human; see, they lie,
Their monstrous works, and uncouth skeletons,
Their statues, homes and fanes; prodigious shapes
Huddled in gray annihilation, split,
Jammed in the hard, black deep; and over these,
The anatomies of unknown wingèd things,
And fishes which were isles of living scale,
And serpents, bony chains, twisted around
The iron crags, or within heaps of dust
To which the tortuous strength of their last pangs

280. Gold and adamant ("a shoot of gold") are mentioned together in the *Timaeus*, 59.

281. "Valueless," beyond value. Compare "unvalued stones," *Arethusa*, l. 60.

283. "Vegetable silver," "apparently some floriate mineral pattern silvery in color" [Grabo].

287. Mr. C. A. Brown has pointed out that the following passage seems to owe many details to Parkinson's *Organic Remains*, which Shelley read in 1812. This history of the earth is hardly compatible with that given by Asia in II, iv; one has its origin in modern science, the other in Greek myth. Either one, however, provides a suitable prologue to the appearance on earth of a regenerate humanity.

Had crushed the iron crags; and over these
The jaggèd alligator, and the might
Of earth-convulsing behemoth, which once
Were monarch beasts, and on the slimy shores,
And weed-overgrown continents of earth,
Increased and multiplied like summer worms
On an abandoned corpse, till the blue globe
Wrapped deluge round it like a cloak, and they
Yelled, gasped, and were abolished; or some God
Whose throne was in a comet, passed, and cried,
"Be not!" And like my words they were no more.

The Earth

The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness!
The boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness,
The vaporous exultation not to be confined!
Ha! ha! the animation of delight
Which wraps me, like an atmosphere of light,
And bears me as a cloud is borne by its own wind.

The Moon

Brother mine, calm wanderer,
Happy globe of land and air,
Some Spirit is darted like a beam from thee,
Which penetrates my frozen frame,
And passes with the warmth of flame,
With love, and odour, and deep melody
Through me, through me!

The Earth

Ha! ha! the caverns of my hollow mountains,
My cloven fire-crags, sound-exulting fountains
Laugh with a vast and inextinguishable laughter.
The oceans, and the deserts, and the abysses
Of the deep air's unmeasured wildernesses,
Answer from all their clouds and billows, echoing after.

310. "Behemoth," — see Job 40:15 ff., and *Paradise Lost*, VII, 471.

316–18. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 368–70. Mr. Grabo shows that Shelley might have found in the writings of Davy speculations about a prehistoric deluge caused by a passing comet.

336. I follow Locock and the Bodleian MS. in reading "of" for "and."

They cry aloud as I do. Sceptred curse,
Who all our green and azure universe
Threatenedst to muffle round with black destruction, sending
A solid cloud to rain hot thunderstones,
And splinter and knead down my children's bones,
All I bring forth, to one void mass battering and blending,—

Until each crag-like tower, and storied column,
Palace, and obelisk, and temple solemn,
My imperial mountains crowned with cloud, and snow, and fire;
My sea-like forests, every blade and blossom
Which finds a grave or cradle in my bosom,
Were stamped by thy strong hate into a lifeless mire:

How art thou sunk, withdrawn, covered, drunk up
By thirsty nothing, as the brackish cup
Drained by a desert-troop, a little drop for all;
And from beneath, around, within, above,
Filling thy void annihilation, love
Bursts in like light on caves cloven by the thunder-ball.

The Moon

The snow upon my lifeless mountains
Is loosened into living fountains,
My solid oceans flow, and sing, and shine:
A spirit from my heart bursts forth,
It clothes with unexpected birth
My cold bare bosom: Oh! it must be thine
On mine, on mine!

Gazing on thee I feel, I know
Green stalks burst forth, and bright flowers grow,
And living shapes upon my bosom move:
Music is in the sea and air,
Wingèd clouds soar here and there,
Dark with the rain new buds are dreaming of:
'Tis love, all love!

338. "Sceptred curse," Jupiter.
358. It was believed in Shelley's day that there were frozen oceans on the moon.

The Earth

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,
It wakes a life in the forgotten dead,
They breathe a spirit up from their obscurest bowers;

And like a storm bursting its cloudy prison
With thunder, and with whirlwind, has arisen
Out of the lampless caves of unimagined being:
With earthquake shock and swiftness making shiver
Thought's stagnant chaos, unremoved for ever,
Till hate, and fear, and pain, light-vanquished shadows, fleeing,

Leave Man, who was a many-sided mirror,
Which could distort to many a shape of error
This true fair world of things, a sea reflecting love;
Which over all his kind, as the sun's heaven
Gliding o'er ocean, smooth, serene, and even,
Darting from starry depths radiance and life, doth move:

Leave Man, even as a leprous child is left,
Who follows a sick beast to some warm cleft
Of rocks, through which the might of healing springs is poured;
Then when it wanders home with rosy smile,
Unconscious, and its mother fears awhile
It is a spirit, then, weeps on her child restored.

370. "It" refers to "love."

375. Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 560. Shelley's references to the state of the dead are not always consistent. Although he seems to have held fairly steadily to belief in *some kind* of immortality, he refuses to try to *picture* any life after death.

377. The subject of "has arisen" is "it" (l. 374).

380. Shelley's meaning apparently is that Thought (Mind, Intelligence) becomes creative, and brings a cosmos out of chaos, only when impelled by Love.

381–84. Compare III, iii, 85 n. "Many-sided" probably implies, as Mr. Grabo suggests, that at least part of the distortion is due to the selfish "separateness of the individual from his kind." — "Sea" may be in apposition with "world" or, more probably, with "Man." "Which," in the following line, I take to refer also to "Man."

391–93. The sentence is left grammatically incomplete. Compare II, iv, 12–18 and n.

Man, oh, not men! a chain of linkèd thought,
Of love and might to be divided not,
Compelling the elements with adamantine stress;
As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,
The unquiet republic of the maze
Of planets, struggling fierce towards heaven's free wilderness.

Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
Whose nature is its own divine control,
Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea;
Familiar acts are beautiful through love;
Labour, and pain, and grief, in life's green grove
Sport like tame beasts, none knew how gentle they could be!

His will, with all mean passions, bad delights,
And selfish cares, its trembling satellites,
A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey,
Is as a tempest-wingèd ship, whose helm
Love rules, through waves which dare not overwhelm,
Forcing life's wildest shores to own its sovereign sway.

All things confess his strength. Through the cold mass
Of marble and of colour his dreams pass;
Bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children wear;
Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng
Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

The lightning is his slave; heaven's utmost deep
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep

397–99. A *truly* poetic use of scientific fact. Compare ll. 463–66, 479–80.

400–401. Woodberry calls this "the most compact statement of Shelley's social ideal, with its spontaneous ethical order of love." It should be noted, however, that the doctrine of "natural goodness" here enunciated is qualified in ll. 406–08.

403. Compare II, v, 40–41.

404. This statement seems inconsistent with l. 381. But see III, iv, 198 n. — Compare Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches*, l. 640 (1st ed.): "Labour, and Pain, and Grief, and joyless Age."

414. Compare II, iv, 83 and n.

415. Compare II, iv, 72–73 and n.

418. It is scarcely necessary to comment on the remarkable manner in which Shelley's prophecy has been fulfilled.

They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on.
The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none.

The Moon

The shadow of white death has passed
From my path in heaven at last,
A clinging shroud of solid frost and sleep;
And through my newly-woven bowers,
Wander happy paramours,
Less mighty, but as mild as those who keep
Thy vales more deep.

The Earth

As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold
A half unfrozen dew-globe, green, and gold,
And crystalline, till it becomes a wingèd mist,
And wanders up the vault of the blue day,
Outlives the noon, and on the sun's last ray
Hangs o'er the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst—

The Moon

Thou art folded, thou art lying
In the light which is undying
Of thine own joy, and heaven's smile divine;
All suns and constellations shower
On thee a light, a life, a power
Which doth array thy sphere; thou pourest thine
On mine, on mine!

The Earth

I spin beneath my pyramid of night,
Which points into the heavens, dreaming delight,
Murmuring victorious joy in my enchanted sleep;
As a youth lulled in love-dreams, faintly sighing,
Under the shadow of his beauty lying,
Which round his rest a watch of light and warmth doth keep.

428. "Paramours," lovers. Compare l. 463.

444. Compare *Hellas*, l. 943. Mr. Grabo notes that in Pliny's *Natural History* the shadow cast by the earth is also spoken of as a pyramid instead of as a cone.

448. A striking instance of the tenuousness of Shelley's imagery. Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 61.

The Moon

As in the soft and sweet eclipse,
When soul meets soul on lovers' lips,
High hearts are calm, and brightest eyes are dull;
So when thy shadow falls on me,
Then am I mute and still, by thee
Covered; of thy love, Orb most beautiful,
Full, oh, too full!

Thou art speeding round the sun
Brightest world of many a one;
Green and azure sphere which shinest
With a light which is divinest
Among all the lamps of Heaven
To whom life and light is given;
I, thy crystal paramour
Borne beside thee by a power
Like the polar Paradise,
Magnet-like of lovers' eyes;
I, a most enamoured maiden
Whose weak brain is overladen
With the pleasure of her love,
Maniac-like around thee move,
Gazing, an insatiate bride,
On thy form from every side
Like a Maenad, round the cup
Which Agave lifted up
In the weird Cadmaean forest.
Brother, wheresoe'er thou soarest
I must hurry, whirl and follow
Through the heavens wide and hollow,
Sheltered by the warm embrace
Of thy soul from hungry space,
Drinking from thy sense and sight

450. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 566–68.

453. *I.e.*, in an eclipse of the moon.

455–56. These lines are in pitiful contrast to the magnificent lyrics that have preceded them.

473–75. See II, iii, 9 n. Agave was the daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes; with a band of female revelers, in Dionysiac frenzy she tore her son Pentheus limb from limb.

481. *I.e.*, from the sense and sight that I have of thee.

Beauty, majesty, and might,
As a lover or a chameleon
Grows like what it looks upon,
As a violet's gentle eye
Gazes on the azure sky
Until its hue grows like what it beholds,
As a gray and watery mist
Glows like solid amethyst
Athwart the western mountain it enfolds,
When the sunset sleeps
Upon its snow—

The Earth

And the weak day weeps
That it should be so.
Oh, gentle Moon, the voice of thy delight
Falls on me like thy clear and tender light
Soothing the seaman, borne the summer night,
Through isles for ever calm;
Oh, gentle Moon, thy crystal accents pierce
The caverns of my pride's deep universe,
Charming the tiger joy, whose tramplings fierce
Made wounds which need thy balm.

Panthea. I rise as from a bath of sparkling water,
A bath of azure light, among dark rocks,
Out of the stream of sound.
Ione. Ah me! sweet sister,
The stream of sound has ebbed away from us,
And you pretend to rise out of its wave,
Because your words fall like the clear, soft dew
Shaken from a bathing wood-nymph's limbs and hair.
Panthea. Peace! peace! A mighty Power, which is as darkness,
Is rising out of Earth, and from the sky
Is showered like night, and from within the air
Bursts, like eclipse which had been gathered up
Into the pores of sunlight: the bright visions,
Wherein the singing spirits rode and shone,

484. Compare I, 450 and n.

Gleam like pale meteors through a watery night.
Ione. There is a sense of words upon mine ear.
Panthea. An universal sound like words: Oh, list!

Demogorgon

Thou, Earth, calm empire of a happy soul,
Sphere of divinest shapes and harmonies,
Beautiful orb! gathering as thou dost roll
The love which paves thy path along the skies:

The Earth

I hear: I am as a drop of dew that dies.

Demogorgon

Thou, Moon, which gazest on the nightly Earth
With wonder, as it gazes upon thee;
Whilst each to men, and beasts, and the swift birth
Of birds, is beauty, love, calm, harmony:

The Moon

I hear: I am a leaf shaken by thee!

Demogorgon

Ye Kings of suns and stars, Daemons and Gods,
Aetherial Dominations, who possess
Elysian, windless, fortunate abodes
Beyond Heaven's constellated wilderness:

A Voice from above

Our great Republic hears, we are blest, and bless.

Demogorgon

Ye happy Dead, whom beams of brightest verse
Are clouds to hide, not colours to portray,

526. "Birth," according to Locock, is "probably a Graecism," "standing for 'race,' 'kind.'" Compare the *Timaeus,* 40: "the race of birds whose way is in the air."

529–32. Compare the *Timaeus,* 40: "And for this reason the fixed stars were created, to be divine and eternal animals, ever-abiding and revolving after the same manner and on the same spot."

534. Compare ll. 374–75. With the phrase "happy Dead," compare I, 638–39. The fact that the Dead are addressed and answer indicates that they still participate somehow in the life of the universe.

Whether your nature is that universe
Which once ye saw and suffered—

A Voice from beneath

Or as they
Whom we have left, we change and pass away.

Demogorgon

Ye elemental Genii, who have homes
From man's high mind even to the central stone
Of sullen lead; from heaven's star-fretted domes
To the dull weed some sea-worm battens on:

A confused Voice

We hear: thy words waken Oblivion.

Demogorgon

Spirits, whose homes are flesh: ye beasts and birds,
Ye worms, and fish; ye living leaves and buds;
Lightning and wind; and ye untameable herds,
Meteors and mists, which throng air's solitudes:—

A Voice

Thy voice to us is wind among still woods.

Demogorgon

Man, who wert once a despot and a slave;
A dupe and a deceiver; a decay;
A traveller from the cradle to the grave
Through the dim night of this immortal day:

536–38. These lines have been variously interpreted. I take the alternatives to be (1) *immediate* union of the individual soul with "Nature," or "the one Spirit" (compare *Adonais,* xlii, xliii)—perhaps a destiny reserved for great souls like that of Keats (*Adonais*) or those of Socrates and Christ (*The Triumph of Life,* ll. 128–137); (2) gradual progress towards such a union through a series of incarnations (compare *Hellas,* ll. 201–210 and Shelley's note)—perhaps the fate of the great majority of human souls.

539–42. Compare *Queen Mab,* IV, 139–46.

544–45. Beasts, birds, worms, and fish are mentioned by Plato at the end of the *Timaeus* as comprising the inhabitants of the earth aside from man.

All

Speak: thy strong words may never pass away.

Demogorgon

This is the day, which down the void abysm
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism,
And Conquest is dragged captive through the deep:
Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep,
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
These are the seals of that most firm assurance
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,

555. *I.e.*, following the triumph of Prometheus, awaits the reign of Love.

556. "Conquest," Jupiter. Perhaps, as Locock suggests, "on which" is to be understood after "and."

565–69. It is interesting to find Shelley, at the very end of the poem, venturing on the speculation that his timeless and perfect paradise may sometime be destroyed. Perhaps he is thinking of a new world-cycle (see I, 809 n.) when Time shall reassume its tyranny, give birth to a new reign of Evil, and force the winning of Prometheus' victory again. And indeed, in the final stanza, as Clutton-Brock points out, Shelley acknowledges that the highest good is realizable, the noblest reach of consciousness is achieved, only *in* a state of conflict. This, of course, is inconsistent with the poet's hatred of change and imperfection, his passionate longing for peace. But this paradox is not peculiar to Shelley; it is rooted in the depths of the human soul. — The new conception of Eternity (l. 565), a name hitherto applied to Demogorgon himself, must remain vague, as must the significance of "the serpent" (l. 567), but the general thought is clear. The serpent is in Shelley's early poems very often, although not exclusively, the symbol of good rather than, as here, evil — probably because of the poet's desire to overturn all conventional beliefs. The tendency is less noticeable in the later works. — Mr. Grabo believes that Shelley had in mind Herschel's early theory of a finite universe which "must sometime become, through the action of gravity in drawing all matter to a center, an inert and lifeless mass," and Erasmus Darwin's supplementary theory of an eventual rebirth. Be that as it may, the main emphasis is on the ethical ideal which the drama has exemplified and which is here made explicit.

Mother of many acts and hours, should free
The serpent that would clasp her with his length;
These are the spells by which to reassume
An empire o'er the disentangled doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

THE CENCI

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

[*Editor's Note.*— The *Cenci* was begun at Rome in May, 1819, after the completion of Act III of *Prometheus,* and finished early in August at Leghorn, whither the Shelleys had gone after the death of their remaining child, William, on June 7. Shelley told Peacock that it "was done in two months." — Shelley had been powerfully moved by the story of the Cenci family (a translation of the MS. which was his source is given in Forman's edition and in Woodberry's Centenary Edition of the poems) and by a supposed portrait of Beatrice by Guido — "the most beautiful creature you can conceive." He first suggested to Mrs. Shelley (as she tells us in her excellent note) that she write a tragedy on the subject; she, however, persuaded him to undertake it himself. He hoped to have it produced at Covent Garden Theatre, with Beatrice played by Miss O'Neil, an actress whom he greatly admired, and who, says Mrs. Shelley, "was often in his thoughts as he wrote." It was rejected because of the subject, however, and was not staged until the private production by the Shelley Society in 1886. — Shelley's friends, except Byron, thought highly of the play, as did Mrs. Shelley; and it was the only one of his works to reach a second edition

during his lifetime. He himself wrote to Hunt: "My 'Prometheus' is finished, and I am also on the eve of completing another work, totally different from anything you might conjecture that I should write; of a more popular kind; and, if anything of mine could deserve attention, of higher claims." But the next spring he was writing to Ollier somewhat disparagingly that "'Cenci' is written for the multitude, and ought to sell well"; and to Medwin a little later he remarked, "I don't think very much of it." He repeated this to Trelawny two years later. A comment to Byron early in 1821 is also of interest: "I am aware of the unfitness of the subject, now it is written, but I had a different opinion in composition."]

DEDICATION

To Leigh Hunt, Esq.

My dear friend — I inscribe with your name, from a distant country, and after an absence whose months have seemed years, this the latest of my literary efforts.

Those writings which I have hitherto published, have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been.

Had I known a person more highly endowed than yourself with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had solicited for this work the ornament of his name. One more gentle, honourable, innocent and brave; one of more exalted toleration for all who do and think evil, and yet himself more free from evil; one who knows better how to receive, and how to confer a benefit, though he must ever confer far more than he can receive; one of simpler, and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and manners I never knew: and I had already been fortunate in friendships when your name was added to the list.

In that patient and irreconcilable enmity with domestic and political tyranny and imposture which the tenor of your life has illustrated, and which, had I health and talents, should illustrate mine, let us, comforting each other in our task, live and die.

All happiness attend you! Your affectionate friend,

PERCY B. SHELLEY.

ROME, *May* 29, 1819.

PREFACE

A MANUSCRIPT was communicated to me during my travels in Italy, which was copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome, and contains a detailed account of the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of that city during the Pontificate of Clement VIII, in the year 1599. The story is, that an old man having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived at length an implacable hatred towards his children; which showed itself towards one daughter under the form of an incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence. This daughter, after long and vain attempts to escape from what she considered a perpetual contamination both of body and mind, at length plotted with her mother-in-law [1] and brother to murder their common tyrant. The young maiden, who was urged to this tremendous deed by an impulse which overpowered its horror, was evidently a most gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired, and thus violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstance and opinion. The deed was quickly discovered, and, in spite of the most earnest prayers made to the Pope by the highest persons in Rome, the criminals were put to death. The old man had during his life repeatedly bought his pardon from the Pope for capital crimes of the most enormous and unspeakable kind, at the price of a hundred thousand crowns; the death therefore of his victims can scarcely be accounted for by the love of justice.

[1] "Mother-in-law" is a slip; it should be "step-mother."

The Pope, among other motives for severity, probably felt that whoever killed the Count Cenci deprived his treasury of a certain and copious source of revenue.[2] Such a story, if told so as to present to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions, and opinions, acting upon and with each other, yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart.

On my arrival at Rome I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest; and that the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs,[3] and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her, who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust. All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart. I had a copy of Guido's[4] picture of Beatrice which is preserved in the Colonna Palace, and my servant instantly recognized it as the portrait of *La Cenci*.

This national and universal interest which the story produces and has produced for two centuries and among all ranks of people in a great City, where the imagination is kept for ever active and awake, first suggested to me the conception of its fitness for a dramatic purpose. In fact it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success. Nothing remained as I imagined, but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts. The deepest and the sublimest tragic

[2] The Papal Government formerly took the most extraordinary precautions against the publicity of facts which offer so tragical a demonstration of its own wickedness and weakness; so that the communication of the MS. had become, until very lately, a matter of some difficulty [Shelley's note].

[3] The syntax here is defective.

[4] It is now known that Guido did not paint in Rome until some years after Beatrice's death.

compositions, *King Lear* and the two plays in which the tale of Oedipus is told, were stories which already existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest, before Shakespeare and Sophocles made them familiar to the sympathy of all succeeding generations of mankind.

This story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose.[5] The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have

[5] Compare the statement in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound:* "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence." It will be noted, however, that the point of view taken in the following discussion is essentially that of the moralist rather than that of the artist. It is, nevertheless, widely different from that expressed in the Preface to the earlier play, as well as in *A Defence of Poetry,* where Shelley says that human wrong-doing is due not to lack of knowledge but to a weak or erring will which leaves that knowledge unapplied; and the will is to be aroused by contemplation of the "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" which the poet is able in his inspired moments to endow with life. This view is certainly more characteristic than that expressed in the passage now under discussion; although the latter is much closer to the general trend of aesthetic theory in our own day. — Shelley is perhaps trying here to make out a case for Mary's contention that he ought to write on subjects less devoid of "human interest."

been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: [6] the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists.

I have endeavoured as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true: thus under a thin veil converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind. They are represented as Catholics, and as Catholics deeply tinged with religion. To a Protestant apprehension there will appear something unnatural in the earnest and perpetual sentiment of the relations between God and men which pervade the tragedy of the Cenci. It will especially be startled at the combination of an undoubting persuasion of the truth of the popular religion with a cool and determined perseverance in enormous guilt. But religion in Italy is not, as in Protestant countries, a cloak to be worn on particular days; or a passport which those who do not wish to be railed at carry with them to exhibit; or a gloomy passion for penetrating the impenetrable mysteries of our being, which terrifies its possessor at the darkness of the abyss to the brink of which it has con-

[6] It has been said that Shelley here retracts his statement in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* that Prometheus is "a more poetical character than Satan" because morally more admirable. There is an alternative, however, which Shelley would at least have been in a position logically to accept: that tragedy is not the "highest" form of poetry — an alternative that has perhaps been too carelessly rejected by traditional literary criticism. In the next clause Shelley states specifically that he is thinking in terms of "a dramatic purpose," *i.e.*, general popularity. — Here is also the answer to those critics who hold that Beatrice ought to have avowed and gloried in her act instead of denying it; Shelley feels, despite his sympathy for his heroine, that she has done wrong; that, as he says, she has done what "needs justification." Compare IV, iv, 24 n.

ducted him. Religion coexists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic, with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connection with any one virtue. The most atrocious villain may be rigidly devout, and without any shock to established faith, confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check. Cenci himself built a chapel in the court of his Palace, and dedicated it to St. Thomas the Apostle, and established masses for the peace of his soul. Thus in the first scene of the fourth act Lucretia's design in exposing herself to the consequences of an expostulation with Cenci after having administered the opiate, was to induce him by a feigned tale to confess himself before death; this being esteemed by Catholics as essential to salvation; and she only relinquishes her purpose when she perceives that her perseverance would expose Beatrice to new outrages.

I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry, and I imagine there will scarcely be found a detached simile or a single isolated description, unless Beatrice's description of the chasm appointed for her father's murder should be judged to be of that nature.[7]

In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion. It is thus that the most remote and the most familiar imagery may alike be fit for dramatic purposes when employed in the illustration of strong feeling, which raises what is low, and levels to the apprehension that which is lofty, casting over all the shadow of its own greatness.

[7] An idea in this speech was suggested by a most sublime passage in *El Purgatorio de San Patricio* of Calderón; the only plagiarism which I have intentionally committed in the whole piece [Shelley's note; see III, i, 244 ff.].

In other respects, I have written more carelessly; that is, without an over-fastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics[8] who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men, and that our great ancestors the ancient English poets are the writers, a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have done for theirs. But it must be the real language of men in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong. So much for what I have attempted; I need not be assured that success is a very different matter; particularly for one whose attention has but newly been awakened to the study of dramatic literature.

I endeavoured whilst at Rome to observe such monuments of this story as might be accessible to a stranger. The portrait of Beatrice at the Colonna Palace is admirable as a work of art: it was taken by Guido during her confinement in prison. But it is most interesting as a just representation of one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features: she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. Her head is bound with folds of white drapery from which the yellow strings of her golden hair escape, and fall about her neck. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched: the lips have that permanent meaning[9] of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which, united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow, are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom

[8] Shelley is thinking especially of Wordsworth's famous Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

[9] "Mingling" would be a much more intelligible word; "meaning" must certainly be a mistake.

energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world.

The Cenci Palace is of great extent; and though in part modernized, there yet remains a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture in the same state as during the dreadful scenes which are the subject of this tragedy. The Palace is situated in an obscure corner of Rome, near the quarter of the Jews, and from the upper windows you see the immense ruins of Mount Palatine half hidden under their profuse overgrowth of trees. There is a court in one part of the Palace (perhaps that in which Cenci built the Chapel to St. Thomas), supported by granite columns and adorned with antique friezes of fine workmanship, and built up, according to the ancient Italian fashion, with balcony over balcony of open-work. One of the gates of the Palace, formed of immense stones and leading through a passage, dark and lofty and opening into gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly.

Of the Castle of Petrella, I could obtain no further information than that which is to be found in the manuscript.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

COUNT FRANCESCO CENCI
GIACOMO, BERNARDO, *his Sons*
CARDINAL CAMILLO
ORSINO, *a Prelate*
SAVELLA, *the Pope's Legate*
OLIMPIO, MARZIO, *Assassins*
ANDREA, *Servant to Cenci*
Nobles, Judges, Guards, Servants

LUCRETIA, *Wife of* CENCI, *and Step-mother of his children*
BEATRICE, *his Daughter*

The SCENE lies principally in Rome, but changes during the Fourth Act to Petrella, a castle among the Apulian Apennines.

TIME. During the Pontificate of Clement VIII.

ACT I

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace. Enter* COUNT CENCI, *and* CARDINAL CAMILLO.

Camillo. That matter of the murder is hushed up
If you consent to yield his Holiness
Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate. —
It needed all my interest in the conclave
To bend him to this point: he said that you
Bought perilous impunity with your gold;
That crimes like yours if once or twice compounded
Enriched the Church, and respited from hell
An erring soul which might repent and live: —
But that the glory and the interest
Of the high throne he fills, little consist
With making it a daily mart of guilt
As manifold and hideous as the deeds
Which you scarce hide from men's revolted eyes.
Cenci. The third of my possessions — let it go!
Ay, I once heard the nephew of the Pope
Had sent his architect to view the ground,
Meaning to build a villa on my vines
The next time I compounded with his uncle:
I little thought he should outwit me so!
Henceforth no witness — not the lamp — shall see
That which the vassal threatened to divulge
Whose throat is choked with dust for his reward.
The deed he saw could not have rated higher
Than his most worthless life: — it angers me!
Respited me from Hell! — So may the Devil
Respite their souls from Heaven. No doubt Pope Clement,
And his most charitable nephews, pray
That the Apostle Peter and the Saints
Will grant for their sake that I long enjoy
Strength, wealth, and pride, and lust, and length of days
Wherein to act the deeds which are the stewards
Of their revenue. — But much yet remains
To which they show no title.
Camillo. Oh, Count Cenci!

1. See l. 23.
24. "Rated higher," *i.e.*, "cost me more."

So much that thou mightst honourably live
And reconcile thyself with thine own heart
And with thy God, and with the offended world.
How hideously look deeds of lust and blood
Through those snow white and venerable hairs! —
Your children should be sitting round you now,
But that you fear to read upon their looks
The shame and misery you have written there.
Where is your wife? Where is your gentle daughter?
Methinks her sweet looks, which make all things else
Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend within you.
Why is she barred from all society
But her own strange and uncomplaining wrongs?
Talk with me, Count, — you know I mean you well.
I stood beside your dark and fiery youth
Watching its bold and bad career, as men
Watch meteors, but it vanished not — I marked
Your desperate and remorseless manhood; now
Do I behold you in dishonoured age
Charged with a thousand unrepented crimes.
Yet I have ever hoped you would amend,
And in that hope have saved your life three times.
Cenci. For which Aldobrandino owes you now
My fief beyond the Pincian. — Cardinal,
One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,
And so we shall converse with less restraint.
A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter —
He was accustomed to frequent my house;
So the next day *his* wife and daughter came
And asked if I had seen him; and I smiled:
I think they never saw him any more.
Camillo. Thou execrable man, beware! —
Cenci. Of thee?
Nay, this is idle: — We should know each other.
As to my character for what men call crime
Seeing I please my senses as I list,
And vindicate that right with force or guile,
It is a public matter, and I care not
If I discuss it with you. I may speak

57. "Owes you," *i.e.*, "is indebted to you for." Aldobrandino must be the Pope's nephew (l. 16).

Alike to you and my own conscious heart —
For you give out that you have half reformed me,
Therefore strong vanity will keep you silent
If fear should not; both will, I do not doubt.
All men delight in sensual luxury,
All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
Over the tortures they can never feel —
Flattering their secret peace with others' pain.
But I delight in nothing else. I love
The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
When this shall be another's, and that mine.
And I have no remorse and little fear,
Which are, I think, the checks of other men.
This mood has grown upon me, until now
Any design my captious fancy makes
The picture of its wish, and it forms none
But such as men like you would start to know,
Is as my natural food and rest debarred
Until it be accomplished.

Camillo. Art thou not
Most miserable?

Cenci. Why miserable? —
No. — I am what your theologians call
Hardened; — which they must be in impudence,
So to revile a man's peculiar taste.
True, I was happier than I am, while yet
Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;
While lust was sweeter than revenge; and now
Invention palls: — Ay, we must all grow old —
And but that there yet remains a deed to act
Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
Duller than mine — I'd do — I know not what.
When I was young I thought of nothing else
But pleasure; and I fed on honey sweets:
Men, by St. Thomas! cannot live like bees,
And I grew tired: — yet, till I killed a foe,
And heard his groans, and heard his children's groans,
Knew I not what delight was else on earth,
Which now delights me little. I the rather

90. *I.e.*, affects me as if I were deprived of my natural food and rest.

Look on such pangs as terror ill conceals,
The dry fixed eyeball; the pale quivering lip,
Which tell me that the spirit weeps within
Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.
I rarely kill the body, which preserves,
Like a strong prison, the soul within my power,
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear
For hourly pain.
Camillo. Hell's most abandoned fiend
Did never, in the drunkenness of guilt,
Speak to his heart as now you speak to me;
I thank my God that I believe you not.

Enter ANDREA

Andrea. My Lord, a gentleman from Salamanca
Would speak with you.
Cenci. Bid him attend me in
The grand saloon. [*Exit* ANDREA.
Camillo. Farewell; and I will pray
Almighty God that thy false, impious words
Tempt not his spirit to abandon thee. [*Exit* CAMILLO.
Cenci. The third of my possessions! I must use
Close husbandry, or gold, the old man's sword,
Falls from my withered hand. But yesterday
There came an order from the Pope to make
Fourfold provision for my cursèd sons;
Whom I had sent from Rome to Salamanca,
Hoping some accident might cut them off;
And meaning if I could to starve them there.
I pray thee, God, send some quick death upon them!
Bernardo and my wife could not be worse
If dead and damned: — then, as to Beatrice —
[*Looking around him suspiciously.*
I think they cannot hear me at that door;
What if they should? And yet I need not speak
Though the heart triumphs with itself in words.
O thou most silent air, that shalt not hear

135. "Worse" seems to mean "worse off than they are now" [Locock].

What now I think! Thou pavement, which I tread
Towards her chamber, — let your echoes talk
Of my imperious step scorning surprise,
But not of my intent! — Andrea!

Enter ANDREA

Andrea. My lord?
Cenci. Bid Beatrice attend me in her chamber
This evening: — no, at midnight and alone. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. — *A Garden of the Cenci Palace. Enter* BEATRICE *and* ORSINO, *as in conversation.*

Beatrice. Pervert not truth,
Orsino. You remember where we held
That conversation; — nay, we see the spot
Even from this cypress; — two long years are past
Since, on an April midnight, underneath
The moonlight ruins of mount Palatine,
I did confess to you my secret mind.
Orsino. You said you loved me then.
Beatrice. You are a Priest,
Speak to me not of love.
Orsino. I may obtain
The dispensation of the Pope to marry.
Because I am a Priest do you believe
Your image, as the hunter some struck deer,
Follows me not whether I wake or sleep?
Beatrice. As I have said, speak to me not of love;
Had you a dispensation I have not;
Nor will I leave this home of misery
Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
To whom I owe life, and these virtuous thoughts,
Must suffer what I still have strength to share.

141. Compare *Macbeth*, II, i, 56–58. There are a number of other reminiscences of the same play, as well as of *Othello* and *King Lear*. For a full list, see David Lee Clark, "Shelley and Shakespeare," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, LIV (1939), 261–87.

17. Bernardo is throughout treated as a boy, although in the MS. which Shelley followed, his age was given as twenty-six. Rossetti quotes another authority which gives his age as fifteen.

18. "To whom I owe life" — see II, i, 91–93.

Alas, Orsino! All the love that once
I felt for you, is turned to bitter pain.
Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
Broke, by assuming vows no Pope will loose.
And thus I love you still, but holily,
Even as a sister or a spirit might;
And so I swear a cold fidelity.
And it is well perhaps we shall not marry.
You have a sly, equivocating vein
That suits me not. — Ah, wretched that I am!
Where shall I turn? Even now you look on me
As you were not my friend, and as if you
Discovered that I thought so, with false smiles
Making my true suspicion seem your wrong.
Ah, no! forgive me; sorrow makes me seem
Sterner than else my nature might have been;
I have a weight of melancholy thoughts,
And they forbode, — but what can they forbode
Worse than I now endure?
Orsino. All will be well.
Is the petition yet prepared? You know
My zeal for all you wish, sweet Beatrice;
Doubt not but I will use my utmost skill
So that the Pope attend to your complaint.
Beatrice. Your zeal for all I wish; — Ah me, you are cold!
Your utmost skill . . . speak but one word . . . (*aside*) Alas!
Weak and deserted creature that I am,
Here I stand bickering with my only friend! [*To* Orsino.
This night my father gives a sumptuous feast,
Orsino; he has heard some happy news
From Salamanca, from my brothers there,
And with this outward show of love he mocks
His inward hate. 'Tis bold hypocrisy,
For he would gladlier celebrate their deaths,
Which I have heard him pray for on his knees:
Great God! that such a father should be mine!
But there is mighty preparation made,
And all our kin, the Cenci, will be there.
And all the chief nobility of Rome.
And he has bidden me and my pale Mother
Attire ourselves in festival array.

Poor lady! She expects some happy change
In his dark spirit from this act; I none.
At supper I will give you the petition:
Till when — farewell.
Orsino. Farewell. (*Exit* Beatrice.) I know the Pope
Will ne'er absolve me from my priestly vow
But by absolving me from the revenue
Of many a wealthy see; and, Beatrice,
I think to win thee at an easier rate.
Nor shall he read her eloquent petition:
He might bestow her on some poor relation
Of his sixth cousin, as he did her sister,
And I should be debarred from all access.
Then as to what she suffers from her father,
In all this there is much exaggeration: —
Old men are testy and will have their way;
A man may stab his enemy, or his vassal,
And live a free life as to wine or women,
And with a peevish temper may return
To a dull home, and rate his wife and children;
Daughters and wives call this foul tyranny.
I shall be well content if on my conscience
There rest no heavier sin than what they suffer
From the devices of my love — a net
From which she shall escape not. Yet I fear
Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze,
Whose beams anatomize me nerve by nerve
And lay me bare, and make me blush to see
My hidden thoughts. — Ah, no! A friendless girl
Who clings to me, as to her only hope: —
I were a fool, not less than if a panther
Were panic-stricken by the antelope's eye,
If she escape me. [*Exit.*

Scene III. — *A Magnificent Hall in the Cenci Palace. A Banquet. Enter* Cenci, Lucretia, Beatrice, Orsino, Camillo, Nobles.

Cenci. Welcome, my friends and kinsmen; welcome ye,
Princes and Cardinals, pillars of the church,
Whose presence honours our festivity.

I have too long lived like an anchorite,
And in my absence from your merry meetings
An evil word is gone abroad of me;
But I do hope that you, my noble friends,
When you have shared the entertainment here,
And heard the pious cause for which 'tis given,
And we have pledged a health or two together,
Will think me flesh and blood as well as you;
Sinful indeed, for Adam made all so,
But tender-hearted, meek and pitiful.
First Guest. In truth, my Lord, you seem too light of heart,
Too sprightly and companionable a man,
To act the deeds that rumour pins on you.
(*To his Companion.*) I never saw such blithe and open cheer
In any eye!
Second Guest. Some most desired event,
In which we all demand a common joy,
Has brought us hither; let us hear it, Count.
Cenci. It is indeed a most desired event.
If, when a parent from a parent's heart
Lifts from this earth to the great Father of all
A prayer, both when he lays him down to sleep,
And when he rises up from dreaming it;
One supplication, one desire, one hope,
That he would grant a wish for his two sons,
Even all that he demands in their regard —
And suddenly beyond his dearest hope
It is accomplished, he should then rejoice,
And call his friends and kinsmen to a feast,
And task their love to grace his merriment, —
Then honour me thus far — for I am he.
Beatrice (*to* LUCRETIA). Great God! How horrible! Some dreadful ill
Must have befallen my brothers.
Lucretia. Fear not, Child,
He speaks too frankly.
Beatrice. Ah! My blood runs cold.
I fear that wicked laughter round his eye,
Which wrinkles up the skin even to the hair.
Cenci. Here are the letters brought from Salamanca;
Beatrice, read them to your mother. God!

I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform,
By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.
My disobedient and rebellious sons
Are dead! — Why, dead! — What means this change of cheer?
You hear me not, I tell you they are dead;
And they will need no food or raiment more:
The tapers that did light them the dark way
Are their last cost. The Pope, I think, will not
Expect I should maintain them in their coffins.
Rejoice with me — my heart is wondrous glad.
[LUCRETIA *sinks, half fainting;* BEATRICE *supports her.*
Beatrice. It is not true! — Dear lady, pray look up.
Had it been true, there is a God in Heaven,
He would not live to boast of such a boon.
Unnatural man, thou knowest that it is false.
Cenci. Ay, as the word of God; whom here I call
To witness that I speak the sober truth; —
And whose most favouring Providence was shown
Even in the manner of their deaths. For Rocco
Was kneeling at the mass, with sixteen others,
When the church fell and crushed him to a mummy,
The rest escaped unhurt. Cristofano
Was stabbed in error by a jealous man,
Whilst she he loved was sleeping with his rival;
All in the self-same hour of the same night;
Which shows that Heaven has special care of me.
I beg those friends who love me, that they mark
The day a feast upon their calendars.
It was the twenty-seventh of December:
Ay, read the letters if you doubt my oath.
[*The Assembly appears confused; several of the guests rise.*
First Guest. Oh, horrible! I will depart —
Second Guest. And I. —
Third Guest. No, stay!
I do believe it is some jest; though faith!
'Tis mocking us somewhat too solemnly.
I think his son has married the Infanta,
Or found a mine of gold in El Dorado;
'Tis but to season some such news; stay, stay!
I see 'tis only raillery by his smile.
Cenci (*filling a bowl of wine, and lifting it up*). Oh, thou bright wine whose purple splendour leaps

And bubbles gaily in this golden bowl
Under the lamplight, as my spirits do,
To hear the death of my accursèd sons!
Could I believe thou wert their mingled blood,
Then would I taste thee like a sacrament,
And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in Hell,
Who, if a father's curses, as men say,
Climb with swift wings after their children's souls,
And drag them from the very throne of Heaven,
Now triumphs in my triumph! — But thou art
Superfluous; I have drunken deep of joy,
And I will taste no other wine to-night.
Here, Andrea! Bear the bowl around.
A Guest (*rising*). Thou wretch!
Will none among this noble company
Check the abandoned villain?
Camillo. For God's sake
Let me dismiss the guests! You are insane,
Some ill will come of this.
Second Guest. Seize, silence him!
First Guest. I will!
Third Guest. And I!
Cenci (*addressing those who rise with a threatening gesture*).
Who moves? Who speaks?
(*turning to the Company*)
'Tis nothing,
Enjoy yourselves. — Beware! For my revenge
Is as the sealed commission of a king
That kills, and none dare name the murderer.
[*The Banquet is broken up; several of the Guests are departing.*
Beatrice. I do entreat you, go not, noble guests;
What, although tyranny and impious hate
Stand sheltered by a father's hoary hair?
What, if 'tis he who clothed us in these limbs
Who tortures them, and triumphs? What, if we,
The desolate and the dead, were his own flesh,
His children and his wife, whom he is bound
To love and shelter? Shall we therefore find
No refuge in this merciless wide world?
O think what deep wrongs must have blotted out
First love, then reverence in a child's prone mind,
Till it thus vanquish shame and fear! O think!

I have borne much, and kissed the sacred hand
Which crushed us to the earth, and thought its stroke
Was perhaps some paternal chastisement!
Have excused much, doubted; and when no doubt
Remained, have sought by patience, love, and tears
To soften him, and when this could not be
I have knelt down through the long sleepless nights
And lifted up to God, the Father of all,
Passionate prayers: and when these were not heard
I have still borne, — until I meet you here,
Princes and kinsmen, at this hideous feast
Given at my brothers' deaths. Two yet remain,
His wife remains and I, whom if ye save not,
Ye may soon share such merriment again
As fathers make over their children's graves.
O Prince Colonna, thou art our near kinsman,
Cardinal, thou art the Pope's chamberlain,
Camillo, thou art chief justiciary,
Take us away!

Cenci. (*He has been conversing with* CAMILLO *during the first part of* BEATRICE'S *speech; he hears the conclusion, and now advances.*)

I hope my good friends here
Will think of their own daughters — or perhaps
Of their own throats — before they lend an ear
To this wild girl.

Beatrice (*not noticing the words of Cenci*). Dare no one look on me?
None answer? Can one tyrant overbear
The sense of many best and wisest men?
Or is it that I sue not in some form
Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit?
O God! That I were buried with my brothers!
And that the flowers of this departed spring
Were fading on my grave! And that my father
Were celebrating now one feast for all!

Camillo. A bitter wish for one so young and gentle;
Can we do nothing?

Colonna. Nothing that I see.
Count Cenci were a dangerous enemy:
Yet I would second any one.

A Cardinal. And I.
Cenci. Retire to your chamber, insolent girl!
Beatrice. Retire thou, impious man! Ay, hide thyself
Where never eye can look upon thee more!
Wouldst thou have honour and obedience
Who art a torturer? Father, never dream
Though thou mayst overbear this company,
But ill must come of ill. — Frown not on me!
Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks
My brothers' ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat!
Cover thy face from every living eye,
And start if thou but hear a human step:
Seek out some dark and silent corner, there,
Bow thy white head before offended God,
And we will kneel around, and fervently
Pray that he pity both ourselves and thee.
Cenci. My friends, I do lament this insane girl
Has spoilt the mirth of our festivity.
Good night, farewell; I will not make you longer
Spectators of our dull domestic quarrels.
Another time. — [*Exeunt all but* CENCI *and* BEATRICE.
My brain is swimming round;
Give me a bowl of wine! [*To* BEATRICE.
Thou painted viper!
Beast that thou art! Fair and yet terrible!
I know a charm shall make thee meek and tame,
Now get thee from my sight! [*Exit* BEATRICE.
Here, Andrea,
Fill up this goblet with Greek wine. I said
I would not drink this evening; but I must;
For, strange to say, I feel my spirits fail
With thinking what I have decreed to do. —
[*Drinking the wine.*
Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my veins, and manhood's purpose stern,
And age's firm, cold, subtle villainy;
As if thou wert indeed my children's blood
Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well;
It must be done; it shall be done, I swear! [*Exit.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace. Enter* LUCRETIA *and* BERNARDO.

Lucretia. Weep not, my gentle boy; he struck but me
Who have borne deeper wrongs. In truth, if he
Had killed me, he had done a kinder deed.
O God, Almighty, do Thou look upon us,
We have no other friend but only Thee!
Yet weep not; though I love you as my own,
I am not your true mother.
Bernardo. O more, more,
Than ever mother was to any child,
That have you been to me! Had he not been
My father, do you think that I should weep?
Lucretia. Alas! Poor boy, what else couldst thou have done?

Enter BEATRICE.

Beatrice (*in a hurried voice*). Did he pass this way? Have you seen him, brother?
Ah, no! that is his step upon the stairs;
'Tis nearer now; his hand is on the door;
Mother, if I to thee have ever been
A duteous child, now save me! Thou, great God,
Whose image upon earth a father is,
Dost Thou indeed abandon me? He comes;
The door is opening now; I see his face;
He frowns on others, but he smiles on me,
Even as he did after the feast last night.

Enter a Servant.

Almighty God, how merciful Thou art!
'Tis but Orsino's servant. — Well, what news?
Servant. My master bids me say, the Holy Father
Has sent back your petition thus unopened. [*Giving a paper.*
And he demands at what hour 'twere secure
To visit you again?
Lucretia. At the Ave Mary. [*Exit Servant.*

10. *I.e., merely* weep, instead of taking violent revenge.

So, daughter, our last hope has failed; Ah me!
How pale you look; you tremble, and you stand
Wrapped in some fixed and fearful meditation,
As if one thought were over strong for you:
Your eyes have a chill glare; O, dearest child!
Are you gone mad? If not, pray speak to me.
Beatrice. You see I am not mad: I speak to you.
Lucretia. You talked of something that your father did
After that dreadful feast? .Could it be worse
Than when he smiled, and cried, "My sons are dead!"
And every one looked in his neighbour's face
To see if others were as white as he?
At the first word he spoke I felt the blood
Rush to my heart, and fell into a trance;
And when it passed I sat all weak and wild;
Whilst you alone stood up, and with strong words
Checked his unnatural pride; and I could see
The devil was rebuked that lives in him.
Until this hour thus have you ever stood
Between us and your father's moody wrath
Like a protecting presence: your firm mind
Has been our only refuge and defence:
What can have thus subdued it? What can now
Have given you that cold melancholy look,
Succeeding to your unaccustomed fear?
Beatrice. What is it that you say? I was just thinking
'Twere better not to struggle any more.
Men, like my father, have been dark and bloody,
Yet never — Oh! Before worse comes of it
'Twere wise to die: it ends in that at last.
Lucretia. Oh, talk not so, dear child! Tell me at once
What did your father do or say to you?
He stayed not after that accursèd feast
One moment in your chamber. — Speak to me.
Bernardo. Oh, sister, sister, prithee, speak to us!
Beatrice (*speaking very slowly with a forced calmness*). It was one word, Mother, one little word;
One look, one smile. (*Wildly.*) Oh! He has trampled me
Under his feet, and made the blood stream down
My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all
Ditch-water, and the fever-stricken flesh
Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,

And we have eaten. — He has made me look
On my beloved Bernardo, when the rust
Of heavy chains has gangrened his sweet limbs,
And I have never yet despaired — but now!
What could I say? [*Recovering herself.*
Ah, no! 'tis nothing new.
The sufferings we all share have made me wild:
He only struck and cursed me as he passed;
He said, he looked, he did, — nothing at all
Beyond his wont, yet it disordered me.
Alas! I am forgetful of my duty,
I should preserve my senses for your sake.

Lucretia. Nay, Beatrice; have courage, my sweet girl,
If any one despairs it should be I
Who loved him once, and now must live with him
Till God in pity call for him or me.
For you may, like your sister, find some husband,
And smile, years hence, with children round your knees;
Whilst I, then dead, and all this hideous coil,
Shall be remembered only as a dream.

Beatrice. Talk not to me, dear lady, of a husband.
Did you not nurse me when my mother died?
Did you not shield me and that dearest boy?
And had we any other friend but you
In infancy, with gentle words and looks,
To win our father not to murder us?
And shall I now desert you? May the ghost
Of my dead Mother plead against my soul
If I abandon her who filled the place
She left, with more, even, than a mother's love!

Bernardo. And I am of my sister's mind. Indeed
I would not leave you in this wretchedness,
Even though the Pope should make me free to live
In some blithe place, like others of my age,
With sports, and delicate food, and the fresh air.
Oh, never think that I will leave you, Mother!

Lucretia. My dear, dear children!

Enter CENCI, *suddenly.*

Cenci. What, Beatrice here!
Come hither! [*She shrinks back, and covers her face*
Nay, hide not your face, 'tis fair;

Look up! Why, yesternight you dared to look
With disobedient insolence upon me,
Bending a stern and an inquiring brow
On what I meant; whilst I then sought to hide
That which I came to tell you — but in vain.
Beatrice (*wildly, staggering towards the door*). O that the earth would gape! Hide me, O God!
Cenci. Then it was I whose inarticulate words
Fell from my lips, and who with tottering steps
Fled from your presence, as you now from mine.
Stay, I command you — from this day and hour
Never again, I think, with fearless eye,
And brow superior, and unaltered cheek,
And that lip made for tenderness or scorn,
Shalt thou strike dumb the meanest of mankind;
Me least of all. Now get thee to thy chamber!
Thou too, loathed image of thy curséd mother, [*To* BERNARDO.
Thy milky, meek face makes me sick with hate!
[*Exeunt* BEATRICE *and* BERNARDO.
(*Aside.*) So much has passed between us as must make
Me bold, her fearful. — 'Tis an awful thing
To touch such mischief as I now conceive:
So men sit shivering on the dewy bank,
And try the chill stream with their feet; once in . . .
How the delighted spirit pants for joy!
Lucretia (*advancing timidly towards him*). O husband! Pray forgive poor Beatrice.
She meant not any ill.
Cenci. Nor you perhaps?
Nor that young imp, whom you have taught by rote
Parricide with his alphabet? Nor Giacomo?
Nor those two most unnatural sons, who stirred
Enmity up against me with the Pope?
Whom in one night merciful God cut off:
Innocent lambs! They thought not any ill.
You were not here conspiring? You said nothing
Of how I might be dungeoned as a madman;
Or be condemned to death for some offence,
And you would be the witnesses? — This failing,
How just it were to hire assassins, or
Put sudden poison in my evening drink?

Or smother me when overcome by wine?
Seeing we had no other judge but God,
And He had sentenced me, and there were none
But you to be the executioners
Of His decree enregistered in Heaven?
Oh, no! You said not this?
Lucretia. So help me God,
I never thought the things you charge me with!
Cenci. If you dare speak that wicked lie again
I'll kill you. What! It was not by your counsel
That Beatrice disturbed the feast last night?
You did not hope to stir some enemies
Against me, and escape, and laugh to scorn
What every nerve of you now trembles at?
You judged that men were bolder than they are;
Few dare to stand between their grave and me.
Lucretia. Look not so dreadfully! By my salvation
I knew not aught that Beatrice designed;
Nor do I think she designed any thing
Until she heard you talk of her dead brothers.
Cenci. Blaspheming liar! You are damned for this!
But I will take you where you may persuade
The stones you tread on to deliver you:
For men shall there be none but those who dare
All things — not question that which I command.
On Wednesday next I shall set out: you know
That savage rock, the Castle of Petrella:
'Tis safely walled, and moated round about:
Its dungeons underground, and its thick towers
Never told tales; though they have heard and seen
What might make dumb things speak. — Why do you linger?
Make speediest preparation for the journey! [*Exit* LUCRETIA.
The all-beholding sun yet shines; I hear
A busy stir of men about the streets;
I see the bright sky through the window panes:
It is a garish, broad, and peering day;
Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears,
And every little corner, nook, and hole
Is penetrated with the insolent light.
Come darkness! Yet, what is the day to me?
And wherefore should I wish for night, who do

A deed which shall confound both night and day?
'Tis she shall grope through a bewildering mist
Of horror: if there be a sun in heaven
She shall not dare to look upon its beams;
Nor feel its warmth. Let her then wish for night;
The act I think shall soon extinguish all
For me: I bear a darker deadlier gloom
Than the earth's shade, or interlunar air,
Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud,
In which I walk secure and unbeheld
Towards my purpose. — Would that it were done! [*Exit.*

SCENE II. — *A Chamber in the Vatican* *Enter* CAMILLO *and* GIACOMO, *in conversation.*

Camillo. There is an obsolete and doubtful law
By which you might obtain a bare provision
Of food and clothing —
Giacomo. Nothing more? Alas!
Bare must be the provision which strict law
Awards, and agèd, sullen avarice pays.
Why did my father not apprentice me
To some mechanic trade? I should have then
Been trained in no highborn necessities
Which I could meet not by my daily toil.
The eldest son of a rich nobleman
Is heir to all his incapacities;
He has wide wants, and narrow powers. If you,
Cardinal Camillo, were reduced at once
From thrice-driven beds of down, and delicate food,
An hundred servants, and six palaces,
To that which nature doth indeed require? —
Camillo. Nay, there is reason in your plea; 'twere hard.
Giacomo. 'Tis hard for a firm man to bear: but I
Have a dear wife, a lady of high birth,
Whose dowry in ill hour I lent my father
Without a bond or witness to the deed:
And children, who inherit her fine senses,
The fairest creatures in this breathing world;

188. "I think," *i.e.*, of which I think.

And she and they reproach me not. Cardinal,
Do you not think the Pope would interpose
And stretch authority beyond the law?
Camillo. Though your peculiar case is hard, I know
The Pope will not divert the course of law.
After that impious feast the other night
I spoke with him, and urged him then to check
Your father's cruel hand; he frowned and said,
"Children are disobedient, and they sting
Their fathers' hearts to madness and despair,
Requiting years of care with contumely.
I pity the Count Cenci from my heart;
His outraged love perhaps awakened hate,
And thus he is exasperated to ill.
In the great war between the old and young
I, who have white hairs and a tottering body,
Will keep at least blameless neutrality."

Enter ORSINO.

You, my good Lord Orsino, heard those words.
Orsino. What words?
Giacomo. Alas, repeat them not again!
There then is no redress for me, at least
None but that which I may achieve myself,
Since I am driven to the brink. — But, say,
My innocent sister and my only brother
Are dying underneath my father's eye.
The memorable torturers of this land,
Galeaz Visconti, Borgia, Ezzelin,
Never inflicted on the meanest slave
What these endure; shall they have no protection?
Camillo. Why, if they would petition to the Pope
I see not how he could refuse it — yet
He holds it of most dangerous example
In aught to weaken the paternal power,
Being, as 'twere, the shadow of his own.
I pray you now excuse me. I have business
That will not bear delay. [*Exit* CAMILLO.

24. Locock suggests "that 'not' should be omitted, for the sake of the metre and a more obvious sense. That Giacomo's family did in fact reproach him is clear from III, i, 326 etc."

Giacomo. But you, Orsino,
Have the petition: wherefore not present it?
Orsino. I have presented it, and backed it with
My earnest prayers, and urgent interest;
It was returned unanswered. I doubt not
But that the strange and execrable deeds
Alleged in it — in truth they might well baffle
Any belief — have turned the Pope's displeasure
Upon the accusers from the criminal:
So I should guess from what Camillo said.
Giacomo. My friend, that palace-walking devil, Gold,
Has whispered silence to his Holiness:
And we are left, as scorpions ringed with fire.
What should we do but strike ourselves to death?
For he who is our murderous persecutor
Is shielded by a father's holy name,
Or I would — [*Stops abruptly.*
Orsino. What? Fear not to speak your thought.
Words are but holy as the deeds they cover:
A priest who has forsworn the God he serves;
A judge who makes Truth weep at his decree;
A friend who should weave counsel, as I now,
But as the mantle of some selfish guile;
A father who is all a tyrant seems,
Were the profaner for his sacred name.
Giacomo. Ask me not what I think; the unwilling brain
Feigns often what it would not; and we trust
Imagination with such phantasies
As the tongue dares not fashion into words,
Which have no words, their horror makes them dim
To the mind's eye. — My heart denies itself
To think what you demand.
Orsino. But a friend's bosom
Is as the inmost cave of our own mind
Where we sit shut from the wide gaze of day,
And from the all-communicating air.
You look what I suspected —
Giacomo. Spare me now!

70. The same simile is used in *Queen Mab*, VI, 36 and in *The Revolt of Islam*, XI, viii.
78. "As I now" must be an aside.

I am as one lost in a midnight wood,
Who dares not ask some harmless passenger
The path across the wilderness, lest he,
As my thoughts are, should be — a murderer.
I know you are my friend, and all I dare
Speak to my soul that will I trust with thee.
But now my heart is heavy, and would take
Lone counsel from a night of sleepless care.
Pardon me, that I say farewell — farewell!
I would that to my own suspected self
I could address a word so full of peace.
Orsino. Farewell! — Be your thoughts better or more bold.
[*Exit* GIACOMO.
I had disposed the Cardinal Camillo
To feed his hope with cold encouragement:
It fortunately serves my close designs
That 'tis a trick of this same family
To analyse their own and other minds.
Such self-anatomy shall teach the will
Dangerous secrets: for it tempts our powers,
Knowing what must be thought, and may be done,
Into the depth of darkest purposes:
So Cenci fell into the pit; even I,
Since Beatrice unveiled me to myself,
And made me shrink from what I cannot shun,
Show a poor figure to my own esteem,
To which I grow half reconciled. I'll do
As little mischief as I can; that thought
Shall fee the accuser conscience.
(*After a pause.*) Now what harm
If Cenci should be murdered? — Yet, if murdered,
Wherefore by me? And what if I could take
The profit, yet omit the sin and peril
In such an action? Of all earthly things
I fear a man whose blows outspeed his words;
And such is Cenci: and while Cenci lives
His daughter's dowry were a secret grave
If a priest wins her. — Oh, fair Beatrice!
Would that I loved thee not, or loving thee
Could but despise danger and gold and all
That frowns between my wish and its effect,

Or smiles beyond it! There is no escape . . .
Her bright form kneels beside me at the altar,
And follows me to the resort of men,
And fills my slumber with tumultuous dreams,
So when I wake my blood seems liquid fire;
And if I strike my damp and dizzy head
My hot palm scorches it: her very name,
But spoken by a stranger, makes my heart
Sicken and pant; and thus unprofitably
I clasp the phantom of unfelt delights
Till weak imagination half possesses
The self-created shadow. Yet much longer
Will I not nurse this life of feverous hours:
From the unravelled hopes of Giacomo
I must work out my own dear purposes.
I see, as from a tower, the end of all:
Her father dead; her brother bound to me
By a dark secret, surer than the grave;
Her mother scared and unexpostulating
From the dread manner of her wish achieved:
And she! — Once more take courage, my faint heart;
What dares a friendless maiden matched with thee?
I have such foresight as assures success:
Some unbeheld divinity doth ever,
When dread events are near, stir up men's minds
To black suggestions; and he prospers best,
Not who becomes the instrument of ill,
But who can flatter the dark spirit, that makes
Its empire and its prey of other hearts
Till it become his slave . . . as I will do. [*Exit.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace.* LUCRETIA, *to her enter* BEATRICE.

Beatrice. (*She enters staggering, and speaks wildly.*) Reach me that handkerchief! — My brain is hurt;

1. Beatrice's first speeches in this scene, during the temporary madness resulting from the fulfilment of her father's incestuous passion, surely

My eyes are full of blood; just wipe them for me . . .
I see but indistinctly . . .
Lucretia. My sweet child,
You have no wound; 'tis only a cold dew
That starts from your dear brow . . . Alas! Alas!
What has befallen?
Beatrice. How comes this hair undone?
Its wandering strings must be what blind me so,
And yet I tied it fast.—O, horrible!
The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls
Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,
And standing calm and motionless, whilst I
Slide giddily as the world reels. . . . My God!
The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!
The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe
In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps
A clinging, black, contaminating mist
About me . . . 'tis substantial, heavy, thick;
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
My fingers and my limbs to one another,
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!
My God! I never knew what the mad felt
Before; for I am mad beyond all doubt!
(*More wildly.*) No, I am dead! These putrefying limbs
Shut round and sepulchre the panting soul
Which would burst forth into the wandering air! (*A pause.*)
What hideous thought was that I had even now?
'Tis gone; and yet its burthen remains here

rank with the greatest of the many passages of the same general kind that are to be found in Elizabethan tragedy. The scene is, moreover, the supreme expression of Shelley's abhorrence of the subjection of spirit to flesh—a frequently recurrent theme in his later work. A contemporary reviewer referred to this magnificent passage as "frigid rant" and commented: "so much easier is it to rake together the vulgar vocabulary of rottenness and reptilism, than to paint the workings of the mind." Not much less astonishing is the verdict of a noted critic of the present day, Mr. Herbert Read, that the lines are "wooden, unnatural." One cannot help thinking of A. C. Bradley's remark that "if Shelley had been Shakespeare's contemporary, we should be wondering at powers which now we wholly deny him."

O'er these dull eyes . . . upon this weary heart!
O, world! O, life! O, day! O, misery!
Lucretia. What ails thee, my poor child? She answers not:
Her spirit apprehends the sense of pain,
But not its cause; suffering has dried away
The source from which it sprung . . .
Beatrice (*frantically*). Like Parricide . . .
Misery has killed its father: yet its father
Never like mine . . . O God! What thing am I?
Lucretia. My dearest child, what has your father done?
Beatrice (*doubtfully*). Who art thou, questioner? I have no father.
(*Aside.*) She is the madhouse nurse who tends on me,
It is a piteous office. [*To* LUCRETIA, *in a slow, subdued voice.*
Do you know
I thought I was that wretched Beatrice
Men speak of, whom her father sometimes hales
From hall to hall by the entangled hair;
At others, pens up naked in damp cells
Where scaly reptiles crawl, and starves her there,
Till she will eat strange flesh. This woful story
So did I overact in my sick dreams,
That I imagined . . . no, it cannot be!
Horrible things have been in this wide world,
Prodigious mixtures, and confusions strange
Of good and ill; and worse have been conceived
Than ever there was found a heart to do.
But never fancy imaged such a deed
As . . . [*Pauses, suddenly recollecting herself.*
Who art thou? Swear to me, ere I die
With fearful expectation, that indeed
Thou art not what thou seemest . . . Mother!
Lucretia. Oh!
My sweet child, know you . . .
Beatrice. Yet speak it not:
For then if this be truth, that other too
Must be a truth, a firm enduring truth,
Linked with each lasting circumstance of life,

48. Compare *Antony and Cleopatra,* I, iv, 67: "thou didst eat strange flesh."

Never to change, never to pass away.
Why so it is. This is the Cenci Palace;
Thou art Lucretia; I am Beatrice.
I have talked some wild words, but will no more.
Mother, come near me: from this point of time,
I am . . . [*Her voice dies away faintly.*
Lucretia. Alas! What has befallen thee, child?
What has thy father done?
Beatrice. What have I done?
Am I not innocent? Is it my crime
That one with white hair, and imperious brow,
Who tortured me from my forgotten years,
As parents only dare, should call himself
My father, yet should be — Oh, what am I?
What name, what place, what memory shall be mine?
What retrospects, outliving even despair?
Lucretia. He is a violent tyrant, surely, child:
We know that death alone can make us free;
His death or ours. But what can he have done
Of deadlier outrage or worse injury?
Thou art unlike thyself; thine eyes shoot forth
A wandering and strange spirit. Speak to me,
Unlock those pallid hands whose fingers twine
With one another.
Beatrice. 'Tis the restless life
Tortured within them. If I try to speak
I shall go mad. Ay, something must be done;
What, yet I know not . . . something which shall make
The thing that I have suffered but a shadow
In the dread lightning which avenges it;
Brief, rapid, irreversible, destroying
The consequence of what it cannot cure.
Some such thing is to be endured or done:
When I know what, I shall be still and calm,
And never anything will move me more.
But now! — O blood, which art my father's blood,
Circling through these contaminated veins,
If thou, poured forth on the polluted earth,
Could wash away the crime, and punishment
By which I suffer . . . no, that cannot be!

Many might doubt there were a God above
Who sees and permits evil, and so die:
That faith no agony shall obscure in me.
Lucretia. It must indeed have been some bitter wrong;
Yet what, I dare not guess. Oh, my lost child,
Hide not in proud impenetrable grief
Thy sufferings from my fear.
Beatrice. I hide them not.
What are the words which you would have me speak?
I, who can feign no image in my mind
Of that which has transformed me: I, whose thought
Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up
In its own formless horror: of all words,
That minister to mortal intercourse,
Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to tell
My misery: if another ever knew
Aught like to it, she died as I will die,
And left it, as I must, without a name.
Death! Death! Our law and our religion call thee
A punishment and a reward . . . Oh, which
Have I deserved?
Lucretia. The peace of innocence;
Till in your season you be called to heaven.
Whate'er you may have suffered, you have done
No evil. Death must be the punishment
Of crime, or the reward of trampling down
The thorns which God has strewed upon the path
Which leads to immortality.
Beatrice. Ay, death . . .
The punishment of crime. I pray thee, God,
Let me not be bewildered while I judge.
If I must live day after day, and keep
These limbs, the unworthy temple of Thy spirit,
As a foul den from which what Thou abhorrest
May mock Thee, unavenged . . . it shall not be!
Self-murder . . . no, that might be no escape,
For Thy decree yawns like a Hell between

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100. *I.e.*, many might doubt, since such evils exist, that there is a God; and hence feel free to commit suicide. Compare I, iii, 52–53.

124. Compare *Adonais*, ll. 44–45; *Hellas*, ll. 213–14; and the *Prologue to Hellas*, ll. 152–55.

Our will and it: — O! In this mortal world
There is no vindication and no law
Which can adjudge and execute the doom
Of that through which I suffer.

Enter ORSINO.

(*She approaches him solemnly.*) Welcome, Friend!
I have to tell you that, since last we met,
I have endured a wrong so great and strange,
That neither life nor death can give me rest.
Ask me not what it is, for there are deeds
Which have no form, sufferings which have no tongue.
Orsino. And what is he who has thus injured you?
Beatrice. The man they call my father: a dread name.
Orsino. It cannot be . . .
Beatrice. What it can be, or not,
Forbear to think. It is, and it has been;
Advise me how it shall not be again.
I thought to die; but a religious awe
Restrains me, and the dread lest death itself
Might be no refuge from the consciousness
Of what is yet unexpiated. Oh, speak!
Orsino. Accuse him of the deed, and let the law
Avenge thee.
Beatrice. Oh, ice-hearted counsellor!
If I could find a word that might make known
The crime of my destroyer; and that done,
My tongue should like a knife tear out the secret
Which cankers my heart's core; ay, lay all bare
So that my unpolluted fame should be
With vilest gossips a stale-mouthèd story;
A mock, a byword, an astonishment: —
If this were done, which never shall be done,
Think of the offender's gold, his dreaded hate,
And the strange horror of the accuser's tale,
Baffling belief, and overpowering speech;
Scarce whispered, unimaginable, wrapped
In hideous hints . . . Oh, most assured redress!
Orsino. You will endure it then?
Beatrice. Endure? — Orsino,
It seems your counsel is small profit.

[*Turns from him, and speaks half to herself.*
Ay,
All must be suddenly resolved and done.
What is this undistinguishable mist
Of thoughts, which rise, like shadow after shadow,
Darkening each other?
Orsino. Should the offender live?
Triumph in his misdeed? and make, by use,
His crime, whate'er it is, dreadful no doubt,
Thine element; until thou mayst become
Utterly lost; subdued even to the hue
Of that which thou permittest?
Beatrice (*to herself*). Mighty death!
Thou double-visaged shadow! Only judge!
Rightfullest arbiter! [*She retires absorbed in thought.*
Lucretia. If the lightning
Of God has e'er descended to avenge . . .
Orsino. Blaspheme not! His high Providence commits
Its glory on this earth, and their own wrongs
Into the hands of men; if they neglect
To punish crime . . .
Lucretia. But if one, like this wretch,
Should mock, with gold, opinion, law, and power?
If there be no appeal to that which makes
The guiltiest tremble? If because our wrongs,
For that they are unnatural, strange, and monstrous,
Exceed all measure of belief? O God!
If, for the very reasons which should make
Redress most swift and sure, our injurer triumphs?
And we, the victims, bear worse punishment
Than that appointed for their torturer?
Orsino. Think not
But that there is redress where there is wrong,
So we be bold enough to seize it.
Lucretia. How?
If there were any way to make all sure,
I know not . . . but I think it might be good
To . . .
Orsino. Why, his late outrage to Beatrice;
For it is such, as I but faintly guess,
As makes remorse dishonour, and leaves her

Only one duty, how she may avenge:
You, but one refuge from ills ill endured;
Me, but one counsel . . .
Lucretia. For we cannot hope
That aid, or retribution, or resource
Will arise thence, where every other one
Might find them with less need. [BEATRICE *advances.*
Orsino. Then . . .
Beatrice. Peace, Orsino!
And, honoured Lady, while I speak, I pray,
That you put off, as garments overworn,
Forbearance and respect, remorse and fear,
And all the fit restraints of daily life,
Which have been borne from childhood, but which now
Would be a mockery to my holier plea.
As I have said, I have endured a wrong,
Which, though it be expressionless, is such
As asks atonement; both for what is past,
And lest I be reserved, day after day,
To load with crimes an overburthened soul,
And be . . . what ye can dream not. I have prayed
To God, and I have talked with my own heart,
And have unravelled my entangled will,
And have at length determined what is right.
Art thou my friend, Orsino? False or true?
Pledge thy salvation ere I speak.
Orsino. I swear
To dedicate my cunning, and my strength,
My silence, and whatever else is mine,
To thy commands.
Lucretia. You think we should devise
His death?
Beatrice. And execute what is devised,
And suddenly. We must be brief and bold.
Orsino. And yet most cautious.
Lucretia. For the jealous laws
Would punish us with death and infamy
For that which it became themselves to do.
Beatrice. Be cautious as ye may, but prompt. Orsino,
What are the means?
Orsino. I know two dull, fierce outlaws,

Who think man's spirit as a worm's, and they
Would trample out, for any slight caprice,
The meanest or the noblest life. This mood
Is marketable here in Rome. They sell
What we now want.
Lucretia. To-morrow before dawn,
Cenci will take us to that lonely rock,
Petrella, in the Apulian Apennines.
If he arrive there . . .
Beatrice. He must not arrive.
Orsino. Will it be dark before you reach the tower?
Lucretia. The sun will scarce be set.
Beatrice. But I remember
Two miles on this side of the fort, the road
Crosses a deep ravine; 'tis rough and narrow,
And winds with short turns down the precipice;
And in its depth there is a mighty rock,
Which has, from unimaginable years,
Sustained itself with terror and with toil
Over a gulf, and with the agony
With which it clings seems slowly coming down;
Even as a wretched soul, hour after hour,
Clings to the mass of life; yet clinging, leans;
And leaning, makes more dark the dread abyss
In which it fears to fall: beneath this crag
Huge as despair, as if in weariness,
The melancholy mountain yawns . . . below,
You hear but see not an impetuous torrent
Raging among the caverns, and a bridge
Crosses the chasm; and high above there grow,
With intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,
Cedars, and yews, and pines; whose tangled hair
Is matted in one solid roof of shade
By the dark ivy's twine. At noonday here
'Tis twilight, and at sunset blackest night.
Orsino. Before you reach that bridge make some excuse
For spurring on your mules, or loitering
Until . . .
Beatrice. What sound is that?
Lucretia. Hark! No, it cannot be a servant's step;
It must be Cenci, unexpectedly

Returned . . . Make some excuse for being here.
Beatrice (*to* ORSINO, *as she goes out*). That step we hear approach must never pass
The bridge of which we spoke.
[*Exeunt* LUCRETIA *and* BEATRICE.
Orsino. What shall I do?
Cenci must find me here, and I must bear
The imperious inquisition of his looks
As to what brought me hither: let me mask
Mine own in some inane and vacant smile.

Enter GIACOMO, *in a hurried manner.*

How! Have you ventured hither? Know you then
That Cenci is from home?
Giacomo. I sought him here;
And now must wait till he returns.
Orsino. Great God!
Weigh you the danger of this rashness?
Giacomo. Ay!
Does my destroyer know his danger? We
Are now no more, as once, parent and child,
But man to man; the oppressor to the oppressed;
The slanderer to the slandered; foe to foe:
He has cast Nature off, which was his shield,
And Nature casts him off, who is her shame;
And I spurn both. Is it a father's throat
Which I will shake, and say, I ask not gold;
I ask not happy years; nor memories
Of tranquil childhood; nor home-sheltered love;
Though all these hast thou torn from me, and more;
But only my fair fame; only one hoard
Of peace, which I thought hidden from thy hate,
Under the penury heaped on me by thee,
Or I will . . . God can understand and pardon,
Why should I speak with man?
Orsino. Be calm, dear friend.
Giacomo. Well, I will calmly tell you what he did.
This old Francesco Cenci, as you know,
Borrowed the dowry of my wife from me,
And then denied the loan; and left me so
In poverty, the which I sought to mend

By holding a poor office in the state.
It had been promised to me, and already
I bought new clothing for my raggèd babes,
And my wife smiled; and my heart knew repose.
When Cenci's intercession, as I found,
Conferred this office on a wretch, whom thus
He paid for vilest service. I returned
With this ill news, and we sate sad together
Solacing our despondency with tears
Of such affection and unbroken faith
As temper life's worst bitterness; when he,
As he is wont, came to upbraid and curse,
Mocking our poverty, and telling us
Such was God's scourge for disobedient sons.
And then, that I might strike him dumb with shame,
I spoke of my wife's dowry; but he coined
A brief yet specious tale, how I had wasted
The sum in secret riot; and he saw
My wife was touched, and he went smiling forth.
And when I knew the impression he had made,
And felt my wife insult with silent scorn
My ardent truth, and look averse and cold,
I went forth too: but soon returned again;
Yet not so soon but that my wife had taught
My children her harsh thoughts, and they all cried,
"Give us clothes, father! Give us better food!
What you in one night squander were enough
For months!" I looked, and saw that home was hell.
And to that hell will I return no more
Until mine enemy has rendered up
Atonement, or, as he gave life to me
I will, reversing Nature's law . . .

Orsino. Trust me,
The compensation which thou seekest here
Will be denied.

Giacomo. Then . . . Are you not my friend?
Did you not hint at the alternative,
Upon the brink of which you see I stand,
The other day when we conversed together?
My wrongs were then less. That word parricide,
Although I am resolved, haunts me like fear.

Orsino. It must be fear itself, for the bare word
Is hollow mockery. Mark, how wisest God
Draws to one point the threads of a just doom,
So sanctifying it: what you devise
Is, as it were, accomplished.
Giacomo. Is he dead?
Orsino. His grave is ready. Know that since we met
Cenci has done an outrage to his daughter.
Giacomo. What outrage?
Orsino. That she speaks not, but you may
Conceive such half conjectures as I do,
From her fixed paleness, and the lofty grief
Of her stern brow bent on the idle air,
And her severe unmodulated voice,
Drowning both tenderness and dread; and last
From this; that whilst her step-mother and I,
Bewildered in our horror, talked together
With obscure hints; both self-misunderstood
And darkly guessing, stumbling, in our talk,
Over the truth, and yet to its revenge,
She interrupted us, and with a look
Which told before she spoke it, he must die: . . .
Giacomo. It is enough. My doubts are well appeased;
There is a higher reason for the act
Than mine; there is a holier judge than me,
A more unblamed avenger. Beatrice,
Who in the gentleness of thy sweet youth
Hast never trodden on a worm, or bruised
A living flower, but thou hast pitied it
With needless tears! Fair sister, thou in whom
Men wondered how such loveliness and wisdom
Did not destroy each other! Is there made
Ravage of thee? O heart, I ask no more
Justification! Shall I wait, Orsino,
Till he return, and stab him at the door?
Orsino. Not so; some accident might interpose
To rescue him from what is now most sure;
And you are unprovided where to fly,
How to excuse or to conceal. Nay, listen:
All is contrived; success is so assured
That . . .

Enter BEATRICE.

Beatrice. 'Tis my brother's voice! You know me not?
Giacomo. My sister, my lost sister!
Beatrice. Lost indeed!
I see Orsino has talked with you, and
That you conjecture things too horrible
To speak, yet far less than the truth. Now, stay not,
He might return: yet kiss me; I shall know
That then thou hast consented to his death.
Farewell, farewell! Let piety to God,
Brotherly love, justice and clemency,
And all things that make tender hardest hearts
Make thine hard, brother. Answer not . . . farewell.
[*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE II. — *A mean Apartment in* GIACOMO'S *House.* GIACOMO *alone.*

Giacomo. 'Tis midnight, and Orsino comes not yet.
[*Thunder, and the sound of a storm.*
What! can the everlasting elements
Feel with a worm like man? If so, the shaft
Of mercy-wingèd lightning would not fall
On stones and trees. My wife and children sleep:
They are now living in unmeaning dreams:
But I must wake, still doubting if that deed
Be just which is most necessary. O,
Thou unreplenished lamp! whose narrow fire
Is shaken by the wind, and on whose edge
Devouring darkness hovers! Thou small flame,
Which, as a dying pulse rises and falls,
Still flickerest up and down, how very soon,
Did I not feed thee, wouldst thou fail and be
As thou hadst never been! So wastes and sinks
Even now, perhaps, the life that kindled mine:
But that no power can fill with vital oil
That broken lamp of flesh. Ha! 'tis the blood
Which fed these veins that ebbs till all is cold:
It is the form that moulded mine that sinks
Into the white and yellow spasms of death:

It is the soul by which mine was arrayed
In God's immortal likeness which now stands
Naked before Heaven's judgement seat! [*A bell strikes.*
One! Two!
The hours crawl on; and when my hairs are white,
My son will then perhaps be waiting thus,
Tortured between just hate and vain remorse;
Chiding the tardy messenger of news
Like those which I expect. I almost wish
He be not dead, although my wrongs are great;
Yet . . . 'tis Orsino's step . . .

Enter ORSINO.

Speak!
Orsino. I am come
To say he has escaped.
Giacomo. Escaped!
Orsino. And safe
Within Petrella. He passed by the spot
Appointed for the deed an hour too soon.
Giacomo. Are we the fools of such contingencies?
And do we waste in blind misgivings thus
The hours when we should act? Then wind and thunder,
Which seemed to howl his knell, is the loud laughter
With which Heaven mocks our weakness! I henceforth
Will ne'er repent of aught designed or done
But my repentance.
Orsino. See, the lamp is out.
Giacomo. If no remorse is ours when the dim air
Has drank this innocent flame, why should we quail
When Cenci's life, that light by which ill spirits
See the worst deeds they prompt, shall sink for ever?
No, I am hardened.
Orsino. Why, what need of this?
Who feared the pale intrusion of remorse
In a just deed? Although our first plan failed,
Doubt not but he will soon be laid to rest.
But light the lamp; let us not talk i' the dark.
Giacomo (*lighting the lamp*). And yet once quenched I cannot thus relume

My father's life: do you not think his ghost
Might plead that argument with God?
Orsino. Once gone
You cannot now recall your sister's peace;
Your own extinguished years of youth and hope;
Nor your wife's bitter words; nor all the taunts
Which, from the prosperous, weak misfortune takes;
Nor your dead mother; nor . . .
Giacomo. O, speak no more!
I am resolved, although this very hand
Must quench the life that animated it.
Orsino. There is no need of that. Listen: you know
Olimpio, the castellan of Petrella
In old Colonna's time; him whom your father
Degraded from his post? And Marzio,
That desperate wretch, whom he deprived last year
Of a reward of blood, well earned and due?
Giacomo. I know Olimpio; and they say he hated
Old Cenci so, that in his silent rage
His lips grew white only to see him pass.
Of Marzio I know nothing.
Orsino. Marzio's hate
Matches Olimpio's. I have sent these men,
But in your name, and as at your request,
To talk with Beatrice and Lucretia.
Giacomo. Only to talk?
Orsino. The moments which even now
Pass onward to to-morrow's midnight hour
May memorize their flight with death: ere then
They must have talked, and may perhaps have done,
And made an end . . .
Giacomo. Listen! What sound is that?
Orsino. The house-dog moans, and the beams crack: nought else.
Giacomo. It is my wife complaining in her sleep:
I doubt not she is saying bitter things
Of me; and all my children round her dreaming
That I deny them sustenance.
Orsino. Whilst he
Who truly took it from them, and who fills
Their hungry rest with bitterness, now sleeps

Lapped in bad pleasures, and triumphantly
Mocks thee in visions of successful hate
Too like the truth of day.
Giacomo. If e'er he wakes
Again, I will not trust to hireling hands . . .
Orsino. Why, that were well. I must be gone; good-night.
When next we meet — may all be done!
Giacomo. And all
Forgotten: Oh, that I had never been! [*Exeunt.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Castle of Petrella.*

Enter CENCI.

Cenci. She comes not; yet I left her even now
Vanquished and faint. She knows the penalty
Of her delay: yet what if threats are vain?
Am I not now within Petrella's moat?
Or fear I still the eyes and ears of Rome?
Might I not drag her by the golden hair?
Stamp on her? Keep her sleepless till her brain
Be overworn? Tame her with chains and famine?
Less would suffice. Yet so to leave undone
What I most seek! No, 'tis her stubborn will
Which by its own consent shall stoop as low
As that which drags it down.

Enter LUCRETIA.

Thou loathèd wretch!
Hide thee from my abhorrence: fly, begone!

10. Woodberry points out that the "peculiar delicacy" with which Shelley said that he had treated the subject is not merely a matter of language (compare l. 140 below and n.), but lies in the fact that Cenci's motive is rather hate than lust; his aim is to win his daughter's consent and thereby destroy her soul. This treatment is in harmony with Shelley's constant insistence that evil is dependent on human will and as such is primarily spiritual. Beatrice "cannot be truly dishonoured" by what is forced upon her against her will.

Yet stay! Bid Beatrice come hither.
Lucretia. Oh,
Husband! I pray for thine own wretched sake
Heed what thou dost. A man who walks like thee
Through crimes, and through the danger of his crimes,
Each hour may stumble o'er a sudden grave.
And thou art old; thy hairs are hoary gray;
As thou wouldst save thyself from death and hell,
Pity thy daughter; give her to some friend
In marriage: so that she may tempt thee not
To hatred, or worse thoughts, if worse there be.
Cenci. What! like her sister who has found a home
To mock my hate from with prosperity?
Strange ruin shall destroy both her and thee
And all that yet remain. My death may be
Rapid, her destiny outspeeds it. Go,
Bid her come hither, and before my mood
Be changed, lest I should drag her by the hair.
Lucretia. She sent me to thee, husband. At thy presence
She fell, as thou dost know, into a trance;
And in that trance she heard a voice which said,
"Cenci must die! Let him confess himself!
Even now the accusing Angel waits to hear
If God, to punish his enormous crimes,
Harden his dying heart!"
Cenci. Why — such things are . . .
No doubt divine revealings may be made.
'Tis plain I have been favoured from above,
For when I cursed my sons they died. — Ay . . . so . . .
As to the right or wrong, that's talk . . . repentance . . .
Repentance is an easy moment's work
And more depends on God than me. Well . . . well . . .
I must give up the greater point, which was
To poison and corrupt her soul.
[*A pause;* LUCRETIA *approaches anxiously, and then shrinks back as he speaks.*

25. Locock remarks that this is seemingly inconsistent with I, ii, 69–70, and suggests that "prosperity" may be equivalent to "impunity."

37. The pauses in Cenci's speech indicate that he is impressed by Lucretia's words, which are designed to lead him to confess himself before the plot against his life is carried out. Although without fear, he apparently is not above superstition.

One, two;
Ay . . . Rocco and Cristofano my curse
Strangled: and Giacomo, I think, will find
Life a worse Hell than that beyond the grave:
Beatrice shall, if there be skill in hate,
Die in despair, blaspheming: to Bernardo,
He is so innocent, I will bequeath
The memory of these deeds, and make his youth
The sepulchre of hope, where evil thoughts
Shall grow like weeds on a neglected tomb.
When all is done, out in the wide Campagna,
I will pile up my silver and my gold;
My costly robes, paintings and tapestries;
My parchments and all records of my wealth,
And make a bonfire in my joy, and leave
Of my possessions nothing but my name;
Which shall be an inheritance to strip
Its wearer bare as infamy. That done,
My soul, which is a scourge, will I resign
Into the hands of him who wielded it;
Be it for its own punishment or theirs,
He will not ask it of me till the lash
Be broken in its last and deepest wound;
Until its hate be all inflicted. Yet,
Lest death outspeed my purpose, let me make
Short work and sure . . . [*Going.*

Lucretia. (*Stops him.*) Oh, stay! It was a feint:
She had no vision, and she heard no voice.
I said it but to awe thee.

Cenci. That is well.
Vile palterer with the sacred truth of God,
Be thy soul choked with that blaspheming lie!
For Beatrice worse terrors are in store
To bend her to my will.

Lucretia. Oh! to what will?
What cruel sufferings more than she has known
Canst thou inflict?

Cenci. Andrea! Go call my daughter,
And if she comes not tell her that I come.
What sufferings? I will drag her, step by step,
Through infamies unheard of among men:

She shall stand shelterless in the broad noon
Of public scorn, for acts blazoned abroad,
One among which shall be . . . What? Canst thou guess?
She shall become (for what she most abhors
Shall have a fascination to entrap
Her loathing will) to her own conscious self
All she appears to others; and when dead,
As she shall die unshrived and unforgiven,
A rebel to her father and her God,
Her corpse shall be abandoned to the hounds;
Her name shall be the terror of the earth;
Her spirit shall approach the throne of God
Plague-spotted with my curses. I will make
Body and soul a monstrous lump of ruin.

Enter ANDREA.

Andrea. The Lady Beatrice . . .
Cenci. Speak, pale slave! What
Said she?
Andrea. My Lord, 'twas what she looked; she said:
"Go tell my father that I see the gulf
Of Hell between us two, which he may pass;
I will not." [*Exit* ANDREA.
Cenci. Go thou quick, Lucretia,
Tell her to come; yet let her understand
Her coming is consent: and say, moreover,
That if she come not I will curse her. [*Exit* LUCRETIA.
Ha!
With what but with a father's curse doth God
Panic-strike armèd victory, and make pale
Cities in their prosperity? The world's Father
Must grant a parent's prayer against his child,
Be he who asks even what men call me.
Will not the deaths of her rebellious brothers
Awe her before I speak? For I on them
Did imprecate quick ruin, and it came.

Enter LUCRETIA.

Well; what? Speak, wretch!
Lucretia. She said, "I cannot come;
Go tell my father that I see a torrent

Of his own blood raging between us."
Cenci (*kneeling*). God!
Hear me! If this most specious mass of flesh,
Which Thou hast made my daughter; this my blood,
This particle of my divided being;
Or rather, this my bane and my disease,
Whose sight infects and poisons me; this devil
Which sprung from me as from a hell, was meant
To aught good use; if her bright loveliness
Was kindled to illumine this dark world;
If nursed by Thy selectest dew of love
Such virtues blossom in her as should make
The peace of life, I pray Thee for my sake,
As Thou the common God and Father art
Of her, and me, and all; reverse that doom!
Earth, in the name of God, let her food be
Poison, until she be encrusted round
With leprous stains! Heaven, rain upon her head
The blistering drops of the Maremma's dew,
Till she be speckled like a toad; parch up
Those love-enkindled lips, warp those fine limbs
To loathèd lameness! All-beholding sun,
Strike in thine envy those life-darting eyes
With thine own blinding beams!
Lucretia. Peace! Peace!
For thine own sake unsay those dreadful words.
When high God grants He punishes such prayers.
Cenci (*leaping up, and throwing his right hand towards Heaven*). He does His will, I mine! This in addition,
That if she have a child . . .
Lucretia. Horrible thought!
Cenci. That if she ever have a child; and thou,
Quick Nature! I adjure thee by thy God,
That thou be fruitful in her, and increase
And multiply, fulfilling his command,

115. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 73 n. Shelley wrote to Medwin in 1820: "As to Cenci's curse — I know not whether I can defend it or no. I wish I may be able, since, as it often happens respecting the worst part of an author's work, it is a particular favorite with me."

131. "Maremma," a marsh in Tuscany, of great extent.

140. As Shelley himself pointed out (according to Mrs. Shelley's note) this is "the nearest allusion" to the exact nature of Cenci's crime.

And my deep imprecation! May it be
A hideous likeness of herself, that as
From a distorting mirror, she may see
Her image mixed with what she most abhors,
Smiling upon her from her nursing breast.
And that the child may from its infancy
Grow, day by day, more wicked and deformed,
Turning her mother's love to misery:
And that both she and it may live until
It shall repay her care and pain with hate,
Or what may else be more unnatural.
So he may hunt her through the clamorous scoffs
Of the loud world to a dishonoured grave.
Shall I revoke this curse? Go, bid her come,
Before my words are chronicled in Heaven. [*Exit* LUCRETIA.
I do not feel as if I were a man,
But like a fiend appointed to chastise
The offences of some unremembered world.
My blood is running up and down my veins;
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle:
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe;
My heart is beating with an expectation
Of horrid joy.

Enter LUCRETIA.

What? Speak!

Lucretia. She bids thee curse;
And if thy curses, as they cannot do,
Could kill her soul . . .

Cenci. She would not come. 'Tis well,
I can do both: first take what I demand,
And then extort concession. To thy chamber!
Fly ere I spurn thee: and beware this night
That thou cross not my footsteps. It were safer
To come between the tiger and his prey. [*Exit* LUCRETIA.
It must be late; mine eyes grow weary dim
With unaccustomed heaviness of sleep.
Conscience! Oh, thou most insolent of lies!
They say that sleep, that healing dew of Heaven,

176. See ii, 30 below.

Steeps not in balm the foldings of the brain
Which thinks thee an impostor. I will go
First to belie thee with an hour of rest,
Which will be deep and calm, I feel: and then . . .
O multitudinous Hell, the fiends will shake
Thine arches with the laughter of their joy!
There shall be lamentation heard in Heaven
As o'er an angel fallen; and upon Earth
All good shall droop and sicken, and ill things
Shall with a spirit of unnatural life
Stir and be quickened . . . even as I am now. [*Exit.*

SCENE II. — *Before the Castle of Petrella. Enter* BEATRICE *and* LUCRETIA *above on the Ramparts.*

Beatrice. They come not yet.
Lucretia. 'Tis scarce midnight.
Beatrice. How slow
Behind the course of thought, even sick with speed,
Lags leaden-footed time!
Lucretia. The minutes pass . . .
If he should wake before the deed is done?
Beatrice. O mother! He must never wake again.
What thou hast said persuades me that our act
Will but dislodge a spirit of deep hell
Out of a human form.
Lucretia. 'Tis true he spoke
Of death and judgement with strange confidence
For one so wicked; as a man believing
In God, yet recking not of good or ill.
And yet to die without confession! . . .
Beatrice. Oh!
Believe that Heaven is merciful and just,
And will not add our dread necessity
To the amount of his offences.

Enter OLIMPIO *and* MARZIO, *below.*

Lucretia. See,
They come.
Beatrice. All mortal things must hasten thus
To their dark end. Let us go down.
[*Exeunt* LUCRETIA *and* BEATRICE *from above.*

Olimpio. How feel you to this work?
Marzio. As one who thinks
A thousand crowns excellent market price
For an old murderer's life. Your cheeks are pale.
Olimpio. It is the white reflection of your own,
Which you call pale.
Marzio. Is that their natural hue?
Olimpio. Or 'tis my hate and the deferred desire
To wreak it, which extinguishes their blood.
Marzio. You are inclined then to this business?
Olimpio. Ay.
If one should bribe me with a thousand crowns
To kill a serpent which had stung my child,
I could not be more willing.

Enter BEATRICE *and* LUCRETIA, *below.*

Noble ladies!
Beatrice. Are ye resolved?
Olimpio. Is he asleep?
Marzio. Is all
Quiet?
Lucretia. I mixed an opiate with his drink:
He sleeps so soundly . . .
Beatrice. That his death will be
But as a change of sin-chastising dreams,
A dark continuance of the Hell within him,
Which God extinguish! But ye are resolved?
Ye know it is a high and holy deed?
Olimpio. We are resolved.
Marzio. As to the how this act
Be warranted, it rests with you.
Beatrice. Well, follow!
Olimpio. Hush! Hark! What noise is that?
Marzio. Ha! some one comes!
Beatrice. Ye conscience-stricken cravens, rock to rest
Your baby hearts. It is the iron gate,
Which ye left open, swinging to the wind,
That enters whistling as in scorn. Come, follow!
And be your steps like mine, light, quick and bold. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. — *An Apartment in the Castle. Enter* BEATRICE *and* LUCRETIA.

Lucretia. They are about it now.
Beatrice. Nay, it is done.
Lucretia. I have not heard him groan.
Beatrice. He will not groan.
Lucretia. What sound is that?
Beatrice. List! 'tis the tread of feet
About his bed.
Lucretia. My God!
If he be now a cold stiff corpse . . .
Beatrice. O, fear not
What may be done, but what is left undone:
The act seals all.

Enter OLIMPIO *and* MARZIO.

Is it accomplished?
Marzio. What?
Olimpio. Did you not call?
Beatrice. When?
Olimpio. Now.
Beatrice. I ask if all is over?
Olimpio. We dare not kill an old and sleeping man;
His thin gray hair, his stern and reverend brow,
His veinèd hands crossed on his heaving breast,
And the calm innocent sleep in which he lay,
Quelled me. Indeed, indeed, I cannot do it.
Marzio. But I was bolder; for I chid Olimpio,
And bade him bear his wrongs to his own grave
And leave me the reward. And now my knife
Touched the loose wrinkled throat, when the old man
Stirred in his sleep, and said, "God! hear, O, hear,
A father's curse! What, art Thou not our Father?"
And then he laughed. I knew it was the ghost

8. Compare *Macbeth*, II, ii, 17:

Lady M. Did not you speak?
Macb. When?
Lady M. Now.

The remainder of the scene contains a number of reminiscences of *Macbeth*. It should be remarked, however, that in his account of the murder Shelley follows closely the MS. which was his primary source.

Of my dead father speaking through his lips,
And could not kill him.
Beatrice. Miserable slaves!
Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,
Found ye the boldness to return to me
With such a deed undone? Base palterers!
Cowards and traitors! Why, the very conscience
Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge
Is an equivocation: it sleeps over
A thousand daily acts disgracing men;
And when a deed where mercy insults Heaven . . .
Why do I talk?
[*Snatching a dagger from one of them and raising it.*
Hadst thou a tongue to say,
"She murdered her own father!" — I must do it!
But never dream ye shall outlive him long!
Olimpio. Stop, for God's sake!
Marzio. I will go back and kill him.
Olimpio. Give me the weapon, we must do thy will.
Beatrice. Take it! Depart! Return!
[*Exeunt* Olimpio *and* Marzio.
How pale thou art!
We do but that which 'twere a deadly crime
To leave undone.
Lucretia. Would it were done!
Beatrice. Even whilst
That doubt is passing through your mind, the world
Is conscious of a change. Darkness and Hell
Have swallowed up the vapour they sent forth
To blacken the sweet light of life. My breath
Comes, methinks, lighter, and the jellied blood
Runs freely through my veins. Hark!

Enter Olimpio *and* Marzio.

He is . . .
Olimpio. Dead!
Marzio. We strangled him that there might be no blood;
And then we threw his heavy corpse i' the garden
Under the balcony; 'twill seem it fell.
Beatrice (*giving them a bag of coin*). Here, take this gold,
and hasten to your homes.

And, Marzio, because thou wast only awed
By that which made me tremble, wear thou this!
[*Clothes him in a rich mantle.*
It was the mantle which my grandfather
Wore in his high prosperity, and men
Envied his state: so may they envy thine.
Thou wert a weapon in the hand of God
To a just use. Live long and thrive! And, mark,
If thou hast crimes, repent: this deed is none.
[*A horn is sounded.*
Lucretia. Hark, 'tis the castle horn; my God! it sounds
Like the last trump.
Beatrice. Some tedious guest is coming.
Lucretia. The drawbridge is let down; there is a tramp
Of horses in the court; fly, hide yourselves!
[*Exeunt* OLIMPIO *and* MARZIO.
Beatrice. Let us retire to counterfeit deep rest;
I scarcely need to counterfeit it now:
The spirit which doth reign within these limbs
Seems strangely undisturbed. I could even sleep
Fearless and calm: all ill is surely past. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV. — *Another Apartment in the Castle. Enter on one side the* LEGATE SAVELLA, *introduced by a Servant, and on the other* LUCRETIA *and* BERNARDO.

Savella. Lady, my duty to his Holiness
Be my excuse that thus unseasonably
I break upon your rest. I must speak with
Count Cenci; doth he sleep?
Lucretia (*in a hurried and confused manner*). I think he sleeps;
Yet wake him not, I pray, spare me awhile,
He is a wicked and a wrathful man;
Should he be roused out of his sleep to-night,
Which is, I know, a hell of angry dreams,
It were not well; indeed it were not well.
Wait till day break . . . (*aside*) O, I am deadly sick!
Savella. I grieve thus to distress you, but the Count
Must answer charges of the gravest import,
And suddenly; such my commission is.

Lucretia (*with increased agitation*). I dare not rouse him: I
know none who dare . . .
'Twere perilous; . . . you might as safely waken
A serpent; or a corpse in which some fiend
Were laid to sleep.
Savella. Lady, my moments here
Are counted. I must rouse him from his sleep,
Since none else dare.
Lucretia (*aside*). O, terror! O, despair!
(*To* BERNARDO.) Bernardo, conduct you the Lord Legate to
Your father's chamber. [*Exeunt* SAVELLA *and* BERNARDO.

Enter BEATRICE.

Beatrice. 'Tis a messenger
Come to arrest the culprit who now stands
Before the throne of unappealable God.
Both Earth and Heaven, consenting arbiters,
Acquit our deed.
Lucretia. Oh, agony of fear!
Would that he yet might live! Even now I heard
The Legate's followers whisper as they passed
They had a warrant for his instant death.
All was prepared by unforbidden means
Which we must pay so dearly, having done.
Even now they search the tower, and find the body;
Now they suspect the truth; now they consult
Before they come to tax us with the fact;
O, horrible, 'tis all discovered!
Beatrice. Mother,
What is done wisely, is done well. Be bold
As thou art just. 'Tis like a truant child
To fear that others know what thou hast done,

24. There is a double irony in Beatrice's words, for not only is the unexpected visit of the Papal Legate the means by which Cenci's murder is discovered and the conspirators convicted, but Shelley's intention is clearly to show that Beatrice ought not to have taken revenge; for the dramatic entrance of Savella with a warrant for Cenci's arrest is entirely Shelley's own invention.—In this scene there is a definite break in the action, which greatly lessens the unity of the play. Heretofore, the relations between Beatrice and Count Cenci have been so exclusively the focus of interest that after the Count's death the reader almost feels that he is beginning a new play.

Even from thine own strong consciousness, and thus
Write on unsteady eyes and altered cheeks
All thou wouldst hide. Be faithful to thyself,
And fear no other witness but thy fear.
For if, as cannot be, some circumstance
Should rise in accusation, we can blind
Suspicion with such cheap astonishment,
Or overbear it with such guiltless pride,
As murderers cannot feign. The deed is done,
And what may follow now regards not me.
I am as universal as the light;
Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock
But shakes it not. [*A cry within and tumult.*

Voices. Murder! Murder! Murder!

Enter BERNARDO *and* SAVELLA.

Savella (*to his followers*). Go search the castle round; sound the alarm;
Look to the gates that none escape!

Beatrice. What now?

Bernardo. I know not what to say . . . my father's dead.

Beatrice. How, dead! he only sleeps; you mistake, brother.
His sleep is very calm, very like death;
'Tis wonderful how well a tyrant sleeps.
He is not dead?

Bernardo. Dead; murdered.

Lucretia (*with extreme agitation*). Oh no, no,
He is not murdered though he may be dead;
I have alone the keys of those apartments.

Savella. Ha! Is it so?

Beatrice. My Lord, I pray excuse us;
We will retire; my mother is not well:
She seems quite overcome with this strange horror.
[*Exeunt* LUCRETIA *and* BEATRICE.

Savella. Can you suspect who may have murdered him?

Bernardo. I know not what to think.

Savella. Can you name any
Who had an interest in his death?

Bernardo. Alas!

I can name none who had not, and those most
Who most lament that such a deed is done;
My mother, and my sister, and myself.
Savella. 'Tis strange! There were clear marks of violence.
I found the old man's body in the moonlight
Hanging beneath the window of his chamber,
Among the branches of a pine: he could not
Have fallen there, for all his limbs lay heaped
And effortless; 'tis true there was no blood . . .
Favour me, Sir — it much imports your house
That all should be made clear — to tell the ladies
That I request their presence. [*Exit* BERNARDO.

Enter GUARDS *bringing in* MARZIO.

Guard. We have one.
Officer. My Lord, we found this ruffian and another
Lurking among the rocks; there is no doubt
But that they are the murderers of Count Cenci:
Each had a bag of coin; this fellow wore
A gold-inwoven robe, which shining bright
Under the dark rocks to the glimmering moon
Betrayed them to our notice: the other fell
Desperately fighting.
Savella. What does he confess?
Officer. He keeps firm silence; but these lines found on him
May speak.
Savella. Their language is at least sincere. [*Reads.*

"*To the Lady Beatrice.*
"*That the atonement of what my nature sickens to conjecture may soon arrive, I send thee, at thy brother's desire, those who will speak and do more than I dare write. . . .*
"*Thy devoted servant, Orsino.*"

Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, *and* BERNARDO.

Knowest thou this writing, Lady?
Beatrice. No.
Savella. Nor thou?
Lucretia. (*Her conduct throughout the scene is marked by extreme agitation.*) Where was it found? What is it? It should be

Orsino's hand! It speaks of that strange horror
Which never yet found utterance, but which made
Between that hapless child and her dead father
A gulf of obscure hatred.
Savella. Is it so?
Is it true, Lady, that thy father did
Such outrages as to awaken in thee
Unfilial hate?
Beatrice. Not hate, 'twas more than hate:
This is most true, yet wherefore question me?
Savella. There is a deed demanding question done;
Thou hast a secret which will answer not.
Beatrice. What sayest? My Lord, your words are bold and rash.
Savella. I do arrest all present in the name
Of the Pope's Holiness. You must to Rome.
Lucretia. O, not to Rome! Indeed we are not guilty.
Beatrice. Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt? My Lord,
I am more innocent of parricide
Than is a child born fatherless . . . Dear mother,
Your gentleness and patience are no shield
For this keen-judging world, this two-edged lie,
Which seems, but is not. What! will human laws,
Rather will ye who are their ministers,
Bar all access to retribution first,
And then, when Heaven doth interpose to do
What ye neglect, arming familiar things
To the redress of an unwonted crime,
Make ye the victims who demanded it
Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits! That poor wretch
Who stands so pale, and trembling, and amazed,
If it be true he murdered Cenci, was
A sword in the right hand of justest God.
Wherefore should I have wielded it? Unless
The crimes which mortal tongue dare never name
God therefore scruples to avenge.
Savella. You own
That you desired his death?
Beatrice. It would have been

116. Compare *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, ll. 156–57.

A crime no less than his, if for one moment
That fierce desire had faded in my heart.
'Tis true I did believe, and hope, and pray,
Ay, I even knew . . . for God is wise and just,
That some strange sudden death hung over him.
'Tis true that this did happen, and most true
There was no other rest for me on earth,
No other hope in Heaven . . . now what of this?
Savella. Strange thoughts beget strange deeds; and here are both:
I judge thee not.
Beatrice. And yet, if you arrest me,
You are the judge and executioner
Of that which is the life of life: the breath
Of accusation kills an innocent name,
And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life
Which is a mask without it. 'Tis most false
That I am guilty of foul parricide;
Although I must rejoice, for justest cause,
That other hands have sent my father's soul
To ask the mercy he denied to me.
Now leave us free; stain not a noble house
With vague surmises of rejected crime;
Add to our sufferings and your own neglect
No heavier sum: let them have been enough:
Leave us the wreck we have.
Savella. I dare not, Lady.
I pray that you prepare yourselves for Rome:
There the Pope's further pleasure will be known.
Lucretia. O, not to Rome! O, take us not to Rome!
Beatrice. Why not to Rome, dear mother? There as here
Our innocence is as an armèd heel
To trample accusation. God is there
As here, and with His shadow ever clothes
The innocent, the injured and the weak;
And such are we. Cheer up, dear Lady, lean
On me; collect your wandering thoughts. My Lord,
As soon as you have taken some refreshment,
And had all such examinations made
Upon the spot, as may be necessary
To the full understanding of this matter,

We shall be ready. Mother; will you come?
Lucretia. Ha! they will bind us to the rack, and wrest
Self-accusation from our agony!
Will Giacomo be there? Orsino? Marzio?
All present; all confronted; all demanding
Each from the other's countenance the thing
Which is in every heart! O, misery!
[*She faints, and is borne out.*
Savella. She faints: an ill appearance this.
Beatrice. My Lord,
She knows not yet the uses of the world.
She fears that power is as a beast which grasps
And loosens not: a snake whose look transmutes
All things to guilt which is its nutriment.
She cannot know how well the supine slaves
Of blind authority read the truth of things
When written on a brow of guilelessness:
She sees not yet triumphant Innocence
Stand at the judgement-seat of mortal man,
A judge and an accuser of the wrong
Which drags it there. Prepare yourself, my Lord;
Our suite will join yours in the court below. [*Exeunt.*

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in* ORSINO'S *Palace. Enter* ORSINO *and* GIACOMO.

Giacomo. Do evil deeds thus quickly come to end?
O, that the vain remorse which must chastise
Crimes done, had but as loud a voice to warn
As its keen sting is mortal to avenge!
O, that the hour when present had cast off
The mantle of its mystery, and shown

1. This scene illustrates, as do some of the previous scenes between Orsino and Giacomo, one of the great weaknesses of the play; because of Shelley's interest in psychological analysis, he allows the main action to lag while two relatively unimportant characters reveal themselves in conversation.

The ghastly form with which it now returns
When its scared game is roused, cheering the hounds
Of conscience to their prey! Alas! Alas!
It was a wicked thought, a piteous deed,
To kill an old and hoary-headed father.
Orsino. It has turned out unluckily, in truth.
Giacomo. To violate the sacred doors of sleep;
To cheat kind Nature of the placid death
Which she prepares for overwearied age;
To drag from Heaven an unrepentant soul
Which might have quenched in reconciling prayers
A life of burning crimes . . .
Orsino. You cannot say
I urged you to the deed.
Giacomo. O, had I never
Found in thy smooth and ready countenance
The mirror of my darkest thoughts; hadst thou
Never with hints and questions made me look
Upon the monster of my thought, until
It grew familiar to desire . . .
Orsino. 'Tis thus
Men cast the blame of their unprosperous acts
Upon the abettors of their own resolve;
Or anything but their weak, guilty selves.
And yet, confess the truth, it is the peril
In which you stand that gives you this pale sickness
Of penitence; confess 'tis fear disguised
From its own shame that takes the mantle now
Of thin remorse. What if we yet were safe?
Giacomo. How can that be? Already Beatrice,
Lucretia and the murderer are in prison.
I doubt not officers are, whilst we speak,
Sent to arrest us.
Orsino. I have all prepared
For instant flight. We can escape even now,
So we take fleet occasion by the hair.
Giacomo. Rather expire in tortures, as I may.
What! will you cast by self-accusing flight
Assured conviction upon Beatrice?
She, who alone in this unnatural work,

23. Compare Pope's *Essay on Man*, II, 217–20.

Stands like God's angel ministered upon
By fiends; avenging such a nameless wrong
As turns black parricide to piety;
Whilst we for basest ends . . . I fear, Orsino,
While I consider all your words and looks,
Comparing them with your proposal now,
That you must be a villain. For what end
Could you engage in such a perilous crime,
Training me on with hints, and signs, and smiles,
Even to this gulf? Thou art no liar? No,
Thou art a lie! Traitor and murderer!
Coward and slave! But, no, defend thyself; [*Drawing.*
Let the sword speak what the indignant tongue
Disdains to brand thee with.

Orsino. Put up your weapon.
Is it the desperation of your fear
Makes you thus rash and sudden with a friend,
Now ruined for your sake? If honest anger
Have moved you, know, that what I just proposed
Was but to try you. As for me, I think,
Thankless affection led me to this point,
From which, if my firm temper could repent,
I cannot now recede. Even whilst we speak
The ministers of justice wait below:
They grant me these brief moments. Now if you
Have any word of melancholy comfort
To speak to your pale wife, 'twere best to pass
Out at the postern, and avoid them so.

Giacomo. O, generous friend! How canst thou pardon me?
Would that my life could purchase thine!

Orsino. That wish
Now comes a day too late. Haste; fare thee well!
Hear'st thou not steps along the corridor? [*Exit* Giacomo.
I'm sorry for it; but the guards are waiting
At his own gate, and such was my contrivance
That I might rid me both of him and them.
I thought to act a solemn comedy
Upon the painted scene of this new world,
And to attain my own peculiar ends
By some such plot of mingled good and ill
As others weave; but there arose a Power

Which grasped and snapped the threads of my device
And turned it to a net of ruin . . . Ha! [*A shout is heard.*
Is that my name I hear proclaimed abroad?
But I will pass, wrapped in a vile disguise;
Rags on my back, and a false innocence
Upon my face, through the misdeeming crowd
Which judges by what seems. 'Tis easy then
For a new name and for a country new,
And a new life, fashioned on old desires,
To change the honours of abandoned Rome.
And these must be the masks of that within,
Which must remain unaltered . . . Oh, I fear
That what is past will never let me rest!
Why, when none else is conscious, but myself,
Of my misdeeds, should my own heart's contempt
Trouble me? Have I not the power to fly
My own reproaches? Shall I be the slave
Of . . . what? A word? which those of this false world
Employ against each other, not themselves;
As men wear daggers not for self-offence.
But if I am mistaken, where shall I
Find the disguise to hide me from myself,
As now I skulk from every other eye? [*Exit.*

SCENE II. — *A Hall of Justice.* CAMILLO, JUDGES, *&c., are discovered seated;* MARZIO *is led in.*

First Judge. Accused, do you persist in your denial?
I ask you, are you innocent, or guilty?
I demand who were the participators
In your offence? Speak truth and the whole truth.
Marzio. My God! I did not kill him; I know nothing;
Olimpio sold the robe to me from which
You would infer my guilt.
Second Judge. Away with him!
First Judge. Dare you, with lips yet white from the rack's kiss
Speak false? Is it so soft a questioner,
That you would bandy lover's talk with it
Till it wind out your life and soul? Away!
Marzio. Spare me! O, spare! I will confess.

First Judge. Then speak.
Marzio. I strangled him in his sleep.
First Judge. Who urged you to it?
Marzio. His own son Giacomo, and the young prelate
Orsino sent me to Petrella; there
The ladies Beatrice and Lucretia
Tempted me with a thousand crowns, and I
And my companion forthwith murdered him.
Now let me die.
First Judge. This sounds as bad as truth. Guards, there,
Lead forth the prisoners!

Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, *and* GIACOMO, *guarded.*

Look upon this man;
When did you see him last?
Beatrice. We never saw him.
Marzio. You know me too well, Lady Beatrice.
Beatrice. I know thee! How? where? when?
Marzio. You know 'twas I
Whom you did urge with menaces and bribes
To kill your father. When the thing was done
You clothed me in a robe of woven gold
And bade me thrive: how I have thriven, you see.
You, my Lord Giacomo, Lady Lucretia,
You know that what I speak is true.
[BEATRICE *advances towards him; he covers his face, and shrinks back.*
Oh, dart
The terrible resentment of those eyes
On the dead earth! Turn them away from me!
They wound: 'twas torture forced the truth. My lords,
Having said this let me be led to death.
Beatrice. Poor wretch, I pity thee: yet stay awhile.
Camillo. Guards, lead him not away.
Beatrice. Cardinal Camillo,
You have a good repute for gentleness
And wisdom: can it be that you sit here
To countenance a wicked farce like this?
When some obscure and trembling slave is dragged
From sufferings which might shake the sternest heart
And bade to answer, not as he believes,

But as those may suspect or do desire
Whose questions thence suggest their own reply:
And that in peril of such hideous torments
As merciful God spares even the damned. Speak now
The thing you surely know, which is that you,
If your fine frame were stretched upon that wheel,
And you were told: "Confess that you did poison
Your little nephew; that fair blue-eyed child
Who was the lodestar of your life": — and though
All see, since his most swift and piteous death,
That day and night, and heaven and earth, and time,
And all the things hoped for or done therein
Are changed to you, through your exceeding grief,
Yet you would say, "I confess anything":
And beg from your tormentors, like that slave,
The refuge of dishonourable death.
I pray thee, Cardinal, that thou assert
My innocence.

Camillo (*much moved*). What shall we think, my Lords?
Shame on these tears! I thought the heart was frozen
Which is their fountain. I would pledge my soul
That she is guiltless.

Judge. Yet she must be tortured.

Camillo. I would as soon have tortured mine own nephew
(If he now lived he would be just her age;
His hair, too, was her colour, and his eyes
Like hers in shape, but blue and not so deep)
As that most perfect image of God's love
That ever came sorrowing upon the earth.
She is as pure as speechless infancy!

Judge. Well, be her purity on your head, my Lord,
If you forbid the rack. His Holiness
Enjoined us to pursue this monstrous crime
By the severest forms of law; nay, even
To stretch a point against the criminals.
The prisoners stand accused of parricide

49. Mrs. Shelley tells us that in writing this and the following lines, Shelley was thinking of the death of their own child, William, a few weeks before.

66. Locock points out that "but blue" must be a slip, since Beatrice's own eyes were blue.

Upon such evidence as justifies
Torture.
Beatrice. What evidence? This man's?
Judge. Even so.
Beatrice (*to* MARZIO). Come near. And who art thou thus
chosen forth
Out of the multitude of living men
To kill the innocent?
Marzio. I am Marzio,
Thy father's vassal.
Beatrice. Fix thine eyes on mine;
Answer to what I ask. [*Turning to the* JUDGES.
I prithee mark
His countenance: unlike bold calumny
Which sometimes dares not speak the thing it looks,
He dares not look the thing he speaks, but bends
His gaze on the blind earth.
(*To* MARZIO.) What! wilt thou say
That I did murder my own father?
Marzio. Oh!
Spare me! My brain swims round . . . I cannot speak . . .
It was that horrid torture forced the truth.
Take me away! Let her not look on me!
I am a guilty miserable wretch;
I have said all I know; now, let me die!
Beatrice. My lords, if by my nature I had been
So stern, as to have planned the crime alleged,
Which your suspicions dictate to this slave,
And the rack makes him utter, do you think
I should have left this two-edged instrument
Of my misdeed; this man, this bloody knife
With my own name engraven on the heft,
Lying unsheathed amid a world of foes,
For my own death? That with such horrible need
For deepest silence, I should have neglected
So trivial a precaution, as the making
His tomb the keeper of a secret written
On a thief's memory? What is his poor life?
What are a thousand lives? A parricide
Had trampled them like dust; and, see, he lives!
(*Turning to* MARZIO.) And thou . . .

Marzio. Oh, spare me! Speak to me no more!
That stern yet piteous look, those solemn tones,
Wound worse than torture.
(*To the* JUDGES.) I have told it all;
For pity's sake lead me away to death.
Camillo. Guards, lead him nearer the Lady Beatrice,
He shrinks from her regard like autumn's leaf
From the keen breath of the serenest north.
Beatrice. O thou who tremblest on the giddy verge
Of life and death, pause ere thou answerest me;
So mayst thou answer God with less dismay:
What evil have we done thee? I, alas!
Have lived but on this earth a few sad years,
And so my lot was ordered, that a father
First turned the moments of awakening life
To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope; and then
Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul;
And my untainted fame; and even that peace
Which sleeps within the core of the heart's heart;
But the wound was not mortal; so my hate
Became the only worship I could lift
To our great father, who in pity and love,
Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off;
And thus his wrong becomes my accusation;
And art thou the accuser? If thou hopest
Mercy in heaven, show justice upon earth:
Worse than a bloody hand is a hard heart.
If thou hast done murders, made thy life's path
Over the trampled laws of God and man,
Rush not before thy Judge, and say: "My maker,
I have done this and more; for there was one
Who was most pure and innocent on earth;
And because she endured what never any
Guilty or innocent endured before:
Because her wrongs could not be told, not thought;
Because thy hand at length did rescue her;
I with my words killed her and all her kin."
Think, I adjure you, what it is to slay
The reverence living in the minds of men
Towards our ancient house, and stainless fame!
Think what it is to strangle infant pity,

Cradled in the belief of guileless looks,
Till it become a crime to suffer. Think
What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood
All that which shows like innocence, and is,
Hear me, great God! I swear, most innocent,
So that the world lose all discrimination
Between the sly, fierce, wild regard of guilt,
And that which now compels thee to reply
To what I ask: Am I, or am I not
A parricide?
Marzio. Thou art not!
Judge. What is this?
Marzio. I here declare those whom I did accuse
Are innocent. 'Tis I alone am guilty.
Judge. Drag him away to torments; let them be
Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds
Of the heart's inmost cell. Unbind him not
Till he confess.
Marzio. Torture me as ye will:
A keener pang has wrung a higher truth
From my last breath. She is most innocent!
Bloodhounds, not men, glut yourselves well with me;
I will not give you that fine piece of nature
To rend and ruin. [*Exit* MARZIO, *guarded.*
Camillo. What say ye now, my Lords?
Judge. Let tortures strain the truth till it be white
As snow thrice sifted by the frozen wind.
Camillo. Yet stained with blood.
Judge (*to* BEATRICE). Know you this paper, Lady?
Beatrice. Entrap me not with questions. Who stands here
As my accuser? Ha! wilt thou be he,
Who art my judge? Accuser, witness, judge,
What, all in one? Here is Orsino's name;
Where is Orsino? Let his eye meet mine.
What means this scrawl? Alas! ye know not what,
And therefore on the chance that it may be
Some evil, will ye kill us?

Enter an Officer.

Officer. Marzio's dead.
Judge. What did he say?

Officer. Nothing. As soon as we
Had bound him on the wheel, he smiled on us,
As one who baffles a deep adversary;
And holding his breath, died.
Judge. There remains nothing
But to apply the question to those prisoners,
Who yet remain stubborn.
Camillo. I overrule
Further proceedings, and in the behalf
Of these most innocent and noble persons
Will use my interest with the Holy Father.
Judge. Let the Pope's pleasure then be done. Meanwhile
Conduct these culprits each to separate cells;
And be the engines ready: for this night
If the Pope's resolution be as grave,
Pious, and just as once, I'll wring the truth
Out of those nerves and sinews, groan by groan. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. — *The Cell of a Prison.* BEATRICE *is discovered asleep on a couch. Enter* BERNARDO.

Bernardo. How gently slumber rests upon her face,
Like the last thoughts of some day sweetly spent
Closing in night and dreams, and so prolonged.
After such torments as she bore last night,
How light and soft her breathing comes. Ay me!
Methinks that I shall never sleep again.
But I must shake the heavenly dew of rest
From this sweet folded flower, thus . . . wake! awake!
What, sister, canst thou sleep?
Beatrice (*awaking*). I was just dreaming
That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest
This cell seems like a kind of Paradise
After our father's presence.
Bernardo. Dear, dear sister,
Would that thy dream were not a dream! O God!
How shall I tell?
Beatrice. What wouldst thou tell, sweet brother?
Bernardo. Look not so calm and happy, or even whilst
I stand considering what I have to say
My heart will break.
Beatrice. See now, thou mak'st me weep:

How very friendless thou wouldst be, dear child,
If I were dead. Say what thou hast to say.
Bernardo. They have confessed; they could endure no more
The tortures . . .
Beatrice. Ha! What was there to confess?
They must have told some weak and wicked lie
To flatter their tormentors. Have they said
That they were guilty? O white innocence,
That thou shouldst wear the mask of guilt to hide
Thine awful and serenest countenance
From those who know thee not!

Enter JUDGE *with* LUCRETIA *and* GIACOMO, *guarded.*

Ignoble hearts!
For some brief spasms of pain, which are at least
As mortal as the limbs through which they pass,
Are centuries of high splendour laid in dust?
And that eternal honour which should live
Sunlike, above the reek of mortal fame,
Changed to a mockery and a byword? What!
Will you give up these bodies to be dragged
At horses' heels, so that our hair should sweep
The footsteps of the vain and senseless crowd,
Who, that they may make our calamity
Their worship and their spectacle, will leave
The churches and the theatres as void
As their own hearts? Shall the light multitude
Fling, at their choice, curses or faded pity,
Sad funeral flowers to deck a living corpse,
Upon us as we pass to pass away,
And leave . . . what memory of our having been?
Infamy, blood, terror, despair? O thou,
Who wert a mother to the parentless,
Kill not thy child! Let not her wrongs kill thee!
Brother, lie down with me upon the rack,
And let us each be silent as a corpse;
It soon will be as soft as any grave.
'Tis but the falsehood it can wring from fear
Makes the rack cruel.
Giacomo. They will tear the truth
Even from thee at last, those cruel pains:

For pity's sake say thou art guilty now.
Lucretia. Oh, speak the truth! Let us all quickly die;
And after death, God is our judge, not they;
He will have mercy on us.
Bernardo. If indeed
It can be true, say so, dear sister mine;
And then the Pope will surely pardon you,
And all be well.
Judge. Confess, or I will warp
Your limbs with such keen tortures . . .
Beatrice. Tortures! Turn
The rack henceforth into a spinning-wheel!
Torture your dog, that he may tell when last
He lapped the blood his master shed . . . not me!
My pangs are of the mind, and of the heart,
And of the soul; ay, of the inmost soul,
Which weeps within tears as of burning gall
To see, in this ill world where none are true,
My kindred false to their deserted selves.
And with considering all the wretched life
Which I have lived, and its now wretched end,
And the small justice shown by Heaven and Earth
To me or mine; and what a tyrant thou art,
And what slaves these; and what a world we make,
The oppressor and the oppressed . . . such pangs compel
My answer. What is it thou wouldst with me?
Judge. Art thou not guilty of thy father's death?
Beatrice. Or wilt thou rather tax high-judging God
That He permitted such an act as that
Which I have suffered, and which He beheld;
Made it unutterable, and took from it
All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,
But that which thou hast called my father's death?
Which is or is not what men call a crime,
Which either I have done, or have not done;
Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.
If ye desire it thus, thus let it be,
And so an end of all. Now do your will;
No other pains shall force another word.
Judge. She is convicted, but has not confessed.
Be it enough. Until their final sentence

Let none have converse with them. You, young Lord,
Linger not here!
Beatrice. Oh, tear him not away!
Judge. Guards, do your duty.
Bernardo (*embracing* BEATRICE). Oh! would ye divide
Body from soul?
Officer. That is the headsman's business.
[*Exeunt all but* LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, *and* GIACOMO.
Giacomo. Have I confessed? Is it all over now?
No hope! No refuge! O weak, wicked tongue
Which hast destroyed me, would that thou hadst been
Cut out and thrown to dogs first! To have killed
My father first, and then betrayed my sister;
Ay, thee! the one thing innocent and pure
In this black guilty world, to that which I
So well deserve! My wife! my little ones!
Destitute, helpless, and I . . . Father! God!
Canst Thou forgive even the unforgiving,
When their full hearts break thus, thus! . . .
[*Covers his face and weeps.*
Lucretia. O my child!
To what a dreadful end are we all come!
Why did I yield? Why did I not sustain
Those torments? Oh, that I were all dissolved
Into these fast and unavailing tears,
Which flow and feel not!
Beatrice. What 'twas weak to do,
'Tis weaker to lament, once being done;
Take cheer! The God who knew my wrong, and made
Our speedy act the angel of His wrath,
Seems, and but seems, to have abandoned us.
Let us not think that we shall die for this.
Brother, sit near me; give me your firm hand,
You had a manly heart. Bear up! Bear up!
O dearest Lady, put your gentle head
Upon my lap, and try to sleep awhile:
Your eyes look pale, hollow and overworn,
With heaviness of watching and slow grief.
Come, I will sing you some low, sleepy tune,
Not cheerful, nor yet sad; some dull old thing,
Some outworn and unused monotony,

Such as our country gossips sing and spin,
Till they almost forget they live: lie down!
So, that will do. Have I forgot the words?
Faith! They are sadder than I thought they were.

SONG

False friend, wilt thou smile or weep
When my life is laid asleep?
Little cares for a smile or a tear,
The clay-cold corpse upon the bier!
Farewell! Heigho!
What is this whispers low?
There is a snake in thy smile, my dear;
And bitter poison within thy tear.

Sweet sleep, were death like to thee,
Or if thou couldst mortal be,
I would close these eyes of pain;
When to wake? Never again.
O World! Farewell!
Listen to the passing bell!
It says, thou and I must part,
With a light and a heavy heart. [*The scene closes.*

SCENE IV.—*A Hall of the Prison. Enter* CAMILLO *and* BERNARDO.

Camillo. The Pope is stern; not to be moved or bent.
He looked as calm and keen as is the engine
Which tortures and which kills, exempt itself
From aught that it inflicts; a marble form,
A rite, a law, a custom: not a man.
He frowned, as if to frown had been the trick
Of his machinery, on the advocates
Presenting the defences, which he tore
And threw behind, muttering with hoarse, harsh voice:
"Which among ye defended their old father
Killed in his sleep?" Then to another: "Thou
Dost this in virtue of thy place; 'tis well."
He turned to me then, looking deprecation,
And said these three words, coldly: "They must die."

Bernardo. And yet you left him not?
Camillo. I urged him still;
Pleading, as I could guess, the devilish wrong
Which prompted your unnatural parent's death.
And he replied: "Paolo Santa Croce
Murdered his mother yester evening,
And he is fled. Parricide grows so rife
That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young
Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs.
Authority, and power, and hoary hair
Are grown crimes capital. You are my nephew,
You come to ask their pardon; stay a moment;
Here is their sentence; never see me more
Till, to the letter, it be all fulfilled."
Bernardo. O God, not so! I did believe indeed
That all you said was but sad preparation
For happy news. Oh, there are words and looks
To bend the sternest purpose! Once I knew them,
Now I forget them at my dearest need.
What think you if I seek him out, and bathe
His feet and robe with hot and bitter tears?
Importune him with prayers, vexing his brain
With my perpetual cries, until in rage
He strike me with his pastoral cross, and trample
Upon my prostrate head, so that my blood
May stain the senseless dust on which he treads,
And remorse waken mercy? I will do it!
Oh, wait till I return! [*Rushes out.*
Camillo. Alas! poor boy!
A wreck-devoted seaman thus might pray
To the deaf sea.

Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, *and* GIACOMO, *guarded.*

Beatrice. I hardly dare to fear
That thou bring'st other news than a just pardon.
Camillo. May God in heaven be less inexorable
To the Pope's prayers, than he has been to mine.
Here is the sentence and the warrant.
Beatrice (*wildly*). O
My God! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? So young to go

Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!
To be nailed down into a narrow place;
To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more
Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again
Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost —
How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be . . .
What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go mad!
Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world;
The wide, gray, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!
If all things then should be . . . my father's spirit,
His eye, his voice, his touch surrounding me;
The atmosphere and breath of my dead life!
If sometimes, as a shape more like himself,
Even the form which tortured me on earth,
Masked in gray hairs and wrinkles, he should come
And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix
His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down!
For was he not alone omnipotent
On Earth, and ever present? Even though dead,
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,
And work for me and mine still the same ruin,
Scorn, pain, despair? Who ever yet returned
To teach the laws of Death's untrodden realm?
Unjust perhaps as those which drive us now,
Oh, whither, whither?

Lucretia. Trust in God's sweet love,
The tender promises of Christ: ere night,
Think, we shall be in Paradise.

Beatrice. 'Tis past!
Whatever comes my heart shall sink no more.

57. Compare *Paradise Lost*, II, 146–51. It has been suggested that these lines express Shelley's own feelings on the subject of death — at least in certain moods. There seems to be no other evidence in support of such a conjecture. Most readers will agree, however, that the horror of Beatrice's conception, especially in ll. 57–59, is expressed with extraordinary power. — It may be remarked that her despair, although in sharp contrast to her customary bearing, is wholly natural and human, and is the result of Shelley's desire to draw not a perfect, but a tragic, character.

62. "My dead life" probably means "my life after death (among the dead)."

And yet, I know not why, your words strike chill:
How tedious, false and cold seem all things. I
Have met with much injustice in this world;
No difference has been made by God or man,
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.
I am cut off from the only world I know,
From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet prime.
You do well telling me to trust in God,
I hope I do trust in Him. In whom else
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold.

[*During the latter speeches* GIACOMO *has retired conversing with* CAMILLO, *who now goes out;* GIACOMO *advances.*

Giacomo. Know you not, Mother . . . Sister, know you not?

Bernardo even now is gone to implore
The Pope to grant our pardon.

Lucretia. Child, perhaps
It will be granted. We may all then live
To make these woes a tale for distant years:
Oh, what a thought! It gushes to my heart
Like the warm blood.

Beatrice. Yet both will soon be cold.
Oh, trample out that thought! Worse than despair,
Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope:
It is the only ill which can find place
Upon the giddy, sharp and narrow hour
Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift frost
That it should spare the eldest flower of spring:
Plead with awakening earthquake, o'er whose couch
Even now a city stands, strong, fair, and free;
Now stench and blackness yawn, like death. Oh, plead
With famine, or wind-walking Pestilence,
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with man!
Cruel, cold, formal man; righteous in words,
In deeds a Cain. No, Mother, we must die:
Since such is the reward of innocent lives;
Such the alleviation of worst wrongs.
And whilst our murderers live, and hard, cold men,

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100. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 558–60.

Smiling and slow, walk through a world of tears
To death as to life's sleep; 'twere just the grave
Were some strange joy for us. Come, obscure Death,
And wind me in thine all-embracing arms!
Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,
And rock me to the sleep from which none wake.
Live ye, who live, subject to one another
As we were once, who now . . .

BERNARDO *rushes in.*

Bernardo. Oh, horrible!
That tears, that looks, that hope poured forth in prayer,
Even till the heart is vacant and despairs,
Should all be vain! The ministers of death
Are waiting round the doors. I thought I saw
Blood on the face of one . . . What if 'twere fancy?
Soon the heart's blood of all I love on earth
Will sprinkle him, and he will wipe it off
As if 'twere only rain. O life! O world!
Cover me! let me be no more! To see
That perfect mirror of pure innocence
Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good,
Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,
Who made all lovely thou didst look upon . . .
Thee, light of life . . . dead, dark! while I say, sister,
To hear I have no sister; and thou, Mother,
Whose love was as a bond to all our loves . . .
Dead! The sweet bond broken!

Enter CAMILLO *and* GUARDS.

They come! Let me
Kiss those warm lips before their crimson leaves
Are blighted . . . white . . . cold. Say farewell, before
Death chokes that gentle voice! Oh, let me hear
You speak!

Beatrice. Farewell, my tender brother. Think
Of our sad fate with gentleness, as now:
And let mild, pitying thoughts lighten for thee
Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh despair,

133. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 32, 282.

But tears and patience. One thing more, my child:
For thine own sake be constant to the love
Thou bearest us; and to the faith that I,
Though wrapped in a strange cloud of crime and shame,
Lived ever holy and unstained. And though
Ill tongues shall wound me, and our common name
Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent brow
For men to point at as they pass, do thou
Forbear, and never think a thought unkind
Of those, who perhaps love thee in their graves.
So mayest thou die as I do; fear and pain
Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!
Bernardo. I cannot say, farewell!
Camillo. Oh, Lady Beatrice!
Beatrice. Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, Mother, tie
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
In any simple knot; ay, that does well.
And yours I see is coming down. How often
Have we done this for one another; now
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well.

THE END.

158. Beatrice's closing speech was a favourite with Shelley himself, and critical opinion has confirmed his judgement.

SONNET: ENGLAND IN 1819[1]

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king,—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring,—
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow,—

[1] First published by Mrs. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 1839, 1st ed.

1. George III, born in 1738, died in 1820, after some years of blindness and mental illness. For a full length portrait of George III as viewed by the younger Romantic writers, see Byron's *The Vision of Judgement*.

A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field,—
An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield,—
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A Senate,—Time's worst statute unrepealed,—
Are graves, from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

THE MASK OF ANARCHY[1]

WRITTEN ON THE OCCASION OF THE MASSACRE AT MANCHESTER

I

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

7. A reference to the "Peterloo Massacre."
11. The grounds on which religion is condemned are worth noting.

[1] Shelley had just finished *The Cenci* when news reached him of the "Peterloo Massacre." England was full of social unrest, caused by the persistent economic depression which followed the Napoleonic wars and by the reactionary domestic policies of the Tory government. Popular agitation for long overdue Parliamentary reform became so strong that the Government was frightened into severe repressive measures; on August 16, 1819, a mass meeting in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, called to further the cause of reform, attended by several thousand workingmen, and conducted in a completely orderly manner, was charged by a force of cavalry with drawn sabers. Nine persons were killed and several hundred injured. The Tory leaders publicly approved the wanton attack.—Shelley's comment to Peacock on hearing "the terrible and important news of Manchester" was: "The tyrants here, as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood. May their execrable lessons not be learnt with equal docility!"—He immediately wrote the poem and sent it to Leigh Hunt to publish in the *Examiner*, but although a number of less poetic and more violent attacks had appeared, Hunt did not publish it until 1832, expressing at that time the belief that the public had not been ready previously to do justice to Shelley. Shelley strongly wished to have the poem published, and wrote to Hunt a second time. But with *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* on the verge of publication, there can be no doubt that Hunt acted in good faith.

II

I met Murder on the way —
He had a mask like Castlereagh —
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven blood-hounds followed him:

III

All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew
Which from his wide cloak he drew.

IV

Next came Fraud, and he had on,
Like Eldon, an ermined gown;
His big tears, for he wept well,
Turned to mill-stones as they fell.

V

And the little children, who
Round his feet played to and fro,
Thinking every tear a gem,
Had their brains knocked out by them.

VI

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,
And the shadows of the night,
Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy
On a crocodile rode by.

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6. Castlereagh was Foreign Secretary. Shelley attacked him again the following year in his satiric drama *Oedipus Tyrannus,* where Castlereagh appears as Purganax. He is also the object of perhaps the bitterest lines to be found in the whole of Byron's *Don Juan.*

15. Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, also reappears in *Oedipus Tyrannus,* as Dakry. It was he who had rendered the decision depriving Shelley of his two children by his first wife. (See Shelley's poem written on that occasion, *To the Lord Chancellor.*) — His tearfulness seems to have been notorious; he wept at the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832.

24. Sidmouth was Home Secretary in the Tory Government.

VII

And many more Destructions played
In this ghastly masquerade,
All disguised, even to the eyes,
Like Bishops, lawyers, peers, and spies.

VIII

Last came Anarchy: he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

IX

And he wore a kingly crown;
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;
On his brow this mark I saw —
"I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!"

X

With a pace stately and fast,
Over English land he passed,
Trampling to a mire of blood
The adoring multitude.

XI

And a mighty troop around,
With their trampling shook the ground,
Waving each a bloody sword,
For the service of their Lord.

XII

And with glorious triumph, they
Rode through England proud and gay,
Drunk as with intoxication
Of the wine of desolation.

XIII

O'er fields and towns, from sea to sea,
Passed the Pageant swift and free,

33. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 782 n.
37. See *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 47 n.

Tearing up, and trampling down;
Till they came to London town.

XIV

And each dweller, panic-stricken,
Felt his heart with terror sicken
Hearing the tempestuous cry
Of the triumph of Anarchy.

XV

For with pomp to meet him came,
Clothed in arms like blood and flame,
The hired murderers, who did sing
"Thou art God, and Law, and King.

XVI

"We have waited, weak and lone
For thy coming, Mighty One!
Our purses are empty, our swords are cold,
Give us glory, and blood, and gold."

XVII

Lawyers and priests, a motley crowd,
To the earth their pale brows bowed;
Like a bad prayer not over loud,
Whispering — "Thou art Law and God." —

XVIII

Then all cried with one accord,
"Thou art King, and God, and Lord;
Anarchy, to thee we bow,
Be thy name made holy now!"

XIX

And Anarchy, the Skeleton,
Bowed and grinned to every one,
As well as if his education
Had cost ten millions to the nation.

60. "Hired murderers," soldiers (such as participated in the Peterloo Massacre).

For he knew the Palaces
Of our Kings were rightly his;
His the sceptre, crown, and globe,
And the gold-inwoven robe.

XXI

So he sent his slaves before
To seize upon the Bank and Tower,
And was proceeding with intent
To meet his pensioned Parliament

XXII

When one fled past, a maniac maid,
And her name was Hope, she said:
But she looked more like Despair,
And she cried out in the air:

"My father Time is weak and gray
With waiting for a better day;
See how idiot-like he stands,
Fumbling with his palsied hands!

"He has had child after child,
And the dust of death is piled
Over every one but me —
Misery, oh, Misery!"

Then she lay down in the street,
Right before the horses' feet,
Expecting, with a patient eye,
Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy.

XXVI

When between her and her foes
A mist, a light, an image rose,
Small at first, and weak, and frail
Like the vapour of a vale:

XXVII

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

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

XXIX

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

XXX

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

XXXI

As flowers beneath May's footstep waken,
As stars from Night's loose hair are shaken,
As waves arise when loud winds call,
Thoughts sprung where'er that step did fall.

XXXII

And the prostrate multitude
Looked — and ankle-deep in blood,
Hope, that maiden most serene,
Was walking with a quiet mien:

110. The "Shape" I take to be Liberty.
115. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 765 n.
118. For the figure, see *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 772 n. And with this and the following stanza compare *Adonais*, xxiv.

XXXIII

And Anarchy, the ghastly birth,
Lay dead earth upon the earth;
The Horse of Death tameless as wind
Fled, and with his hoofs did grind
To dust the murderers thronged behind.

XXXIV

A rushing light of clouds and splendour,
A sense awakening and yet tender
Was heard and felt — and at its close
These words of joy and fear arose

XXXV

As if their own indignant Earth
Which gave the sons of England birth
Had felt their blood upon her brow,
And shuddering with a mother's throe

Had turnèd every drop of blood
By which her face had been bedewed
To an accent unwithstood, —
As if her heart had cried aloud:

"Men of England, heirs of Glory,
Heroes of unwritten story,
Nurslings of one mighty Mother,
Hopes of her, and one another;

XXXVIII

"Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you —
Ye are many — they are few.

XXXIX

"What is Freedom? — ye can tell
That which slavery is, too well —

For its very name has grown
To an echo of your own.

XL

" 'Tis to work and have such pay
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants' use to dwell,

XLI

"So that ye for them are made
Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade,
With or without your own will, bent
To their defence and nourishment.

XLII

" 'Tis to see your children weak
With their mothers pine and peak,
When the winter winds are bleak,—
They are dying whilst I speak.

XLIII

" 'Tis to hunger for such diet
As the rich man in his riot
Casts to the fat dogs that lie
Surfeiting beneath his eye;

XLIV

" 'Tis to let the Ghost of Gold
Take from Toil a thousandfold
More than e'er its substance could
In the tyrannies of old.

XLV

"Paper coin — that forgery
Of the title-deeds, which ye

176. "The Ghost of Gold," paper money. Compare *Peter Bell the Third*, III, v. The financial problems of England were much in Shelley's mind, and in *A Philosophical View of Reform* they are discussed at length. — The protest here seems to be that laborers are cheated by being forced to accept their pay in debased paper currency.

Hold to something of the worth
Of the inheritance of Earth.

XLVI

"'Tis to be a slave in soul
And to hold no strong control
Over your own wills, but be
All that others make of ye.

XLVII

"And at length when ye complain
With a murmur weak and vain
'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew
Ride over your wives and you—
Blood is on the grass like dew.

XLVIII

"Then it is to feel revenge
Fiercely thirsting to exchange
Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong—
Do not thus when ye are strong.

XLIX

"Birds find rest, in narrow nest
When weary of their wingèd quest;
Beasts find fare, in woody lair
When storm and snow are in the air.

L

"Asses, swine, have litter spread
And with fitting food are fed;
All things have a home but one—
Thou, O Englishman, hast none!

184. Compare Shelley's reference to the soldier, in *A Philosophical View of Reform:* "his will is no longer, which is the most sacred prerogative of men, guided by his own judgment."

197. Compare *To Edward Williams,* ll. 41–43.

200. The Wise MS. and Mrs. Shelley's 1839 editions have the following stanza, not in Hunt's 1832 edition:

Horses, oxen, have a home,
When from daily toil they come:
Household dogs, when the wind roars,
Find a home within warm doors.

LI

"This is Slavery — savage men,
Or wild beasts within a den
Would endure not as ye do —
But such ills they never knew.

LII

"What art thou, Freedom? O! could slaves
Answer from their living graves
This demand — tyrants would flee
Like a dream's dim imagery:

LIII

"Thou art not, as impostors say,
A shadow soon to pass away,
A superstition, and a name
Echoing from the cave of Fame.

LIV

"For the labourer thou art bread,
And a comely table spread
From his daily labour come
In a neat and happy home.

LV

"Thou art clothes, and fire, and food
For the trampled multitude —
No — in countries that are free
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see.

LVI

"To the rich thou art a check,
When his foot is on the neck
Of his victim, thou dost make
That he treads upon a snake.

217. The following stanzas, which may be compared with *Hellas*, ll. 38–45, offer sufficient evidence that Shelley's conception of "liberty" is not (as has often been held) to be identified with irresponsible individualism; nor, on the other hand, with a merely sentimental humanitarianism.

LVII

"Thou art Justice — ne'er for gold
May thy righteous laws be sold
As laws are in England — thou
Shield'st alike the high and low.

LVIII

"Thou art Wisdom — Freemen never
Dream that God will damn for ever
All who think those things untrue
Of which Priests make such ado.

LIX

"Thou art Peace — never by thee
Would blood and treasure wasted be
As tyrants wasted them, when all
Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul.

LX

"What if English toil and blood
Was poured forth, even as a flood?
It availed, O Liberty,
To dim, but not extinguish thee.

LXI

"Thou art Love — the rich have kissed
Thy feet, and like him following Christ,
Give their substance to the free
And through the rough world follow thee,

LXII

"Or turn their wealth to arms, and make
War for thy belovèd sake
On wealth, and war, and fraud — whence they
Drew the power which is their prey.

234. Compare *Peter Bell the Third*, III, xvi.

241. The reference is to the war begun in 1792 by Austria and Prussia against the Revolutionary Government of France. The former were soon joined by England and the Netherlands.

247. See Matthew 19:21.

LXIII

"Science, Poetry, and Thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
Such, they curse their Maker not.

LXIV

"Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art thou — let deeds, not words, express
Thine exceeding loveliness.

LXV

"Let a great Assembly be
Of the fearless and the free
On some spot of English ground
Where the plains stretch wide around.

LXVI

"Let the blue sky overhead,
The green earth on which ye tread,
All that must eternal be
Witness the solemnity.

LXVII

"From the corners uttermost
Of the bounds of English coast;
From every hut, village, and town
Where those who live and suffer moan
For others' misery or their own,

LXVIII

"From the workhouse and the prison
Where pale as corpses newly risen,
Women, children, young and old
Groan for pain, and weep for cold —

257. With Rossetti and Woodberry, I follow the revised version of this line in the Wise MS., which Mrs. Shelley also adopted. This reading may be compared with l. 298. Hunt's edition and the MS. which he used read: "So serene, they curse it not."

LXIX

"From the haunts of daily life
Where is waged the daily strife
With common wants and common cares
Which sows the human heart with tares —

LXX

"Lastly from the palaces
Where the murmur of distress
Echoes, like the distant sound
Of a wind alive around

LXXI

"Those prison halls of wealth and fashion,
Where some few feel such compassion
For those who groan, and toil, and wail
As must make their brethren pale —

LXXII

"Ye who suffer woes untold,
Or to feel, or to behold
Your lost country bought and sold
With a price of blood and gold —

LXXIII

"Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free —

LXXIV

"Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,
And wide as targes let them be,
With their shade to cover ye.

LXXV

"Let the tyrants pour around
With a quick and startling sound,
Like the loosening of a sea,
Troops of armed emblazonry.

LXXVI

"Let the charged artillery drive
Till the dead air seems alive
With the clash of clanging wheels,
And the tramp of horses' heels.

LXXVII

"Let the fixèd bayonet
Gleam with sharp desire to wet
Its bright point in English blood
Looking keen as one for food.

LXXVIII

"Let the horsemen's scimitars
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars
Thirsting to eclipse their burning
In a sea of death and mourning.

LXXIX

"Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war,

LXXX

"And let Panic, who outspeeds
The career of armèd steeds
Pass, a disregarded shade
Through your phalanx undismayed.

LXXXI

"Let the laws of your own land,
Good or ill, between ye stand

316. "Sphereless," *i.e.*, "fallen from the spheres." Shelley sometimes follows, for poetical purposes, the Pythagorean system of astronomy, according to which the earth was surrounded by a series of hollow, concentric spheres, in which were set respectively the moon, the sun, each of the five known planets, and the fixed stars. Compare *Epipsychidion*, l. 117. Here, however, Shelley is perhaps thinking of large meteorites.

Hand to hand, and foot to foot,
Arbiters of the dispute,

LXXXII

"The old laws of England — they
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,
Children of a wiser day;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo — Liberty!

LXXXIII

"On those who first should violate
Such sacred heralds in their state
Rest the blood that must ensue,
And it will not rest on you.

"And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,-
What they like, that let them do.

LXXXV

"With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

331. This stanza is a striking expression of the prudence by which Shelley in later life was governed in offering concrete suggestions for reform. He wrote to Hunt toward the end of 1819: "The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to inculcate with fervour both the right of resistance and the duty of forbearance. You know my principles incite me to take all the good I can get in politics, forever aspiring to something more. I am one of those whom nothing will fully satisfy, but who are willing to be partially satisfied in all that is practicable."

340. Although on occasion Shelley did not hesitate to applaud armed revolt against tyranny, the advocacy of passive resistance is equally characteristic. — I venture the suggestion that he was not *afraid* to be consistent on this point, but that he saw that for a person who cares to try to shape the course of mundane affairs, such consistency is impossible. Passive resistance might be effective when employed by Englishmen against Englishmen, but not, for example, when used by the Greeks against the Turks.

LXXXVI

"Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

LXXXVII

"Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand —
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street.

LXXXVIII

"And the bold, true warriors
Who have hugged Danger in wars
Will turn to those who would be free,
Ashamed of such base company.

LXXXIX

"And that slaughter to the Nation
Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular;
A volcano heard afar.

XC

"And these words shall then become
Like Oppression's thundered doom
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again — again — again —

XCI

"Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number —
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you —
Ye are many — they are few."

ODE TO THE WEST WIND[1]

I

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

[1] Published with *Prometheus Unbound*, 1820, with the following note by Shelley: "This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.

"The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it."

This has been perhaps the most admired of Shelley's lyrics, it may be because there is more of himself in it than in any other piece of similar length. The intimate and intense portrayal of Nature, the confession of despair and weakness, the resurgent "faith and hope in something good," and the belief in the prophetic function of poetry, which "redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man"—all these are essential traits of Shelley's character and writings. Woodberry suggests comparison with *The Revolt of Islam*, IX, xxi–xxv. Compare also *Queen Mab*, V, 4–15. For an extended comment on the philosophy expressed in the poem, see Kurtz, *The Pursuit of Death*, pp. 202–08. An admirable discussion of the *form* of this lyric will be found in Stopford Brooke, *Studies in Poetry*, pp. 168–75.

II

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aëry surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystàlline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

21. See *Prometheus Unbound,* II, iii, 9 n.

34. Compare the letter to Peacock dated December 22, 1818: "After passing the bay of Baiae, and observing the ruins of its antique grandeur standing like rocks in the transparent sea under our boat . . ." The shores of this bay are noted among geologists for having undergone periods of remarkably rapid elevation and depression with respect to the level of the sea; the ruins that Shelley describes were actually *in* the water and not merely reflected, as one might infer from the poem.

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

52–56. Compare *Adonais*, xxxi–xxxiv.

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

THE INDIAN SERENADE[1]

I

I ARISE from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night.
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright:
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me — who knows how?
To thy chamber window, Sweet!

II

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream —
The Champak odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart; —
As I must on thine,
Oh, belovèd as thou art!

[1] First published, with the title *Song Written for an Indian Air*, in the second number of *The Liberal*, 1822. There are a number of versions, giving several minor textual variants. — Mrs. Angeli (*Shelley and His Friends in Italy*, p. 98) states that the poem was written for Miss Sophia Stacey, the ward of Shelley's uncle by marriage, who visited the Shelleys in Florence for a few weeks at the close of 1819; "on hearing her sing on the evening of the 17th November, he handed her the exquisite verses, 'I arise from dreams of thee,' having promised to write her some poetry the day before."

9. "Wandering airs" is from Peacock's poem *The Genius of the Thames*, II, xxxv, 2.

11. "Champak," an East Indian tree of the magnolia family, with fragrant yellow flowers.

III

Oh lift me from the grass!
I die! I faint! I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast;—
Oh! press it to thine own again,
Where it will break at last.

LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY[1]

I

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?—

II

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?

[1] First published by Leigh Hunt in *The Indicator*, December 22, 1819. The present text, however, follows a transcript made by Shelley in a copy of Hunt's *Literary Pocket-Book* for 1819, which he presented to Sophia Stacey. Mrs. Angeli points out that the correct date of this presentation, which had previously been given as December 29, 1820, was December 28, 1819. Shelley also copied into this volume the two lyrics entitled *Good-Night* and *Time Long Past*.

ODE TO HEAVEN[1]

CHORUS OF SPIRITS

First Spirit

PALACE-ROOF of cloudless nights!
Paradise of golden lights!
  Deep, immeasurable, vast,
Which art now, and which wert then
  Of the Present and the Past,
Of the eternal Where and When,
  Presence-chamber, temple, home,
  Ever-canopying dome,
  Of acts and ages yet to come!

Glorious shapes have life in thee,
Earth, and all earth's company;
  Living globes which ever throng
Thy deep chasms and wildernesses;
  And green worlds that glide along;
And swift stars with flashing tresses;
  And icy moons most cold and bright,
  And mighty suns beyond the night,
  Atoms of intensest light.

Even thy name is as a god,
Heaven! for thou art the abode

[1] Published with *Prometheus Unbound*, 1820. Dated in one of the extant MSS. "Florence, December, 1819." This poem has been strangely neglected by anthologists, for the craftsmanship is not inferior to that of many more famous lyrics, none of which is perhaps so packed with characteristic speculations. Among familiar themes may be mentioned (1) the problem of the essential nature of Time and Space (compare *Hellas*, ll. 766–85); (2) the question of the relation between the individual human mind, the "universe of things," and the "Spirit" by which the latter is animated (compare *Mont Blanc* and *Adonais*); (3) the problem of immortality, here as elsewhere regarded as being insoluble by reason; (4) the pure mysticism of the close, in which one feels the distinctive Shelleyan struggle to express the inexpressible.

20–22. These lines are interpreted as follows by A. M. D. Hughes (*Poems of 1820*, p. 215): "Man beholding the Universe in the glass of the Sun's light, recognizes in it the same divine nature as he feels to be present in himself." He suggests comparison with Plato's *Republic*, Book VI, 508. Compare also the final stanza of the *Hymn of Apollo*.

Of that Power which is the glass
Wherein man his nature sees.
Generations as they pass
Worship thee with bended knees.
Their unremaining gods and they
Like a river roll away:
Thou remainest such — alway! —

Second Spirit

Thou art but the mind's first chamber,
Round which its young fancies clamber,
Like weak insects in a cave,
Lighted up by stalactites;
But the portal of the grave,
Where a world of new delights
Will make thy best glories seem
But a dim and noonday gleam
From the shadow of a dream!

Third Spirit

Peace! the abyss is wreathed with scorn
At your presumption, atom-born!
What is Heaven? and what are ye
Who its brief expanse inherit?
What are suns and spheres which flee
With the instinct of that Spirit
Of which ye are but a part?
Drops which Nature's mighty heart
Drives through thinnest veins! Depart!

What is Heaven? a globe of dew,
Filling in the morning new
Some eyed flower whose young leaves waken
On an unimagined world:
Constellated suns unshaken,
Orbits measureless, are furled
In that frail and fading sphere,
With ten millions gathered there,
To tremble, gleam, and disappear.

THE SENSITIVE PLANT[1]

PART FIRST

A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light,
And closed them beneath the kisses of Night.

[1] Composed at Pisa early in 1820 and published with *Prometheus Unbound* in the same year. Many critics have noted the relatively light, happy, at times even playful tone of much of the verse written by Shelley during this year, of which the present poem is characteristic. The boyish, unpredictable, mischievous gaiety which his friends knew so well, and which circumstances never quite subdued, here for a brief time finds expression in his poetry. Yet Shelley in this seemingly most ingenuous of moods is no less elusive than in others. One is never quite sure whether one is dealing with a dream or a reality; like Alice before the looking-glass, one has the feeling of looking into a world somehow apart, of which, besides, certain regions are hidden. One cannot help feeling, for example, that the Sensitive Plant, the Garden, and the Lady *stand for* something in somebody's experience; one wonders what it all means. — Probably, as often in Shelley's poems, there are several interpretations, none adequate by itself, all inseparably fused — or perhaps confused. One possibility is that the Sensitive Plant is the poet himself; in a letter to Clare in 1821 he speaks of himself as "the Exotic [an epithet given him by her] who unfortunately belonging to the order of mimosa [sensitive plants], thrives ill in so large a society." The Lady might then be Mary, or rather Shelley's original idealization of her; he had long since been forced to recognize the unreality of this, and at the end of the poem he may be reconciling himself to the changed situation. A somewhat less personal and more certain interpretation is that the Lady is a personification (like the "veiled maid" of *Alastor*) of Ideal Beauty, whose seeming presence in "a mortal image" is always found to be an illusion. The influence of Plato's myths is also obvious; although Shelley was of course no mere imitator, but possessed in his own right a remarkable power to create myth. (See note on *The Cloud.*) The Conclusion of *The Sensitive Plant,* with its distinction between the material world as illusory and the ideal world as real, is one of the most Platonic passages in Shelley's poetry. — It is interesting to find a general correspondence between the story told in this light fantasy and that related in the last and most sombre of Shelley's poems, *The Triumph of Life.* — Without much bearing on the inner meaning of the poem are Hogg's statement that the picture of the desolated garden had its origin in one seen by him and Shelley during a winter walk at Oxford; the remark of Medwin (often a mendacious and confused commentator) that the Lady was a portrait of Lady Mountcashell, a friend of the Shelleys in Italy (where she passed under the name of Mrs. Mason); and Shelley's characterization of Jane Williams as "the exact antitype of the lady I described in 'The Sensitive Plant,' though

And the Spring arose on the garden fair,
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

But none ever trembled and panted with bliss
In the garden, the field, or the wilderness,
Like a doe in the noontide with love's sweet want,
As the companionless Sensitive Plant.

The snowdrop, and then the violet,
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet,
And their breath was mixed with fresh odour, sent
From the turf, like the voice and the instrument.

Then the pied wind-flowers and the tulip tall,
And narcissi, the fairest among them all,
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream's recess,
Till they die of their own dear loveliness;

And the Naiad-like lily of the vale,
Whom youth makes so fair and passion so pale
That the light of its tremulous bells is seen
Through their pavilions of tender green;

And the hyacinth purple, and white, and blue,
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,
It was felt like an odour within the sense;

And the rose like a nymph to the bath addressed,
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing breast,

this must have been a pure *anticipated cognition*" (a jibe at the terminology in Kant's philosophical works, which Shelley once tried to read; see *Peter Bell the Third*, VI, xiii–xvi). Artistically the poem is far from perfect. The irregularity of the metre, though often charming, is suggestive of an improvisation rather than a finished work of art. Yet along with many unimpressive or prosaic lines (*e.g.*, III, 84) there are others of exceptional beauty.

18. See *Adonais*, l. 127 n.

29. There seems to be a reminiscence here of *The Faerie Queene*, II, xii, 74.

Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare:

And the wand-like lily, which lifted up,
As a Maenad, its moonlight-coloured cup,
Till the fiery star, which is its eye,
Gazed through clear dew on the tender sky;

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tuberose,
The sweetest flower for scent that blows;
And all rare blossoms from every clime
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.

And on the stream whose inconstant bosom
Was pranked, under boughs of embowering blossom,
With golden and green light, slanting through
Their heaven of many a tangled hue,

Broad water-lilies lay tremulously,
And starry river-buds glimmered by,
And around them the soft stream did glide and dance
With a motion of sweet sound and radiance.

And the sinuous paths of lawn and of moss,
Which led through the garden along and across,
Some open at once to the sun and the breeze,
Some lost among bowers of blossoming trees,

Were all paved with daisies and delicate bells
As fair as the fabulous asphodels,
And flow'rets which, drooping as day drooped too,
Fell into pavilions, white, purple, and blue,
To roof the glow-worm from the evening dew.

And from this undefilèd Paradise
The flowers (as an infant's awakening eyes
Smile on its mother, whose singing sweet
Can first lull, and at last must awaken it),

34. See *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iii, 9 n.

58. This line is scanned "And from this / undefil'èd Par / adise."

When Heaven's blithe winds had unfolded them,
As mine-lamps enkindle a hidden gem,
Shone smiling to Heaven, and every one
Shared joy in the light of the gentle sun;

For each one was interpenetrated
With the light and the odour its neighbour shed,
Like young lovers whom youth and love make dear
Wrapped and filled by their mutual atmosphere.

But the Sensitive Plant which could give small fruit
Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root,
Received more than all, it loved more than ever,
Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver, —

For the Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;
Radiance and odour are not its dower;
It loves, even like Love, its deep heart is full,
It desires what it has not, the Beautiful!

The light winds which from unsustaining wings
Shed the music of many murmurings;
The beams which dart from many a star
Of the flowers whose hues they bear afar;

The plumèd insects swift and free,
Like golden boats on a sunny sea,
Laden with light and odour, which pass
Over the gleam of the living grass;

The unseen clouds of the dew, which lie
Like fire in the flowers till the sun rides high,
Then wander like spirits among the spheres,
Each cloud faint with the fragrance it bears;

70–73. Locock has an elaborate note on the exact meaning of this stanza, which is certainly obscure. The key seems to lie in the last two lines of the next stanza, which express the Platonic conception that the essence of Love is desire for what one does not possess. See the *Symposium*, 201.

76–77. The singularly infelicitous rhyme of "full" with "beautiful" occurs also in *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 455–56.

The quivering vapours of dim noontide,
Which like a sea o'er the warm earth glide,
In which every sound, and odour, and beam,
Move, as reeds in a single stream;

Each and all like ministering angels were
For the Sensitive Plant sweet joy to bear,
Whilst the lagging hours of the day went by
Like windless clouds o'er a tender sky.

And when evening descended from Heaven above,
And the Earth was all rest, and the air was all love,
And delight, though less bright, was far more deep,
And the day's veil fell from the world of sleep,

And the beasts, and the birds, and the insects were drowned
In an ocean of dreams without a sound;
Whose waves never mark, though they ever impress
The light sand which paves it, consciousness;

(Only overhead the sweet nightingale
Ever sang more sweet as the day might fail,
And snatches of its Elysian chant
Were mixed with the dreams of the Sensitive Plant); —

The Sensitive Plant was the earliest
Upgathered into the bosom of rest;
A sweet child weary of its delight,
The feeblest and yet the favourite,
Cradled within the embrace of Night.

PART SECOND

There was a Power in this sweet place,
An Eve in this Eden; a ruling Grace
Which to the flowers, did they waken or dream,
Was as God is to the starry scheme.

104–05. A striking poetical statement of a common experience, namely, the difficulty of recalling the content of dreams. Shelley was much interested in dreams, especially in their bearing on the ultimate nature of mind, or consciousness (see Section V of the fragmentary prose *Speculations on Metaphysics*), and they occur frequently in his imagery.

A Lady, the wonder of her kind,
Whose form was upborne by a lovely mind
Which, dilating, had moulded her mien and motion
Like a sea-flower unfolded beneath the ocean,

Tended the garden from morn to even:
And the meteors of that sublunar Heaven,
Like the lamps of the air when Night walks forth,
Laughed round her footsteps up from the Earth!

She had no companion of mortal race,
But her tremulous breath and her flushing face
Told, whilst the morn kissed the sleep from her eyes,
That her dreams were less slumber than Paradise:

As if some bright Spirit for her sweet sake
Had deserted Heaven while the stars were awake,
As if yet around her he lingering were,
Though the veil of daylight concealed him from her.

Her step seemed to pity the grass it pressed;
You might hear by the heaving of her breast,
That the coming and going of the wind
Brought pleasure there and left passion behind.

And wherever her aëry footstep trod,
Her trailing hair from the grassy sod
Erased its light vestige, with shadowy sweep,
Like a sunny storm o'er the dark green deep.

I doubt not the flowers of that garden sweet
Rejoiced in the sound of her gentle feet;
I doubt not they felt the spirit that came
From her glowing fingers through all their frame.

She sprinkled bright water from the stream
On those that were faint with the sunny beam;
And out of the cups of the heavy flowers
She emptied the rain of the thunder-showers.

She lifted their heads with her tender hands,
And sustained them with rods and osier-bands;

20. "Veil of daylight" is a typical Shelleyan paradox.

If the flowers had been her own infants, she
Could never have nursed them more tenderly.

And all killing insects and gnawing worms,
And things of obscene and unlovely forms,
She bore, in a basket of Indian woof,
Into the rough woods far aloof, —

In a basket, of grasses and wild-flowers full,
The freshest her gentle hands could pull
For the poor banished insects, whose intent,
Although they did ill, was innocent.

But the bee and the beamlike ephemeris
Whose path is the lightning's, and soft moths that kiss
The sweet lips of the flowers, and harm not, did she
Make her attendant angels be.

And many an antenatal tomb,
Where butterflies dream of the life to come,
She left clinging round the smooth and dark
Edge of the odorous cedar bark.

This fairest creature from earliest Spring
Thus moved through the garden ministering
All the sweet season of Summertide,
And ere the first leaf looked brown — she died!

PART THIRD

Three days the flowers of the garden fair,
Like stars when the moon is awakened, were,
Or the waves of Baiae, ere luminous
She floats up through the smoke of Vesuvius.

And on the fourth, the Sensitive Plant
Felt the sound of the funeral chant,
And the steps of the bearers, heavy and slow,
And the sobs of the mourners, deep and low;

41–48. Santayana uses these lines to illustrate Shelley's inadequate solution of the problem of evil. See *Winds of Doctrine*, p. 172.

7–8. Compare the *Hymn of Pan*, l. 29 n.

The weary sound and the heavy breath,
And the silent motions of passing death,
And the smell, cold, oppressive, and dank,
Sent through the pores of the coffin-plank;

The dark grass, and the flowers among the grass,
Were bright with tears as the crowd did pass;
From their sighs the wind caught a mournful tone,
And sate in the pines, and gave groan for groan.

The garden, once fair, became cold and foul,
Like the corpse of her who had been its soul,
Which at first was lovely as if in sleep,
Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap
To make men tremble who never weep.

Swift Summer into the Autumn flowed,
And frost in the mist of the morning rode,
Though the noonday sun looked clear and bright,
Mocking the spoil of the secret night.

The rose-leaves, like flakes of crimson snow,
Paved the turf and the moss below.
The lilies were drooping, and white, and wan,
Like the head and the skin of a dying man.

And Indian plants, of scent and hue
The sweetest that ever were fed on dew,
Leaf by leaf, day after day,
Were massed into the common clay.

And the leaves, brown, yellow, and gray, and red,
And white with the whiteness of what is dead,
Like troops of ghosts on the dry wind passed;
Their whistling noise made the birds aghast.

And the gusty winds waked the wingèd seeds,
Out of their birthplace of ugly weeds,

17. The following stanzas are an oft-noted instance of the "Gothic" element in Shelley's poetry.

34–35. Compare *Ode to the West Wind*, l. 4.

Till they clung round many a sweet flower's stem,
Which rotted into the earth with them.

The water-blooms under the rivulet
Fell from the stalks on which they were set;
And the eddies drove them here and there,
As the winds did those of the upper air.

Then the rain came down, and the broken stalks
Were bent and tangled across the walks;
And the leafless network of parasite bowers
Massed into ruin; and all sweet flowers.

Between the time of the wind and the snow
All loathliest weeds began to grow,
Whose coarse leaves were splashed with many a speck,
Like the water-snake's belly and the toad's back.

And thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank,
And the dock, and henbane, and hemlock dank,
Stretched out its long and hollow shank,
And stifled the air till the dead wind stank.

And plants, at whose names the verse feels loath,
Filled the place with a monstrous undergrowth,
Prickly, and pulpous, and blistering, and blue,
Livid, and starred with a lurid dew.

And agarics, and fungi, with mildew and mould
Started like mist from the wet ground cold;
Pale, fleshy, as if the decaying dead
With a spirit of growth had been animated!

Spawn, weeds, and filth, a leprous scum,
Made the running rivulet thick and dumb,
And at its outlet flags huge as stakes
Dammed it up with roots knotted like water-snakes.

65. In the 1820 edition the following stanza appeared after this line:

Their moss rotted off them, flake by flake,
Till the thick stalk stuck like a murderer's stake,
Where rags of loose flesh yet tremble on high,
Infesting the winds that wander by.

68–69. Doubtless the clutter of consonants which make these lines almost unpronounceable is deliberate.

And hour by hour, when the air was still,
The vapours arose which have strength to kill;
At morn they were seen, at noon they were felt,
At night they were darkness no star could melt.

And unctuous meteors from spray to spray
Crept and flitted in broad noonday
Unseen; every branch on which they alit
By a venomous blight was burned and bit.

The Sensitive Plant, like one forbid,
Wept, and the tears within each lid
Of its folded leaves, which together grew,
Were changed to a blight of frozen glue.

For the leaves soon fell, and the branches soon
By the heavy axe of the blast were hewn;
The sap shrank to the root through every pore
As blood to a heart that will beat no more.

For Winter came: the wind was his whip:
One choppy finger was on his lip:
He had torn the cataracts from the hills
And they clanked at his girdle like manacles;

His breath was a chain which without a sound
The earth, and the air, and the water bound;
He came, fiercely driven, in his chariot-throne
By the tenfold blasts of the Arctic zone.

Then the weeds which were forms of living death
Fled from the frost to the earth beneath.
Their decay and sudden flight from frost
Was but like the vanishing of a ghost!

And under the roots of the Sensitive Plant
The moles and the dormice died for want:
The birds dropped stiff from the frozen air
And were caught in the branches naked and bare.

First there came down a thawing rain
And its dull drops froze on the boughs again;
Then there steamed up a freezing dew
Which to the drops of the thaw-rain grew;

And a northern whirlwind, wandering about
Like a wolf that had smelt a dead child out,
Shook the boughs thus laden, and heavy, and stiff,
And snapped them off with his rigid griff.

When Winter had gone and Spring came back
The Sensitive Plant was a leafless wreck;
But the mandrakes, and toadstools, and docks, and darnels,
Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels.

CONCLUSION

Whether the Sensitive Plant, or that
Which within its boughs like a Spirit sat,
Ere its outward form had known decay,
Now felt this change, I cannot say.

Whether that Lady's gentle mind,
No longer with the form combined
Which scattered love, as stars do light,
Found sadness, where it left delight,

I dare not guess; but in this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
And we the shadows of the dream,

It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
And all sweet shapes and odours there,
In truth have never passed away:
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
There is no death nor change: their might
Exceeds our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure.

124. Compare *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, ll. 156–57 and *The Cenci*, IV, iv, 115–16.

LETTER TO MARIA GISBORNE[1]

THE SPIDER spreads her webs, whether she be
In poet's tower, cellar, or barn, or tree;
The silk-worm in the dark green mulberry leaves
His winding sheet and cradle ever weaves;
So I, a thing whom moralists call worm,
Sit spinning still round this decaying form,
From the fine threads of rare and subtle thought —
No net of words in garish colours wrought
To catch the idle buzzers of the day —
But a soft cell, where when that fades away,
Memory may clothe in wings my living name
And feed it with the asphodels of fame,
Which in those hearts which must remember me
Grow, making love an immortality.

Whoever should behold me now, I wist,
Would think I were a mighty mechanist,
Bent with sublime Archimedean art
To breathe a soul into the iron heart
Of some machine portentous, or strange gin,
Which by the force of figured spells might win
Its way over the sea, and sport therein;

[1] Written in the summer of 1820 (the date July 1 is presumably that on which the letter was sent to Mrs. Gisborne) while Shelley was occupying the Gisbornes' house at Leghorn, they having returned to England. (See Letter IX, Note 1.) Like most of the poems written during this year, it shows him in a light-hearted mood. In it he returns to the familiar yet neither prosaic nor sentimental style of the first part of *Julian and Maddalo*. Perhaps more than any other of his poems, this reveals Shelley as his friends knew him in everyday life; and it should be considered well by those who are inclined to regard him as an "ineffectual angel," an "eternal child," or some similar kind of interesting freak. — It was first published in the *Posthumous Poems*, 1824.

6. Compare the letter to Clare Claremont, January 16, 1821: "I can do you no other good than in keeping up the unnatural connection between this feeble mass of diseases and infirmities and the vapid and weary spirit doomed to drag it through the world"; also *Remembrance*, l. 21: "the living grave I bear"; and *With a Guitar: to Jane*, l. 39: "a body like a grave."

15. Shelley's study was the former workshop of Mrs. Gisborne's son, Henry Reveley, an engineer.

For round the walls are hung dread engines, such
As Vulcan never wrought for Jove to clutch
Ixion or the Titan: — or the quick
Wit of that man of God, St. Dominic,
To convince Atheist, Turk, or Heretic,
Or those in philanthropic council met,
Who thought to pay some interest for the debt
They owed to Jesus Christ for their salvation,
By giving a faint foretaste of damnation
To Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, and the rest
Who made our land an island of the blest,
When lamp-like Spain, who now relumes her fire
On Freedom's hearth, grew dim with Empire: —
With thumbscrews, wheels, with tooth and spike and jag,
Which fishers found under the utmost crag
Of Cornwall and the storm-encompassed isles,
Where to the sky the rude sea rarely smiles
Unless in treacherous wrath, as on the morn
When the exulting elements in scorn,
Satiated with destroyed destruction, lay
Sleeping in beauty on their mangled prey,
As panthers sleep; — and other strange and dread
Magical forms the brick floor overspread, —
Proteus transformed to metal did not make
More figures, or more strange; nor did he take
Such shapes of unintelligible brass,
Or heap himself in such a horrid mass
Of tin and iron not to be understood;
And forms of unimaginable wood,
To puzzle Tubal Cain and all his brood:
Great screws, and cones, and wheels, and groovèd blocks,
The elements of what will stand the shocks
Of wave and wind and time. — Upon the table
More knacks and quips there be than I am able

24. "Ixion," see Letter XI, Note 1; "the Titan," Prometheus.
25. St. Dominic (1170–1221) was the founder of the Dominican order.
27. "Those" is parallel with "St. Dominic." The reference in the following lines is to the Spanish Armada and its destruction in 1588.
45. "Proteus," — see *The Triumph of Life*, l. 271 n.
51. "Tubal Cain," — see Genesis 4:22.
52. Reveley had been superintending the building of a steamboat, partially financed by Shelley. The project was never completed.

To catalogize in this verse of mine: —
A pretty bowl of wood — not full of wine,
But quicksilver; that dew which the gnomes drink
When at their subterranean toil they swink,
Pledging the demons of the earthquake, who
Reply to them in lava — cry halloo!
And call out to the cities o'er their head, —
Roofs, towers, and shrines, the dying and the dead,
Crash through the chinks of earth — and then all quaff
Another rouse, and hold their sides and laugh.
This quicksilver no gnome has drunk — within
The walnut bowl it lies, veinèd and thin,
In colour like the wake of light that stains
The Tuscan deep, when from the moist moon rains
The inmost shower of its white fire — the breeze
Is still — blue Heaven smiles over the pale seas.
And in this bowl of quicksilver — for I
Yield to the impulse of an infancy
Outlasting manhood — I have made to float
A rude idealism of a paper boat. —
A hollow screw with cogs — Henry will know
The thing I mean and laugh at me, — if so
He fears not I should do more mischief. — Next
Lie bills and calculations much perplexed,
With steam-boats, frigates, and machinery quaint
Traced over them in blue and yellow paint.
Then comes a range of mathematical
Instruments, for plans nautical and statical;
A heap of rosin, a queer broken glass
With ink in it; — a china cup that was
What it will never be again, I think, —
A thing from which sweet lips were wont to drink
The liquor doctors rail at — and which I
Will quaff in spite of them — and when we die
We'll toss up who died first of drinking tea,
And cry out, — "Heads or tails?" where'er we be.

71. The scansion is "Is still/ — blue Heav'n/ smiles o/ver the / pale seas."

75. Hogg gives a vivid account of Shelley's youthful passion for sailing paper boats.

82. Locock points out that the line is a foot short.

Near that a dusty paint-box, some odd hooks,
A half-burnt match, an ivory block, three books,
Where conic sections, spherics, logarithms,
To great Laplace, from Saunderson and Sims,
Lie heaped in their harmonious disarray
Of figures, — disentangle them who may.
Baron de Tott's Memoirs beside them lie,
And some odd volumes of old chemistry.
Near those a most inexplicable thing,
With lead in the middle — I'm conjecturing
How to make Henry understand; but no —
I'll leave, as Spenser says, with many mo,
This secret in the pregnant womb of time,
Too vast a matter for so weak a rhyme.

And here like some weird Archimage sit I,
Plotting dark spells, and devilish enginery,
The self-impelling steam-wheels of the mind
Which pump up oaths from clergymen, and grind
The gentle spirit of our meek reviews
Into a powdery foam of salt abuse,
Ruffling the ocean of their self-content; —
I sit — and smile or sigh as is my bent,
But not for them — Libeccio rushes round
With an inconstant and an idle sound,
I heed him more than them — the thunder-smoke
Is gathering on the mountains, like a cloak
Folded athwart their shoulders broad and bare;
The ripe corn under the undulating air

103–05. I have been unable to find in Spenser any passage that corresponds fully to these lines. "Many moe" is a common phrase in Spenser's verse; and in *The Faerie Queene,* II, x, 50, occurs the line: "O too high ditty for my simple rime."

106. "Archimage," a variation of Archimago, the name of the evil magician in *The Faerie Queene.* Shelley's conception, however, is evidently different. Compare *The Witch of Atlas,* l. 186.

110. Shelley had recently read the malicious and slanderous attack on *The Revolt of Islam* in *The Quarterly Review.* The passage indicates — as do most of his comments on the subject — that he maintained an unusually level-headed attitude towards his unfriendly critics.

114. "Libeccio," the southwest wind.

119. The same rather odd repetition of *undulate* occurs in *Epipsychidion,* l. 434.

Undulates like an ocean; — and the vines
Are trembling wide in all their trellised lines —
The murmur of the awakening sea doth fill
The empty pauses of the blast; — the hill
Looks hoary through the white electric rain,
And from the glens beyond, in sullen strain,
The interrupted thunder howls; above
One chasm of Heaven smiles, like the eye of Love
On the unquiet world; — while such things are,
How could one worth your friendship heed the war
Of worms? the shriek of the world's carrion jays,
Their censure, or their wonder, or their praise?

You are not here! the quaint witch Memory sees,
In vacant chairs, your absent images,
And points where once you sat, and now should be
But are not. — I demand if ever we
Shall meet as then we met; — and she replies,
Veiling in awe her second-sighted eyes;
"I know the past alone — but summon home
My sister Hope, — she speaks of all to come."
But I, an old diviner, who knew well
Every false verse of that sweet oracle,
Turned to the sad enchantress once again,
And sought a respite from my gentle pain,
In citing every passage o'er and o'er
Of our communion — how on the sea-shore
We watched the ocean and the sky together,
Under the roof of blue Italian weather;
How I ran home through last year's thunder-storm,
And felt the transverse lightning linger warm
Upon my cheek — and how we often made
Feasts for each other, where good will outweighed
The frugal luxury of our country cheer,
As well it might, were it less firm and clear
Than ours must ever be; — and how we spun
A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun

130. Compare *Adonais*, l. 335: "these carrion kites that scream below."
132. Compare *Mont Blanc*, l. 44: "the witch Poesy."
147. This line is almost identical with *Epipsychidion*, l. 542.
153. *I.e., even* were it less.

Of this familiar life, which seems to be
But is not — or is but quaint mockery
Of all we would believe — and sadly blame
The jarring and inexplicable frame
Of this wrong world: — and then anatomize
The purposes and thoughts of men whose eyes
Were closed in distant years; — or widely guess
The issue of the earth's great business,
When we shall be as we no longer are —
Like babbling gossips safe, who hear the war
Of winds, and sigh, but tremble not; — or how
You listened to some interrupted flow
Of visionary rhyme, — in joy and pain
Struck from the inmost fountains of my brain,
With little skill perhaps; — or how we sought
Those deepest wells of passion or of thought
Wrought by wise poets in the waste of years,
Staining their sacred waters with our tears;
Quenching a thirst ever to be renewed!
Or how I, wisest lady! then endued
The language of a land which now is free,
And, winged with thoughts of truth and majesty,
Flits round the tyrant's sceptre like a cloud,
And bursts the peopled prisons, and cries aloud,
"My name is Legion!" — that majestic tongue
Which Calderon over the desert flung

158. "Blame," *i.e.*, "would blame"; in using "spun" (l. 154) Shelley had been thinking of *accustomed* action.

164. The line would be much more readily intelligible if it read "When we shall be no longer as we are." As it stands, Rossetti's explanation is perhaps as good as any: "When we shall be *again* such as we were in our antenatal state — free disembodied spirits." — The next line probably goes with "spun," "blame," etc.

175. Shelley had begun the study of Spanish in the previous year, with Mrs. Gisborne as his tutor. — In January, 1820, a revolt against the reactionary despotism of Ferdinand VII had gained for Spain a constitutional government (which, however, the King succeeded in destroying only three years later). — In the following lines (177–80) Spain seems to be personified, and identified with Liberty.

181. Calderón de la Barca (1600–81) is generally regarded as the greatest of Spanish dramatists. During his last years Shelley became an intense admirer of this poet, writing in one of his letters: "Plato and Calderón have been my gods."

Of ages and of nations; and which found
An echo in our hearts, and with the sound
Startled oblivion; — thou wert then to me
As is a nurse — when inarticulately
A child would talk as its grown parents do.
If living winds the rapid clouds pursue,
If hawks chase doves through the aethereal way,
Huntsmen the innocent deer, and beasts their prey,
Why should not we rouse with the spirit's blast
Out of the forest of the pathless past
These recollected pleasures?
You are now
In London, that great sea, whose ebb and flow
At once is deaf and loud, and on the shore
Vomits its wrecks, and still howls on for more.
Yet in its depth what treasures! You will see
That which was Godwin, — greater none than he
Though fallen — and fallen on evil times — to stand
Among the spirits of our age and land,
Before the dread tribunal of *to come*
The foremost, — while Rebuke cowers pale and dumb.
You will see Coleridge — he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lustre and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind,
Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
Flags wearily through darkness and despair —
A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,

193–95. Compare *Time* and the following lines from a fragment written in 1821:

Methought I was a billow in the crowd
Of common men, that stream without a shore,
That ocean which at once is deaf and loud.

198. Compare *Paradise Lost*, VII, 25–26:

though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues.

Although Shelley became completely disillusioned in regard to Godwin's personal character (compare Letter III and the comment to Hunt, "I doubt whether I ought not to expose this solemn lie; for such and not a man is Godwin"), he continued until his death to speak with respect of Godwin's intellectual achievements.

205. A similar figure is used of Byron in *Julian and Maddalo*, l. 51. With this description of Coleridge, compare *Peter Bell the Third*, V, ii–v.

A hooded eagle among blinking owls. —
You will see Hunt — one of those happy souls
Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom
This world would smell like what it is — a tomb;
Who is, what others seem; his room no doubt
Is still adorned with many a cast from Shout,
With graceful flowers tastefully placed about;
And coronals of bay from ribbons hung,
And brighter wreaths in neat disorder flung;
The gifts of the most learned among some dozens
Of female friends, sisters-in-law, and cousins.
And there is he with his eternal puns,
Which beat the dullest brain for smiles, like duns
Thundering for money at a poet's door;
Alas! it is no use to say, "I'm poor!"
Or oft in graver mood, when he will look
Things wiser than were ever read in book,
Except in Shakespeare's wisest tenderness. —
You will see Hogg, — and I cannot express
His virtues, — though I know that they are great,
Because he locks, then barricades the gate
Within which they inhabit; — of his wit
And wisdom, you'll cry out when you are bit.
He is a pearl within an oyster shell,
One of the richest of the deep; — and there
Is English Peacock, with his mountain Fair,
Turned into a Flamingo; — that shy bird
That gleams i' the Indian air — have you not heard
When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,
His best friends hear no more of him? — but you
Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,
With the milk-white Snowdonian Antelope

213. Robert Shout was a London statuary. Forman suggests that the "casts" had been made from clay models by Mrs. Hunt, who was an amateur sculptor. (A head of Shelley by her has been preserved; there has been some disagreement concerning its merit as a likeness.)

231. The line is rhymeless.

233. Peacock (see Letter I, Note 1) had been recently married to Miss Jane Gryffydth, the "Snowdonian Antelope" (with reference to Mt. Snowdon, in Wales).

235. "Indian" continues the play on names begun with "Flamingo," since Peacock was employed in the East India House.

Matched with this cameleopard — his fine wit
Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it;
A strain too learnèd for a shallow age,
Too wise for selfish bigots; let his page,
Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,
Fold itself up for the serener clime
Of years to come, and find its recompense
In that just expectation. — Wit and sense,
Virtue and human knowledge; all that might
Make this dull world a business of delight,
Are all combined in Horace Smith. — And these,
With some exceptions, which I need not tease
Your patience by descanting on, — are all
You and I know in London.
I recall
My thoughts, and bid you look upon the night.
As water does a sponge, so the moonlight
Fills the void, hollow, universal air —
What see you? — unpavilioned Heaven is fair,
Whether the moon, into her chamber gone,
Leaves midnight to the golden stars, or wan
Climbs with diminished beams the azure steep;
Or whether clouds sail o'er the inverse deep,
Piloted by the many-wandering blast,
And the rare stars rush through them dim and fast: —
All this is beautiful in every land. —
But what see you beside? — a shabby stand
Of Hackney coaches — a brick house or wall
Fencing some lonely court, white with the scrawl
Of our unhappy politics; — or worse —
A wretched woman reeling by, whose curse
Mixed with the watchman's, partner of her trade,
You must accept in place of serenade —
Or yellow-haired Pollonia murmuring
To Henry, some unutterable thing.
I see a chaos of green leaves and fruit
Built round dark caverns, even to the root
Of the living stems that feed them — in whose bowers

250. See Letter XII, Note 1.

272. "'Pollonia' is Apollonia Ricci, daughter of the landlord of the house (Casa Ricci) where Shelley was writing" [Locock].

There sleep in their dark dew the folded flowers;
Beyond, the surface of the unsickled corn
Trembles not in the slumbering air, and borne
In circles quaint, and ever-changing dance,
Like wingèd stars the fire-flies flash and glance,
Pale in the open moonshine, but each one
Under the dark trees seems a little sun,
A meteor tamed; a fixed star gone astray
From the silver regions of the milky way; —
Afar the Contadino's song is heard,
Rude, but made sweet by distance — and a bird
Which cannot be the Nightingale, and yet
I know none else that sings so sweet as it
At this late hour; — and then all is still —
Now — Italy or London, which you will!

Next winter you must pass with me; I'll have
My house by that time turned into a grave
Of dead despondence and low-thoughted care,
And all the dreams which our tormentors are;
Oh! that Hunt, Hogg, Peacock, and Smith were there,
With everything belonging to them fair! —
We will have books, Spanish, Italian, Greek;
And ask one week to make another week
As like his father, as I'm unlike mine,
Which is not his fault, as you may divine.
Though we eat little flesh and drink no wine,
Yet let's be merry: we'll have tea and toast;
Custards for supper, and an endless host
Of syllabubs and jellies and mince-pies,
And other such lady-like luxuries, —
Feasting on which we will philosophize!
And we'll have fires out of the Grand Duke's wood,
To thaw the six weeks' winter in our blood.
And then we'll talk; — what shall we talk about?

294. "Low-thoughted care" is from Milton's *Comus*, l. 6. It occurs in the Dedication to *The Revolt of Islam*, l. 115, and in *A Defence of Poetry*.

300. I recall no other direct reference by Shelley to his father during the last years of his life — not even in his private correspondence. It is interesting to note, however, that the tone is whimsical rather than bitter.

Oh! there are themes enough for many a bout
Of thought-entangled descant; — as to nerves —
With cones and parallelograms and curves
I've sworn to strangle them if once they dare
To bother me — when you are with me there.
And they shall never more sip laudanum,
From Helicon or Himeros; — well, come,
And in despite of God and of the devil,
We'll make our friendly philosophic revel
Outlast the leafless time; till buds and flowers
Warn the obscure inevitable hours,
Sweet meeting by sad parting to renew; —
"To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new."

THE CLOUD[1]

I BRING fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,
From the seas and the streams;
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
In their noonday dreams.
From my wings are shaken the dews that waken
The sweet buds every one,
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,
As she dances about the sun.
I wield the flail of the lashing hail,
And whiten the green plains under,

317. "Helicon," a mountain in Greece, sacred to the Muses. On "Himeros" Shelley has the following note: "Ἵμερος, from which the river Himera was named, is, with some slight shade of difference, a synonym of Love." Compare also *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iii, 43.

323. The final line of *Lycidas*.

[1] Published with *Prometheus Unbound*, 1820. One of the most popular of Shelley's lyrics, *The Cloud* is notable not only for its display of metrical virtuosity, but as an example of the myth-making power that Shelley possessed; the power, that is, to invest natural objects with human attributes and to do so in such a manner as to win from the reader a "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment." Success in such an undertaking depends, of course, on the poet's ability to make his work appear perfectly effortless and unaffected; and this particular kind of imaginative power is rare among modern writers. — Mr. Grabo has shown, very interestingly, how much contemporary scientific knowledge and theory have been woven into the poem (see *A Newton Among Poets*, pp. 119–20).

And then again I dissolve it in rain,
And laugh as I pass in thunder.

I sift the snow on the mountains below,
And their great pines groan aghast;
And all the night 'tis my pillow white,
While I sleep in the arms of the blast.
Sublime on the towers of my skiey bowers,
Lightning my pilot sits;
In a cavern under is fettered the thunder,
It struggles and howls at fits;
Over earth and ocean, with gentle motion,
This pilot is guiding me,
Lured by the love of the genii that move
In the depths of the purple sea;
Over the rills, and the crags, and the hills,
Over the lakes and the plains,
Wherever he dream, under mountain or stream,
The Spirit he loves remains;
And I all the while bask in Heaven's blue smile,
Whilst he is dissolving in rains.

The sanguine Sunrise, with his meteor eyes,
And his burning plumes outspread,
Leaps on the back of my sailing rack,
When the morning star shines dead;
As on the jag of a mountain crag,
Which an earthquake rocks and swings,
An eagle alit one moment may sit
In the light of its golden wings.
And when Sunset may breathe, from the lit sea beneath,
Its ardours of rest and of love,
And the crimson pall of eve may fall
From the depth of Heaven above,
With wings folded I rest, on mine aëry nest,
As still as a brooding dove.

That orbèd maiden with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the Moon,

27. The meaning is "Wherever he may dream . . . that the Spirit" etc. The phrase "under mountain and stream" modifies "remains."

Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,
By the midnight breezes strewn;
And wherever the beat of her unseen feet,
Which only the angels hear,
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof,
The stars peep behind her and peer;
And I laugh to see them whirl and flee,
Like a swarm of golden bees,
When I widen the rent in my wind-built tent,
Till the calm rivers, lakes, and seas,
Like strips of the sky fallen through me on high,
Are each paved with the moon and these.

I bind the Sun's throne with a burning zone,
And the Moon's with a girdle of pearl;
The volcanoes are dim, and the stars reel and swim,
When the whirlwinds my banner unfurl.
From cape to cape, with a bridge-like shape,
Over a torrent sea,
Sunbeam-proof, I hang like a roof,—
The mountains its columns be.
The triumphal arch through which I march
With hurricane, fire, and snow,
When the Powers of the air are chained to my chair,
Is the million-coloured bow;
The sphere-fire above its soft colours wove,
While the moist Earth was laughing below.

I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but I cannot die.
For after the rain when with never a stain
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams
Build up the blue dome of air,

76. This line may perhaps be regarded as stating the theme of the poem: the Platonic conception, so often recurrent in Shelley, of unity in diversity and permanence amid change.

79. "Convex gleams," because the light rays are refracted by the earth's atmosphere.

I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.

TO A SKYLARK[1]

HAIL to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
Thou dost float and run;
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of Heaven,
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,

[1] Composed at Leghorn in the early summer of 1820 and published with *Prometheus Unbound* in the same year. Some recent critics have rebelled against the long-standing popularity of this poem; one speaks of the "bad eminence" to which it has been raised by anthologists. It seems likely, however, to remain a general favourite — and not merely among uncritical readers. — The meter has been said to suggest the spiral soaring of the lark.

15. Compare Byron's *Manfred*, I, ii, 53–55.
22. "Silver sphere," Venus, as the morning star.

Whose intense lamp narrows
  In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see — we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
  With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
  From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflowed.

What thou art we know not;
  What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
  Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Like a Poet hidden
  In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
  Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

Like a high-born maiden
  In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
  Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glow-worm golden
  In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
  Its aëreal hue
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view!

Like a rose embowered
  In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
  Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-wingèd thieves:

55. See *Epipsychidion*, l. 452 n.

Sound of vernal showers
  On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
  All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass:

Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
  What sweet thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
  Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Chorus Hymeneal,
  Or triumphal chant,
Matched with thine would be all
  But an empty vaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains
  Of thy happy strain?
What fields, or waves, or mountains?
  What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance
  Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
  Never came near thee:
Thou lovest — but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

Waking or asleep,
  Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
  Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,
  And pine for what is not:

86. "We" should be emphasized; Shelley is contrasting the life of man with that of the skylark.

Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then — as I am listening now.

90. Compare *Julian and Maddalo*, ll. 544–46:

Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

Some critics have been inclined to question whether the assertion in the present poem is borne out by the facts.

91. The meaning of this stanza is somewhat obscure. Shelley may mean that even if man were not subdued by suffering, he still, in the happiest state conceivable, could not come near the perfect joy of the skylark; or he may mean that by virtue of that very suffering man becomes able to experience a joy that *does* come near the skylark's.

ARETHUSA[1]

I

ARETHUSA arose
From her couch of snows
In the Acroceraunian mountains,—
From cloud and from crag,
With many a jag,
Shepherding her bright fountains.
She leapt down the rocks,
With her rainbow locks
Streaming among the streams;—
Her steps paved with green
The downward ravine

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824, where it is dated "Pisa, 1820." This and the following three lyrics form a natural group, having been written, according to Mrs. Shelley, "at the request of a friend," for insertion in two dramas. This "friend," the author of the dramas, although sometimes said to have been Edward Williams, was Mary Shelley herself. *Arethusa* and the *Song of Proserpine* were written for a brief drama called *Proserpine*, while the two *Hymns* were inserted in another called *Midas*. All four illustrate strikingly the myth-making power already mentioned as belonging to Shelley. The story of Arethusa is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book V. She was one of Diana's nymphs, with whom Alpheus, god of a partly subterranean river in the northern part of the Peloponnesus, fell violently in love. During her efforts to escape from him she was changed into a fountain, and when Alpheus wished to mingle his waters with hers, Diana caused the earth to open, and Arethusa passed under the ocean, still pursued by Alpheus, reappearing as a fountain in Ortygia, an island on which the city of Syracuse, in Sicily, is partly built. In Shelley's poem Arethusa is already a river when Alpheus falls in love with her, and in her flight she apparently passes, not under the earth, but along the ocean floor; she nevertheless reappears in Enna, which is in the center of Sicily, and there ensues another race to the sea.—Keats had also treated the myth in *Endymion*, II, 936–1017; and Mr. White suggests that Shelley may have known Horace Smith's poem *Sicylian Arethusa*, although he would not yet have had a chance to see it in print.—The metre and rhyme scheme in *Arethusa* are exactly the same as in *The Cloud*.

3. Compare Byron's *Childe Harold*, IV, lxxiv: "Th' Acroceraunian mountains of old name." These mountains are on the coast of Albania, and it has been observed that "a river Arethusa arising there could not possibly be approached by an Alpheus of the Peloponnesus," which lies across the Gulf of Corinth—not, of course, that it matters.

4–5. Compare Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner*, ll. 324–25.

Which slopes to the western gleams;
And gliding and springing
She went, ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The Earth seemed to love her,
And Heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.

II

Then Alpheus bold,
On his glacier cold,
With his trident the mountains strook;
And opened a chasm
In the rocks — with the spasm
All Erymanthus shook.
And the black south wind
It unsealed behind
The urns of the silent snow,
And earthquake and thunder
Did rend in sunder
The bars of the springs below.
And the beard and the hair
Of the River-god were
Seen through the torrent's sweep,
As he followed the light
Of the fleet nymph's flight
To the brink of the Dorian deep.

III

"Oh, save me! Oh, guide me!
And bid the deep hide me,
For he grasps me now by the hair!"
The loud Ocean heard,
To its blue depth stirred,
And divided at her prayer;
And under the water
The Earth's white daughter

24. "Erymanthus," a mountain to the north of the river Alpheus.
25. Compare Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*, l. 71.
36. "Dorian deep," the part of the Mediterranean adjacent to Greece.

Fled like a sunny beam;
  Behind her descended
  Her billows, unblended
With the brackish Dorian stream: —
  Like a gloomy stain
  On the emerald main
Alpheus rushed behind, —
  As an eagle pursuing
  A dove to its ruin
Down the streams of the cloudy wind.

IV

  Under the bowers
  Where the Ocean Powers
Sit on their pearlèd thrones;
  Through the coral woods
  Of the weltering floods,
Over heaps of unvalued stones;
  Through the dim beams
  Which amid the streams
Weave a network of coloured light;
  And under the caves,
  Where the shadowy waves
Are as green as the forest's night: —
  Outspeeding the shark,
  And the sword-fish dark,
Under the Ocean's foam,
  And up through the rifts
  Of the mountain clifts
They passed to their Dorian home.

V

  And now from their fountains
  In Enna's mountains,
Down one vale where the morning basks,

55. This stanza is somewhat reminiscent of the passage in *Endymion* already referred to.

72. "Dorian home" can only mean Sicily. Yet, although the Dorians (a linguistic and to some extent social division of the Greek race) established settlements in Sicily at an early date, the adjective seems rather pointless, since the previous home of Alpheus and Arethusa had also been Dorian.

Like friends once parted
Grown single-hearted,
They ply their watery tasks.
At sunrise they leap
From their cradles steep
In the cave of the shelving hill;
At noontide they flow
Through the woods below
And the meadows of asphodel;
And at night they sleep
In the rocking deep
Beneath the Ortygian shore;—
Like spirits that lie
In the azure sky
When they love but live no more.

SONG OF PROSERPINE[1]

WHILE GATHERING FLOWERS ON THE PLAIN OF ENNA

I

Sacred Goddess, Mother Earth,
Thou from whose immortal bosom
Gods, and men, and beasts have birth,
Leaf and blade, and bud and blossom,
Breathe thine influence most divine
On thine own child, Proserpine.

II

If with mists of evening dew
Thou dost nourish these young flowers
Till they grow, in scent and hue,
Fairest children of the Hours,
Breathe thine influence most divine
On thine own child, Proserpine.

90. "Live no more," *i.e.*, on earth, in physical bodies.

[1] First published in Mrs. Shelley's first edition of the *Poetical Works*, 1839. See preliminary note on *Arethusa*. Proserpine (Persephone) was the daughter of Ceres (Demeter), who as goddess of agriculture came to be identified with the principle of fertility in the earth.

HYMN OF APOLLO[1]

I

THE SLEEPLESS Hours who watch me as I lie,
Curtained with star-inwoven tapestries
From the broad moonlight of the sky,
Fanning the busy dreams from my dim eyes,—
Waken me when their Mother, the gray Dawn,
Tells them that dreams and that the moon is gone.

II

Then I arise, and climbing Heaven's blue dome,
I walk over the mountains and the waves,
Leaving my robe upon the ocean foam;
My footsteps pave the clouds with fire; the caves
Are filled with my bright presence, and the air
Leaves the green Earth to my embraces bare.

III

The sunbeams are my shafts, with which I kill
Deceit, that loves the night and fears the day;
All men who do or even imagine ill
Fly me, and from the glory of my ray
Good minds and open actions take new might,
Until diminished by the reign of Night.

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. See preliminary note on *Arethusa*. This is one of the finest and most profound of Shelley's lyrics. In the first, second, and fifth stanzas, the ancient conception of Apollo as the personification of the sun and its natural powers is re-imagined with beauty and persuasiveness. In the third stanza Apollo symbolizes, according to the distinctive Shelleyan conception, Imagination (or, to use another name for the same thing, Poetry), which is described in *A Defence of Poetry* as "the great instrument of moral good," "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own," which "can render men more amiable, more generous and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self." The fourth stanza interprets the character of the Sun-god in terms of current scientific knowledge, after the manner of *The Cloud*. The splendid concluding stanza not only presents the classic conception of Apollo as the patron of medicine, prophecy, and the arts, but adds elements of Christianity ("I am the light of the world"), Platonism (compare especially the *Republic*, Book VII), early nineteenth century transcendentalism, and Shelley's own mystical belief in complete self-consciousness as the ultimate end and aim of all existence.

3. The line is a foot short.

13–18. Compare *A Defence of Poetry*, and *Epipsychidion*, ll. 163–69.

IV

I feed the clouds, the rainbows and the flowers
With their aethereal colours; the moon's globe
And the pure stars in their eternal bowers
Are cinctured with my power as with a robe;
Whatever lamps on Earth or Heaven may shine
Are portions of one power, which is mine.

V

I stand at noon upon the peak of Heaven,
Then with unwilling steps I wander down
Into the clouds of the Atlantic even;
For grief that I depart they weep and frown:
What look is more delightful than the smile
With which I soothe them from the western isle?

VI

I am the eye with which the Universe
Beholds itself and knows itself divine;
All harmony of instrument or verse,
All prophecy, all medicine is mine,
All light of art or nature; — to my song
Victory and praise in its own right belong.

21. The "pure stars" are probably the planets (compare *Prometheus Unbound,* IV, 397–99), the "eternal bowers" being the hollow, concentric spheres in which, according to the Pythagorean astronomy, the planets were set; if the reference is to the fixed stars, then the "one power" is Apollo's only in the sense that he participates in it and is a symbol of it.

31–32. Compare *Ode to Heaven,* ll. 21–22. Douglas Bush (*Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry,* p. 137) compares Ovid's "mundi oculus," and Milton's *Paradise Lost,* V, 171: "Thou Sun, of this great world both eye and soul." A. C. Bradley has commented that "in the late poems the Sun, as in Plato's *Republic,* is a visible image of the Absolute" (*A Miscellany,* p. 160 n.).

36. The antecedent of "its" is "song."

HYMN OF PAN[1]

I

From the forests and highlands
We come, we come;
From the river-girt islands,
Where loud waves are dumb
Listening to my sweet pipings.
The wind in the reeds and the rushes,
The bees on the bells of thyme,
The birds on the myrtle bushes,
The cicale above in the lime,
And the lizards below in the grass,
Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was,
Listening to my sweet pipings.

II

Liquid Penëus was flowing,
And all dark Tempe lay
In Pelion's shadow, outgrowing
The light of the dying day,
Speeded by my sweet pipings.

[1] Published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. See preliminary note on *Arethusa*. Pan was a late Greek deity, originally the god of the deep woods and their inhabitants, later of the whole world of Nature. (Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, Stanza ix.) Two stories about him referred to in the present poem tell of his pursuit of the nymph Syrinx, who was changed into a reed, whence the god fashioned the musical instrument called by her name, also known as the "pipes of Pan"; and of his musical competition with Apollo. In the last stanza Shelley again, as in the *Hymn of Apollo*, gives a modern and personal interpretation to the old myth. The pursuit of Syrinx is "the error," "difficult for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid," of "seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal."

2. "We" must be Pan and his followers or worshippers: "The Sileni, and Sylvans, and Fauns."

11. The god of Mount Tmolus in Lydia, judge of the contest between Pan and Apollo.

13. Shelley's geography seems to be once more at fault, for Penëus is a river in Thessaly, on the other side of the Aegaean sea from Lydia. In Thessaly also are Tempe, a valley sacred to the Muses, and Mount Pelion.

The Sileni, and Sylvans, and Fauns,
And the Nymphs of the woods and the waves,
To the edge of the moist river-lawns,
And the brink of the dewy caves,
And all that did then attend and follow,
Were silent with love, as you now, Apollo,
With envy of my sweet pipings.

III

I sang of the dancing stars,
I sang of the daedal Earth,
And of Heaven — and the giant wars,
And Love, and Death, and Birth, —
And then I changed my pipings, —
Singing how down the vale of Maenalus
I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed.
Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:
All wept, as I think both ye now would,
If envy or age had not frozen your blood,
At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

THE WITCH OF ATLAS

[*Editor's Note.* — *The Witch of Atlas* was written in three days (August 14–16, 1820) following "a solitary journey on foot to the top of Monte San Pellegrino — a mountain of some height" near Pisa. In it, as in many of Shelley's other poems belonging to 1820, there is an unpremeditated abandonment to a gay and whimsical mood. For a time, as never before or after, Shelley seems to have escaped to his skylark's world of "keen clear joyance," unmarred by any "shadow of annoyance," by "love's sad satiety," or by "hate, and pride, and fear."

19–21. "The nymphs of the woods and the waves, whose realm extended up to the edge," etc. [Locock].

26. "Daedal Earth" also occurs in *Mont Blanc*, l. 86. There is perhaps a reminiscence here of Virgil's *Sixth Eclogue*.

29. The skill with which Shelley here changes the metre to match the new theme is noteworthy.

30. "Maenalus," a range of mountains in Arcadia, sacred to Pan.

But it was also a world, Mary felt, "containing no human interest," and she took occasion to press upon her husband the wisdom of writing on "subjects that would more suit the popular taste. . . . It was not only that I wished him to acquire popularity as redounding to his fame; but I believed that he would obtain a greater mastery over his own powers, and greater happiness in his mind, if public applause crowned his endeavours. . . . Shelley did not expect sympathy and approbation from the public; but the want of it took away a portion of the ardour that ought to have sustained him while writing." That the last statement is correct is shown clearly enough in Shelley's letters — and, indeed, in the third of the prefatory stanzas which he addressed to Mary by way of reply to her urgings. Yet what she was really asking was that he should cease to be himself. For this poem that Mary did not like is in a sense the most Shelleyan of all her husband's works, the one that could least conceivably have been produced by any other person in the world. True, the passionate intensity, the fiery concentration of energy, that marks his greatest work, is absent from *The Witch of Atlas*. Yet to be allowed to see a poet on a holiday, leaping and playing (to use his own figure) as unselfconsciously as a young kitten, opening to the world with child-like trust his own "starry and flowery" world of fancy, peopled by the children of his fondest dreams, is a privilege too rare to be casually passed by. And we do not feel that his faith is less compelling or its symbols less alluring because he has dared to play with them; rather they are given, in Elton's phrase, "final warrant."

Some recent critics, it is true, have wished to regard the poem as a deliberate and elaborate allegory. Mr. Grabo, for instance, has been led by his indefatigable researches into possible sources of Shelley's thought to regard *The Witch of Atlas* as one more synthesis of the theories of contemporary physics with the most abstruse mysteries of neo-Platonism; and the Witch stands for many things, from electricity to Isis. More plausible is the argument of Mr. E. E. Kellett that the Witch is a personification of the creative imagination. It will be remembered that Shelley speaks in *Mont Blanc* of "the still cave of the witch Poesy"; it is to be noted that the Witch of the present poem is the daughter of Apollo, the god of song and the patron of all the arts; and she is, like "Poetry," "a power which comes and

goes like dream," which "turns all things to loveliness," and whose movements are uncommanded and unforeseen by any human will or intelligence. Nor does her obvious kinship to the other visionary figures of Shelley's verse — Asia, the Lady of *The Sensitive Plant,* the Vision of *Epipsychidion* that becomes briefly incarnate in Emilia, Urania in *Adonais,* and the first Vision of *The Triumph of Life* — really militate against the theory; for all are embodiments of the essential spirit of poetry. Yet so much of the charm of the poem lies in its seeming irresponsibility, in its defiance of the logic of everyday life, as if Prospero's wand should have been wielded by Ariel, that to burden every whimsical or fanciful detail with a specific allegorical interpretation is like trying to use a rainbow to paint a house. It is perilous to go much beyond Woodberry's suggestion that Shelley interprets "half-consciously the functions of genius, imagination, and poetry conceived almost as interdependent existences, with only a remote and dreamy relation to human life." This remoteness, however, should not be overstressed, for the Witch's career is not complete until she has descended to the world of men, "blind and fleeting" though their generations may be, to reward the good and to impose a playful punishment on the evil by making them do good in spite of themselves.

In the use of the *ottava rima* stanza (employed in Byron's *Don Juan* with marvellous effect) and in its general tone, *The Witch of Atlas* resembles Shelley's recently completed translation of the "Homeric" *Hymn to Mercury.* Probable reminiscences of Spenser's *Muiopotmos* (in which the same stanza is used) and *The Faerie Queene* have also been pointed out; and indeed it would be strange if "the Knight of the Shield of Shadow and the Lance of Gossamere" (as Shelley once called himself) should not have been here indebted to the Poet Laureate of Fairyland. But of course the key to such realms of enchantment is not one that can be borrowed. Milton is also frequently echoed, Shakespeare and Coleridge less often. Many of these echoes, along with probable or possible sources among the works of ancient authors, including Ovid, Pliny, Herodotus, and Diodorus Siculus (to whom may be added Strabo), are listed by Carlos Baker and David Lee Clark, "Literary Sources of Shelley's *The Witch of Atlas,*" *Publications of the Modern Language Association,* LVI (1941), 472–94. Another un-

doubted source, especially of the general tone and the character of the Witch, is "the *Ricciardetto* of Niccolò Forteguerri, a three-volume, half-serious, epic-romance" which Mary and Shelley had been reading together just before *The Witch* was written. This source, first noted by Dowden, is discussed at greater length by Mr. White (*Shelley*, II, 219–21).

Shelley himself regarded the poem as a trifle. His only recorded comment is that "if its merit be measured by the labour which it cost, [it] is worth nothing." It was first published in the *Posthumous Poems*, 1824.]

TO MARY

(ON HER OBJECTING TO THE FOLLOWING POEM, UPON THE SCORE OF ITS CONTAINING NO HUMAN INTEREST)

I

How, my dear Mary,—are you critic-bitten
(For vipers kill, though dead) by some review,
That you condemn these verses I have written,
Because they tell no story, false or true?
What, though no mice are caught by a young kitten,
May it not leap and play as grown cats do,
Till its claws come? Prithee, for this one time,
Content thee with a visionary rhyme.

II

What hand would crush the silken-wingèd fly,
The youngest of inconstant April's minions,
Because it cannot climb the purest sky,
Where the swan sings, amid the sun's dominions?
Not thine. Thou knowest 'tis its doom to die,
When Day shall hide within her twilight pinions
The lucent eyes, and the eternal smile,
Serene as thine, which lent it life awhile.

2. Compare "viperous murderer" in *Adonais*, l. 317. The word "dead" is puzzling, and I have no explanation of Shelley's exact meaning.

12. Probably a reference to Byron. Compare the "tempest-cleaving Swan" of *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, l. 174. Shelley was in general inclined to disparage his own work in comparison with Byron's.

III

To thy fair feet a wingèd Vision came,
Whose date should have been longer than a day,
And o'er thy head did beat its wings for fame,
And in thy sight its fading plumes display;
The watery bow burned in the evening flame,
But the shower fell, the swift Sun went his way —
And that is dead. — O, let me not believe
That anything of mine is fit to live!

IV

Wordsworth informs us he was nineteen years
Considering and retouching Peter Bell;
Watering his laurels with the killing tears
Of slow, dull care, so that their roots to Hell
Might pierce, and their wide branches blot the spheres
Of Heaven, with dewy leaves and flowers; this well
May be, for Heaven and Earth conspire to foil
The over-busy gardener's blundering toil.

V

My Witch indeed is not so sweet a creature
As Ruth or Lucy, whom his graceful praise
Clothes for our grandsons — but she matches Peter,
Though he took nineteen years, and she three days
In dressing. Light the vest of flowing metre
She wears; he, proud as dandy with his stays,
Has hung upon his wiry limbs a dress
Like King Lear's "looped and windowed raggedness."

17. "Wingèd Vision," *The Revolt of Islam.*

25. The point of the reference to *Peter Bell* is that the latter *is* a poem that is intended to contain "human interest," and which is nevertheless fantastic, dull, and frequently ridiculous. In his dedicatory letter to Southey, Wordsworth asserts his "belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents, within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life."

40. See *King Lear*, III, iv, 31.

VI

If you strip Peter, you will see a fellow
  Scorched by Hell's hyperequatorial climate
Into a kind of a sulphureous yellow:
  A lean mark, hardly fit to fling a rhyme at;
In shape a Scaramouch, in hue Othello.
  If you unveil my Witch, no priest nor primate
Can shrive you of that sin, — if sin there be
In love, when it becomes idolatry.

THE WITCH OF ATLAS

I

Before those cruel Twins, whom at one birth
  Incestuous Change bore to her father Time,
Error and Truth, had hunted from the Earth
  All those bright natures which adorned its prime,
And left us nothing to believe in, worth
  The pains of putting into learnèd rhyme,
A lady-witch there lived on Atlas' mountain
Within a cavern, by a secret fountain.

II

Her mother was one of the Atlantides:
  The all-beholding Sun had ne'er beholden
In his wide voyage o'er continents and seas
  So fair a creature, as she lay enfolden

52. "Those bright natures," the gods, nymphs, and other personages of Greek mythology. In *Hellas* (ll. 225–38) Shelley, like Milton in his *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity,* represents Christianity as the power which causes the pagan gods to vanish. But here he seems to be thinking rather of "the French, and Material Philosophy," whose doctrines he declared to be "as false as they are pernicious"; there is even a strong resemblance to Keats's famous attack in *Lamia* (which Shelley could hardly have read until a few weeks later) on "cold philosophy" (*i.e.,* science) as the enemy of beauty.

55. E. E. Kellett has pointed out that some of the details in Shelley's conception of the Witch are apparently borrowed from the account of a certain priestess, or sorceress, in the *Aeneid,* IV, 480–91.

57. "Atlantides," the daughters of Atlas. They included three groups of nymphs: the Pleiades, the Hyades, and the Hesperides.

In the warm shadow of her loveliness; —
He kissed her with his beams, and made all golden
The chamber of gray rock in which she lay —
She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away.

III

'Tis said, she first was changed into a vapour,
And then into a cloud, such clouds as flit,
Like splendour-wingèd moths about a taper,
Round the red west when the sun dies in it:
And then into a meteor, such as caper
On hill-tops when the moon is in a fit:
Then, into one of those mysterious stars
Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

IV

Ten times the Mother of the Months had bent
Her bow beside the folding-star, and bidden
With that bright sign the billows to indent
The sea-deserted sand — like children chidden,
At her command they ever came and went —
Since in that cave a dewy splendour hidden
Took shape and motion: with the living form
Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm.

V

A lovely lady garmented in light
From her own beauty — deep her eyes, as are
Two openings of unfathomable night
Seen through a Temple's cloven roof — her hair
Dark — the dim brain whirls dizzy with delight,
Picturing her form; her soft smiles shone afar,

61. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 448.

62. Woodberry points out the strong resemblance to Spenser's account of how the mother of Belphoebe and Amoret conceived them of the sun's rays. See *The Faerie Queene*, III, vi, 7.

71. The reference is to the asteroids, which, however, move between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter.

74. "Folding-star," the evening star, so called because it appears at the time when flocks are brought to the fold.

81. Contrast l. 61. Both figures are characteristic.

And her low voice was heard like love, and drew
All living things towards this wonder new.

VI

And first the spotted cameleopard came,
And then the wise and fearless elephant;
Then the sly serpent, in the golden flame
Of his own volumes intervolved; — all gaunt
And sanguine beasts her gentle looks made tame.
They drank before her at her sacred fount;
And every beast of beating heart grew bold,
Such gentleness and power even to behold.

VII

The brinded lioness led forth her young,
That she might teach them how they should forego
Their inborn thirst of death; the pard unstrung
His sinews at her feet, and sought to know
With looks whose motions spoke without a tongue
How he might be as gentle as the doe.
The magic circle of her voice and eyes
All savage natures did imparadise.

VIII

And old Silenus, shaking a green stick
Of lilies, and the wood-gods in a crew
Came, blithe, as in the olive copses thick
Cicadae are, drunk with the noonday dew:
And Dryope and Faunus followed quick,
Teasing the God to sing them something new;
Till in this cave they found the lady lone,
Sitting upon a seat of emerald stone.

87. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iii, 45.
89. "Cameleopard," the giraffe.
91. Compare *Paradise Lost*, IX, 501–02.
97. Mr. Clark points out that "brinded lioness" is from Milton's *Comus*, l. 443, and that this and the preceding stanza bear a general resemblance to *Paradise Lost*, IV, 340–50.
110. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, II, ii, 90 ff.

IX

And universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,
And though none saw him, — through the adamant
Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air,
And through those living spirits, like a want,
He passed out of his everlasting lair
Where the quick heart of the great world doth pant,
And felt that wondrous lady all alone, —
And she felt him, upon her emerald throne.

X

And every nymph of stream and spreading tree,
And every shepherdess of Ocean's flocks,
Who drives her white waves over the green sea,
And Ocean with the brine on his gray locks,
And quaint Priapus with his company,
All came, much wondering how the enwombèd rocks
Could have brought forth so beautiful a birth; —
Her love subdued their wonder and their mirth.

XI

The herdsmen and the mountain maidens came,
And the rude kings of pastoral Garamant —
Their spirits shook within them, as a flame
Stirred by the air under a cavern gaunt:
Pigmies, and Polyphemes, by many a name,
Centaurs, and Satyrs, and such shapes as haunt
Wet clefts, — and lumps neither alive nor dead,
Dog-headed, bosom-eyed, and bird-footed.

116. Locock comments that "like a want" is "evidently a stopgap."

117. Woodberry has the note: "A variant of the idea of Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound*."

125. "Priapus," a minor deity associated with the generative principle in nature, usually represented as a comic figure.

130. "Garamant" is identified by Woodberry as Fezzan, a region of oases in southwestern Lybia.

136. "Bosom-eyed," with eyes in their bosoms. One evening in the summer of 1816, in Switzerland, Byron was reciting the passage in Coleridge's *Christabel* (I, 252–53) in which the poet suggests some hideous physical deformity in the witch Geraldine. Shelley rushed from the room, explaining later that he had been overcome by horror at a fancy which had suddenly forced itself upon him: that the witch had eyes in her breasts.

XII

For she was beautiful — her beauty made
The bright world dim, and everything beside
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade:
No thought of living spirit could abide,
Which to her looks had ever been betrayed,
On any object in the world so wide,
On any hope within the circling skies,
But on her form, and in her inmost eyes.

XIII

Which when the lady knew, she took her spindle
And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and three
Long lines of light, such as the dawn may kindle
The clouds and waves and mountains with; and she
As many star-beams, ere their lamps could dwindle
In the belated moon, wound skilfully;
And with these threads a subtle veil she wove —
A shadow for the splendour of her love.

XIV

The deep recesses of her odorous dwelling
Were stored with magic treasures — sounds of air,
Which had the power all spirits of compelling,
Folded in cells of crystal silence there;
Such as we hear in youth, and think the feeling
Will never die — yet ere we are aware,
The feeling and the sound are fled and gone,
And the regret they leave remains alone.

XV

And there lay Visions swift, and sweet, and quaint,
Each in its thin sheath, like a chrysalis,
Some eager to burst forth, some weak and faint
With the soft burthen of intensest bliss

141. *I.e.*, "who had ever looked into her eyes." Locock points out the close resemblance of the whole stanza to the last six lines of Sonnet XXXV of Spenser's *Amoretti*.

157. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 12–18.

It was its work to bear to many a saint
  Whose heart adores the shrine which holiest is,
Even Love's: — and others white, green, gray, and black,
And of all shapes — and each was at her beck.

XVI

And odours in a kind of aviary
  Of ever-blooming Eden-trees she kept,
Clipped in a floating net, a love-sick Fairy
  Had woven from dew-beams while the moon yet slept;
As bats at the wired window of a dairy,
  They beat their vans; and each was an adept,
When loosed and missioned, making wings of winds,
To stir sweet thoughts or sad, in destined minds.

XVII

And liquors clear and sweet, whose healthful might
  Could medicine the sick soul to happy sleep,
And change eternal death into a night
  Of glorious dreams — or if eyes needs must weep,
Could make their tears all wonder and delight,
  She in her crystal vials did closely keep:
If men could drink of those clear vials, 'tis said
The living were not envied of the dead.

XVIII

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device,
  The works of some Saturnian Archimage,
Which taught the expiations at whose price
  Men from the Gods might win that happy age

165. "Which" (referring to "bliss") is to be understood before "It" (compare l. 171). There follows a shift in number, the Visions being thought of separately.

174. "Vans," wings. Compare l. 403 below.

178. Compare *Othello,* III, iii, 332.

184. It has been conjectured that "envied" ought to be "envious," and the change would result in a thoroughly Shelleyan sentiment. But probably Locock's interpretation is correct: "The dead would not envy the living, since death would be a 'night of glorious dreams.' "

186. Compare *Letter to Maria Gisborne,* l. 106 n.

Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;
And which might quench the Earth-consuming rage
Of gold and blood — till men should live and move
Harmonious as the sacred stars above;

XIX

And how all things that seem untameable,
Not to be checked and not to be confined,
Obey the spells of Wisdom's wizard skill;
Time, earth, and fire — the ocean and the wind,
And all their shapes — and man's imperial will;
And other scrolls whose writings did unbind
The inmost lore of Love — let the profane
Tremble to ask what secrets they contain.

XX

And wondrous works of substances unknown,
To which the enchantment of her father's power
Had changed those ragged blocks of savage stone,
Were heaped in the recesses of her bower;
Carved lamps and chalices, and vials which shone
In their own golden beams — each like a flower,
Out of whose depth a fire-fly shakes his light
Under a cypress in a starless night.

XXI

At first she lived alone in this wild home,
And her own thoughts were each a minister,
Clothing themselves, or with the ocean foam,
Or with the wind, or with the speed of fire,
To work whatever purposes might come
Into her mind; such power her mighty Sire
Had girt them with, whether to fly or run,
Through all the regions which he shines upon.

189. It is interesting, in such a poem as this, to find Shelley acknowledging the existence, in men, of "native vice," or, in other words, "*original sin.*"

XXII

The Ocean-nymphs and Hamadryades,
Oreads and Naiads, with long weedy locks,
Offered to do her bidding through the seas,
Under the earth, and in the hollow rocks,
And far beneath the matted roots of trees,
And in the gnarlèd heart of stubborn oaks,
So they might live for ever in the light
Of her sweet presence — each a satellite.

XXIII

"This may not be," the wizard maid replied;
"The fountains where the Naiades bedew
Their shining hair, at length are drained and dried;
The solid oaks forget their strength, and strew
Their latest leaf upon the mountains wide;
The boundless ocean like a drop of dew
Will be consumed — the stubborn centre must
Be scattered, like a cloud of summer dust.

XXIV

"And ye with them will perish, one by one; —
If I must sigh to think that this shall be,
If I must weep when the surviving Sun
Shall smile on your decay — oh, ask not me
To love you till your little race is run;
I cannot die as ye must — over me
Your leaves shall glance — the streams in which ye dwell
Shall be my paths henceforth, and so — farewell!" —

XXV

She spoke and wept: — the dark and azure well
Sparkled beneath the shower of her bright tears,

217. Hamadryads were nymphs of the forests; Oreads, of the mountains; Naiads, of fountains and streams.

231. "Centre," the earth.

234. *I.e.*, the Witch would have to sigh and weep at their passing if she were to love them. She will promise only to dwell with them while they live. — A. M. D. Hughes compares the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, ll. 241 ff.

And every little circlet where they fell
  Flung to the cavern-roof inconstant spheres
And intertangled lines of light: — a knell
  Of sobbing voices came upon her ears
From those departing Forms, o'er the serene
Of the white streams and of the forest green.

XXVI

All day the wizard lady sate aloof,
  Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity,
Under the cavern's fountain-lighted roof;
  Or broidering the pictured poesy
Of some high tale upon her growing woof,
  Which the sweet splendour of her smiles could dye
In hues outshining heaven — and ever she
Added some grace to the wrought poesy.

XXVII

While on her hearth lay blazing many a piece
  Of sandal-wood, rare gums, and cinnamon;
Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is —
  Each flame of it is as a precious stone
Dissolved in ever-moving light, and this
  Belongs to each and all who gaze upon.
The Witch beheld it not, for in her hand
She held a woof that dimmed the burning brand.

XXVIII

This lady never slept, but lay in trance
  All night within the fountain — as in sleep.
Its emerald crags glowed in her beauty's glance;
  Through the green splendour of the water deep
She saw the constellations reel and dance
  Like fire-flies — and withal did ever keep
The tenour of her contemplations calm,
With open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm.

XXIX

And when the whirlwinds and the clouds descended
  From the white pinnacles of that cold hill,

251. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, II, i, 184.

She passed at dewfall to a space extended,
  Where in a lawn of flowering asphodel
Amid a wood of pines and cedars blended,
  There yawned an inextinguishable well
Of crimson fire — full even to the brim,
And overflowing all the margin trim.

XXX

Within the which she lay when the fierce war
  Of wintry winds shook that innocuous liquor
In many a mimic moon and bearded star
  O'er woods and lawns; — the serpent heard it flicker
In sleep, and dreaming still, he crept afar —
  And when the windless snow descended thicker
Than autumn leaves, she watched it as it came
Melt on the surface of the level flame.

XXXI

She had a boat, which some say Vulcan wrought
  For Venus, as the chariot of her star;
But it was found too feeble to be fraught
  With all the ardours in that sphere which are,
And so she sold it, and Apollo bought
  And gave it to this daughter: from a car
Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat
Which ever upon mortal stream did float.

XXXII

And others say, that, when but three hours old,
  The first-born Love out of his cradle lept,
And clove dun Chaos with his wings of gold,
  And like a horticultural adept,
Stole a strange seed, and wrapped it up in mould,
  And sowed it in his mother's star, and kept

298. Compare Phaedrus's speech in Plato's *Symposium* [Shelley's translation]: "Hesiod says . . . that after Chaos these two were produced, the Earth and Love."

301. A similar story of the planting of a "strange seed" is told in the *Fragment of an Unfinished Drama.* There is also a resemblance to the unfinished poem *The Zucca.*

302. "His mother's star," the planet Venus. But the son of Venus is Cupid, and not the "first-born Love" who imposed order on the

Watering it all the summer with sweet dew,
And with his wings fanning it as it grew.

XXXIII

The plant grew strong and green, the snowy flower
Fell, and the long and gourd-like fruit began
To turn the light and dew by inward power
To its own substance; woven tracery ran
Of light firm texture, ribbed and branching, o'er
The solid rind, like a leaf's veinèd fan —
Of which Love scooped this boat — and with soft motion
Piloted it round the circumfluous ocean.

XXXIV

This boat she moored upon her fount, and lit
A living spirit within all its frame,
Breathing the soul of swiftness into it.
Couched on the fountain like a panther tame,
One of the twain at Evan's feet that sit —
Or as on Vesta's sceptre a swift flame —
Or on blind Homer's heart a wingèd thought, —
In joyous expectation lay the boat.

XXXV

Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow
Together, tempering the repugnant mass
With liquid love — all things together grow
Through which the harmony of love can pass;
And a fair Shape out of her hands did flow —
A living Image, which did far surpass
In beauty that bright shape of vital stone
Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.

---

primordial Chaos. Ancient mythology presented two distinct conceptions of Love, and Shelley here lightly passes from one to the other.

311. Compare *Alastor*, l. 299 n.

317. "Evan," Bacchus, or Dionysus.

318. "Vesta," goddess of the hearth, upon whose altar a sacred fire was kept perpetually burning.

321. There seems to be a reminiscence here of the making of the "snowy lady," the false Florimel, in *The Faerie Queene*, III, viii, 6.

328. "Pygmalion," the sculptor who fell in love with his statue of a woman — which happily came to life.

XXXVI

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
  It seemed to have developed no defect
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both,—
  In gentleness and strength its limbs were decked;
The bosom swelled lightly with its full youth,
  The countenance was such as might select
Some artist that his skill should never die,
Imaging forth such perfect purity.

XXXVII

From its smooth shoulders hung two rapid wings,
  Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere,
Tipped with the speed of liquid lightenings,
  Dyed in the ardours of the atmosphere:
She led her creature to the boiling springs
  Where the light boat was moored, and said: "Sit here!"
And pointed to the prow, and took her seat
Beside the rudder, with opposing feet.

XXXVIII

And down the streams which clove those mountains vast,
  Around their inland islets, and amid
The panther-peopled forests, whose shade cast
  Darkness and odours, and a pleasure hid
In melancholy gloom, the pinnace passed;
  By many a star-surrounded pyramid
Of icy crag cleaving the purple sky,
And caverns yawning round unfathomably.

XXXIX

The silver noon into that winding dell,
  With slanted gleam athwart the forest tops,
Tempered like golden evening, feebly fell;
  A green and glowing light, like that which drops

329. Various speculations about the symbolic significance of the Hermaphrodite seem to me unconvincing and unnecessary.

338. "The seventh sphere," in the Pythagorean astronomy, the sphere of Saturn, the outermost of the planetary spheres, next to that of the fixed stars. Compare *The Mask of Anarchy*, l. 316 n.

From folded lilies in which glow-worms dwell,
When Earth over her face Night's mantle wraps;
Between the severed mountains lay on high,
Over the stream, a narrow rift of sky.

XL

And ever as she went, the Image lay
With folded wings and unawakened eyes;
And o'er its gentle countenance did play
The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies,
Chasing the rapid smiles that would not stay,
And drinking the warm tears, and the sweet sighs
Inhaling, which, with busy murmur vain,
They had aroused from that full heart and brain.

XLI

And ever down the prone vale, like a cloud
Upon a stream of wind, the pinnace went:
Now lingering on the pools, in which abode
The calm and darkness of the deep content
In which they paused; now o'er the shallow road
Of white and dancing waters, all besprent
With sand and polished pebbles: — mortal boat
In such a shallow rapid could not float.

XLII

And down the earthquaking cataracts which shiver
Their snow-like waters into golden air,
Or under chasms unfathomable ever
Sepulchre them, till in their rage they tear
A subterranean portal for the river,
It fled — the circling sunbows did upbear
Its fall down the hoar precipice of spray,
Lighting it far upon its lampless way.

XLIII

And when the wizard lady would ascend
The labyrinths of some many-winding vale,

379. Compare the "caverns measureless to man" of *Kubla Khan.*
380. The subject of "sepulchre" is "which."

Which to the inmost mountain upward tend —
She called "Hermaphroditus!" — and the pale
And heavy hue which slumber could extend
Over its lips and eyes, as on the gale
A rapid shadow from a slope of grass,
Into the darkness of the stream did pass.

XLIV

And it unfurled its heaven-coloured pinions,
With stars of fire spotting the stream below;
And from above into the Sun's dominions
Flinging a glory, like the golden glow
In which Spring clothes her emerald-wingèd minions,
All interwoven with fine feathery snow
And moonlight splendour of intensest rime,
With which frost paints the pines in winter time.

XLV

And then it winnowed the Elysian air
Which ever hung about that lady bright,
With its aethereal vans — and speeding there,
Like a star up the torrent of the night,
Or a swift eagle in the morning glare
Breasting the whirlwind with impetuous flight,
The pinnace, oared by those enchanted wings,
Clove the fierce streams towards their upper springs.

XLVI

The water flashed, like sunlight by the prow
Of a noon-wandering meteor flung to Heaven;
The still air seemed as if its waves did flow
In tempest down the mountains; loosely driven
The lady's radiant hair streamed to and fro:
Beneath, the billows having vainly striven
Indignant and impetuous, roared to feel
The swift and steady motion of the keel.

XLVII

Or, when the weary moon was in the wane,
Or in the noon of interlunar night,

The lady-witch in visions could not chain
Her spirit; but sailed forth under the light
Of shooting stars, and bade extend amain
Its storm-outspeeding wings, the Hermaphrodite;
She to the Austral waters took her way,
Beyond the fabulous Thamondocana,—

XLVIII

Where, like a meadow which no scythe has shaven,
Which rain could never bend, or whirl-blast shake,
With the Antarctic constellations paven,
Canopus and his crew, lay th' Austral lake—
There she would build herself a windless haven
Out of the clouds whose moving turrets make
The bastions of the storm, when through the sky
The spirits of the tempest thundered by:

XLIX

A haven beneath whose translucent floor
The tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably,
And around which the solid vapours hoar,
Based on the level waters, to the sky
Lifted their dreadful crags, and like a shore
Of wintry mountains, inaccessibly
Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray,
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay.

L

And whilst the outer lake beneath the lash
Of the wind's scourge, foamed like a wounded thing,
And the incessant hail with stony clash
Ploughed up the waters, and the flagging wing
Of the roused cormorant in the lightning flash
Looked like the wreck of some wind-wandering
Fragment of inky thunder-smoke — this haven
Was as a gem to copy Heaven engraven,—

LI

On which that lady played her many pranks,
Circling the image of a shooting star,

424. "Thamondocana," Timbuctoo.

Even as a tiger on Hydaspes' banks
  Outspeeds the antelopes which speediest are,
In her light boat; and many quips and cranks
  She played upon the water, till the car
Of the late moon, like a sick matron wan,
To journey from the misty east began.

LII

And then she called out of the hollow turrets
  Of those high clouds, white, golden and vermilion,
The armies of her ministering spirits —
  In mighty legions, million after million,
They came, each troop emblazoning its merits
  On meteor flags; and many a proud pavilion
Of the intertexture of the atmosphere
They pitched upon the plain of the calm mere.

LIII

They framed the imperial tent of their great Queen
  Of woven exhalations, underlaid
With lambent lightning-fire, as may be seen
  A dome of thin and open ivory inlaid
With crimson silk — cressets from the serene
  Hung there, and on the water for her tread
A tapestry of fleece-like mist was strewn,
Dyed in the beams of the ascending moon.

LIV

And on a throne o'erlaid with starlight, caught
  Upon those wandering isles of aëry dew,
Which highest shoals of mountain shipwreck not,
  She sate, and heard all that had happened new
Between the earth and moon, since they had brought
  The last intelligence — and now she grew

451. "Hydaspes," the ancient name of the Jhelum River in India.
453. Compare *L'Allegro*, l. 27.
460. Compare *Paradise Lost*, V, 588–91.
465. Compare the building of Pandemonium in *Paradise Lost*, I, 710–11.
469. Pandemonium is also hung with "blazing cressets" (l. 728).

Pale as that moon, lost in the watery night—
And now she wept, and now she laughed outright.

LV

These were tame pleasures; she would often climb
The steepest ladder of the crudded rack
Up to some beakèd cape of cloud sublime,
And like Arion on the dolphin's back
Ride singing through the shoreless air;—oft-time
Following the serpent lightning's winding track,
She ran upon the platforms of the wind,
And laughed to hear the fire-balls roar behind.

LVI

And sometimes to those streams of upper air
Which whirl the earth in its diurnal round,
She would ascend, and win the spirits there
To let her join their chorus. Mortals found
That on those days the sky was calm and fair,
And mystic snatches of harmonious sound
Wandered upon the earth where'er she passed,
And happy thoughts of hope, too sweet to last.

LVII

But her choice sport was, in the hours of sleep,
To glide adown old Nilus, where he threads
Egypt and Aethiopia, from the steep
Of utmost Axumè, until he spreads,
Like a calm flock of silver-fleecèd sheep,
His waters on the plain: and crested heads
Of cities and proud temples gleam amid,
And many a vapour-belted pyramid.

484. Arion was a Greek poet and musician of about 600 B.C. According to legend, he was once about to be murdered for his wealth by the crew of a ship on which he was travelling, but was saved by some dolphins which his music attracted. Mr. Baker points out that the line is borrowed from *Twelfth Night*, I, ii, 15.

489. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 186–88, and *With a Guitar, to Jane*, ll. 75–78. Apparently the reference is to the Pythagorean "music of the spheres."

500. "Axumè," Abyssinia [Woodberry].

LVIII

By Moeris and the Mareotid lakes,
  Strewn with faint blooms like bridal chamber floors,
Where naked boys bridling tame water-snakes,
  Or charioteering ghastly alligators,
Had left on the sweet waters mighty wakes
  Of those huge forms — within the brazen doors
Of the great Labyrinth slept both boy and beast,
Tired with the pomp of their Osirian feast.

LIX

And where within the surface of the river
  The shadows of the massy temples lie,
And never are erased — but tremble ever
  Like things which every cloud can doom to die,
Through lotus-paven canals, and wheresoever
  The works of man pierced that serenest sky
With tombs, and towers, and fanes, 'twas her delight
To wander in the shadow of the night.

LX

With motion like the spirit of that wind
  Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet
Passed through the peopled haunts of humankind,
  Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet,
Through fane, and palace-court, and labyrinth mined
  With many a dark and subterranean street
Under the Nile, through chambers high and deep
She passed, observing mortals in their sleep.

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505 ff. Lake Mareotis (now Mariut) is a lake in the Nile delta, bounding on the south the neck of land on which Alexandria is located. Lake Moeris was once a large lake about eighty miles southwest of Cairo; but within historic times has been a small body of water below sea level, surrounded by a large area of fertile land which was once the lake bottom. The two lakes are mentioned together in Strabo's Geography (XVII, i, 4), in which there is also an account (XVII, i, 37) of the famous Labyrinth at Lake Moeris, on which the more famous Labyrinth at Crete is said to have been modelled. In his account of the sports connected with the "Osirian feast," Shelley may have taken a hint, as Hughes suggests, from Landor's *Gebir*, IV, 165–66. Osiris, of course, was one of the principal gods worshipped by the Egyptians.

513. Compare *Alastor*, l. 457 n. and *The Cloud*, l. 76 n.

LXI

A pleasure sweet doubtless it was to see
Mortals subdued in all the shapes of sleep.
Here lay two sister twins in infancy;
There, a lone youth who in his dreams did weep;
Within, two lovers linkèd innocently
In their loose locks which over both did creep
Like ivy from one stem; — and there lay calm
Old age with snow-bright hair and folded palm.

LXII

But other troubled forms of sleep she saw,
Not to be mirrored in a holy song —
Distortions foul of supernatural awe,
And pale imaginings of visioned wrong;
And all the code of Custom's lawless law
Written upon the brows of old and young:
"This," said the wizard maiden, "is the strife
Which stirs the liquid surface of man's life."

LXIII

And little did the sight disturb her soul. —
We, the weak mariners of that wide lake
Where'er its shores extend or billows roll,
Our course unpiloted and starless make
O'er its wild surface to an unknown goal: —
But she in the calm depths her way could take,
Where in bright bowers immortal forms abide
Beneath the weltering of the restless tide.

LXIV

And she saw princes couched under the glow
Of sunlike gems; and round each temple-court

548–49. Compare Shelley's answer to Trelawny's question: "Do you believe in the immortality of the spirit?" "Certainly not; how can I? We know nothing; we have no evidence; we cannot express our inmost thoughts. They are incomprehensible even to ourselves." These utterances, however, must be regarded as not in harmony with Shelley's characteristic attitude.

551. A variation of the realm of the Platonic "Ideas."

In dormitories ranged, row after row,
She saw the priests asleep — all of one sort —
For all were educated to be so. —
The peasants in their huts, and in the port
The sailors she saw cradled on the waves,
And the dead lulled within their dreamless graves.

LXV

And all the forms in which those spirits lay
Were to her sight like the diaphanous
Veils, in which those sweet ladies oft array
Their delicate limbs, who would conceal from us
Only their scorn of all concealment: they
Move in the light of their own beauty thus.
But these and all now lay with sleep upon them,
And little thought a Witch was looking on them.

LXVI

She, all those human figures breathing there,
Beheld as living spirits — to her eyes
The naked beauty of the soul lay bare,
And often through a rude and worn disguise
She saw the inner form most bright and fair —
And then she had a charm of strange device,
Which, murmured on mute lips with tender tone,
Could make that spirit mingle with her own.

LXVII

Alas! Aurora, what wouldst thou have given
For such a charm when Tithon became gray?

560. Shelley asked Trelawny, in a letter dated June 18, 1822, to procure for him a small quantity of prussic acid, so that he might have in his possession a "golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest." Again, however, the implied denial of immortality (if the passages are taken at face value) is in contradiction to most of Shelley's other comments on the subject.

578. Tithonus, a mortal beloved by the goddess of dawn, asked of her, and was given, immortality, but not eternal youth.

Or how much, Venus, of thy silver heaven
  Wouldst thou have yielded, ere Proserpina
Had half (oh! why not all?) the debt forgiven
  Which dear Adonis had been doomed to pay,
To any witch who would have taught you it?
The Heliad doth not know its value yet.

LXVIII

'Tis said in after times her spirit free
  Knew what love was, and felt itself alone—
But holy Dian could not chaster be
  Before she stooped to kiss Endymion,
Than now this lady—like a sexless bee
  Tasting all blossoms, and confined to none,
Among those mortal forms, the wizard-maiden
Passed with an eye serene and heart unladen.

LXIX

To those she saw most beautiful, she gave
  Strange panacea in a crystal bowl:—
They drank in their deep sleep of that sweet wave,
  And lived thenceforward as if some control,
Mightier than life, were in them; and the grave
  Of such, when death oppressed the weary soul,
Was as a green and overarching bower
Lit by the gems of many a starry flower.

LXX

For on the night when they were buried, she
  Restored the embalmers' ruining, and shook

579. Venus loved the beautiful boy Adonis, who was slain by a wild boar. From Proserpina, wife of Pluto and Queen of Hades, Venus obtained permission for him to return to earth for six months of the year. The story is obviously, like the story of Proserpina herself, a vegetation myth.

584. "Heliad," daughter of the sun, *i.e.*, the Witch herself.

587. One of the chief attributes of Diana (Artemis) was chastity; but one myth (originally told of an older moon-goddess, Selene) tells of her falling in love with the mortal youth Endymion. Keats's long poem dealing with this myth had been published in 1818.

598. "Oppressed" probably means, as Locock suggests, merely "overtook" (Latin *opprimo*).

The light out of the funeral lamps, to be
A mimic day within that deathy nook;
And she unwound the woven imagery
Of second childhood's swaddling bands, and took
The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche,
And threw it with contempt into a ditch.

LXXI

And there the body lay, age after age,
Mute, breathing, beating, warm, and undecaying,
Like one asleep in a green hermitage,
With gentle smiles about its eyelids playing,
And living in its dreams beyond the rage
Of death or life; while they were still arraying
In liveries ever new, the rapid, blind
And fleeting generations of mankind.

LXXII

And she would write strange dreams upon the brain
Of those who were less beautiful, and make
All harsh and crooked purposes more vain
Than in the desert is the serpent's wake
Which the sand covers — all his evil gain
The miser in such dreams would rise and shake
Into a beggar's lap; — the lying scribe
Would his own lies betray without a bribe.

LXXIII

The priests would write an explanation full,
Translating hieroglyphics into Greek,
How the God Apis really was a bull,
And nothing more; and bid the herald stick
The same against the temple doors, and pull
The old cant down; they licensed all to speak
Whate'er they thought of hawks, and cats, and geese,
By pastoral letters to each diocese.

615. Compare *Hellas*, ll. 1064–65.
627. "Apis," an Egyptian god widely worshipped in the form of a bull.
631. Among the Egyptians the hawk was sacred to the god Horus, the cat to the goddess Bubastis (or Ubasti). "Geese" I take to be Shelley's humourous addition to the series.

LXXIV

The king would dress an ape up in his crown
And robes, and seat him on his glorious seat,
And on the right hand of the sunlike throne
Would place a gaudy mock-bird to repeat
The chatterings of the monkey. — Every one
Of the prone courtiers crawled to kiss the feet
Of their great Emperor, when the morning came,
And kissed — alas, how many kiss the same!

LXXV

The soldiers dreamed that they were blacksmiths, and
Walked out of quarters in somnambulism;
Round the red anvils you might see them stand
Like Cyclopses in Vulcan's sooty abysm,
Beating their swords to ploughshares; — in a band
The gaolers sent those of the liberal schism
Free through the streets of Memphis, much, I wis,
To the annoyance of king Amasis.

LXXVI

And timid lovers who had been so coy,
They hardly knew whether they loved or not,
Would rise out of their rest, and take sweet joy,
To the fulfilment of their inmost thought;
And when next day the maiden and the boy
Met one another, both, like sinners caught,
Blushed at the thing which each believed was done
Only in fancy — till the tenth moon shone;

LXXVII

And then the Witch would let them take no ill:
Of many thousand schemes which lovers find,
The Witch found one, — and so they took their fill
Of happiness in marriage warm and kind.
Friends who, by practice of some envious skill,
Were torn apart — a wide wound, mind from mind! —

648. "Amasis," an Egyptian king (570–26 B.C.), of whom there is a lengthy account in Herodotus (II, 161 ff.).

660. This passage may be contrasted with the violent attack on marriage in one of the long prose notes to *Queen Mab* (V, 189).

She did unite again with visions clear
Of deep affection and of truth sincere.

LXXVIII

These were the pranks she played among the cities
  Of mortal men, and what she did to Sprites
And Gods, entangling them in her sweet ditties
  To do her will, and show their subtle sleights,
I will declare another time; for it is
  A tale more fit for the weird winter nights
Than for these garish summer days, when we
Scarcely believe much more than we can see.

THE TWO SPIRITS: AN ALLEGORY[1]

First Spirit

O THOU, who plumed with strong desire
  Wouldst float above the earth, beware!
A Shadow tracks thy flight of fire —
    Night is coming!
  Bright are the regions of the air,
And among the winds and beams
  It were delight to wander there —
    Night is coming!

Second Spirit

The deathless stars are bright above;
  If I would cross the shade of night,
Within my heart is the lamp of love,
    And that is day!
  And the moon will smile with gentle light
On my golden plumes where'er they move;

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. Locock considers the theme of the allegory to be love, but there may be a wider application as well. At any rate, the speeches of the First Spirit represent the conventional and worldly point of view, while those of the Second Spirit express the attitude of the incorrigible individualist and idealist. Without suggesting that Shelley intended the allegory to be so specific, one may feel that the two rôles might have been — and in actual life sometimes were — played by Mary Shelley and her husband. — The last two stanzas apparently continue the alternating points of view. "Some say" at the beginning of the final stanza really means "But others say."

The meteors will linger round my flight,
And make night day.

First Spirit

But if the whirlwinds of darkness waken
Hail, and lightning, and stormy rain;
See, the bounds of the air are shaken —
Night is coming!
The red swift clouds of the hurricane
Yon declining sun have overtaken,
The clash of the hail sweeps over the plain —
Night is coming!

Second Spirit

I see the light, and I hear the sound;
I'll sail on the flood of the tempest dark,
With the calm within and the light around
Which makes night day:
And thou, when the gloom is deep and stark,
Look from thy dull earth, slumber-bound,
My moon-like flight thou then mayst mark
On high, far away.

Some say there is a precipice
Where one vast pine is frozen to ruin
O'er piles of snow and chasms of ice
Mid Alpine mountains;
And that the languid storm pursuing
That wingèd shape, for ever flies
Round those hoar branches, aye renewing
Its aëry fountains.

Some say when nights are dry and clear,
And the death-dews sleep on the morass,
Sweet whispers are heard by the traveller,
Which make night day:
And a silver shape like his early love doth pass
Upborne by her wild and glittering hair,
And when he awakes on the fragrant grass,
He finds night day.

26. Compare *Adonais*, Stanza lv.

EPIPSYCHIDION

VERSES ADDRESSED TO THE NOBLE AND UNFORTUNATE LADY, EMILIA V——, NOW IMPRISONED IN THE CONVENT OF ——

L'anima amante si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea nell' infinito un Mondo tutto per essa, diverso assai da questo oscuro e pauroso baratro.[1]

HER OWN WORDS.

[*Editor's Note.*—*Epipsychidion* was written, or at least put in final form, sometime between early December, 1820, when Shelley first met Emilia Viviani, and February 16, 1821, when he sent the poem to Ollier for publication. Emilia was a beautiful and sentimental Italian girl, who had been placed in a convent by her father, at the insistence of a jealous step-mother, pending a marriage which was to be arranged for her. Shelley's innate abhorrence of the forced submission of any human being to the will of another, the memory of his own sufferings from what he regarded as parental tyranny, his permanent interest in women's rights ("Can man be free if woman be a slave?"), and his tendency to idealize every beautiful and ostensibly intelligent woman that he met—all these combined to create an intense sympathy with Emilia.

At the same time (if we overlook what may be charitably called a natural jealousy on Mary's part), it is hard to find much external evidence that Shelley was "in love" with Emilia. (See Letter IV below.) And as for the poem itself, there is considerable evidence in the fragmentary passages usually printed under the title *Lines Connected with Epipsychidion* that, as Woodberry says, "a poem, substantially *Epipsychidion,* was in Shelley's mind before his meeting with Emilia Viviani, and that she was less the inspiration of it than the occasion of the form it took." Moreover, Emilia as a person scarcely appears in the poem. She becomes rather one more symbol of the Ideal—of beauty and goodness and love—which Shelley sought so persistently. She is the Vision of Alastor; she is the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty; she is Asia and the Witch of Atlas and

[1] Woodberry gives the following translation: "The soul that loves, projects itself beyond creation, and creates for itself in the infinite a world all its own, very different from this obscure and fearful gulf."

Urania. It is no mortal woman whom he would have as his companion on his voyage (a dream how often recurrent — in *Alastor, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound,* and *The Witch of Atlas*) out of the world of men, to the shores of some island-paradise. And that paradise itself is infinitely remote from "reality"; it is "an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea," like that at the close of the *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills,* or the world to which Laon and Cythna are led after the failure of their crusade, or the cave to which Prometheus retires with Asia. Even the ecstatic fulfilment of the poet's adoration of his beloved, which so many readers have mistaken for a literal rendering of a merely physical passion, is not peculiar to this poem, has really nothing to do with Emilia. It is, in Woodberry's words, "a mystical symbol of the soul communing with the ideal object of its pursuit under images of mortal beauty and love." It is the transfiguration of Asia in "Life of Life"; it is the poet's ineffable union with "that Light whose smile kindles the universe" in *Adonais;* it is Plato's vision of the *Phaedrus.*

Shelley's own comments make sufficiently clear what the nature of the poem is. "It is an idealized history of my life and feelings," he told Gisborne; and the emphasis should be placed on the adjective; for "the *Epipsychidion* is a mystery; as to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me." And to his publisher he wrote: "It is to be published simply for the esoteric few; and I make its author a secret, to avoid the malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison." Later he complained that even intelligent readers seemed "inclined to approximate me to the circle of a servant girl and her sweetheart."

This inclination is still strong. It is due partly to the popular misinterpretation of Shelley's relations with women, and partly, perhaps, to the disillusioning sequel of the episode which occasioned the poem, in which Emilia showed herself sadly unequal to the task of wearing the robes of glory in which Shelley had clothed her; so that the poet was moved to confess, "The *Epipsychidion* I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the Centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace." — Mary, who in the beginning had been as enthusiastic and sympathetic

toward Emilia as was her husband, went even further. Writing to Mrs. Gisborne in March, 1822, she remarked: "Emilia has married Biondi; we hear that she leads him and his mother (to use a vulgarism) a devil of a life." — Some readers seem, like Mary, not to have realized quite how vulgar her comment was. For Emilia's sins seem to have consisted mainly of consenting to marry a commonplace person whom she did not love, and of availing herself somewhat freely of Shelley's financial aid. (In the second respect she was not different from most of his friends, and the money seems to have been requested on behalf of somebody else. Incidentally, this is probably what Shelley referred to in writing to Byron that Mary might be "seriously annoyed" if she were to learn the whole story of his relations with Emilia. Some critics have been inclined to give this phrase the worst possible interpretation.) But Emilia's personal history is after all quite irrelevant to the poem; and it is surprising that the widely accepted allegation that Emilia was Shelley's mistress, or that he would have liked her to be, should ever have been admitted to the realm of serious criticism.[1]

The title of the poem is a Shelleyan coinage, and seems to mean "a little additional soul" (Locock), or "this soul out of my soul" (l. 238). In the fragmentary essay *On Love,* also, Shelley speaks of "a miniature as it were of our entire self," "a soul within our soul," which is "the ideal prototype of everything excellent and lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man," and which is "the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends." (The whole essay, and also the fragment *Una Favola,* will shed a good deal of light on the general theme and tone of the poem.) The chief literary influence, noticeable especially at the beginning and at the end, is that of Dante, whose *Paradiso* Shelley praised a month or two later in *A Defence of Poetry* as "the most glorious imagination of modern poetry." There are also, of course, frequent echoes of Plato's philosophizings on love, especially in the famous passage on "free love" (ll. 146–189).

Shelley foresaw that the present poem, like *The Witch of Atlas,* would appeal in its entirety only to a limited circle of readers, possessed to some degree of his own idealizing temper.

[1] The whole question is fully discussed in the editor's *Shelley's Religion,* Chap. VI, especially pp. 273–84.

Artistically, however, it is perhaps the most nearly perfect of his longer poems. The ideas are more closely knit, the emotions are more harmonious, the imagery and music are more brilliantly sustained than in any other of his major works.]

ADVERTISEMENT

THE Writer of the following lines died at Florence, as he was preparing for a voyage to one of the wildest of the Sporades,[2] which he had bought, and where he had fitted up the ruins of an old building, and where it was his hope to have realised a scheme of life, suited perhaps to that happier and better world of which he is now an inhabitant, but hardly practicable in this. His life was singular; less on account of the romantic vicissitudes which diversified it, than the ideal tinge which it received from his own character and feelings. The present Poem, like the *Vita Nuova*[3] of Dante, is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates; and to a certain other class it must ever remain incomprehensible, from a defect of a common organ of perception for the ideas of which it treats. Not but that *gran vergogna sarebbe a colui, che rimasse cosa sotto veste di figura, o di colore rettorico: e domandato non sapesse denudare le sue parole da cotal veste, in guisa che avessero verace intendimento.*[4]

The present poem appears to have been intended by the Writer as the dedication to some longer one. The stanza on the opposite page[5] is almost a literal translation from Dante's famous Canzone

[2] The Sporades, two groups of islands in the Aegean Sea. Compare ll. 422 ff. below.

[3] *Vita Nuova*, or *The New Life*, is the work in which Dante tells of his first meeting with Beatrice and of the subsequent course of his love for her. It may be regarded as a prologue to *The Divine Comedy*.

[4] This passage is quoted, not quite accurately, from Dante's *Vita Nuova*, xxv. Norton's translation is as follows: "It would be a great disgrace to him who should rhyme anything under the garb of a figure or of rhetorical coloring, if afterward, being asked, he should not be able to denude his words of this garb, in such wise that they should have a true meaning."

[5] *I.e.*, the nine lines following.

Voi, ch' intendendo, il terzo ciel movete, etc.[6]

The presumptuous application of the concluding lines to his own composition will raise a smile at the expense of my unfortunate friend: be it a smile not of contempt, but pity. S.

My Song, I fear that thou wilt find but few
Who fitly shall conceive thy reasoning,
Of such hard matter dost thou entertain;
Whence, if by misadventure, chance should bring
Thee to base company (as chance may do),
Quite unaware of what thou dost contain,
I prithee, comfort thy sweet self again,
My last delight! tell them that they are dull,
And bid them own that thou art beautiful.

EPIPSYCHIDION

Sweet Spirit! Sister of that orphan one,
Whose empire is the name thou weepest on,
In my heart's temple I suspend to thee
These votive wreaths of withered memory.

Poor captive bird! who, from thy narrow cage,
Pourest such music, that it might assuage
The ruggèd hearts of those who prisoned thee,
Were they not deaf to all sweet melody;
This song shall be thy rose: its petals pale

[6] The first line of the first Canzone of Dante's *Convito*. Shelley translated the whole Canzone, rendering the first line "Ye who intelligent the Third Heaven move." The Third Heaven is that of Venus, Goddess of Love. Compare l. 117 n.

1. Lines 1–146 make up a sort of invocation to Emilia, chiefly as a type of ideal Beauty. The "orphan one" is usually taken as referring to Mary; but Locock suggests that it may equally well refer to Shelley himself.

2. "Name," Shelley's own.

4. "Withered memory" refers to the autobiographical section of the poem (ll. 190–344).

5. Professor Pacchiani, who introduced Emilia to the Shelleys, said of her: "Poverina, she pines like a bird in a cage — ardently longs to escape from her prison-house."

9. Woodberry points out how "the poem, wherever it touches the fact of life and the person of Emilia, tends immediately to escape into the free world of poetry." So in ll. 21, 72, 112, etc.

Are dead, indeed, my adored Nightingale!
But soft and fragrant is the faded blossom,
And it has no thorn left to wound thy bosom.

High, spirit-wingèd Heart! who dost for ever
Beat thine unfeeling bars with vain endeavour,
Till those bright plumes of thought, in which arrayed
It over-soared this low and worldly shade,
Lie shattered; and thy panting, wounded breast
Stains with dear blood its unmaternal nest!
I weep vain tears: blood would less bitter be,
Yet poured forth gladlier, could it profit thee.

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light, and love, and immortality!
Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!
Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe!
Thou Moon beyond the clouds! Thou living Form
Among the Dead! Thou Star above the Storm!
Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror!
Thou Harmony of Nature's art! Thou Mirror
In whom, as in the splendour of the Sun,
All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on!
Ay, even the dim words which obscure thee now
Flash, lightning-like, with unaccustomed glow;
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

10. The poem is "dead," I take it, in that the passion it celebrates is ideal, remote (at least in intention; compare ll. 35–36, 389–90) from the alternating thirst and satiety, enchantment and disillusionment, of "what men call love."

12. The nightingale is fabled to sing most sweetly when its breast is against a thorn.

25. Compare *Adonais,* l. 480: "That Benediction which th' eclipsing Curse, Of birth" etc. The whole passage (like ll. 77–104 below) also recalls very strongly the description of Asia in the lyric "Life of Life" in *Prometheus Unbound.*

30. Compare *On Love:* "a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness."

From the twin lights thy sweet soul darkens through,
Weeping, till sorrow becomes ecstasy:
Then smile on it, so that it may not die.

I never thought before my death to see
Youth's vision thus made perfect. Emily,
I love thee; though the world by no thin name
Will hide that love from its unvalued shame.
Would we two had been twins of the same mother!
Or, that the name my heart lent to another
Could be a sister's bond for her and thee,
Blending two beams of one eternity!
Yet were one lawful or the other true,
These names, though dear, could paint not, as is due,
How beyond refuge I am thine. Ah me!
I am not thine: I am a part of *thee*.

Sweet Lamp! my moth-like Muse has burned its wings
Or, like a dying swan who soars and sings,
Young Love should teach Time, in his own gray style,
All that thou art. Art thou not void of guile,
A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless?
A well of sealed and secret happiness,
Whose waters like blithe light and music are,
Vanquishing dissonance and gloom? A Star
Which moves not in the moving heavens, alone?
A Smile amid dark frowns? a gentle tone
Amid rude voices? a belovèd light?
A Solitude, a Refuge, a Delight?
A Lute, which those whom Love has taught to play
Make music on, to soothe the roughest day

42. "Youth's vision," the vision of *Alastor* [Woodberry].

43–44. Compare the letter to Gisborne: "the malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison." To such malignity the poet here declares himself to be indifferent.

46. *I.e.*, that Shelley had been married to Emilia instead of to Mary (the "name" is "spouse" — compare l. 130) and Mary had been his sister.

49. *I.e.*, yet, were Emilia his lawful spouse or his true sister, neither of these names ("spouse" and "sister") would adequately express . . . — All editions before Locock's read "and" instead of "or." But such a reading makes no sense, and as Locock points out, in the manuscript Shelley's "or" and his abbreviated "and" could have been easily confused.

61. *I.e.*, "the only star which does not move" [Locock].

And lull fond Grief asleep? a buried treasure?
A cradle of young thoughts of wingless pleasure?
A violet-shrouded grave of Woe? — I measure
The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
And find — alas! mine own infirmity.

She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,
And lured me towards sweet Death; as Night by Day,
Winter by Spring, or Sorrow by swift Hope,
Led into light, life, peace. An antelope,
In the suspended impulse of its lightness,
Were less aethereally light: the brightness
Of her divinest presence trembles through
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew
Embodied in the windless heaven of June
Amid the splendour-wingèd stars, the Moon
Burns, inextinguishably beautiful:
And from her lips, as from a hyacinth full
Of honey-dew, a liquid murmur drops,
Killing the sense with passion; sweet as stops
Of planetary music heard in trance.
In her mild lights the starry spirits dance,
The sunbeams of those wells which ever leap
Under the lightnings of the soul — too deep
For the brief fathom-line of thought or sense.
The glory of her being, issuing thence,
Stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade
Of unentangled intermixture, made

68. "Wingless," "without the power to fly away, and hence lasting" [Woodberry].

72. "She" probably refers not so much to Emilia as to Ideal Beauty.

75. "Light, life, peace" refer respectively to Day, Spring, Hope.

77. For other examples of this characteristic image, Woodberry refers to *Alastor*, ll. 161–77, *The Revolt of Islam*, I, lvii, and *Prometheus Unbound*, II, i, 70–79. It is interesting to note that the last two of these have reference to a male figure.

81. "Splendour-wingèd" occurs also in *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 67.

85. The supersensuous, transcendental quality of the experience that Shelley calls "passion" (compare l. 90) emphasizes once again that his real theme is love of the ideal.

93. "Unentangled intermixture" seems to imply that "light" and "motion," intermixed, are separately perceived. Or, since "entangled" might imply that the two elements were still distinct, the meaning of the ad-

By Love, of light and motion: one intense
Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence,
Whose flowing outlines mingle in their flowing,
Around her cheeks and utmost fingers glowing
With the unintermitted blood, which there
Quivers, (as in a fleece of snow-like air
The crimson pulse of living morning quiver,)
Continuously prolonged, and ending never,
Till they are lost, and in that Beauty furled
Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world;
Scarce visible from extreme loveliness.
Warm fragrance seems to fall from her light dress
And her loose hair; and where some heavy tress
The air of her own speed has disentwined,
The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind;
And in the soul a wild odour is felt,
Beyond the sense, like fiery dews that melt
Into the bosom of a frozen bud. —
See where she stands! a mortal shape indued
With love and life and light and deity,
And motion which may change but cannot die;
An image of some bright Eternity;
A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour
Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender
Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love
Under whose motions life's dull billows move;
A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning;
A Vision like incarnate April, warning,
With smiles and tears, Frost the Anatomy
Into his summer grave.
Ah, woe is me!
What have I dared? where am I lifted? how

jective may be just the opposite, *i.e.*, "uniform," "perfectly fused." — Despite the subtlety of some details, the general conception is not difficult to grasp.

100. Rossetti's emendation "morn may quiver" has not been accepted by other editors, although the error in grammar is flagrant even for Shelley.

114. Compare *The Cloud*, l. 76: "I change, but I cannot die."

117. "The third sphere," that of Venus. Shelley is following the system of astronomy used by Dante in the "Paradiso" of *Divina Commedia*. See *The Mask of Anarchy*, l. 316 n.

122. "Anatomy," skeleton.

Shall I descend, and perish not? I know
That Love makes all things equal: I have heard
By mine own heart this joyous truth averred:
The spirt of the worm beneath the sod
In love and worship, blends itself with God.

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate
Whose course has been so starless! O too late
Belovèd! O too soon adored, by me!
For in the fields of Immortality
My spirit should at first have worshipped thine,
A divine presence in a place divine;
Or should have moved beside it on this earth,
A shadow of that substance, from its birth;
But not as now: — I love thee; yes, I feel
That on the fountain of my heart a seal
Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright
For thee, since in those *tears* thou hast delight.
We — are we not formed, as notes of music are,
For one another, though dissimilar;
Such difference without discord, as can make
Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake
As trembling leaves in a continuous air?

Thy wisdom speaks in me, and bids me dare
Beacon the rocks on which high hearts are wrecked.

125–29. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, II, v, 42–43; also the *Sonnet to Byron* (1821), ll. 13–14.

142. Locock compares *On Love:* "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."

147. Here begins the second section of the poem, in which Shelley sets forth in general terms his philosophy of love. It is in a somewhat different style from the rest of the poem (much like the *Fragments*) and was almost certainly written before the meeting with Emilia. Many critics (*e.g.*, Peck) have regarded this passage as merely a restatement of what they have taken to be the attitude in *Queen Mab;* as a defence of "free love" in the ordinary sense. This view I believe to be wholly mistaken. Both Shelley's life and his writings, taken as a whole, seem to me to weigh heavily against such an interpretation. Even in *Queen Mab* Shelley is far from advocating promiscuity in sex relations; and his remarks about the poem on the occasion of its appearance in a pirated edition in the summer of 1821, as well as Stanza lxxvii of *The Witch of Atlas,* indicate that his views on marriage had changed as radically as his opinions on

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, though it is in the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.

True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning. 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.

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many other subjects. One need read into the present passage nothing more than a general appeal for the overthrow of jealousy and selfishness, and a special appeal for the treatment of women as *persons*, as beings possessed of intelligence, capable of friendship, and entitled no less than men to the right to lead their own lives. The reader who converts Shelley's protest against prudery into a plea for promiscuity has only himself to blame. The first paragraph, moreover, is to be taken in conjunction with the second and third, where the question of sex is simply forgotten, and the conception of love becomes indistinguishable from that of the New Testament. It is, in fact, more Christian than Platonic, although often compared to the *Symposium*, 210–11; it lacks the rationalism and aestheticism so often discernible in Plato's vision; it calls for self-realization within a *community* of free human spirits. And it is not easy to find in English poetry a more compelling enunciation of this ideal.

160. The following thirty lines foreshadow many passages in *A Defence of Poetry* in which Shelley discusses the moral function of Imagination, or Poetry (which is practically identified with Love).

164–69. Compare the *Hymn of Apollo*, ll. 13–18.

Mind from its object differs most in this:
Evil from good; misery from happiness;
The baser from the nobler; the impure
And frail, from what is clear and must endure.
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away;
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared:
This truth is that deep well, whence sages draw
The unenvied light of hope; the eternal law
By which those live, to whom this world of life
Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
Tills for the promise of a later birth
The wilderness of this Elysian earth.

There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,

186–89. Compare *Peter Bell the Third*, III, xx.

190. Here begins the "idealized history of my life and feelings" of which Shelley speaks in his letter to Gisborne. The "Being" is "the vision of *Alastor*, and also the 'awful shadow of some unseen power,' of the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*" (Woodberry). Two other works which Shelley left unfinished were to have dealt exclusively with the attempt to achieve complete communion with that Being. *Prince Athanase* is too fragmentary to shed much light on the subject, but the prose *Una Favola* (*A Fable*) offers a number of close parallels with the passage now under discussion. Swinburne criticized this part of the poem because of the obscurity of the supposed personal references, remarking that "mysteries must have place" in poetry, "but riddles should find none." So far as the passage has the appearance of a puzzle which the reader is challenged to solve, Swinburne is right; and the reader is perhaps not unreasonable who is irritated because the solutions proposed by such critics as Todhunter, Ackermann, and, more recently, Peck, remain (as Woodberry says) "incapable of verification." But such readers, it may be, have mistaken Shelley's intention. They have failed to consider how easily a poet (especially when the poet is Shelley) passes from fact to fancy. A smile or frown, a kind or unkind word, might become in Shelley's imagination, for poetic purposes, a symbol or manifestation of the good or the evil forces of whose workings in his life and in the world he was so intensely aware; and his account is of what might have been — what he desired or feared — rather than what *was*. Emilia and Mary are clearly represented by the Sun and Moon. Further than this it is needless and unwise to go. Woodberry's pronouncement on the matter seems to me final: "Shelley's

In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,
Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
Paved her light steps; — on an imagined shore,
Under the gray beak of some promontory
She met me, robed in such exceeding glory,
That I beheld her not. In solitudes
Her voice came to me through the whispering woods,
And from the fountains, and the odours deep
Of flowers, which, like lips murmuring in their sleep
Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them there,
Breathed but of *her* to the enamoured air;
And from the breezes whether low or loud,
And from the rain of every passing cloud,
And from the singing of the summer-birds,
And from all sounds, all silence. In the words
Of antique verse and high romance, — in form,
Sound, colour — in whatever checks that Storm
Which with the shattered present chokes the past;
And in that best philosophy, whose taste
Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom
As glorious as a fiery martyrdom;
Her Spirit was the harmony of truth. —

Then, from the caverns of my dreamy youth
I sprang, as one sandalled with plumes of fire,
And towards the lodestar of my one desire,
I flitted, like a dizzy moth, whose flight
Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet light,
When it would seek in Hesper's setting sphere
A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre,

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self-description has the truth of his poetic consciousness at the time, and its moods are sadly sustained by many passages of his verse; but to seek precise fact and named individuals as meant by his words is, I believe, futile, and may be misleading." — If one must attach names, the "Being" may be identified with Harriet Grove more plausibly than with anyone else.

200. Compare *Alastor*, ll. 479 ff. and *The Revolt of Islam*, I, xlv.

211. "Storm," Time (involving change and death). Woodberry paraphrases: "In whatever outlives death, and is immortal in the works of art."

As if it were a lamp of earthly flame. —
But She, whom prayers or tears then could not tame,
Passed, like a God throned on a wingèd planet,
Whose burning plumes to tenfold swiftness fan it,
Into the dreary cone of our life's shade;
And as a man with mighty loss dismayed,
I would have followed, though the grave between
Yawned like a gulf whose spectres are unseen:
When a voice said: — "O thou of hearts the weakest,
The phantom is beside thee whom thou seekest."
Then I — "Where?" — the world's echo answered "Where?"
And in that silence, and in my despair,
I questioned every tongueless wind that flew
Over my tower of mourning, if it knew
Whither 'twas fled, this soul out of my soul;
And murmured names and spells which have control
Over the sightless tyrants of our fate;
But neither prayer nor verse could dissipate
The night which closed on her; nor uncreate
That world within this Chaos, mine and me,
Of which she was the veiled Divinity,
The world I say of thoughts that worshipped her:
And therefore I went forth, with hope and fear
And every gentle passion sick to death,
Feeding my course with expectation's breath,
Into the wintry forest of our life;
And struggling through its error with vain strife,
And stumbling in my weakness and my haste,
And half bewildered by new forms, I passed,
Seeking among those untaught foresters
If I could find one form resembling hers,

224. Compare *The Woodman and the Nightingale,* l. 29: "As if it were a lamp of earthly light."

226. Compare *Prometheus Unbound,* IV, 316–17.

228. For the metaphor, compare *Prometheus Unbound,* IV, 444. It has been remarked that the line has a strikingly Dantesque quality.

239–40. Compare *Alastor,* l. 27 etc. and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,* l. 53.

240. "Sightless," invisible (Locock); compare *Prometheus Unbound,* IV, 248. But it is quite possible that Shelley meant "blind," for in *Hellas,* l. 711, he speaks of "the world's eyeless charioteer, Destiny," and in *The Triumph of Life* the driver of the car of Life is blindfolded.

In which she might have masked herself from me.
There, — One, whose voice was venomed melody
Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers;
The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,
Her touch was as electric poison, — flame
Out of her looks into my vitals came,
And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
Into the core of my green heart, and lay
Upon its leaves; until, as hair grown gray
O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
With ruins of unseasonable time.

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought.
And some were fair — but beauty dies away:
Others were wise — but honeyed words betray:
And One was true — oh! why not true to me?
Then, as a hunted deer that could not flee,
I turned upon my thoughts, and stood at bay,
Wounded and weak and panting; the cold day

256. "One" is thought by some to be Harriet (Westbrook) Shelley; Elizabeth Hitchener has also been suggested; and Peck conjectures (on wholly inadequate evidence) that the reference is to Shelley's partner in a supposed illicit relation formed while he was at Oxford. — Woodberry's interpretation of "Venus Pandemos," the sensual love described in Plato's *Symposium*, 180, is the most satisfactory. (*Prince Athanase* was first entitled *Pandemos and Urania.*)

267–71. Many futile attempts have been made to provide satisfactory identifications for these references. Most speculations have centered on a group of Shelley's female friends at Bracknell, where he lived from the summer of 1813 to the spring of 1814. They included Mrs. Newton, wife of the vegetarian John Newton, whose influence is so evident in *Queen Mab;* her sister, Mrs. Boinville; and Mrs. Boinville's married daughter, Cornelia Turner. (Some commentators seem to have been confused as to Mrs. Turner's name, and have given it as Taylor.) The first two were middle-aged women at the time Shelley knew them, but Mrs. Turner was three years younger than he. The first reference (l. 269) has been applied variously to Mrs. Newton, Mrs. Turner, and Harriet Shelley; the second, to Mrs. Boinville and Elizabeth Hitchener; the third, to Harriet Shelley, Mrs. Turner (see the introductory note to *Stanzas. — April, 1814*), and Harriet Grove. The variety of interpretations suggests that Shelley probably had no particular persons in mind, as indeed his manner of speaking indicates.

272. Compare *Adonais*, ll. 275–79.

Trembled, for pity of my strife and pain, —
When, like a noonday dawn, there shone again
Deliverance. One stood on my path who seemed
As like the glorious shape which I had dreamed
As is the Moon, whose changes ever run
Into themselves, to the eternal Sun;
The cold chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven's bright isles,
Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles,
That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame
Which ever is transformed, yet still the same,
And warms not but illumines. Young and fair
As the descended Spirit of that sphere,
She hid me, as the Moon may hide the night
From its own darkness, until all was bright
Between the Heaven and Earth of my calm mind,
And, as a cloud charioted by the wind,
She led me to a cave in that wild place,
And sate beside me, with her downward face
Illumining my slumbers, like the Moon
Waxing and waning o'er Endymion.
And I was laid asleep, spirit and limb,
And all my being became bright or dim
As the Moon's image in a summer sea,
According as she smiled or frowned on me;
And there I lay, within a chaste cold bed:
Alas, I then was nor alive nor dead: —
For at her silver voice came Death and Life,
Unmindful each of their accustomed strife,
Masked like twin babes, a sister and a brother,
The wandering hopes of one abandoned mother,
And through the cavern without wings they flew,

277. "One," Mary Shelley. A comparison of the following passage with the known facts of Shelley's life with Mary will show how perilous is the reading of the poem as actual autobiography. That there was a certain measure of estrangement between Shelley and Mary during their last years together (there is no hint of it in the Dedication of *The Revolt of Islam*, written towards the end of 1817) and that Shelley felt this keenly, is clear enough; but that such poems as *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Mask of Anarchy*, and *The Witch of Atlas* were written by a man who was neither alive nor dead (l. 300) is really a little too much to be asked to believe!

293. See *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 587 n.

301–03. Compare *Una Favola*.

And cried "Away, he is not of our crew."
I wept, and though it be a dream, I weep.

What storms then shook the ocean of my sleep,
Blotting that Moon, whose pale and waning lips
Then shrank as in the sickness of eclipse; —
And how my soul was as a lampless sea,
And who was then its Tempest; and when She,
The Planet of that hour, was quenched, what frost
Crept o'er those waters, till from coast to coast
The moving billows of my being fell
Into a death of ice, immovable; —
And then — what earthquakes made it gape and split,
The white Moon smiling all the while on it,
These words conceal: — If not, each word would be
The key of staunchless tears. Weep not for me!

At length, into the obscure Forest came
The Vision I had sought through grief and shame.
Athwart that wintry wilderness of thorns
Flashed from her motion splendour like the Morn's,
And from her presence life was radiated
Through the gray earth and branches bare and dead;
So that her way was paved, and roofed above
With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love;
And music from her respiration spread
Like light, — all other sounds were penetrated
By the small, still, sweet spirit of that sound,
So that the savage winds hung mute around;
And odours warm and fresh fell from her hair
Dissolving the dull cold in the frore air:
Soft as an Incarnation of the Sun,

312. Here, again, interpreters have failed (not through lack of trying) to establish the identity of the lady (or ladies, since the Tempest and the Planet may or may not be the same) to whom they suppose the poet to be referring. There is the mysterious English lady who (according to the notoriously mendacious Medwin) conceived such a passion for Shelley that she followed him to Italy and died at Naples of a broken heart; there is Fanny Imlay (known as Fanny Godwin), who was certainly not tempestuous; and, at this rate, why exclude from consideration Mrs. Gisborne, Mrs. Mason, Clare Claremont — or any other woman with whom the poet may have been acquainted?

322. "The Vision," Emilia.

When light is changed to love, this glorious **One**
Floated into the cavern where I lay,
And called my Spirit, and the dreaming clay
Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below
As smoke by fire, and in her beauty's glow
I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night
Was penetrating me with living light:
I knew it was the Vision veiled from me
So many years — that it was Emily.

Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth,
This world of love, this *me;* and into birth
Awaken all its fruits and flowers, and dart
Magnetic might into its central heart;
And lift its billows and its mists, and guide
By everlasting laws, each wind and tide
To its fit cloud, and its appointed cave;
And lull its storms, each in the craggy grave
Which was its cradle, luring to faint bowers
The armies of the rainbow-wingèd showers;
And, as those married lights, which from the towers
Of Heaven look forth and fold the wandering globe
In liquid sleep and splendour, as a robe;
And all their many-mingled influence blend,
If equal, yet unlike, to one sweet end; —
So ye, bright regents, with alternate sway
Govern my sphere of being, night and day!
Thou, not disdaining even a borrowed might;
Thou, not eclipsing a remoter light;
And, through the shadow of the seasons three,
From Spring to Autumn's sere maturity,
Light it into the Winter of the tomb,

362. The first "Thou" I take to be Emilia, the "borrowed might" being the Moon's. In the next line, Mary is addressed, since "the remoter light" is obviously the Sun. Mary's "might" is "borrowed," perhaps, in the sense that she participates in the Ideal Beauty or Good of which Emilia is said to be the perfect embodiment; she might "eclipse" Emilia by asserting her claims as Shelley's wife and insisting that the friendship between Shelley and Emilia cease. — In the actual course of events, as far as can be gathered, she wisely refrained from showing her annoyance until Emilia's imperfections had become evident.

366. Compare *Ode to the West Wind*: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Where it may ripen to a brighter bloom.
Thou too, O Comet beautiful and fierce,
Who drew the heart of this frail Universe
Towards thine own; till, wrecked in that convulsion,
Alternating attraction and repulsion,
Thine went astray and that was rent in twain;
Oh, float into our azure heaven again!
Be there Love's folding-star at thy return;
The living Sun will feed thee from its urn
Of golden fire; the Moon will veil her horn
In thy last smiles; adoring Even and Morn
Will worship thee with incense of calm breath
And lights and shadows; as the star of Death
And Birth is worshipped by those sisters wild
Called Hope and Fear — upon the heart are piled
Their offerings, — of this sacrifice divine
A World shall be the altar.
Lady mine,
Scorn not these flowers of thought, the fading birth
Which from its heart of hearts that plant puts forth
Whose fruit, made perfect by thy sunny eyes,
Will be as of the trees of Paradise.

The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me.
To whatsoe'er of dull mortality

368. The "Comet" has been variously identified with Harriet Shelley (who had been dead four years), Sophia Stacey (with whom Shelley was acquainted for a few weeks at the close of 1819, and to whom he addressed a few tender lyrics), and Clare Claremont. If one feels with Locock that "here there must be some particular allusion," the most likely guess is Clare. Woodberry, however, maintains that the Comet "is not to be identified."

374. Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 74 n. and *Hellas*, l. 1029.

385. "That plant," Love; or perhaps the poet himself, who is inspired by Love.

388. Here begins the fourth and final section of the poem, telling of the voyage with the beloved to an island paradise and of the final mystical union of the poet's soul with the Ideal Beauty by which he had so long been haunted. Emilia, as a person, again drops out of the poem after l. 415 and does not reappear until l. 592.

389. This and the following line, if the poet is sincere, testify either to the essential ideality of his love for Emilia or to a lack of self-knowledge that is scarcely credible — especially since he had written to Clare, "There is no reason that you should fear any mixture of that which you call *love*."

Is mine, remain a vestal sister still;
To the intense, the deep, the imperishable,
Not mine but me, henceforth be thou united
Even as a bride, delighting and delighted.
The hour is come: — the destined Star has risen
Which shall descend upon a vacant prison.
The walls are high, the gates are strong, thick set
The sentinels — but true Love never yet
Was thus constrained: it overleaps all fence:
Like lightning, with invisible violence
Piercing its continents; like Heaven's free breath,
Which he who grasps can hold not; liker Death,
Who rides upon a thought, and makes his way
Through temple, tower, and palace, and the array
Of arms: more strength has Love than he or they;
For it can burst his charnel, and make free
The limbs in chains, the heart in agony,
The soul in dust and chaos.

Emily,
A ship is floating in the harbour now,

392. "Not mine but me" is in apposition with "thou."

399. "Lightning" must be used, as often in Shelley, merely as a synonym for "electricity"; otherwise the use of "invisible" would make nonsense of the passage. In the following line, "continents" apparently has the archaic meaning of "containers."

402. I do not fully understand the phrase "rides upon a thought." Comparison may be made with *The Cenci*, I, iii, where Count Cenci rejoices that his prayer for the death of his sons had been answered in a seemingly miraculous way. Or the meaning may simply be that men — even in high places — are sometimes driven to suicide by their own thoughts.

408. Frequent reference has been made already to the "boat-motif" in Shelley's poetry, which is prominent in *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *The Witch of Atlas*, among his longer poems. The "island paradise" was also a favourite theme of Shelleyan fantasy. Sometimes he even mentions it in a mood more than half serious, as when he writes to Mary in August, 1821: "My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the floodgates of the world." The theme occurs also in a sonnet of Dante addressed to Guido Cavalcanti, which Shelley translated in 1815 or 1816, and which is recalled in the closing lines of the present poem, and in the close of *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills*. The conception in the present poem has also numerous points of contact with the paradise described at the end of Act III of *Prometheus Unbound*, although it is more definitely mystical, as appears in ll. 411, 457, 477–82, 538–40. Compare also *Hellas*, ll. 1050–59.

A wind is hovering o'er the mountain's brow;
There is a path on the sea's azure floor,
No keel has ever ploughed that path before;
The halcyons brood around the foamless isles;
The treacherous Ocean has forsworn its wiles;
The merry mariners are bold and free:
Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me?
Our bark is as an albatross, whose nest
Is a far Eden of the purple East;
And we between her wings will sit, while Night,
And Day, and Storm, and Calm, pursue their flight,
Our ministers, along the boundless Sea,
Treading each other's heels, unheededly.
It is an isle under Ionian skies,
Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise,
And, for the harbours are not safe and good,
This land would have remained a solitude
But for some pastoral people native there,
Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air
Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
Simple and spirited; innocent and bold.
The blue Aegean girds this chosen home,
With ever-changing sound and light and foam,
Kissing the sifted sands, and caverns hoar;
And all the winds wandering along the shore
Undulate with the undulating tide:
There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
As clear as elemental diamond,
Or serene morning air; and far beyond,
The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer
(Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year)
Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls
Illumining, with sound that never fails
Accompany the noonday nightingales;
And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;

412. "Halcyons," — see *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iv, 80 n.

442–44. The grammatical structure of this passage is faulty.

445. "Airs" has been interpreted as "breezes," but Locock is "convinced that the word is used in its musical sense, with a reference to the preceding lines."

The light clear element which the isle wears
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep;
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison:
Which is a soul within the soul — they seem
Like echoes of an antenatal dream. —
It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea,
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity;
Bright as that wandering Eden Lucifer,
Washed by the soft blue Oceans of young air.
It is a favoured place. Famine or Blight,
Pestilence, War and Earthquake, never light
Upon its mountain-peaks; blind vultures, they
Sail onward far upon their fatal way:
The wingèd storms, chanting their thunder-psalm
To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm
Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,
From which its fields and woods ever renew
Their green and golden immortality.
And from the sea there rise, and from the sky
There fall, clear exhalations, soft and bright,
Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,
Which Sun or Moon or zephyr draw aside,
Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride
Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
Blushes and trembles at its own excess:
Yet, like a buried lamp, a Soul no less
Burns in the heart of this delicious isle,

452. Locock compares Shelley's letter to Peacock, March 23, 1819: "Odour, which . . . produces sensations of voluptuous faintness"; and the letter to Clare, January 16, 1821: "the smell of a flower affects me with violent emotions." Compare also ll. 108–10 of the present poem, *Alastor*, l. 453 ("a soul-dissolving odour"), *To a Skylark*, l. 55, and Pope's *Essay on Man*, I, 200: "Die of a rose in aromatic pain."

456. Compare *Prince Athanase*, l. 91: "memories of an antenatal life"; also *The Triumph of Life*, ll. 332–33. The idea is common in Shelley's writings.

459. "Lucifer," the morning star.

An atom of th' Eternal, whose own smile
Unfolds itself, and may be felt, not seen
O'er the gray rocks, blue waves, and forests green,
Filling their bare and void interstices. —
But the chief marvel of the wilderness
Is a lone dwelling, built by whom or how
None of the rustic island-people know:
'Tis not a tower of strength, though with its height
It overtops the woods; but, for delight,
Some wise and tender Ocean-King, ere crime
Had been invented, in the world's young prime,
Reared it, a wonder of that simple time,
An envy of the isles, a pleasure-house
Made sacred to his sister and his spouse.
It scarce seems now a wreck of human art,
But, as it were Titanic; in the heart
Of Earth having assumed its form, then grown
Out of the mountains, from the living stone,
Lifting itself in caverns light and high:
For all the antique and learnèd imagery
Has been erased, and in the place of it
The ivy and the wild-vine interknit
The volumes of their many-twining stems;
Parasite flowers illume with dewy gems
The lampless halls, and when they fade, the sky
Peeps through their winter-woof of tracery
With moonlight patches, or star atoms keen,
Or fragments of the day's intense serene; —
Working mosaic on their Parian floors.
And, day and night, aloof, from the high towers
And terraces, the Earth and Ocean seem
To sleep in one another's arms, and dream
Of waves, flowers, clouds, woods, rocks, and all that we
Read in their smiles, and call reality.

This isle and house are mine, and I have vowed
Thee to be lady of the solitude. —

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479. Compare *Adonais*, l. 340: "A portion of the Eternal."
480. Compare *The Zucca*, l. 22.
507. "Parian," *i.e.*, made of marble from the island of Paros, one of the Cyclades, famous for the beauty of its marble.

And I have fitted up some chambers there
Looking towards the golden Eastern air,
And level with the living winds, which flow
Like waves above the living waves below.—
I have sent books and music there, and all
Those instruments with which high Spirits call
The future from its cradle, and the past
Out of its grave, and make the present last
In thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die,
Folded within their own eternity.
Our simple life wants little, and true taste
Hires not the pale drudge Luxury, to waste
The scene it would adorn, and therefore still,
Nature with all her children haunts the hill.
The ring-dove, in the embowering ivy, yet
Keeps up her love-lament, and the owls flit
Round the evening tower, and the young stars glance
Between the quick bats in their twilight dance;
The spotted deer bask in the fresh moonlight
Before our gate, and the slow, silent night
Is measured by the pants of their calm sleep.
Be this our home in life, and when years heap
Their withered hours, like leaves, on our decay,
Let us become the overhanging day,
The living soul of this Elysian isle,
Conscious, inseparable, one. Meanwhile
We two will rise, and sit, and walk together,
Under the roof of blue Ionian weather,
And wander in the meadows, or ascend

522–24. Compare *The Revolt of Islam*, XI, xvii:

if ought survive, I deem
It must be love and joy, for they immortal seem;

also *Rosalind and Helen*, ll. 553–58; and the last four lines of *The Sensitive Plant*.

526–27. These lines are reminiscent of *Queen Mab*, both in content and poetic quality.

528. This line, which itself haunts the imagination of the reader, seems to be a reminiscence of *The Faerie Queene*, VI, x, 15.

531. This line, which Locock calls "unmetrical," may be scanned as follows:

Round the ev'ning tow'er and the young' stars glance.

538. Compare *Adonais*, l. 370: "He is made one with Nature" etc.

The mossy mountains, where the blue heavens bend
With lightest winds, to touch their paramour;
Or linger, where the pebble-paven shore,
Under the quick, faint kisses of the sea
Trembles and sparkles as with ecstasy,—
Possessing and possessed by all that is
Within that calm circumference of bliss,
And by each other, till to love and live
Be one: — or, at the noontide hour, arrive
Where some old cavern hoar seems yet to keep
The moonlight of the expired night asleep,
Through which the awakened day can never peep;
A veil for our seclusion, close as night's,
Where secure sleep may kill thine innocent lights;
Sleep, the fresh dew of languid love, the rain
Whose drops quench kisses till they burn again.
And we will talk, until thought's melody
Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
In words, to live again in looks, which dart
With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound.
Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound

549. Compare the following from Shelley's prose fragment *The Coliseum:* "The internal nature of each being is surrounded by a circle, not to be surmounted by his fellows; and it is this repulsion which constitutes the misfortune of the condition of life. But there is a circle which comprehends, as well as one which mutually excludes, all things that feel. And, with respect to man, his public and his private happiness consists in diminishing the circumference which includes those resembling himself, until they become one with him and he with them."

550. Compare *On Love:* "a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap."

551. Compare *The Revolt of Islam,* VIII, xii: "To live, as if to love and live were one."

557. *I.e.,* "may close thine innocent eyes"; Shelley's manner of expressing the idea is rather odd.

565. The following passage is that on which the argument that Shelley was "in love" with Emilia is chiefly based; and it is true that the language and imagery are indicative of a human, physical passion between man and woman, such as Shelley describes (in what is certainly one of the most splendid and powerful treatments of the theme in the whole range of English poetry) in *The Revolt of Islam,* VI, xxx–xxxvii. Moreover, the generally accepted view of Shelley's life and character has been that he was (in Arnold's phrase) "extremely inflammable," and that the Platonic or

And our veins beat together; and our lips
With other eloquence than words, eclipse
The soul that burns between them, and the wells
Which boil under our being's inmost cells,
The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
Confused in Passion's golden purity,
As mountain-springs under the morning sun.
We shall become the same, we shall be one
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
Till like two meteors of expanding flame,
Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
Burning, yet ever inconsumable:
In one another's substance finding food,
Like flames too pure and light and unimbued
To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away:
One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation. Woe is me!
The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of Love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire —
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

transcendental tone of some of his utterances concerning love is due at best to self-delusion and at worst to insincerity. Any suggestion, therefore, that the language of the present passage is to be taken symbolically rather than literally, and that Shelley is describing a mystical and not a physical passion, is likely to be regarded as special pleading or downright disingenuousness. (One needs also to remind oneself that the general acceptance of this suggestion and of what it implies would be unlikely, at present, to increase the number of Shelley's admirers.) To the present editor, nevertheless, the whole course of Shelley's life and the whole trend of his writings make clear beyond question that the mystical interpretation is correct. It must be remembered here, as in the third act of *Prometheus Unbound*, that if a poet writes at all, he must, however mystical or metaphysical or transcendental may be the substance of what he wishes to communicate, draw his imagery from the physical, familiar world. — It is impossible, of course, in the nature of things, to prove objectively that one or another interpretation is correct. In the end, every individual reader must do his own interpreting.

575. Compare Swift's *Cadenus and Vanessa*, ll. 29–34.

Weak Verses, go, kneel at your Sovereign's feet,
And say: — "We are the masters of thy slave;
What wouldest thou with us and ours and thine?"
Then call your sisters from Oblivion's cave,
All singing loud: "Love's very pain is sweet,
But its reward is in the world divine
Which, if not here, it builds beyond the grave."
So shall ye live when I am there. Then haste
Over the hearts of men, until ye meet
Marina, Vanna, Primus, and the rest,
And bid them love each other and be blessed:
And leave the troop which errs, and which reproves,
And come and be my guest, — for I am Love's.

ADONAIS

AN ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF JOHN KEATS, AUTHOR OF ENDYMION, HYPERION, ETC.

Ἀστὴρ πρὶν μὲν ἔλαμπες ἐνὶ ζωοῖσιν Ἑῷος·
νῦν δὲ θανὼν λάμπεις Ἔσπερος ἐν φθιμένοις.[1]

— PLATO

[*Editor's Note.* — The names of Keats and Shelley are inseparably linked in the popular mind. They were contemporaries; they were both great poets, who have been most widely known through their lyrics of intense personal emotion; they were both, during their lives, ignored by the public and bitterly attacked by the reviews; they died, under tragic circumstances, but a little over a year apart; and the best known of Shelley's

592. This "wonderfully peaceful 'Conclusion,'" as Locock calls it, contains a number of reminiscences of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and the sonnet to Guido mentioned above.

601. "Marina," Mary Shelley; "Vanna" (Giovanna), Jane Williams; "Primus," Edward Williams. "The name Primus is imitated from the *Vita Nuova*, where Dante continually speaks of Guido as his 'first friend'" [Locock].

[1] Shelley's own translation of this epigram is as follows:

Thou wert the morning star among the living,
Ere thy fair light had fled; —
Now, having died, thou art, as Hesperus, giving
New splendour to the dead.

major poems is his elegy on Keats. Yet in actual life they were little more than acquaintances. Leigh Hunt first brought them together and characteristically strove to make them friends. Shelley was more than willing, but he disapproved of the delight in sensations for their own sake which is so obtrusive in Keats's early poetry; and Keats in turn had no sympathy with Shelley's "passion for reforming the world." The younger poet, moreover, rightly conscious of his own genius, and erring chiefly in trusting it too little, avoided an intimacy which he felt might hinder his free and natural development as a poet. If Shelley was aware of this feeling, however, he did not care; and in 1820, hearing of Keats's first severe attack of consumption, he wrote a cordial letter, urging a journey to Italy and sending an invitation to join the Shelley household at Pisa. (See Letter II in the present volume.) Keats replied courteously, but when he finally arrived in Italy toward the end of the year, he was already desperately ill and probably did not live to receive another letter which Shelley addressed to him at Naples in February, 1821.

Shelley's letters show that in general he regarded Keats as a poet rather of great promise than of great achievement. He complained that the author's intention in *Endymion* appeared to have been "that no person should possibly get to the end of it"; but he added that "it is full of some of the highest and the finest gleams of poetry." His praise of *Hyperion* was usually qualified by comments that "his other things are imperfect enough," "insignificant enough," or "worth little" (rather astonishing statements, considering that the "other things" included *The Eve of St. Agnes, Lamia,* and the great *Odes*); but for *Hyperion* itself his admiration was unbounded. "The fragment called *Hyperion* promises for him that he is destined to become one of the first writers of the age." "The great proportion of this piece is surely in the very highest style of poetry." "If the *Hyperion* be not grand poetry, none has been produced by our contemporaries." To Joseph Severn, who accompanied Keats to Rome and nursed him during his last illness, he spoke of Keats's "transcendent genius."

What was doubtless a stronger motive for writing the elegy than either personal affection or critical admiration was his conception of Keats as a highly gifted and sensitive individual done to death by the stupidity, intolerance, and malice of society,

as represented by the *Quarterly* reviewer. His abnormal sensitiveness to every form of injustice was heightened in the present instance by the memory of his own treatment by the reviews (far more vicious than that accorded Keats); too proud to take notice publicly of the assaults upon himself, he "in another's fate now wept his own."

But for this motive, *Adonais* might never have been written; or at least many passages in it might have been less moving. Yet this feeling of Shelley's had some effects not wholly fortunate; it did Keats an injustice, and it weakened the poem.

Everyone knows now that Keats was not, as Byron flippantly put it in *Don Juan,* "snuffed out by an article." Whatever "agitation" the *Quarterly* article may have inspired (there was a much more savage attack in *Blackwood's Magazine,* which Shelley apparently had not heard of), it did not produce the "rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs" of the poet, nor had it any part in causing the disease from which he died. Some of Keats's admirers have accordingly resented Shelley's account of the matter — somewhat unreasonably, since he was merely repeating in good faith a story for which more intimate friends of Keats must have been responsible; and before publishing the poem (perhaps moved by Byron's question, "Is it *actually* true?"), he inquired specifically of Ollier "as to the degree in which, as I am assured, the brutal attack in the *Quarterly Review* excited the disease by which he perished." The theory that Keats's illness sprang from his extreme sensitiveness to unfriendly reviews seems, in fact, to have been common talk, for *Blackwood's Magazine* refers to it as early as September, 1820, several months before the poet's death.

At any rate, leaving this particular detail aside, it is undeniable that Charles Armitage Brown and others of Keats's closest friends did their best to spread the impression that the poet's spirit had been crushed by the indifference or antipathy of a callous world. And perhaps they also can be too severely blamed. Even now, to read the story of the last months of Keats's life, as revealed in his own and Severn's letters, is scarcely bearable — is almost impossible without a sense of bitterness against a world in which such things can happen. Considering all these circumstances, as well as Shelley's own ill usage at the hands of his fellow-men, ought we to be surprised to find him speaking of "the heart-rending account of the clos-

ing scene of the great genius whom envy and ingratitude scourged out of the world" — and adding, "I have dipped my pen in consuming fire for his destroyers"?

Yet one may wish that Shelley had been less inclined, in his verse, to represent the poet — not merely Keats, but any poet, as such — as a "frail form," a "pale youth," the helpless victim of an unfeeling society; that he had held more firmly to the opposite conception that a poet is a person divinely inspired, one who alone with God "deserves the name of Creator," "the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory," and himself "the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men." The same injustice that he did to Keats, Shelley did to himself. There was plenty of iron in both of them; and it is a pity that that fact is so nearly obscured in some of the earlier parts of *Adonais*. The diatribe against the reviewers, one may likewise feel — acknowledging the power of the invective and mindful that no chastisement could have been too severe — is somewhat out of place. It was fitting enough that Milton, in *Lycidas*, should denounce the corruption of the clergy; to prostitute their holy office was not a trivial crime. But in *Adonais* the poet dignifies his victims more than they deserve; what, after all, have creatures like these to do with such a poet as Keats — or Shelley?

It was perhaps something less than fortunate, again, that in the first part of his poem Shelley should have leaned so heavily upon Greek models: Bion's *Lament for Adonis* (part of which Shelley translated; for the myth of Adonis, see *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 579 n.) and Moschus' *Lament for Bion*. Here he seems less successful than usual in translating, or rather transforming, the imaginative concepts of ancient authors so as to give them immediate appeal to modern minds. It is not so much, perhaps, as some critics have suggested, that the form itself is at fault; that the traditional content of the pastoral elegy — the invocation, the lament of nature, the procession of mourners, and so on — is necessarily unsuited to a modern poem. It is rather that Shelley adopts too many *details* that, to a mind less steeped than his in ancient literature and less passionately engaged with the particular theme, are apt to seem unnatural and obscure. When he transforms the "Loves" of Bion into "Dreams," but still has them (Stanzas x and xi) washing the limbs of the dead youth, fanning him with their wings,

clipping their "profuse locks," and breaking their bows and arrows, the passage is bound to impress many readers as not having the inevitable *rightness* of really great poetry.

Even these early stanzas, however, are not lacking in magnificent imagery, in poignant feeling, in persuasive Shelleyan music; and it is not hard to let oneself be swept along by these until the real theme of the poem emerges — the immemorial human protest against the passing of youth and beauty; against the transcience, in the individual, of thought and passion, of ideals and affection; against the seeming subjugation by merely physical forces of that which so immeasurably transcends these forces as apparently to belong to another order of being. Then Shelley becomes wholly himself; models and sources are forgotten; here, if ever, he becomes the instrument of the divine Power in which he so fervently believed; and to this greatest of poetic themes he accords a treatment that is yet unsurpassed in English poetry.

Adonais was a favourite with Shelley himself. He told the Gisbornes soon after it was finished (early in June, 1821): "It is a highly-wrought *piece of art,* and perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written." To Clare Claremont a few days later he wrote that "it is better than anything that I have yet written, and worthy both of him [Keats] and of me." His comment to Ollier was that *Adonais* was "perhaps the least imperfect of my compositions," although "little adapted for popularity," and "in spite of its mysticism." His only misgiving one may infer from a remark to Horace Smith: "I am glad you like 'Adonais,' and, particularly, that you do not think it metaphysical, which I was afraid it was." He even hoped that it might be more widely read than his other works. "I am especially curious to hear the fate of 'Adonais.' I confess I should be surprised if *that* poem were born to an immortality of oblivion." "It is absurd in any Review to criticize 'Adonais,' and still more to pretend that the verses are bad." (It is pleasant to find Shelley, on rare occasions, doing justice to himself as a poet.) "I know what to think of 'Adonais,' but what to think of those who confound it with the many bad poems of the day I know not." It was not until a few weeks before his death that he confessed defeat. "The 'Adonais' I wished to have had a fair chance, both because it is a favourite with me and on account of the memory of Keats, who was a poet of great genius, let the classic party say what it will."

Shelley had the poem printed at Pisa, and copies sent to England. *The Literary Gazette* and *Blackwood's Magazine,* glad of a chance to attack the two poets together, fell upon the work immediately with reviews more virulent (if possible) than any that had appeared before. The publication in the same year of the pirated edition of *Queen Mab* was all that was needed to render finally impassable the gulf between Shelley and the great mass of Englishmen of his own generation.]

PREFACE

Φάρμακον ἦλθε, Βίων, ποτὶ σὸν στόμα, φάρμακον εἶδες.
πῶς τευ τοῖς χείλεσσι ποτέδραμε, κοὐκ ἐγλυκάνθη;
τίς δὲ βροτὸς τοσσοῦτον ἀνάμερος, ἢ κεράσαι τοι,
ἢ δοῦναι λαλέοντι τὸ φάρμακον; ἔκφυγεν ᾠδάν.[2]

— MOSCHUS, EPITAPH. BION.

It is my intention to subjoin to the London edition of this poem a criticism[3] upon the claims of its lamented object to be classed among the writers of the highest genius who have adorned our age. My known repugnance to the narrow principles of taste on which several of his earlier compositions were modelled prove at least that I am an impartial judge. I consider the fragment of *Hyperion* as second to nothing that was ever produced by a writer of the same years.

John Keats died at Rome of a consumption, in his twenty-fourth year,[4] on the —— of —— 1821; and was buried in the romantic and lonely cemetery of the Protestants in that city, under the pyramid which is the tomb of Cestius, and the massy walls and towers, now mouldering and desolate, which formed the circuit of ancient Rome. The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in winter with violets and daisies.

[2] Moschus, *Lament for Bion,* ll. 111–14 (trans. Andrew Lang): "Poison came, Bion, to thy mouth — thou didst know poison. To such lips as thine did it come and was not sweetened? What mortal was so cruel that could mix poison for thee, or who could give thee venom that heard thy voice? Surely, he had no music in his soul."

[3] Apparently this criticism was never written.

[4] Keats was in his twenty-sixth year, having been born October 31, 1795. The date of his death was February 23.

It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.[5]

The genius of the lamented person to whose memory I have dedicated these unworthy verses was not less delicate and fragile than it was beautiful; and where cankerworms abound, what wonder if its young flower was blighted in the bud? The savage criticism[6] on his *Endymion,* which appeared in the *Quarterly Review,* produced the most violent effect on his susceptible mind; the agitation thus originated ended in the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs; a rapid consumption ensued, and the succeeding acknowledgements[7] from more candid critics of the true greatness of his powers were ineffectual to heal the wound thus wantonly inflicted.

It may be well said that these wretched men know not what they do. They scatter their insults and their slanders without heed as to whether the poisoned shaft lights on a heart made callous by many blows or one like Keats's composed of more penetrable stuff. One of their associates is, to my knowledge, a most base and unprincipled calumniator.[8] As to *Endymion,* was it a poem, whatever might be its defects, to be treated contemptuously by those who had celebrated, with various degrees of complacency and panegyric, *Paris,* and *Woman,* and a *Syrian Tale,* and Mrs. Lefanu, and Mr. Barrett, and Mr. Howard Payne,[9] and a long list of the illustrious obscure? Are these

[5] A similar but somewhat longer description of this cemetery is given in a letter to Peacock dated December 22, 1818. Compare Stanzas xlix–l.

[6] The criticism, as Rossetti says, was rather "contemptuous" than "savage." — Most of it is reprinted in Rossetti's edition of *Adonais* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1891, revised ed. 1903) to which all subsequent editors of the poem must be indebted.

[7] Especially Lord Jeffrey's in *The Edinburgh Review,* August, 1820 [Rossetti].

[8] Probably the reference is to the author of the review of *The Revolt of Islam.* Shelley at first attributed it to Southey, and later to Milman. It was by John Taylor Coleridge; and, as far as the review is concerned, Shelley's epithet is just.

[9] For information concerning these titles see Rossetti's edition. Most interesting to American readers is the mention of John Howard Payne, author of *Home, Sweet Home,* who after Shelley's death met and fell deeply in love with Mary. As a matter of fact, the *Quarterly* criticism (April, 1820) of his play *Brutus* consisted, as Rossetti says, of "unmixed censure."

the men who in their venal good nature presumed to draw a parallel between the Rev. Mr. Milman and Lord Byron?[10] What gnat did they strain at here, after having swallowed all those camels?[11] Against what woman taken in adultery dares the foremost of these literary prostitutes to cast his opprobrious stone?[12] Miserable man! you, one of the meanest, have wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the workmanship of God. Nor shall it be your excuse, that, murderer as you are, you have spoken daggers, but used none.

The circumstances of the closing scene of poor Keats's life were not made known to me until the *Elegy* was ready for the press. I am given to understand that the wound which his sensitive spirit had received from the criticism of *Endymion* was exasperated by the bitter sense of unrequited benefits; the poor fellow seems to have been hooted from the stage of life, no less by those on whom he had wasted the promise of his genius, than those on whom he had lavished his fortune and his care.[13] He was accompanied to Rome, and attended in his last illness by Mr. Severn, a young artist of the highest promise, who, I have been informed, "almost risked his own life, and sacrificed every prospect to unwearied attendance upon his dying friend." Had I known these circumstances before the completion of my poem, I should have been tempted to add my feeble tribute of applause to the more solid recompense which the virtuous man finds in the recollection of his own motives. Mr. Severn can dispense with a reward from "such stuff as dreams are made of." His conduct is a golden augury of the success of his future career — may the unextinguished Spirit of his illustrious friend animate the creations of his pencil, and plead against Oblivion for his name!

[10] Rossetti was unable to locate the passage referred to.

[11] See Matthew 23:24.

[12] See John 8:7.

[13] Shelley's authority for these statements is a letter from a certain Colonel Finch to John Gisborne, who had passed it on to Shelley. The reference in the last clause is uncertain. Rossetti, who regards Colonel Finch's statement on this point as "rather haphazard," suggests that Keats's brother George and the painter Haydon "may be glanced at." Against neither could the charge be justly made.

I

I WEEP for Adonais — he is dead!
O, weep for Adonais! though our tears
Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!
And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years
To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,
And teach them thine own sorrow, say: "With me
Died Adonais; till the Future dares
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
An echo and a light unto eternity!"

II

Where wert thou, mighty Mother, when he lay,
When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies
In darkness? where was lorn Urania
When Adonais died? With veilèd eyes,
'Mid listening Echoes, in her Paradise
She sate, while one, with soft enamoured breath,
Rekindled all the fading melodies,
With which, like flowers that mock the corse beneath,
He had adorned and hid the coming bulk of Death.

5. "Obscure" has been variously interpreted. The most likely meaning seems to me to be that the other hours are obscure in comparison, because associated with no such notable event.

9. "Eternity" here means simply "all future time." Usually in Shelley it implies opposition to, or negation of, time.

10. The "mighty Mother," Urania, is doubtless the Uranian Aphrodite of Plato's *Symposium*, more or less the counterpart of Asia and the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty. She is the opposite of the Pandemian Aphrodite (Venus Pandemos), who is the personification of physical, earthly love, and by whom Adonis is beloved in the original myth. When Shelley uses ancient myths, he invariably spiritualizes them, and it is of course the goddess of spiritual love and beauty who mourns the death of Adonais. — Urania was also the name of one of the Muses; and Shelley would remember that she is invoked by Milton in Book VII of *Paradise Lost*, not as the muse of astronomy (which she was in Greek myth), but as the equivalent of the Holy Spirit invoked in Book I. This Urania, as the muse inspiring the highest kind of poetry, could easily be identified with the Uranian Aphrodite; and each could claim to be the spiritual mother of such a poet as Keats. — Rossetti makes the obvious comparison of this line and the next with *Lycidas*, ll. 50–51.

11. "The shaft which flies In darkness" is evidently a reference to the anonymous attack of the *Quarterly* reviewer.

15. "One," *i.e.*, one Echo.

III

Oh, weep for Adonais — he is dead!
Wake, melancholy Mother, wake and weep!
Yet wherefore? Quench within their burning bed
Thy fiery tears, and let thy loud heart keep
Like his, a mute and uncomplaining sleep;
For he is gone, where all things wise and fair
Descend; — oh, dream not that the amorous Deep
Will yet restore him to the vital air;
Death feeds on his mute voice, and laughs at our despair.

IV

Most musical of mourners, weep again!
Lament anew, Urania! — He died,
Who was the Sire of an immortal strain,
Blind, old, and lonely, when his country's pride,
The priest, the slave, and the liberticide,
Trampled and mocked with many a loathèd rite
Of lust and blood; he went, unterrified,
Into the gulf of death; but his clear Sprite
Yet reigns o'er earth; the third among the sons of light.

V

Most musical of mourners, weep anew!
Not all to that bright station dared to climb;

24. Compare Bion: "Persephone . . . all lovely things drift down to thee." (I quote only the most definite parallels; they are indicated in detail by Woodberry and Locock as well as Rossetti. In all cases, I use Lang's translation, except where Shelley's own partial translation of Bion is specified.)

28. "Weep again," *i.e.*, for Keats now as before for Milton (the "He" of the next line). The implication is that no poet so great as Keats has died since Milton.

31. "Pride" is the object of "trampled" and "mocked." Such inversions are not uncommon in Shelley's work. The reference is to the political corruption and immoral court life during the reign of Charles II.

36. Compare *A Defence of Poetry:* "Homer was the first and Dante the second epic poet. . . . Milton was the third epic poet."

38. "Bright station," that of Milton (and Homer and Dante). The next two lines are obscure. The meaning may be that lesser but genuine poets, whose aspirations have been exactly equal to their gifts and who

And happier they their happiness who knew,
Whose tapers yet burn through that night of time
In which suns perished; others more sublime,
Struck by the envious wrath of man or god,
Have sunk, extinct in their refulgent prime;
And some yet live, treading the thorny road,
Which leads, through toil and hate, to Fame's serene abode.

VI

But now, thy youngest, dearest one, has perished —
The nursling of thy widowhood, who grew,
Like a pale flower by some sad maiden cherished,
And fed with true-love tears, instead of dew;
Most musical of mourners, weep anew!
Thy extreme hope, the loveliest and the last,
The bloom, whose petals nipped before they blew
Died on the promise of the fruit, is waste;
The broken lily lies — the storm is overpast.

VII

To that high Capital, where kingly Death
Keeps his pale court in beauty and decay,

have therefore been able to achieve during their lifetime a certain measure of lasting popularity, are happier (in the ordinary human sense) than the greatest poets, like Dante and Milton. These latter, *because* of their greatness (Shelley seems to imply), are unacknowledged by their own age and hence (l. 41) have sometimes been completely forgotten — or perhaps remain only names, none of their works having been preserved. Compare *A Defence of Poetry:* "Ennius, Varro, Pacuvius, and Accius, all great poets, have been lost."

41. "Others more sublime" include Keats and the other "inheritors of unfulfilled renown" mentioned in Stanza xlv [Rossetti].

42. "God," although printed in the first edition with a capital letter, can at this date be only equivalent to Fate ("Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change").

44. The reference is probably to Byron, Shelley himself (though he often expressed doubts as to the verdict of posterity upon his work), and perhaps Wordsworth and Coleridge.

47. "Nursling of thy widowhood," *i.e.*, "Keats, as the son of the Muse, was born . . . in an unpoetical and unappreciative age" [Rossetti].

48. See Keats's *Isabella,* lii–liv.

55. "High Capital," Rome. The phrase is from *Paradise Lost,* I, 756.

He came; and bought, with price of purest breath,
A grave among the eternal. — Come away!
Haste, while the vault of blue Italian day
Is yet his fitting charnel-roof! while still
He lies, as if in dewy sleep he lay;
Awake him not! surely he takes his fill
Of deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill.

VIII

He will awake no more, oh, never more! —
Within the twilight chamber spreads apace
The shadow of white Death, and at the door
Invisible Corruption waits to trace
His extreme way to her dim dwelling-place;
The eternal Hunger sits, but pity and awe
Soothe her pale rage, nor dares she to deface
So fair a prey, till darkness, and the law
Of change, shall o'er his sleep the mortal curtain draw.

IX

Oh, weep for Adonais! — The quick Dreams,
The passion-wingèd Ministers of thought,
Who were his flocks, whom near the living streams
Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught
The love which was its music, wander not, —
Wander no more, from kindling brain to brain,
But droop there, whence they sprung; and mourn their lot
Round the cold heart, where, after their sweet pain,
They ne'er will gather strength, or find a home again.

59. The passage of time in Stanzas vii–xiv "is indicated by successive epithets and phrases: 'blue Italian day,' 'twilight chamber,' 'moonlight wings,' 'starry dew,' the image at the end of Stanza xii, 'Morning sought her eastern watchtower' " [Rossetti].

67–68. "To trace" etc. The pronouns are somewhat confusing. Rossetti suggests that "his" refers to Adonais, "her" to "Corruption"; that "extreme way" is equivalent to "last journey," and "dim dwelling-place" to "grave." Corruption ("the eternal Hunger") waits to "follow his remains to the grave" before beginning her work.

73. This and the next two stanzas are based in large measure on Bion.

74. Much of Shelley's philosophy of poetry is implicit in this line.

X

And one with trembling hands clasps his cold head,
And fans him with her moonlight wings, and cries;
"Our love, our hope, our sorrow, is not dead;
See, on the silken fringe of his faint eyes,
Like dew upon a sleeping flower, there lies
A tear some Dream has loosened from his brain."
Lost Angel of a ruined Paradise!
She knew not 'twas her own; as with no stain
She faded, like a cloud which had outwept its rain.

XI

One from a lucid urn of starry dew
Washed his light limbs as if embalming them;
Another clipped her profuse locks, and threw
The wreath upon him, like an anadem,
Which frozen tears instead of pearls begem;
Another in her wilful grief would break
Her bow and wingèd reeds, as if to stem
A greater loss with one which was more weak;
And dull the barbèd fire against his frozen cheek.

XII

Another Splendour on his mouth alit,
That mouth, whence it was wont to draw the breath
Which gave it strength to pierce the guarded wit,
And pass into the panting heart beneath

82. Compare Bion: "and another from behind him with his wings is fanning Adonis."

88. "Ruined Paradise," "the mind, now torpid in death, of Adonais" [Rossetti].

91. Compare Bion: "One in a golden vessel bears water, and another laves the wound."

93. Compare Bion: "clipping their locks for Adonis."

96. Compare Bion: "And one upon his shafts, another on his bow, is treading."

99. "Barbèd fire" implies that the arrows ("wingèd reeds") were flame-tipped. — Rossetti remarks with some justice that Shelley here "declines into the super-subtle or wire drawn."

102. "Guarded wit," *i.e.*, of the reader (or hearer). Perhaps the phrase implies something of the disparagement of "reason," or the "calculating faculty," that is so evident in *A Defence of Poetry*.

With lightning and with music: the damp death
Quenched its caress upon his icy lips;
And, as a dying meteor stains a wreath
Of moonlight vapour, which the cold night clips,
It flushed through his pale limbs, and passed to its eclipse.

XIII

And others came . . . Desires and Adorations,
Wingèd Persuasions and veiled Destinies,
Splendours, and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations
Of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies;
And Sorrow, with her family of Sighs,
And Pleasure, blind with tears, led by the gleam
Of her own dying smile instead of eyes,
Came in slow pomp; — the moving pomp might seem
Like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream.

XIV

All he had loved, and moulded into thought,
From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound,
Lamented Adonais. Morning sought
Her eastern watch-tower, and her hair unbound,
Wet with the tears which should adorn the ground,
Dimmed the aëreal eyes that kindle day;
Afar the melancholy thunder moaned,
Pale Ocean in unquiet slumber lay,
And the wild Winds flew round, sobbing in their dismay.

XV

Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,
And feeds her grief with his remembered lay,

104. "Damp death," the dampness of death.
107. "Clips," embraces.
109. Moschus lists among the mourners for Bion, Apollo, the Satyrs, the Priapi and Panes (gods like Priapus and Pan), and the Fountain-fairies. Shelley characteristically (and felicitously) substitutes the personified elements of poetry.
127. *Compare Moschus:* "And Echo in the rocks laments that thou art silent, and no more she mimics thy voice." Echo was a mountain-nymph, or Oread, whose unrequited love for the beautiful boy Narcissus caused her to pine away into a mere voice. Narcissus had fallen in love with his own image in a clear pool of water and eventually was changed into the flower which bears his name (compare l. 141 below).

And will no more reply to winds or fountains,
Or amorous birds perched on the young green spray,
Or herdsman's horn, or bell at closing day;
Since she can mimic not his lips, more dear
Than those for whose disdain she pined away
Into a shadow of all sounds: — a drear
Murmur, between their songs, is all the woodmen hear.

XVI

Grief made the young Spring wild, and she threw down
Her kindling buds, as if she Autumn were,
Or they dead leaves; since her delight is flown,
For whom should she have waked the sullen year?
To Phoebus was not Hyacinth so dear
Nor to himself Narcissus, as to both
Thou, Adonais: wan they stand and sere
Amid the faint companions of their youth,
With dew all turned to tears; odour, to sighing ruth.

XVII

Thy spirit's sister, the lorn nightingale
Mourns not her mate with such melodious pain;
Not so the eagle, who like thee could scale
Heaven, and could nourish in the sun's domain
Her mighty youth with morning, doth complain,
Soaring and screaming round her empty nest,

136. Shelley evidently did not know the exact date of Keats's death; he probably supposed it to have occurred in early spring, somewhat later than it actually did (Rossetti). — Compare Moschus: "And in sorrow for thy fall the trees cast down their fruit, and all the flowers have faded."

140. See *Prometheus Unbound*, II, i, 140 n.

141. "Both," *i.e.*, both flowers (not both youths), whose grief symbolizes that of Nature in general.

145. Shelley implies that Keats's position among poets is comparable to that of the nightingale among birds; he may also have had in mind the *Ode to a Nightingale*, published in the same volume with *Hyperion* [Rossetti].

146. "Such," and "so" in the following line, go with "as" in l. 151.

147. Rossetti compares Milton's *Areopagitica*: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation . . . as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam"; Locock compares *Hellas*, l. 76.

As Albion wails for thee: the curse of Cain
Light on his head who pierced thy innocent breast,
And scared the angel soul that was its earthly guest!

XVIII

Ah, woe is me! Winter is come and gone,
But grief returns with the revolving year;
The airs and streams renew their joyous tone;
The ants, the bees, the swallows reappear;
Fresh leaves and flowers deck the dead Seasons' bier;
The amorous birds now pair in every brake,
And build their mossy homes in field and brere;
And the green lizard, and the golden snake,
Like unimprisoned flames, out of their trance awake.

XIX

Through wood and stream and field and hill and Ocean
A quickening life from the Earth's heart has burst
As it has ever done, with change and motion,
From the great morning of the world when first
God dawned on Chaos; in its steam immersed,
The lamps of Heaven flash with a softer light;
All baser things pant with life's sacred thirst;
Diffuse themselves; and spend in love's delight,
The beauty and the joy of their renewèd might.

XX

The leprous corpse, touched by this spirit tender,
Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;
Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour
Is changed to fragrance, they illumine death

151. "Albion," England. Shelley's statement is to be understood as prophetic.

152. The reference is to the *Quarterly* reviewer.

156. In the passage that follows Shelley seems to forget the picture painted in Stanza xvi.

160. "Brere," brake. The word is an archaic form of "briar."

166. Compare *Hellas*, ll. 46–48.

167. Woodberry and Hutchinson have followed an 1829 edition of the poem in reading "In its *stream* immersed"; but "steam" (mist, vapour), as in the first edition, seems to fit the context better.

And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath;
Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
By sightless lightning? — the intense atom glows
A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose.

XXI

Alas! that all we loved of him should be,
But for our grief, as if it had not been,
And grief itself be mortal! Woe is me!
Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene
The actors or spectators? Great and mean
Meet massed in death, who lends what life must borrow.
As long as skies are blue, and fields are green,
Evening must usher night, night urge the morrow,
Month follow month with woe, and year wake year to sorrow.

XXII

He will awake no more, oh, never more!
"Wake thou," cried Misery, "childless Mother, rise
Out of thy sleep, and slake, in thy heart's core,
A wound more fierce than his, with tears and sighs."
And all the Dreams that watched Urania's eyes,
And all the Echoes whom their sister's song

177. "Nought we know dies" is the general statement of the principle exemplified at the beginning of the stanza: that in the physical world matter and energy are never destroyed but merely pass into other forms. Shall the mind, then (Shelley continues), which is to matter (the body) as the sword to the sheath, be subject to destruction in some inexplicable manner (as by invisible lightning)? An affirmative answer seems to be given in the last two lines of the stanza. But this is to be understood as expressive of the natural emotion of bereaved persons in the first access of grief; although it is elaborated in the following stanza, it is not the poet's final answer.

184. Compare *A Vision of the Sea,* ll. 82–83:

> Alas! what is life, what is death, what are we,
> That when the ship sinks we no longer may be?

186. With Rossetti I confess that the meaning of the last clause "is far from clear to me." The pessimistic thought of the preceding lines is obviously continued, and perhaps the poet is asserting (for the moment) the primacy of non-living matter (*i.e.,* death), and the derivative, transient nature of life and mind; in other words, the doctrine of materialism.

190. The following six stanzas are based in general on Bion, chiefly the portion that Shelley translated.

Had held in holy silence, cried: "Arise!"
Swift as a Thought by the snake Memory stung,
From her ambrosial rest the fading Splendour sprung.

XXIII

She rose like an autumnal Night, that springs
Out of the East, and follows wild and drear
The golden Day, which, on eternal wings,
Even as a ghost abandoning a bier,
Had left the Earth a corpse. Sorrow and fear
So struck, so roused, so rapt Urania;
So saddened round her like an atmosphere
Of stormy mist; so swept her on her way
Even to the mournful place where Adonais lay.

XXIV

Out of her secret Paradise she sped,
Through camps and cities rough with stone, and steel,
And human hearts, which to her aery tread
Yielding not, wounded the invisible
Palms of her tender feet where'er they fell:
And barbèd tongues, and thoughts more sharp than they,
Rent the soft Form they never could repel,
Whose sacred blood, like the young tears of May,
Paved with eternal flowers that undeserving way.

XXV

In the death-chamber for a moment Death,
Shamed by the presence of that living Might,
Blushed to annihilation, and the breath

198. "Fading," "as being overcast by sorrow and dismay" [Rossetti].
211. Compare Bion (Shelley's translation):

the thorns pierce
Her hastening feet, and drink her sacred blood.

Shelley's adaptation is thoroughly characteristic.
212. "Palms" for "soles" of the feet also occurs in *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 123 and *The Triumph of Life*, l. 361.
219. "Blushed to annihilation" is explained by Rossetti as follows: "the nature of Death is to be pallid: therefore Death, in blushing, abnegates his very nature, and almost ceases to be Death." But perhaps Shelley means simply that the blush of life returned momentarily to the face of the seemingly dead poet.

Revisited those lips, and Life's pale light
Flashed through those limbs, so late her dear delight.
"Leave me not wild and drear and comfortless,
As silent lightning leaves the starless night!
Leave me not!" cried Urania: her distress
Roused Death: Death rose and smiled, and met her vain caress.

XXVI

"Stay yet awhile! speak to me once again;
Kiss me, so long but as a kiss may live;
And in my heartless breast and burning brain
That word, that kiss, shall all thoughts else survive,
With food of saddest memory kept alive,
Now thou art dead, as if it were a part
Of thee, my Adonais! I would give
All that I am to be as thou now art!
But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart!

XXVII

"O gentle child, beautiful as thou wert,
Why didst thou leave the trodden paths of men
Too soon, and with weak hands though mighty heart
Dare the unpastured dragon in his den?
Defenceless as thou wert, oh, where was then
Wisdom the mirrored shield, or scorn the spear?
Or hadst thou waited the full cycle, when
Thy spirit should have filled its crescent sphere,
The monsters of life's waste had fled from thee like deer.

226. This whole stanza is a fairly close paraphrase of Bion.

228. "Heartless," because she had "bestowed her whole heart upon Adonais" [Rossetti].

234. I do not understand the phrase "chained to Time" as applied to Urania.

235. Compare Bion: "For why, ah overbold! didst thou follow the chase, and being so fair, why wert thou thus over-hardy to fight with beasts?"

240. The reference is evidently to the shield of Athene. Rossetti suggests that Keats's "want of wisdom was shown . . . by the grave blemishes and defects in his *Endymion*"; but since the highest excellence was no safeguard against critical attacks, Shelley perhaps means the wisdom to ignore criticism completely, or bitter scorn inspiring retaliation, like that of Byron as described in the following stanza.

XXVIII

"The herded wolves, bold only to pursue;
The obscene ravens, clamorous o'er the dead;
The vultures to the conqueror's banner true
Who feed where Desolation first has fed,
And whose wings rain contagion; — how they fled,
When, like Apollo, from his golden bow
The Pythian of the age one arrow sped
And smiled! — The spoilers tempt no second blow,
They fawn on the proud feet that spurn them lying low.

XXIX

"The sun comes forth, and many reptiles spawn;
He sets, and each ephemeral insect then
Is gathered into death without a dawn,
And the immortal stars awake again;
So is it in the world of living men:
A godlike mind soars forth, in its delight
Making earth bare and veiling heaven, and when
It sinks, the swarms that dimmed or shared its light
Leave to its kindred lamps the spirit's awful night."

XXX

Thus ceased she: and the mountain shepherds came,
Their garlands sere, their magic mantles rent;
The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame

250. "The Pythian of the age," Byron. The reference seems to be to his early satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,* inspired by a criticism in *The Edinburgh Review* of his youthful poems *Hours of Idleness.* (The Python was a fabulous serpent slain by Apollo.) As a matter of fact, his late poems, such as *Don Juan* and *Cain,* were violently abused by the reviewers. *The Vision of Judgment* was definitely a "second blow" in retaliation; and *Don Juan* is full of counter-attacks.

253. Rossetti points out the lack of connection between "reptiles" and "insect"; the former probably means simply "creeping things" of various kinds — "spawn" meaning to burst out of the egg. — The general idea is that the critics are dependent for their ephemeral and insignificant existence on the "god-like mind" of the creative writer.

264. "The Pilgrim of Eternity," Byron, who, as the author of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* was sometimes called "The Pilgrim." Byron had been no friend of Keats. Although after Keats's death he was to some extent won over by Shelley to a more sympathetic view, and seems to

Over his living head like Heaven is bent,
An early but enduring monument,
Came, veiling all the lightnings of his song
In sorrow; from her wilds Ierne sent
The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,
And Love taught Grief to fall like music from his tongue.

XXXI

Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
A phantom among men; companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm
Whose thunder is its knell; he, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,

have thought well of *Hyperion*, he had been offended by Keats's attack, in *Sleep and Poetry*, on his beloved Pope and had spoken of the younger poet in the most savage and abusive terms; "dirty little blackguard" is an example. His later attitude is probably fairly shown in *Who Killed John Keats?* and the famous stanza in *Don Juan* (XI, lix).

268. The reference is to Thomas Moore. Rossetti remarks that there is no "evidence to show that Moore took the slightest interest in Keats, his doings or his fate." — Shelley was hard put to it to make out a respectable list of mourners from among the poets of the day and probably introduced Byron and Moore because they were well known poets who might be considered "liberal" in one sense or another.

271. "Frail Form," Shelley himself. The self-portrait in this and the following stanzas had been severely criticized as being disproportionately long and unpleasantly expressive of self-pity. The length may be partially justified by the similarity (as Shelley felt) between his own career and that of Keats. He does not conceal (see l. 300) that it is his own case as well as Keats's that he is pleading. The second charge has already been touched upon in several places. Estimations of its justness will vary according to the temperaments of individual readers. It is possible to read the passage less as a plea for pity than as an honest, if unconsciously exaggerated, confession of weakness. It may be observed also, that Shelley would have been something more or less than human if he had not been painfully aware of his isolation from his fellow-men — an isolation which seemed to him undeserved and inexplicable, and which was most bitter in that it rendered useless the talent which to him as to Milton it was "death to hide," and which he so ardently desired to use in alleviating the ugliness and evil of human life. — Perhaps, after all, it is less the sentiment itself that repels a certain class of readers than it is the poet's lack of reticence in unlocking his heart so publicly. So alien is this procedure to the English temper that some of Shelley's countrymen seem to have felt that there is something scarcely decent in such unreserve. But there are other readers who find it not the least engaging trait of Shelley's poetic character.

Actaeon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

XXXII

A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift —
A Love in desolation masked; — a Power
Girt round with weakness; — it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow; — even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

XXXIII

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart.

XXXIV

All stood aloof, and at his partial moan
Smiled through their tears; well knew that gentle band

276. "Actaeon," a huntsman who chanced to see Diana bathing, and was changed by the angered goddess into a stag, who was pursued and torn to pieces by his own hounds. Compare also *Epipsychidion*, ll. 272–74; and with the general idea compare the sonnet (1818) beginning "Lift not the painted veil." — The vision of the ideal makes the actual intolerable.

289. Symbolic interpretations of the pansies, violets, and ivy-tresses have been suggested, but seem to me needless. The "light spear" is the thyrsus, sacred to Dionysus, and appropriate here because of Shelley's conception of the poet as being at times subject to a "divine madness."

298. "Partial," *i.e.*, because of his sympathy for Keats. — Why the hearers *smiled*, even through tears, I cannot understand.

Who in another's fate now wept his own,
As in the accents of an unknown land
He sung new sorrow; sad Urania scanned
The Stranger's mien, and murmured: "Who art thou?"
He answered not, but with a sudden hand
Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,
Which was like Cain's or Christ's — oh! that it should be so!

XXXV

What softer voice is hushed over the dead?
Athwart what brow is that dark mantle thrown?
What form leans sadly o'er the white death-bed,
In mockery of monumental stone,
The heavy heart heaving without a moan?
If it be He, who, gentlest of the wise,
Taught, soothed, loved, honoured the departed one,
Let me not vex, with inharmonious sighs,
The silence of that heart's accepted sacrifice.

XXXVI

Our Adonais has drunk poison — oh!
What deaf and viperous murderer could crown
Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?
The nameless worm would now itself disown:
It felt, yet could escape, the magic tone

301. "Unknown land," England; but why or in what sense "unknown" is not clear.

305. "Branded like Cain's and ensanguined like Christ's" [Woodberry]. Shelley is simply saying that he is an outcast from society as were Cain and Christ. The reviewers were of course outraged by this instance of "daring profanation," "impious folly," and "ferocious blasphemy"; but Rossetti's surmise that the passage was introduced "for the rather wanton purpose of exasperating them" is apparently contradicted by a passage in one of Shelley's letters: "The introduction of the name of Christ as an antithesis to Cain is surely anything but irreverence or sarcasm."

312. "He," Leigh Hunt.

316. Compare the lines from Moschus used by Shelley as the motto of his poem.

317. "Deaf," because insensible to the "magic tone" of Keats's verse. The adjective is appropriately paired with "viperous" because snakes are proverbially deaf.

Whose prelude held all envy, hate, and wrong,
But what was howling in one breast alone,
Silent with expectation of the song,
Whose master's hand is cold, whose silver lyre unstrung.

XXXVII

Live thou, whose infamy is not thy fame!
Live! fear no heavier chastisement from me,
Thou noteless blot on a remembered name!
But be thyself, and know thyself to be!
And ever at thy season be thou free
To spill the venom when thy fangs o'erflow;
Remorse and Self-contempt shall cling to thee;
Hot Shame shall burn upon thy secret brow,
And like a beaten hound tremble thou shalt — as now.

XXXVIII

Nor let us weep that our delight is fled
Far from these carrion kites that scream below;
He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead;
Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now. —
Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same,
Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.

321. "Prelude," *i.e.*, Keats died before attaining his full powers. — Or Shelley may be referring, as Rossetti thinks, to *Endymion* alone. Rossetti compares Psalms 58:4–5.

334. Here begins Shelley's final answer to the question asked in l. 177 — his confident affirmation of the indestructibility of the human spirit. The terms are purposely kept vague, for he had come to feel (see his note on *Hellas*, ll. 197 ff.) that to frame a completely intelligible and adequate conception of immortality is simply impossible. Somehow, ultimately, the human soul escapes from the limitations of time and space and sensation and becomes one with the Spirit of Beauty and Love to whose service Shelley had long since dedicated himself. It is not a "personal" immortality that he describes; but neither is it merely an immortality of fame, nor an "immortality" conceived in terms of physical forces. Shelley is conscious of the presence within himself of "a spirit . . . at enmity with nothingness and dissolution"; and that this consciousness in some way corresponds to the ultimate reality, he cannot doubt.

337. "Thou," the reviewer. Rossetti compares *Paradise Lost*, IV, 829.

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep —
He hath awakened from the dream of life —
'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings. — *We* decay
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

XL

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again;
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown gray in vain;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

XLI

He lives, he wakes — 'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais. — Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air,
Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

XLII

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

Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

XLIII

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

XLIV

The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not;
Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot

375. "That Power" is the same as "the burning fountain" of l. 339 and "the one Spirit" of l. 381.

381. Compare Coleridge's *Sonnet to W. L. Bowles:*

> As the great Spirit erst with plastic sweep
> Moved on the darkness of the unformed deep.

Compare also the *Essay on Christianity:* "the Power which models, as they pass, all the elements of this mixed universe to the purest and most perfect shape which it belongs to their nature to assume"; also the essay *On the Devil and Devils:* "The Greek philosophers . . . accounted for evil by supposing that what is called matter is eternal, and that God in making the world, made not the best that he, or even inferior intelligence could conceive, but that he molded the reluctant and stubborn materials ready to his hand, into the nearest arrangement possible to the perfect archetype existing in his contemplation." There is a specific statement of this view in Plato's *Statesman,* 273, although some commentators regard the doctrine as less Platonic than neo-Platonic. — Although the thought of this and the previous stanza is often described as "pantheistic," it is hard to see how the idea of ll. 381–385 is compatible with any definition of pantheism; and "Nature" in the preceding stanza must mean the Spirit of Good *in* Nature, not the sum of physical existence.

391. "Death" here is used in the ordinary sense. There is a return to the characteristic Shelleyan inversion of meaning in l. 394, where "life" is equivalent to "the world's slow stain."

The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought
Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
And love and life contend in it, for what
Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

XLV

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,
Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton
Rose pale, — his solemn agony had not
Yet faded from him; Sidney, as he fought
And as he fell and as he lived and loved
Sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot,
Arose; and Lucan, by his death approved:
Oblivion as they rose shrank like a thing reproved.

XLVI

And many more, whose names on Earth are dark,
But whose transmitted effluence cannot die
So long as fire outlives the parent spark,
Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.
"Thou art become as one of us," they cry,
"It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
Swung blind in unascended majesty,

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395. "The illustrious dead live again in that heart — for its higher emotions are nurtured by their noble thoughts and aspirations" [Rossetti].

398. Shelley does not commit himself here to belief in personal immortality, for the thrones are "built beyond mortal thought." Locock compares *The Revolt of Islam*, I, liv.

399. Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770), a precocious literary genius, best known as the author of the pseudo-medieval *Rowley Poems*, committed suicide in his eighteenth year. Compare Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*, ll. 43–44.

401. Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), courtier, soldier, and man of letters, was killed while fighting in the army sent by England to aid the Netherlands in their struggle against Spain. He has been traditionally (and apparently with justice) regarded as the perfect exemplar of the chivalric ideal.

404. Lucan (39–65), a Roman poet, author of the *Pharsalia* (which Shelley at one time extravagantly admired), conspired against the Emperor Nero; when the conspiracy failed, he committed suicide.

407. "Transmitted," *i.e.*, through their influence "over other minds" (Rossetti). Compare l. 38 n.

Silent alone amid an Heaven of Song.
Assume thy wingèd throne, thou Vesper of our throng!"

XLVII

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

XLVIII

Or go to Rome, which is the sepulchre,
Oh, not of him, but of our joy: 'tis nought
That ages, empires, and religions there
Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought;
For such as he can lend, — they borrow not
Glory from those who made the world their prey;
And he is gathered to the kings of thought
Who waged contention with their time's decay,
And of the past are all that cannot pass away.

XLIX

Go thou to Rome, — at once the Paradise,
The grave, the city, and the wilderness;
And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,
And flowering weeds, and fragrant copses dress
The bones of Desolation's nakedness

414. The reference is to the first motto of the elegy.

415. Various interpretations of this obscure stanza have been offered. To me Shelley appears to be presenting a contrast between the present state of the transfigured Adonais, in a realm of being "beyond mortal thought," and his own limited, earthly, temporal existence; and in the last lines he expresses the fear that when he stands on the brink of an experience (perhaps to be achieved only through death) like that of Adonais, the contemplation of it will overwhelm him. Woodberry points out how frequently (*e.g.*, in "Life of Life" and at the close of *Epipsychidion*) Shelley describes himself as sinking back in a swoon as he approaches the summit of mystical exaltation.

Pass, till the spirit of the spot shall lead
Thy footsteps to a slope of green access
Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead
A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread;

L

And gray walls moulder round, on which dull Time
Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand;
And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,
Pavilioning the dust of him who planned
This refuge for his memory, doth stand
Like flame transformed to marble; and beneath,
A field is spread, on which a newer band
Have pitched in Heaven's smile their camp of death,
Welcoming him we lose with scarce extinguished breath.

LI

Here pause: these graves are all too young as yet
To have outgrown the sorrow which consigned
Its charge to each; and if the seal is set,
Here, on one fountain of a mourning mind,
Break it not thou! too surely shalt thou find
Thine own well full, if thou returnest home,
Of tears and gall. From the world's bitter wind
Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.
What Adonais is, why fear we to become?

LII

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

439. The Protestant cemetery in Rome. Compare Shelley's Preface.

444. "The tomb of Caius Cestius, a Tribune of the People" [Rossetti].

454. Shelley's own son, William, who died in June, 1819, was buried in the same cemetery.

460. The opposition between the One and the many, between an eternal, immaterial, transcendental Reality and the temporal, changing, illusory physical world, is a central doctrine of both Shelley and Plato — not to mention Christianity. The first half of the present stanza contains Shelley's most exalted statement of this creed — in the opinion of many readers, the greatest poetry that he ever wrote.

Until Death tramples it to fragments. — Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled! — Rome's azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

LIII

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
A light is passed from the revolving year,
And man, and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The soft sky smiles, — the low wind whispers near:
'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

LIV

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

LV

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!

466–67. All these beautiful things are still "Earth's shadows" and can only imperfectly reveal the supreme Spirit of Beauty.

478. Woodberry judges this stanza to be "the clearest, most comprehensive and most condensed expression of Shelley's conception of the infinite and its presence and operation in this life."

480. Compare *Epipsychidion*, l. 25.

I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

TO NIGHT[1]

I

Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave,
Where, all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear,—
Swift be thy flight!

II

Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,
Star-inwrought!
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
Kiss her until she be wearied out,
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand—
Come, long-sought!

III

When I arose and saw the dawn,
I sighed for thee;
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
And the weary Day turned to his rest,
Lingering like an unloved guest,
I sighed for thee.

IV

Thy brother Death came, and cried,
Wouldst thou me?

[1] Written early in 1821 and first published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824.

19. Shelley seems to have forgotten that in l. 11 "Day" is feminine. Perhaps here he is thinking of "Day" as identified with Apollo.

Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
Murmured like a noontide bee,
Shall I nestle near thy side?
Wouldst thou me? — And I replied,
No, not thee!

V

Death will come when thou art dead,
Soon, too soon —
Sleep will come when thou art fled;
Of neither would I ask the boon
I ask of thee, belovèd Night —
Swift be thine approaching flight,
Come soon, soon!

EPITHALAMIUM[1]

Boys Sing

NIGHT! with all thine eyes look down!
Darkness! weep thy holiest dew!
Never smiled the inconstant moon
On a pair so true.
Haste, coy hour! and quench all light,
Lest eyes see their own delight!
Haste, swift hour! and thy loved flight
Oft renew!

Girls Sing

Fairies, sprites, and angels, keep her!
Holy stars! permit no wrong!
And return, to wake the sleeper,
Dawn, ere it be long!

[1] There are three versions of this song, which was written for Edward Williams's play *The Promise: or A Year, a Month and a Day.* The present text was first published in Rossetti's edition of 1870, from the Trelawny MS. of that play. Echoes of Spenser's *Epithalamion* are inevitable, but the poem as a whole is one of the finest examples of Shelley's distinctive lyric manner. Mr. Walter E. Peck makes the implausible suggestion that the specific theme is the imagined consummation of Shelley's passion for Emilia Viviani. (See *Shelley: His Life and Work*, II, 207.)

O joy! O fear! there is not one
Of us can guess what may be done
In the absence of the sun: —
Come along!

Boys

Oh! linger long, thou envious eastern lamp,
In the damp
Caves of the deep!

Girls

Nay, return, Vesper! urge thy lazy car!
Swift unbar
The gates of Sleep!

Chorus

The golden gate of Sleep unbar,
When Strength and Beauty, met together,
Kindle their image, like a star
In a sea of glassy weather.
May the purple mist of love
Round them rise, and with them move,
Nourishing each tender gem
Which, like flowers, will burst from them.
As the fruit is to the tree
May their children ever be!

17. "Envious eastern lamp," the sun. The boys are expressing a wish contrary to that of the girls in ll. 11–12.

20. "Vesper," Venus as the evening star. The transition is rather difficult, but apparently "Nay" refers to the former wish for the quick return of day. The girls now request, like the boys in l. 5, the swift coming of night.

THE DIRGE *FROM* GINEVRA[1]

Old winter was gone
In his weakness back to the mountains hoar,
And the spring came down
From the planet that hovers upon the shore
Where the sea of sunlight encroaches
On the limits of wintry night;—
If the land, and the air, and the sea,
Rejoice not when spring approaches,
We did not rejoice in thee,
Ginevra!

She is still, she is cold
On the bridal couch.
One step to the white deathbed,
And one to the bier,
And one to the charnel — and one, oh where?
The dark arrow fled
In the noon.

Ere the sun through heaven once more has rolled,
The rats in her heart
Will have made their nest,
And the worms be alive in her golden hair;
While the Spirit that guides the sun,
Sits throned in his flaming chair,
She shall sleep.

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[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems,* 1824. This unfinished narrative poem based on an Italian source deals with the familiar theme of a girl's being forced to renounce her true but obscure lover and marry a man of high position but low character. Rather than be unfaithful, Ginevra commits suicide. Of "The Dirge," Locock says: "The lyric, although clearly unfinished . . . ranks among Shelley's greatest." Although the conclusion is inferior to the opening lines, the judgement will probably be sustained by most careful readers. The elaborate and unconventional pattern which Shelley often follows in his later lyrics is likely, however, to disturb a reader to whom it is unfamiliar.

1–2. Locock points out that "the first two lines are almost a word for word rendering of Goethe's

Der alter Winter in seiner Schwäche
Zog sich in rauhe Berge zurück."

4. "The planet," the morning star.

16–17. The "dark arrow" is perhaps the soul. Compare Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner,* ll. 223–24.

SONNET: POLITICAL GREATNESS[1]

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

HELLAS

A LYRICAL DRAMA

ΜΑΝΤΙΣ ΕΙΜ' ΕΣΘΛΩΝ 'ΑΓΩΝΩΝ.[1]

— OEPID. COLON.

[*Editor's Note.* — *Hellas* celebrates the beginning in 1821 of the last and successful Greek struggle for independence from the Turks — to which Byron gave his fortune and his life. Shelley's normal hatred of oppression was strengthened in this in-

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems,* 1824. This poem is a notable expression of the poet's uncompromising insistence on the supreme worth of the individual soul; the need, for the full development of such souls, of complete self-mastery; and the dependence of man, in his first steps towards such an achievement, upon political liberty.

8. *I.e.,* believing in an anthropomorphic god to whom are ascribed such base human attributes as hatred, jealousy, and the desire to take revenge and inflict pain.

13. "Will" here, as in some other passages in Shelley, evidently means "will directed towards evil ends." Compare *Prometheus Unbound,* II, iv, 104 and IV, 406–08.

[1] "This day shall bring victory" (*Oedipus at Colonus,* l. 1078).

stance by his intense admiration for the culture of ancient Greece, which he felt to be the source of all that was best in European civilization. (See, for instance, *The Revolt of Islam,* I, xxxii, the *Ode to Liberty,* Stanza v, and *A Defence of Poetry.*)

It is significant that the last long poem that Shelley completed deals with contemporary politics. In the closing paragraphs of the Preface, the flame of revolt against present evils burns as fiercely as in *Queen Mab* or *The Mask of Anarchy.* Nor has his idealizing temper — the tendency to see in human events a cosmic struggle between Good and Evil, and consequently to paint one side as immaculately white and the other as irredeemably black — undergone much change, at least as far as his poetry is concerned. True, it has been observed that in Mahmud Shelley presents us for the first time with a villain who is not a monster but a human being. But the contrast between the savagery of the Turks in general and the magnanimity of the Greeks could hardly be more sharply drawn. Viewed impartially, the Greeks were little, if any, better than the Turks; they showed themselves, during the ensuing war, to be pretty generally an avaricious, treacherous, and cruel lot — not a whit better, morally, than their adversaries. Trelawny, indeed, who delighted in trying to crack Shelley's armour of unworldliness, once induced him to admit that a scene aboard a Greek ship corresponded less to his idea of Hellas than to his conception of Hell; and he wrote to Horace Smith concerning the revolution, "I dare not hope . . . that slaves can become freemen so cheaply." But as a poet he takes the position that the modern Greeks are descendants of the race that produced Aeschylus, Socrates, and Plato and must therefore be themselves heroic.

In one respect, however, Shelley has changed. No longer does he end his poem with the picture of an earthly paradise. Ignoring the actual course of events, he pictures the Greeks as being defeated and the ideal of Liberty as being driven to take refuge in "The Evening land," the poet's dream of what America *might* become. The final chorus is confessedly "indistinct and obscure." No longer, one feels, does the poet expect, or even really hope, that his dreams will ever be realized on earth.

In the dominance of the lyric over the dramatic element, in the long narrative accounts given by Hassan and the various messengers, and in the summoning of the Phantom of Mahomet

II, Shelley's poem resembles Aeschylus' *Persae* (*The Persians*). There is evidence, in the piece now known as *Prologue to Hellas,* that he had intended to make the Greek struggle for independence the theme of a great philosophical drama modelled on the Book of Job. But this ambitious undertaking was abandoned; and the poem as we have it is, as Shelley said, "a mere improvise," a "lyrical, dramatic, nondescript piece of business," "written without much care, in one of those few moments of enthusiasm which now seldom visit me." The casual character of the piece is evidenced not only by the lack of originality in the general structure but by the frequent borrowings of diction and imagery from his own earlier poems as well as from the works of other authors. Yet most of the lyrics and some of the blank verse — notably the speeches of Ahasuerus — are in his finest manner. And the pervasive sense of an impartial and irresistible Destiny, brooding above the confusion of cruelty and nobility in human life and apportioning to every action its just consequence, lends to the work as a whole an austere impressiveness.]

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

PRINCE ALEXANDER MAVROCORDATO[2]

LATE SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO THE HOSPODAR OF WALLACHIA

THE DRAMA OF HELLAS IS INSCRIBED AS AN IMPERFECT TOKEN OF THE ADMIRATION, SYMPATHY, AND FRIENDSHIP OF

THE AUTHOR.

PISA, *November* 1, 1821.

PREFACE

THE poem of *Hellas,* written at the suggestion of the events of the moment, is a mere improvise, and derives its interest (should it be found to possess any) solely from the intense sympathy which the Author feels with the cause he would celebrate.

[2] A friend of the Shelleys at Pisa during the early months of 1821, afterwards one of the leaders in the Greek struggle for independence. Mary, who read Greek plays with him, was an enthusiastic admirer. Shelley's admiration, judging from his letters, was considerably more restrained. Trelawny despised him.

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

The *Persae* of Aeschylus afforded me the first model of my conception, although the decision of the glorious contest now waging in Greece being yet suspended forbids a catastrophe parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians. I have, therefore, contented myself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures, and with having wrought upon the curtain of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene, such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilisation and social improvement.[3]

The drama (if drama it must be called) is, however, so inartificial that I doubt whether, if recited on the Thespian waggon to an Athenian village at the Dionysiaca, it would have obtained the prize of the goat. I shall bear with equanimity any punishment, greater than the loss of such a reward, which the Aristarchi of the hour may think fit to inflict.

The only *goat-song*[4] which I have yet attempted has, I confess, in spite of the unfavourable nature of the subject, received a greater and a more valuable portion of applause than I expected or than it deserved.

Common fame is the only authority which I can allege for the details which form the basis of the poem, and I must trespass upon the forgiveness of my readers for the display of newspaper erudition to which I have been reduced. Undoubtedly, until the conclusion of the war, it will be impossible to obtain an

[3] To the present editor, the general tone and implications of the poem are decidedly less optimistic.

[4] *"Goat-song"* (a literal translation of the Greek word for tragedy), *The Cenci* — the only one of Shelley's works written with the express aim of gaining popularity, and the only one to reach a second edition in his life-time. His letters indicate that at the time of writing it he expected for it a much more favorable reception by the public than it was actually given. It is true, however, that he later set little store by it.

account of it sufficiently authentic for historical materials; but poets have their privilege, and it is unquestionable that actions of the most exalted courage have been performed by the Greeks — that they have gained more than one naval victory, and that their defeat in Wallachia was signalised by circumstances of heroism more glorious even than victory.

The apathy of the rulers of the civilised world to the astonishing circumstance of the descendants of that nation to which they owe their civilisation, rising as it were from the ashes of their ruin, is something perfectly inexplicable to a mere spectator of the shows of this mortal scene. We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece. But for Greece — Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters; or, what is worse, might have arrived at such a stagnant and miserable state of social institution as China and Japan possess.

The human form and the human mind attained to a perfection in Greece which has impressed its image on those faultless productions, whose very fragments are the despair of modern art, and has propagated impulses which cannot cease, through a thousand channels of manifest or imperceptible operation, to ennoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the race.

The modern Greek is the descendant of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our kind, and he inherits much of their sensibility, their rapidity of conception, their enthusiasm, and their courage. If in many instances he is degraded by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders — and that below the level of ordinary degradation — let us reflect that the corruption of the best produces the worst, and that habits which subsist only in relation to a peculiar state of social institution may be expected to cease as soon as that relation is dissolved. In fact, the Greeks, since the admirable novel of *Anastasius*[5]

[5] *Anastasius, or, Memoirs of a Greek*, a novel by Thomas Hope, which Shelley had recently read.

could have been a faithful picture of their manners, have undergone most important changes; the flower of their youth, returning to their country from the universities of Italy, Germany, and France, have communicated to their fellow-citizens the latest results of that social perfection of which their ancestors were the original source. The University of Chios contained before the breaking out of the revolution eight hundred students, and among them several Germans and Americans. The munificence and energy of many of the Greek princes and merchants, directed to the renovation of their country with a spirit and a wisdom which has few examples, is above all praise.

The English permit their own oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish tyrant, and to brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity[6] and civilisation.

Russia desires to possess, not to liberate Greece; and is contented to see the Turks, its natural enemies, and the Greeks, its intended slaves, enfeeble each other until one or both fall into its net. The wise and generous policy of England would have consisted in establishing the independence of Greece, and in maintaining it both against Russia and the Turk; — but when was the oppressor generous or just?

Should the English people ever become free, they will reflect upon the part which those who presume to represent their will have played in the great drama of the revival of liberty, with feelings which it would become them to anticipate. This is the age of the war of the oppressed against the oppressors, and every one of those ringleaders of the privileged gangs of murderers and swindlers, called Sovereigns, look to each other for aid against the common enemy, and suspend their mutual jealousies in the presence of a mightier fear. Of this holy alliance all the despots of the earth are virtual members. But a new race has arisen throughout Europe, nursed in the abhorrence of the opinions which are its chains, and she will

[6] I believe this is the only instance in Shelley's writings where "Christianity" is referred to in terms of approbation.

continue to produce fresh generations to accomplish that destiny which tyrants foresee and dread.[7]

The Spanish Peninsula is already free. France is tranquil in the enjoyment of a partial exemption from the abuses which its unnatural and feeble government are vainly attempting to revive. The seed of blood and misery has been sown in Italy, and a more vigorous race is arising to go forth to the harvest. The world waits only the news of a revolution of Germany to see the tyrants who have pinnacled themselves on its supineness precipitated into the ruin from which they shall never arise. Well do these destroyers of mankind know their enemy, when they impute the insurrection in Greece to the same spirit before which they tremble throughout the rest of Europe, and that enemy well knows the power and the cunning of its opponents, and watches the moment of their approaching weakness and inevitable division to wrest the bloody sceptres from their grasp.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MAHMUD. DAOOD.
HASSAN. AHASUERUS, *a Jew.*
CHORUS *of Greek Captive Women.* [*The Phantom of Mahomet II.*]
Messengers, Slaves, and Attendants. SCENE, *Constantinople.* TIME, *Sunset.*

SCENE. — *A Terrace on the Seraglio.* MAHMUD *sleeping, an Indian Slave sitting beside his Couch.*

Chorus of Greek Captive Women

We strew these opiate flowers
On thy restless pillow, —
They were stripped from Orient bowers,
By the Indian billow.
Be thy sleep
Calm and deep,
Like theirs who fell — not ours who weep!

[7] This paragraph was suppressed by the publisher, Ollier, to whom Shelley had written, "If any passages should alarm you in the notes, you are at liberty to suppress them." — In the end, England did intervene, enabling the Greeks to gain their independence in 1828.

7. *I.e.*, may it be the sleep of death.

Indian

Away, unlovely dreams!
Away, false shapes of sleep!
Be his, as Heaven seems,
Clear, and bright, and deep!
Soft as love, and calm as death,
Sweet as a summer night without a breath.

Chorus

Sleep, sleep! our song is laden
With the soul of slumber;
It was sung by a Samian maiden,
Whose lover was of the number
Who now keep
That calm sleep
Whence none may wake, where none shall weep.

Indian

I touch thy temples pale!
I breathe my soul on thee!
And could my prayers avail,
All my joy should be
Dead, and I would live to weep,
So thou mightst win one hour of quiet sleep.

Chorus

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!

Semichorus I

Life may change, but it may fly not;
Hope may vanish, but can die not;
Truth be veiled, but still it burneth;
Love repulsed, — but it returneth!

Semichorus II

Yet were life a charnel where
Hope lay coffined with Despair;
Yet were truth a sacred lie,
Love were lust —

Semichorus I

If Liberty
Lent not life its soul of light,
Hope its iris of delight,
Truth its prophet's robe to wear,
Love its power to give and bear.

Chorus

In the great morning of the world,
The Spirit of God with might unfurled
The flag of Freedom over Chaos,
And all its banded anarchs fled,
Like vultures frighted from Imaus,
Before an earthquake's tread. —
So from Time's tempestuous dawn
Freedom's splendour burst and shone: —
Thermopylae and Marathon
Caught, like mountains beacon-lighted,
The springing Fire. — The wingèd glory
On Philippi half-alighted,
Like an eagle on a promontory.
Its unwearied wings could fan
The quenchless ashes of Milan.

46. Compare *Adonais*, l. 166.

49. "Anarchs," — see *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 47 n.; and compare ll. 318 and 934 below.

50. "Imaus," the Himalayas.

54. "Thermopylae and Marathon," scenes of famous battles (480 and 490 B.C. respectively), during the Persian invasions of Greece.

55. Compare Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 280 ff. (The numbering of lines varies in different editions. I follow the text of the Loeb Classical Library.)

57. "Philippi," the scene of the battle in which Brutus and Cassius were defeated by Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar.

60. Milan was the centre of the resistance of the Lombard league against the Austrian tyrant. Frederic Barbarossa burnt the city to the ground, but liberty lived in its ashes, and it rose like an exhalation from

From age to age, from man to man,
It lived; and lit from land to land
Florence, Albion, Switzerland.

Then night fell; and, as from night,
Reassuming fiery flight,
From the West swift Freedom came,
Against the course of Heaven and doom,
A second sun arrayed in flame,
To burn, to kindle, to illume.
From far Atlantis its young beams
Chased the shadows and the dreams.
France, with all her sanguine steams,
Hid, but quenched it not; again
Through clouds its shafts of glory rain
From utmost Germany to Spain.

As an eagle fed with morning
Scorns the embattled tempest's warning,
When she seeks her aerie hanging
In the mountain-cedar's hair,
And her brood expect the clanging
Of her wings through the wild air,
Sick with famine: — Freedom, so
To what of Greece remaineth now
Returns; her hoary ruins glow
Like Orient mountains lost in day;
Beneath the safety of her wings
Her renovated nurslings prey,
And in the naked lightenings
Of truth they purge their dazzled eyes.
Let Freedom leave — where'er she flies,
A Desert, or a Paradise:
Let the beautiful and the brave
Share her glory, or a grave.

its ruin. See Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes*, a book which has done much towards awakening the Italians to an imitation of their great ancestors [Shelley's note].

66. A reference to the American Revolution.

67. *I.e.*, "in a direction contrary to that of the diurnal revolution and the ordinary progress of civilisation" [Locock].

72. The French Revolution is referred to.

76. Compare *Adonais*, l. 149.

Semichorus I

With the gifts of gladness
Greece did thy cradle strew;

Semichorus II

With the tears of sadness
Greece did thy shroud bedew!

Semichorus I

With an orphan's affection
She followed thy bier through Time;

Semichorus II

And at thy resurrection
Reappeareth, like thou, sublime!

Semichorus I

If Heaven should resume thee,
To Heaven shall her spirit ascend;

Semichorus II

If Hell should entomb thee,
To Hell shall her high hearts bend.

Semichorus I

If Annihilation ——

Semichorus II

Dust let her glories be!
And a name and a nation
Be forgotten, Freedom, with thee!

Indian

His brow grows darker — breathe not — move not!
He starts — he shudders — ye that love not,
With your panting loud and fast,
Have awakened him at last.

95. "Thy," Freedom's.

Mahmud (*starting from his sleep*). Man the Seraglio-guard!
make fast the gate!
What! from a cannonade of three short hours?
'Tis false! that breach towards the Bosphorus
Cannot be practicable yet — who stirs?
Stand to the match; that when the foe prevails
One spark may mix in reconciling ruin
The conqueror and the conquered! Heave the tower
Into the gap — wrench off the roof!
(*Enter* HASSAN.) Ha! what!
The truth of day lightens upon my dream
And I am Mahmud still.
Hassan. Your Sublime Highness
Is strangely moved.
Mahmud. The times do cast strange shadows
On those who watch and who must rule their course,
Lest they, being first in peril as in glory,
Be whelmed in the fierce ebb: — and these are of them.
Thrice has a gloomy vision hunted me
As thus from sleep into the troubled day;
It shakes me as the tempest shakes the sea,
Leaving no figure upon memory's glass.
Would that —— no matter. Thou didst say thou knewest
A Jew, whose spirit is a chronicle
Of strange and secret and forgotten things.
I bade thee summon him: — 'tis said his tribe
Dream, and are wise interpreters of dreams.
Hassan. The Jew of whom I spake is old, — so old
He seems to have outlived a world's decay;
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

127. "And these are of them" is taken from *Macbeth*, I, iii, 80.

133. "A Jew," Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, who also appears in *Queen Mab*, Canto VII. A comparison of the two figures will offer striking evidence of Shelley's progress as a poet and as a thinker between his twentieth and his thirtieth years.

To the winter wind: — but from his eye looks forth
A life of unconsumèd thought which pierces
The Present, and the Past, and the To-come.
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 pre-adamite and has survived
Cycles of generation and of ruin.
The sage, in truth, by dreadful abstinence
And conquering penance of the mutinous flesh,
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.
Mahmud. I would talk
With this old Jew.
Hassan. 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! He who would question him
Must sail alone at sunset, where the stream
Of Ocean sleeps around those foamless isles,
When the young moon is westering as now,
And evening airs wander upon the wave;
And when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle,
Green Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow
Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water,
Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud
"Ahasuerus!" and the caverns round
Will answer "Ahasuerus!" 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:

164. "The Demonesi," islands in the Sea of Marmora.
167. Compare *Epipsychidion*, l. 412.

Thence at the hour and place and circumstance
Fit for the matter of their conference
The Jew appears. Few dare, and few who dare
Win the desired communion — but that shout
Bodes —— [*A shout within.*
Mahmud. Evil, doubtless; like all human sounds.
Let me converse with spirits.
Hassan. That shout again.
Mahmud. This Jew whom thou hast summoned —
Hassan. Will be here —
Mahmud. When the omnipotent hour to which are yoked
He, I, and all things shall compel — enough!
Silence those mutineers — that drunken crew,
That crowd about the pilot in the storm.
Ay! strike the foremost shorter by a head!
They weary me, and I have need of rest.
Kings are like stars — they rise and set, they have
The worship of the world, but no repose. [*Exeunt severally.*

Chorus

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,

192. Woodberry compares Plato's *Republic,* Book VI [488].

195. Compare Bacon's *Essays,* "Of Empire": "Princes are like to heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times, and which have much veneration but no rest."

197. The popular notions of Christianity are represented in this chorus as true in their relation to the worship they superseded, and that which in all probability they will supersede, without considering their merits in a relation more universal. The first stanza contrasts the immortality of the living and thinking beings which inhabit the planets, and to use a common and inadequate phrase, *clothe themselves in matter,* with the transience of the noblest manifestations of the external world.

The concluding verses indicate a progressive state of more or less exalted existence, according to the degree of perfection which every distinct intelligence may have attained. Let it not be supposed that I mean to dogmatize upon a subject concerning which all men are equally ignorant, or that I think that the Gordian knot of the origin of evil can be disentangled by that or any similar assertions. The received hypothesis of a Being resembling men in the moral attributes of His nature, having called us out of non-existence, and after inflicting on us the misery of the commission of error, should superadd that of the punishment and the privations consequent upon it, still would remain inexplicable and

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.

A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror, came;
Like a triumphal path he trod
The thorns of death and shame.

incredible. That there is a true solution of the riddle, and that in our present state that solution is unattainable by us, are propositions which may be regarded as equally certain: meanwhile, as 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. Until better arguments can be produced than sophisms which disgrace the cause, this desire itself must remain the strongest and the only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being [Shelley's note].

209–10. *I.e.*, the character of their present existence is determined by their achievements or way of life in their previous incarnation. "Death's bare ribs" I take to mean the physical body; the "robes" being the attributes and actions of the soul or spirit by which the body was animated. The doctrine here stated has a prominent — one might almost say *central* — place in a number of Oriental religions. Shelley's immediate sources were doubtless Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Republic* (the Vision of Er in Book X). Shelley had early become interested in the idea of reincarnation, and here advances it in all seriousness as a theory of life that is in accord both with man's "inextinguishable thirst for immortality" and with the promptings of his moral nature.

211. "A power," Christ. The phrase "unknown God" is repeated in l. 735 and is apparently equivalent to "the Fathomless" of l. 783. In this stanza Shelley seems almost to accept the orthodox belief in Christ as the incarnation of God. But although he had probably come by this time to regard Christ as the most nearly perfect human being who had ever lived, it must be remembered that, according to Shelley's view, all human souls participate in the Divine Nature. The difference between Christ and other men would be in degree rather than kind.

A mortal shape to him
Was like the vapour dim
Which the orient planet animates with light;
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
Nor preyed, until their Lord had taken flight;
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While blazoned as on Heaven's immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

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 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 turned to blood, their dew to tears,
Wailed for the golden years.

Enter MAHMUD, HASSAN, DAOOD, *and others.*

Mahmud. More gold? our ancestors bought gold with victory,
And shall I sell it for defeat?
Daood. The Janizars
Clamour for pay.

230. Woodberry compares Milton's *Ode on the Nativity*, xix–xxi. Although admitting that "the popular notions of Christianity are . . . true in their relation to the worship they superseded," Shelley nevertheless feels that in the religion of the Greeks there was much that was beautiful, and he laments its passing. Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, i.

240. "Daood," "commander-in-chief of the Turkish forces" [Locock]. "Janizars" (or Janissaries), a famous and important part of the Turkish army, originally composed of men taken in their childhood from conquered Christian communities. They became very powerful and had numerous special privileges. From their ranks was drawn the Sultan's

Mahmud. Go! bid them pay themselves
With Christian blood! Are there no Grecian virgins
Whose shrieks and spasms and tears they may enjoy?
No infidel children to impale on spears?
No hoary priests after that Patriarch
Who bent the curse against his country's heart,
Which clove his own at last? Go! bid them kill,
Blood is the seed of gold.
Daood. It has been sown,
And yet the harvest to the sicklemen
Is as a grain to each.
Mahmud. Then, take this signet,
Unlock the seventh chamber in which lie
The treasures of victorious Solyman, —
An empire's spoil stored for a day of ruin.
O spirit of my sires! is it not come?
The prey-birds and the wolves are gorged and sleep;
But these, who spread their feast on the red earth,
Hunger for gold, which fills not. — See them fed;
Then, lead them to the rivers of fresh death. [*Exit* DAOOD.
O miserable dawn, after a night
More glorious than the day which it usurped!
O faith in God! O power on earth! O word
Of the great prophet, whose o'ershadowing wings
Darkened the thrones and idols of the West,

body-guard. In 1826 they attempted one of their frequent revolts; Mahmud put down the insurrection with great severity and disbanded them.

242. Mahmud's words are bitterly ironical; he abhors the cruelty of the soldiers who fight for him and despises himself for using such instruments.

245. The Greek Patriarch, after having been compelled to fulminate an anathema against the insurgents, was put to death by the Turks.

Fortunately the Greeks have been taught that they cannot buy security by degradation, and the Turks, though equally cruel, are less cunning than the smooth-faced tyrants of Europe. As to the anathema, his Holiness might as well have thrown his mitre at Mount Athos for any effect that it produced. The chiefs of the Greeks are almost all men of comprehension and enlightened views on religion and politics [Shelley's note].

252. "Solyman," Sultan from 1520 to 1566, famous for many victorious wars against Christian countries.

256. "Their" I take to refer to "prey-birds" and "wolves."

Now bright! — For thy sake cursèd be the hour,
Even as a father by an evil child,
When the orient moon of Islam rolled in triumph
From Caucasus to White Ceraunia!
Ruin above, and anarchy below;
Terror without, and treachery within;
The Chalice of destruction full, and all
Thirsting to drink; and who among us dares
To dash it from his lips? and where is Hope?
Hassan. The lamp of our dominion still rides high;
One God is God — Mahomet is His prophet.
Four hundred thousand Moslems, from the limits
Of utmost Asia, irresistibly
Throng, like full clouds at the Sirocco's cry;
But not like them to weep their strength in tears:
They bear destroying lightning, and their step
Wakes earthquake to consume and overwhelm,
And reign in ruin. Phrygian Olympus,
Tmolus, and Latmos, and Mycale, roughen
With horrent arms; and lofty ships even now,
Like vapours anchored to a mountain's edge,
Freighted with fire and whirlwind, wait at Scala
The convoy of the ever-veering wind.
Samos is drunk with blood; — the Greek has paid
Brief victory with swift loss and long despair.
The false Moldavian serfs fled fast and far,
When the fierce shout of "Allah-illa-Allah!"
Rose like the war-cry of the northern wind
Which kills the sluggish clouds, and leaves a flock
Of wild swans struggling with the naked storm.
So were the lost Greeks on the Danube's day!
If night is mute, yet the returning sun
Kindles the voices of the morning birds;
Nor at thy bidding less exultingly
Than birds rejoicing in the golden day,
The Anarchies of Africa unleash
Their tempest-wingèd cities of the sea,
To speak in thunder to the rebel world.

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277. "Sirocco," a hot south wind of the Mediterranean region.
294. "Danube's day," — see ll. 362 ff.

Like sulphurous clouds, half-shattered by the storm,
They sweep the pale Aegean, while the Queen
Of Ocean, bound upon her island-throne,
Far in the West, sits mourning that her sons
Who frown on Freedom spare a smile for thee:
Russia still hovers, as an eagle might
Within a cloud, near which a kite and crane
Hang tangled in inextricable fight,
To stoop upon the victor; — for she fears
The name of Freedom, even as she hates thine.
But recreant Austria loves thee as the Grave
Loves Pestilence, and her slow dogs of war
Fleshed with the chase, come up from Italy,
And howl upon their limits; for they see
The panther, Freedom, fled to her old cover,
Amid seas and mountains, and a mightier brood
Crouch round. What Anarch wears a crown or mitre,
Or bears the sword, or grasps the key of gold,
Whose friends are not thy friends, whose foes thy foes?
Our arsenals and our armouries are full;
Our forts defy assault; ten thousand cannon
Lie ranged upon the beach, and hour by hour
Their earth-convulsing wheels affright the city;
The galloping of fiery steeds makes pale
The Christian merchant; and the yellow Jew
Hides his hoard deeper in the faithless earth.
Like clouds, and like the shadows of the clouds,
Over the hills of Anatolia,
Swift in wide troops the Tartar chivalry
Sweep; — the far flashing of their starry lances
Reverberates the dying light of day.
We have one God, one King, one Hope, one Law;
But many-headed Insurrection stands
Divided in itself, and soon must fall.

Mahmud. Proud words, when deeds come short, are seasonable:
Look, Hassan, on yon crescent moon, emblazoned
Upon that shattered flag of fiery cloud

303. "Queen," England.

Which leads the rear of the departing day;
Wan emblem of an empire fading now!
See how it trembles in the blood-red air,
And like a mighty lamp whose oil is spent
Shrinks on the horizon's edge, while, from above,
One star with insolent and victorious light
Hovers above its fall, and with keen beams,
Like arrows through a fainting antelope,
Strikes its weak form to death.
Hassan. Even as that moon
Renews itself ——
Mahmud. Shall we be not renewed!
Far other bark than ours were needed now
To stem the torrent of descending time:
The Spirit that lifts the slave before his lord
Stalks through the capitals of armèd kings,
And spreads his ensign in the wilderness:
Exults in chains; and, when the rebel falls,
Cries like the blood of Abel from the dust;
And the inheritors of the earth, like beasts
When earthquake is unleashed, with idiot fear
Cower in their kingly dens — as I do now.
What were Defeat when Victory must appal?
Or Danger, when Security looks pale? —
How said the messenger — who, from the fort
Islanded in the Danube, saw the battle
Of Bucharest? — that —
Hassan. Ibrahim's scimitar
Drew with its gleam swift victory from Heaven,
To burn before him in the night of battle —
A light and a destruction.
Mahmud. Ay! the day
Was ours: but how? ——
Hassan. The light Wallachians,
The Arnaut, Servian, and Albanian allies
Fled from the glance of our artillery
Almost before the thunderstone alit.
One half the Grecian army made a bridge

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355. See Genesis 4:10.

Of safe and slow retreat, with Moslem dead;
The other —
Mahmud. Speak — tremble not. —
Hassan. Islanded
By victor myriads, formed in hollow square
With rough and steadfast front, and thrice flung back
The deluge of our foaming cavalry;
Thrice their keen wedge of battle pierced our lines,
Our baffled army trembled like one man
Before a host, and gave them space; but soon,
From the surrounding hills, the batteries blazed,
Kneading them down with fire and iron rain:
Yet none approached; till, like a field of corn
Under the hook of the swart sickleman,
The band, intrenched in mounds of Turkish dead,
Grew weak and few. — Then said the Pacha, "Slaves,
Render yourselves — they have abandoned you —
What hope of refuge, or retreat, or aid?
We grant your lives." "Grant that which is thine own!"
Cried one, and fell upon his sword and died!
Another — "God, and man, and hope abandon me;
But I to them, and to myself, remain
Constant": — he bowed his head, and his heart burst.
A third exclaimed, "There is a refuge, tyrant,
Where thou darest not pursue, and canst not harm
Shouldst thou pursue; there we shall meet again."
Then held his breath, and, after a brief spasm,
The indignant spirit cast its mortal garment
Among the slain — dead earth upon the earth!
So these survivors, each by different ways,
Some strange, all sudden, none dishonourable,
Met in triumphant death; and when our army
Closed in, while yet wonder, and awe, and shame
Held back the base hyaenas of the battle
That feed upon the dead and fly the living,

373. Hassan's long account of the battle resembles in some of its details the description of the battle of Salamis in Aeschylus, but the resemblances are in most cases slight. It seems to correspond not much more closely to the historical facts.

380–85. Compare *The Revolt of Islam*, VI, xi.

396. Compare *The Cenci*, V, ii, 183.

One rose out of the chaos of the slain:
And if it were a corpse which some dread spirit
Of the old saviours of the land we rule
Had lifted in its anger, wandering by;—
Or if there burned within the dying man
Unquenchable disdain of death, and faith
Creating what it feigned;—I cannot tell—
But he cried, "Phantoms of the free, we come!
Armies of the Eternal, ye who strike
To dust the citadels of sanguine kings,
And shake the souls throned on their stony hearts
And thaw their frostwork diadems like dew;—
O ye who float around this clime, and weave
The garment of the glory which it wears,
Whose fame, though earth betray the dust it clasped,
Lies sepulchred in monumental thought;—
Progenitors of all that yet is great,
Ascribe to your bright senate, O accept
In your high ministrations, us, your sons—
Us first, and the more glorious yet to come!
And ye, weak conquerors! giants who look pale
When the crushed worm rebels beneath your tread,
The vultures and the dogs, your pensioners tame,
Are overgorged; but, like oppressors, still
They crave the relic of Destruction's feast.
The exhalations and the thirsty winds
Are sick with blood; the dew is foul with death;
Heaven's light is quenched in slaughter: thus, where'er
Upon your camps, cities, or towers, or fleets,
The obscene birds the reeking remnants cast
Of these dead limbs,—upon your streams and mountains,

419. "Betray" is explained by Locock as "expose to view." The clause seems rather pointless.

420. Compare ll. 696–99.

422. "Ascribe to," enroll among [Locock].

426. Compare *Julian and Maddalo*, ll. 412–13:

> Even the instinctive worm on which we tread
> Turns, though it wound not—

a passage very close, in turn, to Gothe's *Faust, Part* I, ll. 653–55.

430–42. This passage is reminiscent of *The Revolt of Islam*, X, xii–xxv.

Upon your fields, your gardens, and your housetops,
Where'er the winds shall creep, or the clouds fly,
Or the dews fall, or the angry sun look down
With poisoned light — Famine, and Pestilence,
And Panic, shall wage war upon our side!
Nature from all her boundaries is moved
Against ye: Time has found ye light as foam.
The Earth rebels; and Good and Evil stake
Their empire o'er the unborn world of men
On this one cast; — but ere the die be thrown,
The renovated genius of our race,
Proud umpire of the impious game, descends,
A seraph-wingèd Victory, bestriding
The tempest of the Omnipotence of God.
Which sweeps all things to their appointed doom,
And you to oblivion!" — More he would have said,
But —

Mahmud. Died — as thou shouldst ere thy lips had painted
Their ruin in the hues of our success.
A rebel's crime, gilt with a rebel's tongue!
Your heart is Greek, Hassan.

Hassan. It may be so:
A spirit not my own wrenched me within,
And I have spoken words I fear and hate;
Yet would I die for —

Mahmud. Live! oh live! outlive
Me and this sinking empire. But the fleet —

Hassan. Alas! ——

Mahmud. The fleet which, like a flock of clouds
Chased by the wind, flies the insurgent banner!
Our wingèd castles from their merchant ships!
Our myriads before their weak pirate bands!
Our arms before their chains! our years of empire
Before their centuries of servile fear!
Death is awake! Repulse is on the waters!
They own no more the thunder-bearing banner
Of Mahmud; but, like hounds of a base breed,
Gorge from a stranger's hand, and rend their master.

456. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 254.
461. "Flies," *i.e.*, "flies from."

Hassan. Latmos, and Ampelos, and Phanae saw
The wreck ——
Mahmud. The caves of the Icarian isles
Told each to the other in loud mockery,
And with the tongue as of a thousand echoes,
First of the sea-convulsing fight — and, then, —
Thou darest to speak — senseless are the mountains:
Interpret thou their voice!
Hassan. My presence bore
A part in that day's shame. The Grecian fleet
Bore down at daybreak from the North, and hung
As multitudinous on the ocean line,
As cranes upon the cloudless Thracian wind.
Our squadron, convoying ten thousand men,
Was stretching towards Nauplia when the battle
Was kindled. —
First through the hail of our artillery
The agile Hydriote barks with press of sail
Dashed: — ship to ship, cannon to cannon, man
To man were grappled in the embrace of war,
Inextricable but by death or victory.
The tempest of the raging fight convulsed
To its crystàlline depths that stainless sea,
And shook Heaven's roof of golden morning clouds,
Poised on an hundred azure mountain-isles.
In the brief trances of the artillery
One cry from the destroyed and the destroyer
Rose, and a cloud of desolation wrapped
The unforeseen event, till the north wind
Sprung from the sea, lifting the heavy veil
Of battle-smoke — then victory — victory!
For, as we thought, three frigates from Algiers
Bore down from Naxos to our aid, but soon
The abhorrèd cross glimmered behind, before,
Among, around us; and that fatal sign
Dried with its beams the strength in Moslem hearts,
As the sun drinks the dew. — What more? We fled! —
Our noonday path over the sanguine foam
Was beaconed, — and the glare struck the sun pale, —
By our consuming transports: the fierce light
Made all the shadows of our sails blood-red,

And every countenance blank. Some ships lay feeding
The ravening fire, even to the water's level;
Some were blown up; some, settling heavily,
Sunk; and the shrieks of our companions died
Upon the wind, that bore us fast and far,
Even after they were dead. Nine thousand perished!
We met the vultures legioned in the air
Stemming the torrent of the tainted wind;
They, screaming from their cloudy mountain-peaks,
Stooped through the sulphurous battle-smoke and perched
Each on the weltering carcase that we loved,
Like its ill angel or its damnèd soul,
Riding upon the bosom of the sea.
We saw the dog-fish hastening to their feast.
Joy waked the voiceless people of the sea,
And ravening Famine left his ocean cave
To dwell with War, with us, and with Despair.
We met night three hours to the west of Patmos,
And with night, tempest——

Mahmud. Cease!

Enter a Messenger.

Messenger. Your Sublime Highness,
That Christian hound, the Muscovite Ambassador,
Has left the city. — If the rebel fleet
Had anchored in the port, had victory
Crowned the Greek legions in the Hippodrome,
Panic were tamer. — Obedience and Mutiny,
Like giants in contention planet-struck,
Stand gazing on each other. — There is peace
In Stamboul. —

Mahmud. Is the grave not calmer still?
Its ruins shall be mine.

Hassan. Fear not the Russian:
The tiger leagues not with the stag at bay
Against the hunter. — Cunning, base, and cruel,
He crouches, watching till the spoil be won,

532. *I.e.*, "the panic would be less."

533. "Planet-struck," *i.e.*, as if struck (or perhaps merely astonished) by a meteorite [Locock].

And must be paid for his reserve in blood.
After the war is fought, yield the sleek Russian
That which thou canst not keep, his deserved portion
Of blood, which shall not flow through streets and fields,
Rivers and seas, like that which we may win,
But stagnate in the veins of Christian slaves!

Enter second Messenger.

Second Messenger. Nauplia, Tripolizza, Mothon, Athens,
Navarin, Artas, Monembasia,
Corinth, and Thebes are carried by assault,
And every Islamite who made his dogs
Fat with the flesh of Galilean slaves
Passed at the edge of the sword: the lust of blood,
Which made our warriors drunk, is quenched in death;
But like a fiery plague breaks out anew
In deeds which make the Christian cause look pale
In its own light. The garrison of Patras
Has store but for ten days, nor is there hope
But from the Briton: at once slave and tyrant,
His wishes still are weaker than his fears,
Or he would sell what faith may yet remain
From the oaths broke in Genoa and in Norway;
And if you buy him not, your treasury
Is empty even of promises — his own coin.

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545. The line is rather obscure. I take it that Hassan is advising Mahmud to cede to Russia territories inhabited by Christians, who will become the slaves of the tyrannical Russian government.

554. Again, the meaning is far from clear. The "deeds" are apparently those of the Christians, whose cause "looks pale" in the sense that such a motive as "lust of blood" bodes ill for its success. This is a thoroughly Shelleyan sentiment; and however ardent his enthusiasm for the Greek cause, it could never have led him to condone the horrible massacres by which that cause was disgraced.

560. In 1814 Genoa had revolted against Napoleon, having been promised by England's representative, Sir William Bentinck, that it would be allowed to become a republic. It was, however, placed under the rule of the King of Sardinia. — In 1814, also, Denmark, which had been fighting on the side of France, was forced to cede Norway to Sweden. The Norwegians bitterly resented the Swedish domination, and attempted to set up an independent state — as they had every right to do. Britain and her allies, however, forced Norway to accept the rule of the Swedish king.

The freedman of a western poet-chief
Holds Attica with seven thousand rebels,
And has beat back the Pacha of Negropont:
The agèd Ali sits in Yanina
A crownless metaphor of empire:
His name, that shadow of his withered might,
Holds our besieging army like a spell
In prey to famine, pest, and mutiny;
He, bastioned in his citadel, looks forth
Joyless upon the sapphire lake that mirrors
The ruins of the city where he reigned,
Childless and sceptreless. The Greek has reaped
The costly harvest his own blood matured,
Not the sower, Ali — who has bought a truce
From Ypsilanti with ten camel-loads
Of Indian gold.

Enter a third Messenger.

Mahmud. What more?
Third Messenger. The Christian tribes

563. A Greek who had been Lord Byron's servant commands the insurgents in Attica. This Greek, Lord Byron informs me, though a poet and enthusiastic patriot, gave him rather the idea of a timid and unenterprising person. It appears that circumstances make men what they are, and that we all contain the germ of a degree of degradation or of greatness whose connection with our character is determined by events [Shelley's note]. With the view expressed here, compare a statement in a letter to Leigh Hunt, dated May 1, 1820: "It is less the character of the individual than the situation in which he is placed which determines him to be honest or dishonest." (Shelley is discussing the shortcomings of his publisher, Ollier.) This theory is incompatible with Shelley's constant insistence on the freedom of the will, and cannot be regarded as characteristic.

566. Ali Pasha, ruler of Albania and much of western Greece, is described by Byron in *Childe Harold,* II, lxii–lxiii. Famous and powerful, he finally rebelled against the Sultan. In 1822 — as Byron had prophesied — he met the fate which he had meted out to many others, and was treacherously stabbed in the back by the Sultan's men.

573. I have added a comma after "reigned," since "childless and sceptreless" refers to Ali's present situation. His sons had been killed by the Sultan.

577. There were two revolutionary leaders named Ypsilanti: Alexander, the incompetent and unprincipled instigator of an unsuccessful revolt in what is now Rumania (one scene of which is apparently described in ll. 361 ff.); and Demetrios, one of the more enlightened leaders of the ultimately successful revolt in Greece proper.

Of Lebanon and the Syrian wilderness
Are in revolt; — Damascus, Hems, Aleppo
Tremble; — the Arab menaces Medina,
The Aethiop has intrenched himself in Sennaar,
And keeps the Egyptian rebel well employed,
Who denies homage, claims investiture
As price of tardy aid. Persia demands
The cities on the Tigris, and the Georgians
Refuse their living tribute. Crete and Cyprus,
Like mountain-twins that from each other's veins
Catch the volcano-fire and earthquake-spasm,
Shake in the general fever. Through the city,
Like birds before a storm, the Santons shriek,
And prophesyings horrible and new
Are heard among the crowd: that sea of men
Sleeps on the wrecks it made, breathless and still.
A Dervise, learnèd in the Koran, preaches
That it is written how the sins of Islam
Must raise up a destroyer even now.
The Greeks expect a Saviour from the West,
Who shall not come, men say, in clouds and glory,
But in the omnipresence of that Spirit
In which all live and are. Ominous signs
Are blazoned broadly on the noonday sky:
One saw a red cross stamped upon the sun;
It has rained blood; and monstrous births declare
The secret wrath of Nature and her Lord.
The army encamped upon the Cydaris
Was roused last night by the alarm of battle,
And saw two hosts conflicting in the air,
The shadows doubtless of the unborn time
Cast on the mirror of the night. While yet
The fight hung balanced, there arose a storm
Which swept the phantoms from among the stars.

583. Mehemet Ali, ruler of Egypt, although nominally a vassal of the Sultan, was practically independent. In the end, however, he interceded in behalf of the Turks and almost succeeded in crushing the Greek revolt.

591. "Santons," a sect of dervishes, regarded as saints.

598. It is reported that this Messiah had arrived at a seaport near Lacedaemon in an American brig. The association of names and ideas is irresistibly ludicrous, but the prevalence of such a rumor strongly marks the state of popular enthusiasm in Greece [*Shelley's note*].

At the third watch the Spirit of the Plague
Was heard abroad flapping among the tents;
Those who relieved watch found the sentinels dead.
The last news from the camp is, that a thousand
Have sickened, and ——

Enter a fourth Messenger.

Mahmud. And thou, pale ghost, dim shadow
Of some untimely rumour, speak!
Fourth Messenger. One comes
Fainting with toil, covered with foam and blood:
He stood, he says, on Chelonites'
Promontory, which o'erlooks the isles that groan
Under the Briton's frown, and all their waters
Then trembling in the splendour of the moon;
When, as the wandering clouds unveiled or hid
Her boundless light, he saw two adverse fleets
Stalk through the night in the horizon's glimmer,
Mingling fierce thunders and sulphureous gleams,
And smoke which strangled every infant wind
That soothed the silver clouds through the deep air.
At length the battle slept, but the Sirocco
Awoke, and drove his flock of thunder-clouds
Over the sea-horizon, blotting out
All objects — save that in the faint moon-glimpse
He saw, or dreamed he saw, the Turkish admiral
And two the loftiest of our ships of war,
With the bright image of that Queen of Heaven,
Who hid, perhaps, her face for grief, reversed;
And the abhorrèd cross —

Enter an Attendant.

Attendant. Your Sublime Highness,
The Jew, who ——
Mahmud. Could not come more seasonably:

621. The Ionian Islands, which were under the "protection" of the British.

637. *I.e.*, (as I understand the passage) the ships were in the sky (perhaps inverted) and the moon appeared to be lying in the sea. "Admiral" (l. 634) apparently has the archaic meaning of "largest ship in a fleet," or "flagship" (compare *Paradise Lost*, I, 294).

Bid him attend. I'll hear no more! too long
We gaze on danger through the mist of fear,
And multiply upon our shattered hopes
The images of ruin. Come what will!
To-morrow and to-morrow are as lamps
Set in our path to light us to the edge
Through rough and smooth, nor can we suffer aught
Which He inflicts not in whose hand we are. [*Exeunt.*

Semichorus I

Would I were the wingèd cloud
Of a tempest swift and loud!
I would scorn
The smile of morn
And the wave where the moonrise is born!
I would leave
The spirits of eve
A shroud for the corpse of the day to weave
From other threads than mine!
Bask in the deep blue noon divine
Who would? Not I.

Semichorus II

Whither to fly?

Semichorus I

Where the rocks that gird th' Aegean
Echo to the battle paean
Of the free—
I would flee
A tempestuous herald of victory!
My golden rain
For the Grecian slain
Should mingle in tears with the bloody main,
And my solemn thunder-knell
Should ring to the world the passing-bell
Of Tyranny!

Semichorus II

Ah king! wilt thou chain
The rack and the rain?
Wilt thou fetter the lightning and hurricane?

The storms are free,
But we—

Chorus

O Slavery! thou frost of the world's prime,
Killing its flowers and leaving its thorns bare!
Thy touch has stamped these limbs with crime,
These brows thy branding garland bear,
But the free heart, the impassive soul
Scorn thy control!

Semichorus I

Let there be light! said Liberty,
And like sunrise from the sea,
Athens arose! — Around her born,
Shone like mountains in the morn
Glorious states; — and are they now
Ashes, wrecks, oblivion?

Semichorus II

Go,
Where Thermae and Asopus swallowed
Persia, as the sand does foam;
Deluge upon deluge followed,
Discord, Macedon, and Rome:
And lastly thou!

Semichorus I

Temples and towers,
Citadels and marts, and they
Who live and die there, have been ours,
And may be thine, and must decay;
But Greece and her foundations are

682. Compare *Ode to Liberty*, ll. 60 ff.

688. "Asopus" is a reference to the Battle of Plataea, the final and decisive Greek victory over the Persians in 479 B.C. It was fought near the Asopus river. What "Thermae" refers to is uncertain.

692. "Thou," Mahmud. It is to be remembered that the Chorus is composed of captive Greek women.

696. "The main metaphysical idea of the poem, the primacy of thought and its sole reality, begins here" [Woodberry].

Built below the tide of war,
Based on the crystàlline sea
Of thought and its eternity;
Her citizens, imperial spirits,
Rule the present from the past,
On all this world of men inherits
Their seal is set.

Semichorus II

Hear ye the blast,
Whose Orphic thunder thrilling calls
From ruin her Titanian walls?
Whose spirit shakes the sapless bones
Of Slavery? Argos, Corinth, Crete
Hear, and from their mountain thrones
The daemons and the nymphs repeat
The harmony.

Semichorus I

I hear! I hear!

Semichorus II

The world's eyeless charioteer,
Destiny, is hurrying by!
What faith is crushed, what empire bleeds
Beneath her earthquake-footed steeds?
What eagle-wingèd victory sits
At her right hand? what shadow flits
Before? what splendour rolls behind?
Ruin and renovation cry
"Who but We?"

Semichorus I

I hear! I hear!
The hiss as of a rushing wind,

704. "Orphic," oracular, or prophetic.

709. "Daemons," spirits intermediate between mortals and gods; not the "demons" of medieval Christianity.

711. Compare *The Triumph of Life*, ll. 99–100. I am inclined to think, however, that the reference in the present poem to a blind Destiny is purely dramatic. The world seems at the moment to be completely chaotic. Of course, Shelley never denies that man during his life in Time, on the earth, is subject to "*chance* and death and mutability."

The roar as of an ocean foaming,
The thunder as of earthquake coming.
I hear! I hear!
The crash as of an empire falling,
The shrieks as of a people calling
"Mercy! mercy!" — How they thrill!
Then a shout of "kill! kill! kill!"
And then a small still voice, thus —

Semichorus II

Fear,
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.

Semichorus I

In sacred Athens, near the fane
Of Wisdom, Pity's altar stood:
Serve not the unknown God in vain,
But pay that broken shrine again,
Love for hate and tears for blood.

Enter MAHMUD *and* AHASUERUS.

Mahmud. Thou art a man, thou sayest, even as we.
Ahasuerus. No more!
Mahmud. But raised above thy fellow-men
By thought, as I by power.

728. The MS. (a transcript by Edward Williams) and early editions read "For"; I follow Forman and Dowden in reading "Fear" because (1) "For" makes no sense; (2) "Fear" is necessary for the rhyme (with "hear"); (3) Shelley habitually associates Fear with Revenge, Hate, and other spiritual evils. True, Shelley did not include it in his list of *errata;* but editors, of all people, ought to appreciate the ease with which errors of this sort can be passed over, especially when the work is one with which the reader is familiar.

729–30. These lines are a paraphrase of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, ll. 758–60 (see l. 55 above, n.). Shelley quotes the Greek lines in a letter to Mary dated August 10, 1821. — Compare *The Revolt of Islam,* XI, xv:

and Hate must be
The nurse and parent still of an ill progeny.

735. See Acts 17:23.

Ahasuerus. Thou sayest so.
Mahmud. 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;
Thy spirit is present in the Past, and sees
The birth of this old world through all its cycles
Of desolation and of loveliness,
And when man was not, and how man became
The monarch and the slave of this low sphere,
And all its narrow circles — it is much —
I honour thee, and would be what thou art
Were I not what I am; but the unborn hour,
Cradled in fear and hope, conflicting storms,
Who shall unveil? Nor thou, nor I, nor any
Mighty or wise. I apprehended not
What thou hast taught me, but I now perceive
That thou art no interpreter of dreams;
Thou dost not own that art, device, or God,
Can make the Future present — let it come!
Moreover thou disdainest us and ours;
Thou art as God, whom thou contemplatest.
Ahasuerus. Disdain thee? — not the worm beneath thy feet!
The Fathomless has care for meaner things
Than thou canst dream, and has made pride for those
Who would be what they may not, or would seem
That which they are not. Sultan! talk no more
Of thee and me, the Future and the Past;

742. "Frank," a name applied in the Near East to any person from western Europe. Ahasuerus is familiar with modern as well as ancient philosophy.

762. This speech by Ahasuerus is perhaps the noblest blank verse passage in *Hellas*. It is certainly the most imaginative and uncompromising statement of Shelley's metaphysical idealism — "the primacy of thought and its sole reality." — The poet does not escape logical difficulties, however: for although "Thought" is declared to be the cradle and the grave of the universe, yet beyond the universe is a "chaos" — an ultimate reality — with which thought is unable to cope. Space and Time may be illusions, but normal human consciousness, at least, cannot pass beyond them. — In style, the passage has been thought reminiscent of Shakespeare; and Prospero's famous speech in *The Tempest* (IV, i, 148–58) is clearly echoed around l. 780. But the content and tone as a whole are definitely Shelleyan.

But look on that which cannot change — the One,
The unborn and the undying. Earth and ocean,
Space, and the isles of life or light that gem
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire,
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds — this Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision; — all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
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.
Mahmud. What meanest thou? Thy words stream like a tempest
Of dazzling mist within my brain — they shake
The earth on which I stand, and hang like night
On Heaven above me. What can they avail?
They cast on all things surest, brightest, best,
Doubt, insecurity, astonishment.
Ahasuerus. Mistake me not! All is contained in each.
Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
Is that which has been, or will be, to that
Which is — the absent to the present. Thought
Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die;

768. Compare *Adonais,* l. 460.

776. "Calpe," Gibraltar.

785. *I.e.,* nothing truly exists save that which is conscious of its existence. Compare Shelley's reference, in his note on ll. 197 ff., to "the immortality of the living and thinking beings which inhabit the planets" and "the transience of the noblest manifestations of the external world."

795–97. The same five nouns are mentioned in *Prometheus Unbound,* II, iv, 10–11. — In the next line Shelley apparently falls into another logical contradiction, asserting that these "quick [*i.e.,* living] elements" of thought are the only reality while admitting that there *is* something else which "they regard."

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. What has thought
To do with time, or place, or circumstance?
Wouldst thou behold the Future? — ask and have!
Knock and it shall be opened — look, and lo!
The coming age is shadowed on the Past
As on a glass.
Mahmud. Wild, wilder thoughts convulse
My spirit — Did not Mahomet the Second
Win Stamboul?
Ahasuerus. Thou wouldst ask that giant spirit
The written fortunes of thy house and faith.
Thou wouldst cite one out of the grave to tell
How what was born in blood must die.
Mahmud. Thy words
Have power on me! I see ——
Ahasuerus. What hearest thou?
Mahmud. A far whisper ——
Terrible silence.
Ahasuerus. What succeeds?
Mahmud. The sound
As of the assault of an imperial city,
The hiss of inextinguishable fire,
The roar of giant cannon; the earthquaking
Fall of vast bastions and precipitous towers,
The shock of crags shot from strange enginery,
The clash of wheels, and clang of armèd hoofs,

815. For the vision of Mahmud of the taking of Constantinople in 1453, see Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. xii, p. 223 [Chapter 68].

The manner of the invocation of the spirit of Mahomet the Second will be censured as over subtle. I could easily have made the Jew a regular conjurer, 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.

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 [Shelley's note].

And crash of brazen mail as of the wreck
Of adamantine mountains — the mad blast
Of trumpets, and the neigh of raging steeds,
The shrieks of women whose thrill jars the blood,
And one sweet laugh, most horrible to hear,
As of a joyous infant waked and playing
With its dead mother's breast, and now more loud
The mingled battle-cry, — ha! hear I not
"Ἐν τούτῳ νίκη!" "Allah-illa-Allah!"?
Ahasuerus. The sulphurous mist is raised — thou seest —
Mahmud. A chasm,
As of two mountains, in the wall of Stamboul;
And in that ghastly breach the Islamites,
Like giants on the ruins of a world,
Stand in the light of sunrise. In the dust
Glimmers a kingless diadem, and one
Of regal port has cast himself beneath
The stream of war. Another proudly clad
In golden arms spurs a Tartarian barb
Into the gap, and with his iron mace
Directs the torrent of that tide of men,
And seems — he is — Mahomet!
Ahasuerus. What thou seest
Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream.
A dream itself, yet less, perhaps, than that
Thou call'st reality. Thou mayst behold
How cities, on which Empire sleeps enthroned,
Bow their towered crests to mutability.
Poised by the flood, e'en on the height thou holdest,
Thou mayst 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 seest the mortal throes
Of that whose birth was but the same. The Past
Now stands before thee like an Incarnation
Of the To-come; yet wouldst thou commune with
That portion of thyself which was ere thou

829. The respective battle-cries of the Greeks (literally "In this, victory!") and their Mohammedan enemies.
842. Compare *The Triumph of Life*, l. 428.
855. Another reference to the doctrine of reincarnation.

Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death,
Dissolve with that strong faith and fervent passion
Which called it from the uncreated deep,
Yon cloud of war, with its tempestuous phantoms
Of raging death; and draw with mighty will
The imperial shade hither. [*Exit* AHASUERUS. The *Phantom of* MAHOMET THE SECOND *appears.*

Mahmud. Approach!

Phantom. I come
Thence whither thou must go! The grave is fitter
To take the living than give up the dead;
Yet has thy faith prevailed, and I am here.
The heavy fragments of the power which fell
When I arose, like shapeless crags and clouds,
Hang round my throne on the abyss, and voices
Of strange lament soothe my supreme repose,
Wailing for glory never to return. —
A later Empire nods in its decay:
The autumn of a greener faith is come,
And wolfish change, like winter, howls to strip
The foliage in which Fame, the eagle, built
Her aerie, while Dominion whelped below.
The storm is in its branches, and the frost
Is on its leaves, and the blank deep expects
Oblivion on oblivion, spoil on spoil,
Ruin on ruin: — Thou art slow, my son;
The Anarchs of the world of darkness keep
A throne for thee, round which thine empire lies
Boundless and mute; and for thy subjects thou,
Like us, shalt rule the ghosts of murdered life,
The phantoms of the powers who rule thee now —
Mutinous passions, and conflicting fears,
And hopes that sate themselves on dust, and die! —
Stripped of their mortal strength, as thou of thine.
Islam must fall, but we will reign together
Over its ruins in the world of death: —
And if the trunk be dry, yet shall the seed

861. The summoning of the Phantom is based more or less on the scene in Aeschylus in which Atossa raises the Ghost of Darius. It also resembles very closely the calling up of the Phantom of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 191–301.

Unfold itself even in the shape of that
Which gathers birth in its decay. Woe! woe!
To the weak people tangled in the grasp
Of its last spasms.
Mahmud. Spirit, woe to all!
Woe to the wronged and the avenger! Woe
To the destroyer, woe to the destroyed!
Woe to the dupe, and woe to the deceiver!
Woe to the oppressed, and woe to the oppressor!
Woe both to those that suffer and inflict;
Those who are born and those who die! but say,
Imperial shadow of the thing I am,
When, how, by whom, Destruction must accomplish
Her consummation!
Phantom. Ask the cold pale Hour,
Rich in reversion of impending death,
When *he* shall fall upon whose ripe gray hairs
Sit Care, and Sorrow, and Infirmity —
The weight which Crime, whose wings are plumed with years,
Leaves in his flight from ravaged heart to heart
Over the heads of men, under which burthen
They bow themselves unto the grave: fond wretch!
He leans upon his crutch, and talks of years
To come, and how in hours of youth renewed
He will renew lost joys, and ——
Voice without. Victory! Victory!
[*The Phantom vanishes.*
Mahmud. What sound of the importunate earth has broken
My mighty trance?
Voice without. Victory! Victory!
Mahmud. Weak lightning before darkness! poor faint smile
Of dying Islam! Voice which art the response
Of hollow weakness! Do I wake and live?
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?
It matters not! — for nought we see or dream,
Possess, or lose, or grasp at, can be worth
More than it gives or teaches. Come what may,

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908. See *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 772 n.
918. Compare *Macbeth*, I, iii, 83–85.

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!

[*Exit* MAHMUD.

Voice without. Shout in the jubilee of death! The Greeks
Are as a brood of lions in the net
Round which the kingly hunters of the earth
Stand smiling. Anarchs, ye whose daily food
Are curses, groans, and gold, the fruit of death,
From Thule to the girdle of the world,
Come, feast! the board groans with the flesh of men;
The cup is foaming with a nation's blood,
Famine and Thirst await! eat, drink, and die!

Semichorus I

Victorious Wrong, with vulture scream,
Salutes the rising sun, pursues the flying day!
I saw her, ghastly as a tyrant's dream,
Perch on the trembling pyramid of night,
Beneath which earth and all her realms pavilioned lay
In visions of the dawning undelight.
Who shall impede her flight?
Who rob her of her prey?

Voice without. Victory! Victory! Russia's famished eagles
Dare not to pray beneath the crescent's light.
Impale the remnant of the Greeks! despoil!
Violate! make their flesh cheaper than dust!

Semichorus II

Thou voice which art
The herald of the ill in splendour hid!
Thou echo of the hollow heart
Of monarchy, bear me to thine abode
When desolation flashes o'er a world destroyed:
Oh, bear me to those isles of jaggèd cloud

926. Compare *The Cenci*, III, i, 252–53.
943. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 444.

Which float like mountains on the earthquake, mid
The momentary oceans of the lightning,
Or to some toppling promontory proud
Of solid tempest whose black pyramid,
Riven, overhangs the founts intensely bright'ning
Of those dawn-tinted deluges of fire
Before their waves expire,
When heaven and earth are light, and only light
In the thunder-night!

Voice without. Victory! Victory! Austria, Russia, England,
And that tame serpent, that poor shadow, France,
Cry peace, and that means death when monarchs speak.
Ho, there! bring torches, sharpen those red stakes,
These chains are light, fitter for slaves and poisoners
Than Greeks. Kill! plunder! burn! let none remain.

Semichorus I

Alas! for Liberty!
If numbers, wealth, or unfulfilling years,
Or fate, can quell the free!
Alas! for Virtue, when
Torments, or contumely, or the sneers
Of erring judging men
Can break the heart where it abides.
Alas! if Love, whose smile makes this obscure world splendid,
Can change with its false times and tides,
Like hope and terror,—
Alas for Love!
And Truth, who wanderest lone and unbefriended,
If thou canst veil thy lie-consuming mirror
Before the dazzled eyes of Error,
Alas for thee! Image of the Above.

Semichorus II

Repulse, with plumes from conquest torn,
Led the ten thousand from the limits of the morn

961. Compare *Ode to the West Wind*, l. 27.

985. The reference is probably to the shield of Arthur in *The Faerie Queene*, Book I [Woodberry].

988. *I.e.*, "swift as Victory" [Locock]. The reference is to the famous "march of the ten thousand" narrated in Xenophon's *Anabasis*.

Through many an hostile Anarchy!
At length they wept aloud, and cried, "The Seal the Seal"
Through exile, persecution, and despair,
Rome was, and young Atlantis shall become
The wonder, or the terror, or the tomb
Of all whose step wakes Power lulled in her savage lair:
But Greece was as a hermit-child,
Whose fairest thoughts and limbs were built
To woman's growth, by dreams so mild,
She knew not pain or guilt;
And now, O Victory, blush! and Empire, tremble
When ye desert the free —
If Greece must be
A wreck, yet shall its fragments reassemble,
And build themselves again impregnably
In a diviner clime,
To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime,
Which frowns above the idle foam of Time.

Semichorus I

Let the tyrants rule the desert they have made;
Let the free possess the Paradise they claim;
Be the fortune of our fierce oppressors weighed
With our ruin, our resistance, and our name!

Semichorus II

Our dead shall be the seed of their decay,
Our survivors be the shadow of their pride,
Our adversity a dream to pass away —
Their dishonour a remembrance to abide!

Voice without. Victory! Victory! The bought Briton sends
The keys of ocean to the Islamite. —
Now shall the blazon of the cross be veiled,
And British skill directing Othman might,
Thunder-strike rebel victory. Oh, keep holy
This jubilee of unrevengèd blood!
Kill! crush! despoil! Let not a Greek escape!

993. "Atlantis," America.

1006. Amphion, in Greek myth, built the walls of Thebes by playing on the lyre so beautifully that the stones moved into place of their own accord.

Semichorus I

Darkness has dawned in the East
On the noon of time:
The death-birds descend to their feast
From the hungry clime.
Let Freedom and Peace flee far
To a sunnier strand,
And follow Love's folding-star
To the Evening land!

Semichorus II

The young moon has fed
Her exhausted horn
With the sunset's fire:
The weak day is dead,
But the night is not born;
And, like loveliness panting with wild desire
While it trembles with fear and delight,
Hesperus flies from awakening night,
And pants in its beauty and speed with light
Fast-flashing, soft, and bright.
Thou beacon of love! thou lamp of the free!
Guide us far, far away,
To climes where now veiled by the ardour of day
Thou art hidden
From waves on which weary Noon
Faints in her summer swoon,
Between kingless continents sinless as Eden,
Around mountains and islands inviolably
Pranked on the sapphire sea.

Semichorus I

Through the sunset of hope,
Like the shapes of a dream,
What Paradise islands of glory gleam!
Beneath Heaven's cope,

1030. "Evening land," America. Compare *The Revolt of Islam*, XI, xxii–xxiv. — Locock comments that "in this and the following Semichorus Shelley attains almost his highest lyrical level."
1036. Compare *Epipsychidion*, ll. 475–76.

Their shadows more clear float by —
The sound of their oceans, the light of their sky,
The music and fragrance their solitudes breathe
Burst, like morning on dream, or like Heaven on death,
Through the walls of our prison;
And Greece, which was dead, is arisen!

Chorus

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.

A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves serener far;

1060. The final chorus is indistinct and obscure, as the event of the living drama whose arrival it foretells. Prophecies of wars, and rumours of wars, etc., may safely be made by poet or prophet in any age, but to anticipate however darkly a period of regeneration and happiness is a more hazardous exercise of the faculty which bards possess or feign. It will remind the reader "magno *nec* proximo intervallo" of Isaiah and Virgil, whose ardent spirits overleaping the actual reign of evil which we endure and bewail, already saw the possible and perhaps approaching state of society in which the *"lion shall lie down with the lamb,"* and "omnis feret omnia tellus." Let these great names be my authority and my excuse [Shelley's note]. — There has been some critical disagreement concerning the poetic quality of the closing Chorus. Mrs. Shelley placed it "among the most beautiful of his lyrics." There is a resemblance, but hardly an indebtedness, to Byron's "Isles of Greece," and a clear indebtedness, pointed out by Woodberry, to Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue.* — According to Locock, it "describes the future Hellas in America"; but this last paradise of the poet's dreams is even more remote than its predecessors from the world that we know. Shelley seems, in fact, all but ready to abandon his long-cherished hope of something like a paradise on earth. Has he not asserted, after all, that the whole physical world is "but a vision"? Without some such belief, the burden of human crime and suffering becomes intolerable; yet that very belief makes human virtue and heroism meaningless. Shelley does indeed declare "that there is a true solution of the riddle"; but at the moment he is oppressed by the fact "that in our present state that solution is unattainable by us." And he cannot now summon the moral fervour or the mystical faith which, at the end of *Prometheus Unbound* and *Adonais* respectively, had made a rational solution seem not greatly to matter. In the close of this chorus, especially, but more or less throughout the poem, one feels, as Woodberry says, "a wearied pulse."

A new Penëus rolls his fountains
  Against the morning star.
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.

A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
  Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
  And loves, and weeps, and dies.
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore.

Oh, write no more the tale of Troy,
  If earth Death's scroll must be!
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy
  Which dawns upon the free:
Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Thebes never knew.

Another Athens shall arise,
  And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
  The splendour of its prime;
And leave, if nought so bright may live,
All earth can take or Heaven can give.

Saturn and Love their long repose
  Shall burst, more bright and good

1068. See *Hymn of Pan*, l. 13 n.

1071. "Cyclads" (Cyclades), islands in the Aegean Sea, famed for their beauty.

1072. "Argo," the ship of Jason in his quest for the Golden Fleece.

1074. Among Shelley's unfinished works is the beginning of a drama dealing with the story of Orpheus and Eurydice.

1077. "Calypso," a nymph who fell in love with Ulysses and detained him on her island for seven years.

1080. "Laian" refers to Laius, the father of Oedipus, by whom he was slain, both being ignorant of their relationship. Laius in anger struck the first blow. But possibly Shelley intends merely a general reference to the bloody deeds and fierce passions which dominate the story of Laius and his descendants.

1082. See *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 347 n.

1090. Saturn and Love were among the deities of a real or imaginary state of innocence and happiness. *All* those *who fell*, or the Gods of Greece, Asia, and Egypt; the *One who rose*, or Jesus Christ, at whose

Than all who fell, than One who rose,
  Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers.

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

TIME [1]

Unfathomable Sea! whose waves are years,
  Ocean of Time, whose waters of deep woe
Are brackish with the salt of human tears!
  Thou shoreless flood, which in thy ebb and flow
Claspest the limits of mortality,

appearance the idols of the Pagan World were amerced of their worship; and the *many unsubdued,* or the monstrous objects of the idolatry of China, India, the Antarctic islands, and the native tribes of America, certainly have reigned over the understandings of men in conjunction or in succession, during periods in which all we know of evil has been in a state of portentous, and, until the revival of learning and the arts, perpetually increasing, activity. The Grecian gods seem indeed to have been personally more innocent, although it cannot be said, that as far as temperance and chastity are concerned, they gave so edifying an example as their successor. The sublime human character of Jesus Christ was deformed by an imputed identification with a Power, who tempted, betrayed, and punished the innocent beings who were called into existence by His sole will; and for the period of a thousand years, the spirit of this most just, wise, and benevolent of men has been propitiated with myriads of hecatombs of those who approached the nearest to his innocence and wisdom, sacrificed under every aggravation of atrocity and variety of torture. The horrors of the Mexican, the Peruvian, and the Indian superstitions are well known [Shelley's note].

1101. "It" evidently refers to "past" and not "world."

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems,* 1824. This is the first of a number of lyrics written during the last year and a half of the poet's life which are remarkable even among Shelley's poems for their depth of melancholy. It is to be noted, however, that the mood is not particularly apparent in his letters, nor does it seem to have been evident to his companions.

And sick of prey, yet howling on for more,
Vomitest thy wrecks on its inhospitable shore;
Treacherous in calm, and terrible in storm,
Who shall put forth on thee,
Unfathomable Sea?

MUTABILITY[1]

I

The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies;
All that we wish to stay
Tempts and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright.

II

Virtue, how frail it is!
Friendship how rare!
Love, how it sells poor bliss
For proud despair!
But we, though soon they fall,
Survive their joy, and all
Which ours we call.

III

Whilst skies are blue and bright,
Whilst flowers are gay,
Whilst eyes that change ere night
Make glad the day;
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,
Dream thou — and from thy sleep
Then wake to weep.

[1]. First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. The reader may be interested in comparing the early lyric of the same title (not included in this volume).

12–13. Shelley's phrasing is somewhat confusing; he intends a contrast — "Virtue, Friendship, Love, die; but *we* live on."

A LAMENT[1]

I

O WORLD! O life! O time!
On whose last steps I climb,
Trembling at that where I had stood before;
When will return the glory of your prime?
No more — Oh, never more!

II

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
No more — Oh, never more!

A DIRGE[1]

ROUGH wind, that moanest loud
Grief too sad for song;
Wild wind, when sullen cloud
Knells all the night long;

Sad storm, whose tears are vain,
Bare woods, whose branches strain,
Deep caves and dreary main, —
Wail, for the world's wrong!

LINES: "WHEN THE LAMP IS SHATTERED"[1]

I

WHEN the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead —
When the cloud is scattered

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824.

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824.

4. "'Knells" here evidently means "rumbles with thunder."

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. The study of no other lyric will give the student greater insight into the secret of Shelley's marvellous rhythms.

The rainbow's glory is shed.
  When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not;
  When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.

II

  As music and splendour
Survive not the lamp and the lute,
  The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute: —
  No song but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruined cell,
  Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.

III

  When hearts have once mingled
Love first leaves the well-built nest;
  The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possessed.
  O Love! who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
  Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?

IV

  Its passions will rock thee
As the storms rock the ravens on high;
  Bright reason will mock thee,
Like the sun from a wintry sky.
  From thy nest every rafter
Will rot, and thine eagle home
  Leave thee naked to laughter,
When leaves fall and cold winds come.

THE ZUCCA[1]

* * * * *

III

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.
From Heaven and Earth, and all that in them are,
Veiled art thou, like a star.

IV

By Heaven and Earth, from all whose shapes thou flowest,
Neither to be contained, delayed, nor hidden;
Making divine the loftiest and the lowest,
When for a moment thou art not forbidden
To live within the life which thou bestowest;
And leaving noblest things vacant and chidden,

[1] This fragmentary narrative (suggestive to some extent of *The Sensitive Plant*) was first published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824, where it is dated "January, 1822." "Zucca," according to Mrs. Shelley, means "pumpkin"; and apparently the poem was to tell a story of a plant possessed of marvellous attributes. The present selection (Stanzas III–V) forms a unit by itself, and gives explicit expression, for the last time, to Shelley's passionate intuition of a Spirit of Intellectual Beauty which transcends the impermanent and in themselves unreal "shapes" of the material world. Compare especially the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and "Life of Life" (*Prometheus Unbound*, II, v, 48–71). The "great original" of all such faiths is to be found in Plato's *Symposium*, 211 [Shelley's translation]: "Nor can this supreme beauty be figured to the imagination like a beautiful face, or beautiful hands, or any portion of the body, nor like any discourse, nor any science. Nor does it subsist in any other that lives or is, either in earth, or in heaven, or in any other place; but it is eternally uniform and consistent, and monoeidic with itself. All other things are beautiful through a participation of it, with this condition, that although they are subject to production and decay, it never becomes more or less, or endures any change."

28–29. These lines are perhaps the clearest expression in Shelley's poetry of the relation which he conceived to exist between "the One Spirit" (or God) and individual mortal beings. A similar conception is expressed in the *Essay on Christianity*.

Cold as a corpse after the spirit's flight,
Blank as the sun after the birth of night.

V

In winds, and trees, and streams, and all things common,
  In music and the sweet unconscious tone
Of animals, and voices which are human,
  Meant to express some feelings of their own;
In the soft motions and rare smile of woman,
  In flowers and leaves, and in the grass fresh-shown,
Or dying in the autumn, I the most
Adore thee present or lament thee lost.

* * * * *

TO EDWARD WILLIAMS

[*Editor's Note.*—With this poem we come to the group of intensely personal lyrics written (probably) during the last six months of Shelley's life, as a result of his friendship with Jane Williams. The poem was first published in Ascham's edition of Shelley's *Poems*, 1834, under the title *Stanzas*. The present title was first given by Rossetti in 1870. A copy among the Trelawny MSS. is accompanied by the following brief letter from Shelley: "My dear Williams, Looking over the portfolio in which my friend used to keep his verses . . . I have lit upon these; which, as they are too dismal for *me* to keep, I send you. If any of the stanzas should please you, you may read them to Jane, but to no one else. And yet, on second thoughts, I had rather you would not. Yours ever affectionately, P.B.S." The "friend," of course, is Shelley himself. In his journal for January 26, 1822, Williams wrote: "S. sent us some beautiful but too melancholy lines." This poem is a portion of the last chapter in the story of Shelley's search for "a mortal image" which should embody the eternal, ideal Beauty of his visions. Jane

33. This stanza seems to be echoed in the next to the last paragraph of Edgar Allan Poe's essay *The Poetic Principle*.

and Edward Williams were friends of Shelley's distant cousin, Thomas Medwin; Shelley met them for the first time on January 16, 1821 (the same day, incidentally, on which he wrote to Clare Claremont that she need not "fear any mixture of that which you call love" in his feeling for Emilia Viviani). Williams quickly became Shelley's most intimate companion, and remained so until they were drowned together in July, 1822.

The exact nature of Shelley's relations with Jane has been the subject of much speculation. Because Shelley addressed to her the most tender lyrics of his last months, because during this time he was clearly estranged in some degree from Mary, and because it has always been a popular notion that Shelley was "extremely inflammable," some scholars have assumed that Shelley was guilty of adultery with Jane. Indeed, Mr. Peck asserts that Shelley in an "unpublished letter to Byron" confesses such guilt. (See *Shelley: His Life and Work*, II, 199.) He gives no further information about the letter, however; and one would like to know, first, whether Shelley's statement (whatever it may be) is so explicit as to permit no other interpretation, and, second, whether the letter is not one of the many forgeries of Shelley's letters which have appeared from time to time. The tone of Shelley's published letters to Byron, as well as the bitter remarks about Byron in other letters written towards the end of his life, makes such an intimate confidence all but incredible. As for the poems, it seems clear that Shelley's lyrics of personal emotion, although true to the mood of the moment, invariably heighten and intensify to a great and indeterminate degree whatever actual experience may have given rise to them. The act of poetical creation seems to have been for Shelley like a flash of lightning, imparting to some remembered sensation or thought or emotion an incandescent brilliance in which the original form becomes totally unrecognizable.

Shelley's references to Jane in his letters are sufficiently sensible and casual. After the first meeting he describes her as "an extremely pretty and gentle woman, apparently not *very* clever. I like her very much." A few months later he writes that the Williamses "are very good people, and I like her much better than I did." In August, 1821, he remarks: "We see the Williams's every day, and my regard for them is every day increased;

I hardly know which I like best." In the house on the Bay of Spezzia, however, where the two families lived together during May and June, 1822, things did not always go smoothly; and Jane "pines after her own house and saucepans to which no one can have a claim except herself. It is a pity that anyone so pretty should be so selfish." Yet the Williamses "are serene people," and Jane is "a sort of spirit of embodied peace in the midst of our circle of tempests." What these "tempests" were is not entirely clear, but probably Mary had a part in some of them; and it is evident from one of Shelley's letters to Gisborne (Letter XI of the present volume) that Jane's companionship meant much to him; and she was also able through the use of hypnotism to ease the intense pain caused by Shelley's mysterious ailment.

One may doubt, all things considered, whether Shelley was ever "in love" with Jane, in the ordinary sense of the phrase. And it seems obvious that she was not in love with him. Williams himself saw nothing wrong; and if Mary did, that fact may be regarded as one more bit of evidence that she never understood the man she had married. It is the realization that she never would understand, that she never could give him the complete and unfaltering sympathy for which he longed — a realization made more poignant by the unclouded affection between Edward and Jane Williams — that finds voice in this inexpressibly sad lyric.]

I

THE SERPENT is shut out from Paradise.
The wounded deer must seek the herb no more
In which its heart-cure lies:
The widowed dove must cease to haunt a bower
Like that from which its mate with feignèd sighs
Fled in the April hour.
I too must seldom seek again
Near happy friends a mitigated pain.

1. "The Snake" was one of Byron's nicknames for Shelley. He explained to Thomas Moore: "Goethe's 'Mephistofeles' calls the Serpent who tempted Eve 'my Aunt the renowned Snake,' and I always insist that Shelley is nothing but one of her nephews walking about on the tip of his tail."

II

Of hatred I am proud, — with scorn content;
Indifference, that once hurt me, now is grown
Itself indifferent;
But, not to speak of love, pity alone
Can break a spirit already more than bent.
The miserable one
Turns the mind's poison into food, —
Its medicine is tears, — its evil good.

III

Therefore, if now I see you seldomer,
Dear friends, dear *friend!* know that I only fly
Your looks, because they stir
Griefs that should sleep, and hopes that cannot die:
The very comfort that they minister
I scarce can bear, yet I,
So deeply is the arrow gone,
Should quickly perish if it were withdrawn.

IV

When I return to my cold home, you ask
Why I am not as I have ever been.
You spoil me for the task
Of acting a forced part in life's dull scene, —
Of wearing on my brow the idle mask
Of author, great or mean,
In the world's carnival. I sought
Peace thus, and but in you I found it not.

9–11. Shelley is here evidently referring to the attitude of the world in general. Compare *Stanzas Written in Dejection* and the preliminary note.

16. That is, I take it, "The miserable one finds pleasure in morbid self-pity, and pain in viewing the happiness of others." The second of these attitudes, at least, is a cardinal sin in Shelley's moral code.

24. Compare *The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient*, l. 42.

25. This line suggests the "sad and silent home" of *Stanzas. — April, 1814.*

V

Full half an hour, to-day, I tried my lot
With various flowers, and every one still said,
"She loves me — loves me not."
And if this meant a vision long since fled —
If it meant fortune, fame, or peace of thought —
If it meant, — but I dread
To speak what you may know too well:
Still there was truth in the sad oracle.

VI

The crane o'er seas and forests seeks her home;
No bird so wild but has its quiet nest,
When it no more would roam;
The sleepless billows on the ocean's breast
Break like a bursting heart, and die in foam,
And thus at length find rest:
Doubtless there is a place of peace
Where *my* weak heart and all its throbs will cease.

VII

I asked her, yesterday, if she believed
That I had resolution. One who *had*
Would ne'er have thus relieved
His heart with words, — but what his judgement bade
Would do, and leave the scorner unrelieved.
These verses are too sad
To send to you, but that I know,
Happy yourself, you feel another's woe.

35 The first and the 1839 editions had a note here, "See *Faust.*" The reference is to Part I, ll. 3181–84 of Goethe's poem (the "Garden Scene").

40. This probably means that Shelley feels that Mary has ceased to love him as she once did.

41–48. Compare ll. 16–20 of *Stanzas. — April, 1814.*

49. "Her" may be either Mary or Jane. The general sense of the stanza is perhaps that if Shelley possessed resolution he would continue his intimacy with Jane — which his judgement told him was not wrong — instead of allowing his actions to be determined by Mary's complaints.

TO ———[1]

I

One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdained
For thee to disdain it;
One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother,
And pity from thee more dear
Than that from another.

II

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

[1] First published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. Comparison with the poems avowedly addressed to Jane suggests that this poem belongs with them. Perhaps no other of Shelley's lyrics expresses so aptly and succinctly the passion etherealized by idealism which so frequently informs his poetry. The implied assertion that "what men call love" is not what he calls love is characteristic of Shelley (see, for example, the beginning of the essay *On Love*, and the "Advertisement" to *Epipsychidion*) and deserves, in the opinion of the present editor, to be taken at its face value.

5–6. These two lines are apparently explained by the next two; *i.e.*, "prudence need not smother his hope to be pitied, because that hope implies his despair of being loved."

13. This oft quoted line echoes an earlier passage (ll. 24–32) in *The Woodman and the Nightingale:*

> And every silver moth fresh from the grave
> Which is its cradle—ever from below
> Aspiring like one who loves too fair, too far,
> To be consumed within the purest glow
> Of one serene and unapproachèd star,
> As if it were a lamp of earthly light,
> Unconscious, as some human lovers are,
> Itself how low, how high beyond all height
> The heaven where it would perish! —

TO JANE: "THE KEEN STARS WERE TWINKLING"[1]

I

THE KEEN STARS were twinkling,
And the fair moon was rising among them,
Dear Jane!
The guitar was tinkling,
But the notes were not sweet till you sung them
Again.

II

As the moon's soft splendour
O'er the faint cold starlight of Heaven
Is thrown,
So your voice most tender
To the strings without soul had then given
Its own.

III

The stars will awaken,
Though the moon sleep a full hour later,
To-night;
No leaf will be shaken
Whilst the dews of your melody scatter
Delight.

IV

Though the sound overpowers,
Sing again, with your dear voice revealing
A tone
Of some world far from ours,
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.

[1] First published (ll. 7–24 only) by Medwin in *The Athenaeum*, November 17, 1832. Published in full in Mrs. Shelley's second edition of the *Poetical Works*, 1839.

22–24. These lines have been regarded as epitomizing one phase, or part, of "Romanticism."

TO JANE: THE INVITATION[1]

Best and brightest, come away!
Fairer far than this fair Day,
Which, like thee to those in sorrow,
Comes to bid a sweet good-morrow
To the rough Year just awake
In its cradle on the brake.
The brightest hour of unborn Spring,
Through the winter wandering,
Found, it seems, the halycon Morn
To hoar February born.
Bending from Heaven, in azure mirth,
It kissed the forehead of the Earth,
And smiled upon the silent sea,
And bade the frozen streams be free,
And waked to music all their fountains,
And breathed upon the frozen mountains,
And like a prophetess of May
Strewed flowers upon the barren way,
Making the wintry world appear
Like one on whom thou smilest, dear.
Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood and the downs—
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
Its music lest it should not find
An echo in another's mind,
While the touch of Nature's art
Harmonizes heart to heart.
I leave this notice on my door
For each accustomed visitor:—
"I am gone into the fields
To take what this sweet hour yields;—

[1] This and the following poem, in a somewhat different form, were first published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824, as a single piece under the title *The Pine Forest of the Cascine Near Pisa*, with the date "February 2, 1822." They were published separately in their present form in Mrs. Shelley's second edition of the *Poetical Works*, 1839.

3–10. These lines contain reminiscences of Milton's *L'Allegro*.
24–26. Compare the beginning of the essay *On Love*.

Reflection, you may come to-morrow,
Sit by the fireside with Sorrow. —
You with the unpaid bill, Despair, —
You, tiresome verse-reciter, Care, —
I will pay you in the grave, —
Death will listen to your stave.
Expectation too, be off!
To-day is for itself enough;
Hope, in pity mock not Woe
With smiles, nor follow where I go;
Long having lived on thy sweet food,
At length I find one moment's good
After long pain — with all your love,
This you never told me of."

Radiant Sister of the Day,
Awake! arise! and come away!
To the wild woods and the plains,
And the pools where winter rains
Image all their roof of leaves,
Where the pine its garland weaves
Of sapless green and ivy dun
Round stems that never kiss the sun;
Where the lawns and pastures be,
And the sandhills of the sea; —
Where the melting hoar-frost wets
The daisy-star that never sets,
And wind-flowers, and violets,
Which yet join not scent to hue,
Crown the pale year weak and new,
When the night is left behind
In the deep east, dun and blind,
And the blue noon is 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.

62–69. Compare the close of *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills.*

TO JANE: THE RECOLLECTION[1]

I

Now the last day of many days,
  All beautiful and bright as thou,
    The loveliest and the last, is dead,
Rise, Memory, and write its praise!
  Up, — to thy wonted work! come, trace
    The epitaph of glory fled, —
For now the Earth has changed its face,
  A frown is on the Heaven's brow.

II

We wandered to the Pine Forest
  That skirts the Ocean's foam,
The lightest wind was in its nest,
  The tempest in its home.
The whispering waves were half asleep,
  The clouds were gone to play,
And on the bosom of the deep
  The smile of Heaven lay;
It seemed as if the hour were one
  Sent from beyond the skies,
Which scattered from above the sun
  A light of Paradise.

III

We paused amid the pines that stood
  The giants of the waste,
Tortured by storms to shapes as rude
  As serpents interlaced,
And soothed by every azure breath,
  That under Heaven is blown,
To harmonies and hues beneath,
  As tender as its own;

[1] See preliminary note to the preceding poem. On the Trelawny MS. is written: "To Jane: not to be opened unless you are alone, or with Williams."

26. Locock points out that this line is quoted exactly from Spenser, *The Faerie Queen*, I, vii, 32.

Now all the tree-tops lay asleep,
  Like green waves on the sea,
As still as in the silent deep
  The ocean woods may be.

IV

How calm it was! — the silence there
  By such a chain was bound
That even the busy woodpecker
  Made stiller by her sound
The inviolable quietness;
  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;
And still I felt the centre of
  The magic circle there
Was one fair form that filled with love
  The lifeless atmosphere.

V

We paused beside the pools that lie
  Under the forest bough, —
Each seemed as 'twere a little sky
  Gulfed in a world below;
A firmament of purple light
  Which in the dark earth lay,
More boundless than the depth of night,
  And purer than the day —
In which the lovely forests grew,
  As in the upper air,

61. See *Alastor*, l. 457 n.

More perfect both in shape and hue
Than any spreading there.
There lay the glade and neighbouring lawn,
And through the dark green wood
The white sun twinkling like the dawn
Out of a speckled cloud.
Sweet views which in our world above
Can never well be seen,
Were imaged by the water's love
Of that fair forest green.
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 and lineament
With more than truth expressed;
Until an envious wind crept by,
Like an unwelcome thought,
Which from the mind's too faithful eye
Blots one dear image out.
Though thou art ever fair and kind,
The forests ever green,
Less oft is peace in Shelley's mind,
Than calm in waters, seen.

WITH A GUITAR, TO JANE[1]

Ariel to Miranda: — Take
This slave of Music, for the sake
Of him who is the slave of thee,

[1] First published (ll. 43–90 only) by Medwin, in *The Athenaeum*, October 20, 1832; the remainder in *Fraser's Magazine*, January, 1833. — The guitar given by Shelley to Jane is now in the Bodleian Library. Trelawny gives this interesting account of the composition of the poem: "The day I found Shelley in the pine forest he was writing verses on a guitar. I picked up a fragment, but could only make out the first two lines. . . . It was a frightful scrawl; words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run

And teach it all the harmony
In which thou canst, and only thou,
Make the delighted spirit glow,
Till joy denies itself again,
And, too intense, is turned to pain;
For by permission and command
Of thine own Prince Ferdinand,
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken;
Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who,
From life to life, must still pursue
Your happiness;—for thus alone
Can Ariel ever find his own.
From Prospero's enchanted cell,
As the mighty verses tell,
To the throne of Naples, he
Lit you o'er the trackless sea,
Flitting on, your prow before,
Like a living meteor.
When you die, the silent Moon,

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together in most 'admired disorder'; it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks; such a dashed off daub as self-conceited artists mistake for a manifestation of genius. On my observing this to him, he answered,

" 'When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of the rude sketch as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing.' "—The allusions in the first part are, of course, to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (the "mighty verses" of l. 18).—In the concluding lines the guitar seems to become more or less a symbol of poetic inspiration or imagination.

7–8. A common theme in Shelley. Compare the second paragraph of the letter to Clare Claremont (Letter IV in the present volume); also *Prometheus Unbound*, II, ii, 40 and III, iv, 125; also *Epipsychidion*, l. 452 and n.

10. *I.e.*, Edward Williams.

14. Shelley seems to have been seriously interested in the doctrine of reincarnation, which he probably first met with in Plato (see especially the Vision of Er at the end of the *Republic*). Compare *Hellas*, ll. 197–210, and Shelley's note.

23. In *Fraser's Magazine* are quoted for comparison these lines (87–89) from Milton's *Samson Agonistes:*

> And silent as the Moon,
> [When she deserts the night,]
> Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.

In her interlunar swoon,
Is not sadder in her cell
Than deserted Ariel.
When you live again on earth,
Like an unseen star of birth,
Ariel guides you o'er the sea
Of life from your nativity.
Many changes have been run
Since Ferdinand and you begun
Your course of love, and Ariel still
Has tracked your steps, and served your will;
Now, in humbler, happier lot,
This is all remembered not;
And now, alas! the poor sprite is
Imprisoned, for some fault of his,
In a body like a grave; —
From you he only dares to crave,
For his service and his sorrow,
A smile to-day, a song to-morrow.
The artist who this idol wrought,
To echo all harmonious thought,
Felled a tree, while on the steep
The woods were in their winter sleep,
Rocked in that repose divine
On the wind-swept Apennine;
And dreaming, some of Autumn past,
And some of Spring approaching fast,
And some of April buds and showers,
And some of songs in July bowers,
And all of love; and so this tree, —
O that such our death may be! —
Died in sleep, and felt no pain,
To live in happier form again:
From which, beneath Heaven's fairest star,
The artist wrought this loved Guitar,
And taught it justly to reply,
To all who question skilfully,

39. Compare *Remembrance,* l. 21: "On the living grave I bear"; and (among numerous similar passages in Shelley's letters) the final paragraph of the letter to Clare Claremont mentioned in the note on ll. 7–8 above.

In language gentle as thine own;
Whispering in enamoured tone
Sweet oracles of woods and dells,
And summer winds in sylvan cells;
For it had learned all harmonies
Of the plains and of the skies,
Of the forests and the mountains,
And the many-voicèd fountains;
The clearest echoes of the hills,
The softest notes of falling rills,
The melodies of birds and bees,
The murmuring of summer seas,
And pattering rain, and breathing dew,
And airs of evening; and it knew
That seldom-heard mysterious sound,
Which, driven on its diurnal round,
As it floats through boundless day,
Our world enkindles on its way.—
All this it knows, but will not tell
To those who cannot question well
The Spirit that inhabits it;
It talks according to the wit
Of its companions; and no more
Is heard than has been felt before,
By those who tempt it to betray
These secrets of an elder day:
But, sweetly as its answers will
Flatter hands of perfect skill,
It keeps its highest, holiest tone
For our belovèd Jane alone.

75. Locock compares *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 186–88; compare also *The Witch of Atlas*, ll. 489–92. The phrasing is very close to Peacock's *Palmyra*, II, 11–12 (1st ed.),

a dim mysterious sound
That breathed in hollow murmurs round.

83–84. Compare the opening of the essay *On Love* and the "Advertisement" of *Epipsychidion*. Locock points out the resemblance to the Homeric *Hymn to Mercury* (Stanza lxxxiii in Shelley's translation).

THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

[*Editor's Note.*—*Epipsychidion, Adonais,* and *Hellas* are all occasional poems. In *The Triumph of Life* Shelley apparently sets out deliberately to compose a work that shall give full expression to his latest reading of the riddle of life, as *Prometheus Unbound* had done three years before. The poem was written in the spring and early summer of 1822. His death prevented its completion; and since he makes no mention of it in his letters and apparently did not discuss it with his companions, we can only guess what the plan and purpose of the whole poem was to have been, or how it would have ended. Perhaps Shelley himself had not decided. Mrs. Shelley found the MS. "in so unfinished a state that I arranged it in its present form only with difficulty." She published it in the *Posthumous Poems,* 1824.

In its remoteness from contemporary events, from specific social or political problems, from any attempt at an objective portrayal of "real" life, it belongs with *Alastor, Epipsychidion,* the lyrical portions of *Prometheus Unbound,* and, to some extent, *The Witch of Atlas* and *Adonais.* Here once more the poet is preoccupied with the essential nature of life and consciousness and the world in which they appear; with the ends that men *do* pursue, and those that they *ought* to, and the means by which they may be induced to try to free themselves from the "evil spirit" that "has dominion in this imperfect world." Mrs. Shelley deplored the fact that the poem was "divested from human interest," and would have liked him to finish *Charles the First,* an orthodox drama. But Shelley had accurately gauged his talent in writing to Godwin five years earlier: "I am formed, if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind, to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us, and to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole." *The Triumph of Life* shows him still adhering to this view.

As for the specific ideas which dominate the present poem, and which some critics have regarded as indicating a departure from Shelley's previous opinions, they are in fact the logical

extension of the doctrines set forth in earlier works. The gloomy view of human history and human nature (leaving aside the probability that it would have been in some way modified at the end) can be found in almost all the important poems of the last years of his life, beginning with *Prometheus Unbound*. The distinction between a base and an exalted passion, a sensual and an ideal love, together with a perception that there is danger of confusing them, is surely, at this point, not a novelty. It is true that these themes are emphasized in the present instance by the exclusion of other themes which in earlier compositions contribute greatly to the total impression; and that as it stands, *The Triumph of Life* is the most sombre of Shelley's poems, the least touched by enthusiasm. But it marks no revolution in his philosophy.

It does, however, give evidence of an advance in Shelley's poetic powers. The measured tone, the evenly sustained elevation of style, the incisive yet sympathetic characterization of Rousseau, the absence of the personal preoccupation which is usually so noticeable in his poems of this class — all these qualities point towards the achievement "of that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power," and in which, as he once confessed to Godwin, he felt himself to be lacking. Mrs. Shelley is "convinced" that the last two months of his life, during which the poem was largely written, "were the happiest he had ever known." And he himself declared that "if the past and the future could be obliterated, the present would content me so well that I could say with Faust to the passing moment, 'Remain, thou, thou art so beautiful.'" Dreadful though the pageant of human existence may be, unanswered though the poet's final question remains, he himself is no longer chained to the car of *Life*.

Much of the machinery of the poem is borrowed from the *Trionfi* of Petrarch, whose work Shelley greatly admired. These "Triumphs" — the title is derived from the spectacular processions with which ancient Roman conquerors, on their return to the capital, celebrated their exploits — embodying as they do the fondness of medieval poets for dreams and visions, for allegory and pageantry, were to Shelley wholly congenial — as to most modern readers they are not. His actual indebtedness — chiefly to the first of Petrarch's six poems — is summarized by A. C. Bradley ("Notes on Shelley's *Triumph of*

Life," Modern Language Review, IX (1914), 441–56): "Here Petrarch, lying in early morning on the grass in a solitary place, and wearied with sad thoughts of the past, falls asleep. In his sleep he sees a great light, and within this light four white coursers drawing a car, in which sits Love, like a conqueror in a Roman triumph. Around the car he sees innumerable mortals, dead and alive; and one of them, a friend who recognizes him, points out and describes to him the most famous of the victims. Here we have in outline the main scheme of Shelley's fragment." The same critic points out, however, that these borrowings have little to do with the meaning of Shelley's poem, which in tone and substance is much closer to the work of Dante, whose *Purgatorio* seems to be definitely echoed in a few passages of *The Triumph of Life.* It has been held, also, that the style of the *Divina Commedia* (both Petrarch and Dante use the verse form which Shelley chose, the difficult *terza rima*) served as a model that tended to check the diffuseness to which Shelley is undeniably prone. The less obvious but undoubtedly real kinship of Goethe's *Faust* is emphasized by Miss F. M. Stawell ("Shelley's *Triumph of Life," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association,* V (1914), 104–31). But despite these debts or affinities, there are few of Shelley's poems that bear more clearly the stamp of his distinctive genius.

A few words of summary may nelp the uninitiated reader through the somewhat confusing narrative. The poet, lying on a beautiful mountain slope, falls into a trance, and beholds a shadowy crowd of people moving along a desolate and arid highway, indifferent to the beautiful landscape through which it passes; and in their midst a mysterious chariot, preceded by a Bacchanalian rout and followed by a host of captives in chains. Bewildered and saddened, he asks the meaning of what he sees, and is answered by "what was once Rousseau" that the shape within the car is "Life," and that the shapes chained to the car are those whom, though great, Life has conquered. Then Rousseau tells his own story: of how, awaking in a wholly beautiful world, he presently beheld an indescribably lovely Vision; and asking of her "whence I came, and where I am, and why," he was given to drink a magic potion, whereupon he saw the car of Life, and yielded himself to its destructive force —with the result which his questioner now beholds. With

Shelley's further question, "Then what is life?" the poem breaks off.]

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

Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth —
The smokeless altars of the mountain snows
Flamed above crimson clouds, and at the birth

Of light, the Ocean's orison arose,
To which the birds tempered their matin lay.
All flowers in field or forest which unclose

Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day,
Swinging their censers in the element,
With orient incense lit by the new ray

Burned slow and inconsumably, and sent
Their odorous sighs up to the smiling air;
And, in succession due, did continent,

Isle, ocean, and all things that in them wear
The form and character of mortal mould,
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

Their portion of the toil, which he of old
Took as his own, and then imposed on them:
But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold

Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
The cone of night, now they were laid asleep,
Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem

Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep
Of a green Apennine: before me fled
The night; behind me rose the day; the deep

8. Compare *The Faerie Queene*, II, xii, 71.
18. Compare *The Boat on the Serchio*, ll. 30–31; also *Hymn of Apollo*, ll. 31–32 n.
23. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 444 n.

Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head,—
When a strange trance over my fancy grew
Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread

Was so transparent, that the scene came through
As clear as when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills, they glimmer; and I knew

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

Under the self-same bough, and heard as there
The birds, the fountains and the ocean hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air;
And then a vision on my brain was rolled.

As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay,
This was the tenour of my waking dream:—
Methought I sate beside a public way

Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great stream
Of people there was hurrying to and fro,
Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,

All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
He made one of the multitude, and so

Was borne amid the crowd, as through the sky
One of the million leaves of Summer's bier;
Old age and youth, manhood and infancy,

32. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 211–12.

34. Locock compares Shelley's account of a garden near Oxford which he was sure he had beheld in a dream long before. See *Speculations on Metaphysics*, Section V.

49. "So," in such a manner [Locock].

Mixed in one mighty torrent did appear,
Some flying from the thing they feared, and some
Seeking the object of another's fear;

And others, as with steps towards the tomb,
Pored on the trodden worms that crawled beneath,
And others mournfully within the gloom

Of their own shadow walked, and called it death;
And some fled from it as it were a ghost,
Half fainting in the affliction of vain breath:

But more, with motions which each other crossed,
Pursued or shunned the shadows the clouds threw,
Or birds within the noonday aether lost,

Upon that path where flowers never grew,—
And, weary with vain toil and faint for thirst,
Heard not the fountains, whose melodious dew

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

With overarching elms and caverns cold,
And violet banks where sweet dreams brood, but they
Pursued their serious folly as of old.

And as I gazed, methought that in the way
The throng grew wilder, as the woods of June
When the south wind shakes the extinguished day,

And a cold glare, intenser than the noon,
But icy cold, obscured with blinding light
The sun, as he the stars. Like the young moon—

When on the sunlit limits of the night
Her white shell trembles amid crimson air,
And whilst the sleeping tempest gathers might—

61. *I.e.*, breathless and exhausted from their vain efforts. Compare "vain toil," l. 66. With the passage as a whole (ll. 47–65) compare *Adonais*, xxxix.

Doth, as the herald of its coming, bear
The ghost of its dead mother, whose dim form
Bends in dark aether from her infant's chair,—

So came a chariot on the silent storm
Of its own rushing splendour, and a Shape
So sate within, as one whom years deform,

Beneath a dusky hood and double cape,
Crouching within the shadow of a tomb;
And o'er what seemed the head a cloud-like crape

Was bent, a dun and faint aethereal gloom
Tempering the light. Upon the chariot-beam
A Janus-visaged Shadow did assume

The guidance of that wonder-wingèd team;
The shapes which drew it in thick lightenings
Were lost: — I heard alone on the air's soft stream

The music of their ever-moving wings.
All the four faces of that Charioteer
Had their eyes banded; little profit brings

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83. Compare Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode,* ll. 9–14. The reference is apparently to the fact that when the moon is nearly new, the whole face is faintly visible, on a clear night, within the brilliantly lighted crescent; the cause is the light reflected upon it from the earth. Evidently the phenomenon has been popularly considered a sign of approaching storm.

87. "A shape," Life. This Shape, as Miss Stawell suggests, probably *does not stand for the whole of even earthly life, but rather for the* evil (now predominant) in life. Its role is more or less the same as that of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound;* it represents fear, hatred, cruelty, selfishness, and especially (ll. 137 ff.) lust. Whether another Demogorgon would have appeared to overthrow this new "supreme Tyrant" can only be conjectured. As the poem stands, at any rate, it seems clearly to imply that life as we know it, in the temporal, material world, necessarily involves some morally and spiritually destructive principle, which can be overcome only by a relatively few individuals and only after a desperate struggle.

99. The identity of the Charioteer and the meaning of the lines that follow constitute a difficult and much discussed problem. It has been suggested that the driver of the car is Destiny (compare *Hellas,* l. 711: "The world's eyeless charioteer, Destiny"), and that the four faces

Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the sun,—
Or that with banded eyes could pierce the sphere

Of all that is, has been or will be done;
So ill was the car guided — but it passed
With solemn speed majestically on.

The crowd gave way, and I arose aghast,
Or seemed to rise, so mighty was the trance,
And saw, like clouds upon the thunder-blast,

represent past, present, future (compare l. 104), and eternity. The most widely accepted interpretation of the remainder of the passage is somewhat as follows: "The speed of the team is of little use when the charioteer is blind; nor, under these conditions, are the beams which radiate from the car (compare ll. 78–79) of any value; if they were (or if the charioteer were not blindfolded), then that charioteer whose eyes are now banded would be able to pierce" etc. To be sure, one naturally expects "that" in l. 104 to be parallel to "that" in l. 103; and to take the second "that" as meaning "that charioteer" is admittedly a somewhat forced interpretation. But it is, as far as I can see, the only one that can possibly make sense.

The point seems to be that the charioteer is possessed of powers which he cannot or does not use. And this makes questionable the identification of this figure with Destiny; an identification which is dubious on other grounds as well, since Shelley at no time in his life regarded the universe as a chaos ruled by blind Destiny. The line in *Hellas,* as I have already suggested, has only dramatic significance; and the resemblance of the passage in *The Revolt of Islam,* IX, xxvii, where Shelley speaks of

> Necessity, whose sightless strength forever
> Evil with evil, good with good must wind,

is deceptive; for "sightless" here implies the presence of justice, or impartiality, whereas the blindness of the charioteer in *The Triumph of Life* signifies ignorance or irresponsibility. I suggest, then, that the charioteer represents the human soul, blinded by evil desires and by the careless or cowardly acceptance of base superstitions, corrupt institutions, and degrading customs and conventions (in short, by all that is personified in the figure of Life) and hence unable to see any meaning in the past or present, to say nothing of foreseeing or influencing the future, or passing beyond Time into Eternity. It is not Destiny that is blind, but man; and if his blindness is partly caused by his involuntary enslavement to "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change," it is due even more to

> His will, with all mean passions, bad delights,
> And selfish cares, its trembling satellites,
> A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey.

(*Prometheus Unbound,* IV, 406–08; compare also *Ode to Liberty,* Stanza xvii, *Sonnet: Political Greatness,* and "Fragments Supposed to Be Parts of *Otho,*" ll. 1–4.)

The million with fierce song and maniac dance
Raging around — such seemed the jubilee
As when to greet some conqueror's advance

Imperial Rome poured forth her living sea
From senate-house, and forum, and theatre,
When upon the free

Had bound a yoke, which soon they stooped to bear.
Nor wanted here the just similitude
Of a triumphal pageant, for where'er

The chariot rolled, a captive multitude
Was driven; — all those who had grown old in power
Or misery, — all who had their age subdued

By action or by suffering, and whose hour
Was drained to its last sand in weal or woe,
So that the trunk survived both fruit and flower; —

All those whose fame or infamy must grow
Till the great winter lay the form and name
Of this green earth with them for ever low; —

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

119. The "captive multitude" are the same as "those chained to the car" in l. 208; although "was driven" suggests a different condition. — Their situation perhaps symbolizes the fact that their achievements are still remembered and still influence the lives of men.

120–24. These lines are explained by Miss Stawell as follows: "Good or bad, they have, in a sense, been themselves, and possessed their own souls through life. Only such does Life count as foemen worthy to adorn her triumph, after the fashion of a Roman conqueror." Throughout the poem Shelley emphasizes the idea stated so uncompromisingly in the last paragraph of the Preface to *Alastor*, where he refers to the "selfish, blind, and torpid . . . unforeseeing multitudes." To be a slave to convention and superstition, not to care to be oneself, is still the worst of sins.

129. The "conqueror" (which, following Rossetti and Locock, I substitute for the "conquerors" of the early editions) is Life (compare ll. 240, 304).

Fled back like eagles to their native noon,
Or those who put aside the diadem
Of earthly thrones or gems . . .

Were there, of Athens or Jerusalem,
Were neither mid the mighty captives seen,
Nor mid the ribald crowd that followed them,

Nor those who went before fierce and obscene.
The wild dance maddens in the van, and those
Who lead it — fleet as shadows on the green,

Outspeed the chariot, and without repose
Mix with each other in tempestuous measure
To savage music; wilder as it grows,

They, tortured by their agonizing pleasure,
Convulsed and on the rapid whirlwinds spun
Of that fierce Spirit, whose unholy leisure

Was soothed by mischief since the world begun,
Throw back their heads and loose their streaming hair;
And in their dance round her who dims the sun,

Maidens and youths fling their wild arms in air
As their feet twinkle; they recede, and now
Bending within each other's atmosphere,

133. The text is defective here, and Locock's addition of the words "till the last" and substitution of "and" for "or" in the next line (on the authority of the MS., as described by Dr. Garnett) do not help. The general sense, however, is clear. Socrates and Christ are among "the sacred few" whom Life could not conquer (compare *Prologue to Hellas*, l. 155).

137. Bradley suggests the comparison, with this passage, of Shelley's prose description of a sculptured dance of Maenads on the pedestal of a statue of Minerva. (*Critical Notices of the Sculpture in the Florence Gallery.*)

145. The "fierce Spirit" is passionate love, Venus Pandemos. The thought underlying this description is of course not new in Shelley's poetry; but nowhere else has he painted so grim a picture of the destructive power of sexual passion regarded as an end in itself. It is matched, in fact, by few passages in literature.

148. *I.e.*, Life; although the previous description suggested that the light came from the car rather than from the figure within.

Kindle invisibly — and as they glow,
Like moths by light attracted and repelled,
Oft to their bright destruction come and go,

Till like two clouds into one vale impelled,
That shake the mountains when their lightnings mingle,
And die in rain — the fiery band which held

Their natures, snaps — while the shock still may tingle;
One falls and then another in the path
Senseless — nor is the desolation single,

Yet ere I can say *where* — the chariot hath
Passed over them — nor other trace I find
But as of foam after the ocean's wrath

Is spent upon the desert shore; — behind,
Old men and women foully disarrayed,
Shake their gray hairs in the insulting wind,

And follow in the dance, with limbs decayed,
Seeking to reach the light which leaves them still
Farther behind and deeper in the shade.

But not the less with impotence of will
They wheel, though ghastly shadows interpose
Round them and round each other, and fulfil

Their work, and in the dust from whence they rose
Sink, and corruption veils them as they lie,
And past in these performs what in those.

Struck to the heart by this sad pageantry,
Half to myself I said — "And what is this?
Whose shape is that within the car? And why — "

160–61. "Nor is . . . *where*" is thus interpreted by Bradley: "Those who fall fall so thickly that, . . . the chariot passing over them so quickly, the spectator cannot, as they are being crushed, distinguish the several points at which they are crushed."

170. *I.e.,* they have lost the power to will another course of action, and must follow helplessly.

I would have added — "is all here amiss? — "
But a voice answered — "Life!" — I turned, and knew
(O Heaven, have mercy on such wretchedness!)

That what I thought was an old root which grew
To strange distortion out of the hill side,
Was indeed one of those deluded crew,

And that the grass, which methought hung so wide
And white, was but his thin discoloured hair,
And that the holes it vainly sought to hide,

Were or had been eyes: — "If thou canst, forbear
To join the dance, which I had well forborne!"
Said the grim Feature (of my thought aware).

"I will unfold that which to this deep scorn
Led me and my companions, and relate
The progress of the pageant since the morn;

"If thirst of knowledge shall not then abate,
Follow it thou even to the night, but I
Am weary." — Then like one who with the weight

Of his own words is staggered, wearily
He paused; and ere he could resume, I cried:
"First, who art thou?" — "Before thy memory,

"I feared, loved, hated, suffered, did and died,
And if the spark with which Heaven lit my spirit
Had been with purer nutriment supplied,

182. The influence of Dante's *Inferno* is obvious in this description. — Rousseau's relation to the procession is not clear. From l. 304 we infer that he is among those who walk in chains behind the car, and that the poet converses with him as they move onward. In l. 541, however, he says that he has "fallen, by the wayside."

187. With Locock I read "it," as in the early editions, rather than "he," as in most modern editions.

"Corruption would not now thus much inherit
Of what was once Rousseau, — nor this disguise
Stain that which ought to have disdained to wear it;

"If I have been extinguished, yet there rise
A thousand beacons from the spark I bore" —
"And who are those chained to the car?" — "The wise,

"The great, the unforgotten, — they who wore
Mitres and helms and crowns, or wreaths of light,
Signs of thought's empire over thought — their lore

"Taught them not this, to know themselves; their might
Could not repress the mystery within,
And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night

"Caught them ere evening." — "Who is he with chin
Upon his breast, and hands crossed on his chain?" —
"The Child of a fierce hour; he sought to win

204. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) is the greatest name, except Voltaire, in French literature and philosophy of the eighteenth century. His belief in the "natural goodness" of men, his advocacy of social equality, his glorification (to and beyond the point of sentimentalism) of feeling, sympathy, and unreasoning impulse, his complete rejection of external authority — all these helped to bring about the French Revolution, and contributed to the rise of the democratic ideal in politics and the Romantic movement in literature. His private life and personal character were in many ways contemptible, and his name has become almost synonymous with emotional instability and sensual self-indulgence.

205. The implication that man possesses freedom and responsibility should be noted.

207. One of the few openings for optimism that are left by the poem as it stands.

209. Miss Stawell remarks on the sympathy with which, in general, Shelley treats those who are chained to the car. Especially in ll. 254–278, "Shelley's admiration carries him so far that we are ready to ask why they are bound to the Car at all." Another curious fact is the heterogeneity of the group of captives. The principle of selection according to which they have ostensibly been brought together — that they did not learn "to know themselves," or "to repress the mystery within" — seems to have been, as one might expect, somewhat difficult to apply.

217. Napoleon. Compare *Lines Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon, Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte,* and *Ode to Liberty,* ll. 174–80.

The world, and lost all that it did contain
Of greatness, in its hope destroyed; and more
Of fame and peace than virtue's self can gain

"Without the opportunity which bore
Him on its eagle pinions to the peak
From which a thousand climbers have before

"Fallen, as Napoleon fell." — I felt my cheek
Alter, to see the shadow pass away,
Whose grasp had left the giant world so weak

That every pigmy kicked it as it lay;
And much I grieved to think how power and will
In opposition rule our mortal day,

And why God made irreconcilable
Good and the means of good; and for despair
I half disdained mine eyes' desire to fill

With the spent vision of the times that were
And scarce have ceased to be. — "Dost thou behold,"
Said my guide, "those spoilers spoiled, Voltaire,

"Frederick, and Paul, Catherine, and Leopold,
And hoary anarchs, demagogues, and sage
names which the world thinks always old,

228–31. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 625–31.

235. It is rather surprising to find Voltaire in this particular group, in view of the vast enthusiasm with which Shelley had once regarded him and his work. In his last years, however, Shelley shows a prejudice against French literature and philosophy as extreme and unreasonable as had been his early admiration for it. While changing completely his estimate of the authors whom he had read as a youth, he apparently read no others, and hence came to regard all French authors (except Rousseau) as sceptics and materialists, who "have defaced the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men." As Voltaire in *A Defence of Poetry* is disparagingly classed among the "mere reasoners," so here he has apparently fallen still farther, to the ranks of "demagogues." These seem to be on the same level as emperors, for Voltaire's four companions among "the spoilers spoiled" are (1) Frederick the Great of Prussia, (2) the Emperor Paul of Russia, son and successor to (3) Catherine the Great, and (4) the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II. All these persons died near the close of the eighteenth century.

237. I omit the dash usually placed at the end of this line, agreeing with Locock that "sage" is "clearly an adjective."

"For in the battle Life and they did wage,
She remained conqueror. I was overcome
By my own heart alone, which neither age,

"Nor tears, nor infamy, nor now the tomb
Could temper to its object." — "Let them pass,"
I cried, "the world and its mysterious doom

"Is not so much more glorious than it was,
That I desire to worship those who drew
New figures on its false and fragile glass

"As the old faded." — "Figures ever new
Rise on the bubble, paint them as you may;
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,

"Our shadows on it as it passed away.
But mark how chained to the triumphal chair
The mighty phantoms of an elder day;

"All that is mortal of great Plato there
Expiates the joy and woe his master knew not;
The star that ruled his doom was far too fair,

"And life, where long that flower of Heaven grew not,
Conquered that heart by love, which gold, or pain,
Or age, or sloth, or slavery could subdue not.

240. Rousseau advances two claims to superiority over some at least of those whom Life holds captive. First, he has not been overcome by external forces but through failure to control his own genius; he has not desired worldly fame or power, but only complete self-development. Second (ll. 292–95), he has been a *creator* rather than a destroyer.

249. "Paint them," *i.e.*, "colour them in your thoughts, conceive of them" [Locock].

254. "All that is mortal" is a puzzling phrase, since what is thus referred to has actually survived death. Hence, the adjective must mean simply "subject to change"; — death being regarded as merely a change. Compare *Hellas*, ll. 201–10. The part of Plato that is not "mortal" is perhaps his teachings.

255. "Socrates, because he did not love" [Woodberry]. It is striking that Shelley should now regard such abstinence as a sign of strength.

256. Bradley explains this puzzling passage as a reference to Plato's legendary love for the boy called Aster (the Greek word for "star"), whose early death (referred to in l. 257) moved Plato to compose the epigram used by Shelley as the motto of *Adonais*, and another which he translates in *The Revolt of Islam*, IX, xxxvi.

"And near him walk the twain,
The tutor and his pupil, whom Dominion
Followed as tame as vulture in a chain.

"The world was darkened beneath either pinion
Of him whom from the flock of conquerors
Fame singled for her thunder-bearing minion;

"The other long outlived both woes and wars,
Throned in the thoughts of men, and still had kept
The jealous key of Truth's eternal doors,

"If Bacon's eagle spirit had not lept
Like lightning out of darkness — he compelled
The Proteus shape of Nature, as it slept

"To wake, and lead him to the caves that held
The treasure of the secrets of its reign.
See the great bards of elder time, who quelled

"The passions which they sung, as by their strain
May well be known: their living melody
Tempers its own contagion to the vein

"Of those who are infected with it — I
Have suffered what I wrote, or viler pain!
And so my words have seeds of misery —

261. Aristotle and Alexander.

265. Bradley shows that the "out" following "singled" in all editions is unquestionably a printer's error, due to "outlived" in the next line. Compare *Lines: When the Lamp Is Shattered*, l. 19.

269. Francis Bacon is regarded as the father of inductive reasoning and experimental science, which are opposed to the deductive method of reasoning set forth by Aristotle in his *Logic* and accepted throughout Europe during the Middle Ages.

271. Proteus was a minor sea-deity, able to change his shape and also to foretell the future. Ulysses, undaunted by the former power, compelled him to exercise the latter.

274. This seems hardly consistent with l. 213.

276. My interpretation of the following lines is: "Their poetry, although it describes evil passions, does so in such a way that the reader is not moved to emulate them, even though enchanted by the beauty of the poetry." ("It" I take to refer to "melody.") Rousseau's writings, on the contrary, *do* make such passions attractive, and hence "have seeds of misery." (Yet contrast l. 207.)

"Even as the deeds of others, not as theirs."
And then he pointed to a company,

'Midst whom I quickly recognized the heirs
Of Caesar's crime, from him to Constantine;
The anarch chiefs, whose force and murderous snares

Had founded many a sceptre-bearing line,
And spread the plague of gold and blood abroad:
And Gregory and John, and men divine,

Who rose like shadows between man and God;
Till that eclipse, still hanging over heaven,
Was worshipped by the world o'er which they strode,

For the true sun it quenched — "Their power was given
But to destroy," replied the leader: — "I
Am one of those who have created, even

281. "Others" refers to the "company" of the next line; "theirs" to the "great bards" of l. 274. The rhyme scheme is interrupted here, but the sense appears to be complete.

284. "Caesar's crime," the final destruction of the Roman Republic (compare ll. 115–16); the "heirs" are the succeeding Roman emperors. It is uncertain whether "anarch chiefs" also refers to them, or to the men who gained power in various regions after the breakup of the Empire. — Here perhaps may be inserted part of a note which Shelley attached to his prose fragment *The Coliseum,* and which casts some light on his portrayal of Life's captives in the present poem. In it he describes the "triumph" of a Roman hero: "a human being returning in the midst of festival and solemn joy, with thousands and thousands of his enslaved and desolated species chained behind his chariot, exhibiting, as titles to renown, the labour of ages, and the admired creations of genius, overthrown by the brutal force, which was placed as a sword within his hand, and — contemplation fearful and abhorred! — he himself a being capable of the gentlest and best emotions, inspired with the persuasion that he has done a virtuous deed!"

288. Apparently Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), first Pope of that name; and the author of the Fourth Gospel, whom Shelley no doubt identified with the Apostle.

293. It has been observed that there is nothing for Rousseau to reply to.

294. Compare Shelley's quotation from Tasso in *A Defence of Poetry* (as well as in the essay *On Life* and a letter to Peacock), which may be translated, "None deserves the name of Creator, except God and the poet."

"If it be but a world of agony." —
"Whence camest thou? and whither goest thou?
How did thy course begin?" I said, "and why?

"Mine eyes are sick of this perpetual flow
Of people, and my heart sick of one sad thought —
Speak!" — "Whence I am, I partly seem to know,

"And how and by what paths I have been brought
To this dread pass, methinks even thou mayst guess; —
Why this should be, my mind can compass not;

"Whither the conqueror hurries me, still less; —
But follow thou, and from spectator turn
Actor or victim in this wretchedness,

"And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn
From thee. Now listen: — In the April prime,
When all the forest-tips began to burn

"With kindling green, touched by the azure clime
Of the young season, I was laid asleep
Under a mountain, which from unknown time

"Had yawned into a cavern, high and deep;
And from it came a gentle rivulet,
Whose water, like clear air, in its calm sweep

"Bent the soft grass, and kept for ever wet
The stems of the sweet flowers, and filled the grove
With sounds, which whoso hears must needs forget

"All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love,
Which they had known before that hour of rest;
A sleeping mother then would dream not of

318. The effect of the sounds of this stream was perhaps suggested by Dante's account of the river Lethe in the *Purgatorio*. Compare l. 463.

"The only child who died upon her breast
At eventide — a king would mourn no more
The crown of which his brows were dispossessed

"When the sun lingered o'er his ocean floor
To gild his rival's new prosperity.
Thou wouldst forget thus vainly to deplore

"Ills, which if ills can find no cure from thee,
The thought of which no other sleep will quell,
Nor other music blot from memory,

"So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell;
And whether life had been before that sleep
The Heaven which I imagine, or a Hell

"Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep,
I know not. I arose, and for a space
The scene of woods and waters seemed to keep,

322. The reading of this line follows Locock, who reverses, on the authority of the MS., the previously accepted position of "the" and "her."

328. Bradley suggests that these "ills" are connected with Shelley's personal life. Such an interpretation seems hardly in keeping with the general tone of the poem. — The qualifying phrase "if ills" is interesting, for Shelley usually has no doubts about such matters. It may be connected, however, with the belief stated in the note to *Hellas* "that there is a true solution of the riddle" of evil, and "that in our present state that solution is unattainable by us."

331. "Oblivious," causing oblivion [Locock].

332. Compare *Prince Athanase*, ll. 91–92:

> That memories of an antenatal life
> Made this, where now he dwelt, a penal hell.

334. "This harsh world" is from Hamlet's dying exhortation to Horatio.

336. With the thought of the following lines compare the theme of Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* and Shelley's own *Lines Connected with Epipsychidion*:

> When everything familiar seemed to be
> Wonderful, and the immortality
> Of this great world, which all things must inherit,
> Was felt as one with the awakening spirit,
> Unconscious of itself, and of the strange
> Distinctions which in its proceeding change
> It feels and knows.

Compare also the essay *On Life*.

"Though it was now broad day, a gentle trace
Of light diviner than the common sun
Sheds on the common earth, and all the place

"Was filled with magic sounds woven into one
Oblivious melody, confusing sense
Amid the gliding waves and shadows dun;

"And, as I looked, the bright omnipresence
Of morning through the orient cavern flowed,
And the sun's image radiantly intense

"Burned on the waters of the well that glowed
Like gold, and threaded all the forest's maze
With winding paths of emerald fire; there stood

"Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze
Of his own glory, on the vibrating
Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing rays,

"A Shape all light, which with one hand did fling
Dew on the earth, as if she were the dawn,
And the invisible rain did ever sing

"A silver music on the mossy lawn;
And still before me on the dusky grass,
Iris her many-coloured scarf had drawn:

"In her right hand she bore a crystal glass,
Mantling with bright Nepenthe; the fierce splendour
Fell from her as she moved under the mass

"Of the deep cavern, and with palms so tender,
Their tread broke not the mirror of its billow,
Glided along the river, and did bend her

341. Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 261.

352. The Shape is clearly a benign spirit, and may be practically identified with the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*, the "Being" of *Epipsychidion*, ll. 190–216, and so on. It is true that her gift to Rousseau has tragic effects; but it must be that, as Miss Stawell says, "The actual evil lies, not in the cup itself, but in him who drinks it unworthily."

357. "Iris," goddess of the rainbow. Compare l. 440.

359. "Nepenthe," — see *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 61n.

"Head under the dark boughs, till like a willow
Her fair hair swept the bosom of the stream
That whispered with delight to be its pillow.

"As one enamoured is upborne in dream
O'er lily-paven lakes, mid silver mist,
To wondrous music, so this shape might seem

"Partly to tread the waves with feet which kissed
The dancing foam; partly to glide along
The air which roughened the moist amethyst,

"Or the faint morning beams that fell among
The trees, or the soft shadows of the trees;
And her feet, ever to the ceaseless song

"Of leaves, and winds, and waves, and birds, and bees,
And falling drops, moved in a measure new
Yet sweet, as on the summer evening breeze,

"Up from the lake a shape of golden dew
Between two rocks, athwart the rising moon,
Dances i' the wind, where never eagle flew;

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

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

"Trampled its sparks into the dust of death;
As day upon the threshold of the east
Treads out the lamps of night, until the breath

379. I can find nothing in Shelley's work to throw light on the nature or significance of this "shape of golden dew."

386–88. These lines have been thought to have a sinister suggestion; but the thoughts are extinguished, be it noted, as are stars by the sun. Similar experiences, moreover, are common in Shelley's work; in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,* for instance, in "Life of Life," and at the close of *Adonais;* the same experience is described in *A Defense of Poetry* as being the source of the poet's greatest creations (Shelley tells us in the same essay that "Rousseau . . . was essentially a poet").

"Of darkness re-illumine even the least
Of heaven's living eyes — like day she came,
Making the night a dream; and ere she ceased

"To move, as one between desire and shame
Suspended, I said — 'If, as it doth seem,
Thou comest from the realm without a name

" 'Into this valley of perpetual dream,
Show whence I came, and where I am, and why —
Pass not away upon the passing stream.'

" 'Arise and quench thy thirst,' was her reply.
And as a shut lily stricken by the wand
Of dewy morning's vital alchemy,

"I rose; and, bending at her sweet command,
Touched with faint lips the cup she raised,
And suddenly my brain became as sand

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

"Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore,
Until the second bursts; — so on my sight
Burst a new vision, never seen before,

401. "Stricken," struck (touched).

411. The "new vision" is Life and her car. The nature of the Nepenthe which causes Rousseau to see the "new vision" is not clear. It may be the knowledge of good and evil, with the corollary of freedom, without which man cannot be truly man; in other words that which, in *Prometheus Unbound,* Saturn is said to have refused men:

> The birthright of their being, knowledge, power . . .
> Self-empire, and the majesty of love (II, iv, 39–42);

a birthright, of course, that is capable of being perverted. Or perhaps it is to be identified, as Miss Stawell suggests, with the "oracular vapour" that is "hurled up" from the Cave of Demogorgon,

> Which lonely men drink wandering in their youth,
> And call truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy,
> The maddening wine of life (*Prometheus Unbound,* II, iii, 5–7).

In a sense, Rousseau is like the youth in *Alastor.* Both are intoxicated by a Vision; both selfishly seek complete union with it; but the hero of *Alastor* seeks it in death, Rousseau in life.

"And the fair shape waned in the coming light,
As veil by veil the silent splendour drops
From Lucifer, amid the chrysolite

"Of sunrise, ere it tinge the mountain-tops;
And as the presence of that fairest planet,
Although unseen, is felt by one who hopes

"That his day's path may end as he began it,
In that star's smile, whose light is like the scent
Of a jonquil when evening breezes fan it,

"Or the soft note in which his dear lament
The Brescian shepherd breathes, or the caress
That turned his weary slumber to content;

"So knew I in that light's severe excess
The presence of that Shape which on the stream
Moved, as I moved along the wilderness,

"More dimly than a day-appearing dream,
The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep;
A light of heaven, whose half-extinguished beam

"Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
Glimmers, for ever sought, for ever lost;
So did that shape its obscure tenour keep

"Beside my path, as silent as a ghost;
But the new Vision, and the cold bright car,
With solemn speed and stunning music, crossed

"The forest, and as if from some dread war
Triumphantly returning, the loud million
Fiercely extolled the fortune of her star.

414. "Lucifer," the morning star.

422. "The favourite song, *Stanco di pascolar le pecorelle,* is a Brescian national air" [Mrs. Shelley's note].

424. Here is another slight qualification of the pessimistic trend of the poem; the first Vision is not totally obscured.

427–28. Compare *Hellas,* l. 842. This thoroughly Shelleyan image is apparently borrowed from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* l. 82.

"A moving arch of victory, the vermilion
And green and azure plumes of Iris had
Built high over her wind-wingèd pavilion,

"And underneath aethereal glory clad
The wilderness, and far before her flew
The tempest of the splendour, which forbade

"Shadow to fall from leaf and stone; the crew
Seemed in that light, like atomies to dance
Within a sunbeam; — some upon the new

"Embroidery of flowers, that did enhance
The grassy vesture of the desert, played,
Forgetful of the chariot's swift advance;

"Others stood gazing, till within the shade
Of the great mountain its light left them dim;
Others outspeeded it; and others made

"Circles around it, like the clouds that swim
Round the high moon in a bright sea of air;
And more did follow, with exulting hymn,

"The chariot and the captives fettered there: —
But all like bubbles on an eddying flood
Fell into the same track at last, and were

"Borne onward. — I among the multitude
Was swept — me, sweetest flowers delayed not long;
Me, not the shadow nor the solitude;

"Me, not that falling stream's Lethean song;
Me, not the phantom of that early Form
Which moved upon its motion — but among

"The thickest billows of that living storm
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime
Of that cold light, whose airs too soon deform.

458. Compare *Hellas*, ll. 199–200.
464. **The first Shape.**

"Before the chariot had begun to climb
The opposing steep of that mysterious dell,
Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme

"Of him who from the lowest depths of hell,
Through every paradise and through all glory,
Love led serene, and who returned to tell

"In words of hate and awe, the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured except Love;
For deaf as is a sea, which wrath makes hoary,

"The world can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers —
A wonder worthy of his rhyme. — The grove

"Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,
The earth was gray with phantoms, and the air
Was peopled with dim forms, as when there hovers

472. "Him," Dante.

476. There seems little doubt that Shelley's statement of this doctrine implies his own acceptance of it. (In *A Defence of Poetry* he calls Dante's *Paradiso* "the most glorious imagination of modern poetry.") If so, this line perhaps supplies the answer to the question of how Shelley would have resolved the problem of evil, which the poem as we have it merely presents.

477. "The argument seems to be that, since men are deaf to the music of Love, it needed a Dante to tell them of it" [Locock].

479. "The sphere," that of Venus. Compare *Epipsychidion*, l. 117.

482. These "phantoms" are the creations of the human mind ("which," Shelley tells us in *Prometheus Unbound*, "was late so dusk and obscene and blind"). They are the superstitions, the evil desires, the fears, the hatreds, the vain hopes, the senseless and hypocritical usages, the insane "ideologies," by which the human soul allows itself to be deformed and degraded — that is, the soul that has been enslaved by Life; for although the minds of men supply the "stuff" of these phantoms, it is "the car's creative ray" (compare *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 448: "the all-miscreative brain of Jove") which determines their form. The victims of Life have not the strength to create their own patterns of conduct, but allow these to be imposed by a corrupt and artificial society; Imagination (the mediator between man and the Divine) has become atrophied. And these evils have come about because men *desire* what Life can give — sensual pleasure and empty fame and power over their fellows. The utter renunciation of self, the unflinching devotion to a world of ideals, which have enabled such souls as Christ and Socrates to remain free spirits — these they have not cared to achieve. — It ought not to be hard for Christians to understand this passage.

"A flock of vampire-bats before the glare
Of the tropic sun, bringing, ere evening,
Strange night upon some Indian isle; — thus were

"Phantoms diffused around; and some did fling
Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves,
Behind them; some like eaglets on the wing

"Were lost in the white day; others like elves
Danced in a thousand unimagined shapes
Upon the sunny streams and grassy shelves;

"And others sate chattering like restless apes
On vulgar hands, . . .
Some made a cradle of the ermined capes

"Of kingly mantles; some across the tiar
Of pontiffs sate like vultures; others played
Under the crown which girt with empire

"A baby's or an idiot's brow, and made
Their nests in it. The old anatomies
Sate hatching their bare broods under the shade

"Of daemon wings, and laughed from their dead eyes
To reassume the delegated power,
Arrayed in which those worms did monarchize,

"Who made this earth their charnel. Others more
Humble, like falcons, sate upon the fist
Of common men, and round their heads did soar;

"Or like small gnats and flies, as thick as mist
On evening marshes, thronged about the brow
Of lawyers, statesmen, priest and theorist; —

489–90. These may be imaginative creations of true beauty; but it seems likely that all the phantoms belong to the same general class, are futile and delusive.

505. *I.e.*, who covered the earth with corpses.

"And others, like discoloured flakes of snow
On fairest bosoms and the sunniest hair,
Fell, and were melted by the youthful glow

"Which they extinguished; and, like tears, they were
A veil to those from whose faint lids they rained
In drops of sorrow. I became aware

"Of whence those forms proceeded which thus stained
The track in which we moved. After brief space,
From every form the beauty slowly waned;

"From every firmest limb and fairest face
The strength and freshness fell like dust, and left
The action and the shape without the grace

"Of life. The marble brow of youth was cleft
With care; and in those eyes where once hope shone,
Desire, like a lioness bereft

"Of her last cub, glared ere it died; each one
Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly
These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown

"In autumn evening from a poplar tree.
Each like himself and like each other were
At first; but some distorted seemed to be

"Obscure clouds, moulded by the casual air;
And of this stuff the car's creative ray
Wrought all the busy phantoms that were there,

511. "It is hard to say" whether these "refer to impure desires or to legalistic superstitions about marriage" [Stawell]. Perhaps Shelley is thinking of the degraded position in society which law and custom have usually assigned to women.

518. "The transfiguration is precisely the opposite of that described in *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iv, 65 etc." [Locock].

530. "Each shadow resembled the original form from which it fell, and also the other shadows which fell from that same form" [Locock].

As the sun shapes the clouds; thus on the way
Mask after mask fell from the countenance
And form of all; and long before the day

"Was old, the joy which waked like heaven's glance
The sleepers in the oblivious valley, died;
And some grew weary of the ghastly dance,

"And fell, as I have fallen, by the wayside;—
Those soonest from whose forms most shadows passed,
And least of strength and beauty did abide."

"Then, what is life?" I cried — The cripple cast
His eye upon the car, which now had rolled
Onward, as if that look must be the last,

And answered, "Happy those for whom the gold
Of" * * *

544. The last lines (beginning "The cripple cast") were found in the manuscript by Dr. Garnett and first printed by Locock.

ESSAYS

THE NECESSITY OF ATHEISM[1]

A CLOSE EXAMINATION of the validity of the proofs adduced to support any proposition, has ever been allowed to be the only sure way of attaining truth, upon the advantages of which it is unnecessary to descant: our knowledge of the existence of a Deity is a subject of such importance, that it cannot be too minutely investigated; in consequence of this conviction, we proceed briefly and impartially to examine the proofs which have been adduced. It is necessary first to consider the nature of Belief.

When a proposition is offered to the mind, it perceives the agreement or disagreement of the ideas of which it is composed. A perception of their agreement is termed belief, many obstacles frequently prevent this perception from being immediate, these the mind attempts to remove in order that the perception may be distinct. The mind is active in the investigation, in order to perfect the state of perception which is passive; the investigation being confused with the perception has induced many falsely to imagine that the mind is active in belief, that belief is an act of volition, in consequence of which it may be regulated by the mind. Pursuing, continuing this mistake they have attached a degree of criminality to disbelief of which in its nature it is incapable; it is equally so of merit.

The strength of belief like that of every other passion is in proportion to the degrees of excitement.

The degrees of excitement are three.

The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind,[2] consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent.

[1] For the circumstances of composition and publication, see the general introduction.

[2] This is the central principle of Locke's theory of knowledge, on which Shelley leans heavily in this essay.

The decision of the mind founded upon our own experience, derived from these sources, claims the next degree.

The experience of others which addresses itself to the former one, occupies the lowest degree. —

Consequently no testimony can be admitted which is contrary to reason, reason is founded on the evidence of our senses.

Every proof may be referred to one of these three divisions; we are naturally led to consider what arguments we receive from each of them to convince us of the existence of a Deity.

1st. The evidence of the senses. — If the Deity should appear to us, if he should convince our senses of his existence; this revelation would necessarily command belief; — Those to whom the Deity has thus appeared have the strongest possible conviction of his existence.

Reason claims the 2nd. place, it is urged that man knows that whatever is, must either have had a beginning or existed from all eternity, he also knows that whatever is not eternal must have had a cause. — Where this is applied to the existence of the universe, it is necessary to prove that it was created, until that is clearly demonstrated, we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity. — In a case where two propositions are diametrically opposite, the mind believes that which is less incomprehensible, it is easier to suppose that the Universe has existed from all eternity, than to conceive a being capable of creating it; if the mind sinks beneath the weight of one, is it an alleviation to increase the intolerability of the burden? — The other argument which is founded on a man's knowledge of his own existence stands thus. — A man knows not only he now is, but that there was a time when he did not exist, consequently there must have been a cause. — But what does this prove? we can only infer from effects causes exactly adequate to those effects; — But there certainly is a generative power which is effected by particular instruments; we cannot prove that it is inherent in these instruments, nor is the contrary hypothesis capable of demonstration; we admit that the generative power is incomprehensible, but to suppose that the same effect is produced by an eternal, omniscient, Almighty Being,

not only leaves the cause in the same obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible.

The 3rd. and last degree of assent is claimed by Testimony — it is required that it should not be contrary to reason. — The testimony that the Deity convinces the senses of men of his existence can only be admitted by us, if our mind considers it less probable that these men should have been deceived, than that the Deity should have appeared to them[3] — our reason can never admit the testimony of men, who not only declare that they were eye-witnesses of miracles but that the Deity was irrational, for he commanded that he should be believed, he proposed the highest rewards for faith, eternal punishments for disbelief — we can only command voluntary actions, belief is not an act of volition, the mind is even passive, from this it is evident that we have not sufficient testimony, or rather that testimony is insufficient to prove the being of a God, we have before shown that it cannot be deduced from reason, — they who have been convinced by the evidence of the senses, they only can believe it.

From this it is evident that having no proof from any of the three sources of conviction: the mind *cannot* believe the existence of a God, it is also evident that as belief is a passion of the mind, no degree of criminality can be attached to disbelief, they only are reprehensible who willingly neglect to remove the false medium thro' which their mind views the subject.

It is almost unnecessary to observe, that the general knowledge of the deficiency of such proof, cannot be prejudicial to society: Truth has always been found to promote the best interests of mankind. — Every reflecting mind must allow that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity. Q. E. D.

[3] This is essentially Hume's famous argument against miracles.

ON LOVE[1]

WHAT is love? Ask him who lives, what is life? ask him who adores, what is God?

I know not the internal constitution of other men, nor even thine, whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when, misled by that appearance, I have thought to appeal to something in common, and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience, the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. With a spirit ill fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have everywhere sought sympathy and have found only repulse and disappointment.[2]

Thou demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with

[1] The two fragmentary essays *On Love* and *On Life*, first published by Mrs. Shelley in *Essays and Letters from Abroad*, 1840, have often, like the *Essay on Christianity*, been assigned to the year 1815. Neither content nor style, however, precludes a considerably later date. *On Love* has connections with *Epipsychidion* as well as with *Alastor*, and a copy of *On Life* was seen by Dowden in Shelley's handwriting in a notebook belonging to the Italian years, where it "would hardly have had a place . . . if it were of earlier origin than the year 1818 or 1819." *On Love* may well belong to the same period.

[2] Compare *Adonais*, l. 271 n.

everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed;[3] a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise, which pain, and sorrow, and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. The discovery of its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret; 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; and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands; this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends; and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules.[4] Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathize not with us, 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

[3] These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so —No help! [Shelley's note].

[4] Compare the famous remark to Gisborne: "I think one is always in love with something or other . . ." (See Letter XI.)

in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing 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, and brings tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone.[5] Sterne says that, if he were in a desert, he would love some cypress.[6] 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.[7]

PREFACE

THE REVOLT OF ISLAM[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. It is an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live. I have sought

[5] Compare *Prometheus Unbound,* II, iv, 14.

[6] See *A Sentimental Journey,* p. 50 (Oxford World Classics).

[7] Compare the close of the Preface to *Alastor.*

[1] *The Revolt of Islam* is a 5000-line narrative poem written by Shelley during the summer of 1817. It tells the story of two lovers, Laon and Cythna, who attempt to overthrow the oppressive political and social system of a mythical kingdom (which more or less represents Shelley's conception of any European state after the fall of Napoleon) and to establish in its place a system based on universal altruism. They are eventually defeated and put to death, although their reception, after death, into a supra-mundane Senate of Immortals suggests that their efforts have not been in vain. The narrative is rather confused and is obviously incidental to the exposition of Shelley's ideas on social reform. The Preface is particularly notable because it anticipates the teachings of *A Defence of Poetry* concerning the moral function of poetry, and because it illustrates the rather remarkable moderation and reasonableness which Shelley regularly shows in his prose discussions of social problems. — The same temper does not extend, however, to his reckless defiance of reviewers.

to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality; and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind.

For this purpose I have chosen a story of human passion in its most universal character, diversified with moving and romantic adventures, and appealing, in contempt of all artificial opinions or institutions, to the common sympathies of every human breast. I have made no attempt to recommend the motives which I would substitute for those at present governing mankind, by methodical and systematic argument. I would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue, and be incited to those inquiries which have led to my moral and political creed, and that of some of the sublimest intellects in the world. The Poem therefore (with the exception of the first canto, which is purely introductory) is narrative, not didactic. It is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind; its influence in refining and making pure the most daring and uncommon impulses of the imagination, the understanding, and the senses; its impatience at "all the oppressions which are done under the sun"; its tendency to awaken public hope, and to enlighten and improve mankind; the rapid effects of the application of that tendency; the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission; the tranquillity of successful patriotism, and the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy; the treachery and barbarity of hired soldiers; vice not the object of punishment and hatred,

but kindness and pity; the faithlessness of tyrants; the confederacy of the Rulers of the World, and the restoration of the expelled Dynasty by foreign arms; the massacre and extermination of the Patriots, and the victory of established power; 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, that secure earnest of its final and inevitable fall; the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue. Such is the series of delineations of which the Poem consists. And, if the lofty passions with which it has been my scope to distinguish this story shall not excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence, an interest profound and strong such as belongs to no meaner desires, let not the failure be imputed to a natural unfitness for human sympathy in these sublime and animating themes. It is the business of the Poet to communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings in the vivid presence of which within his own mind consists at once his inspiration and his reward.

The panic, which like an epidemic transport, seized upon all classes of men during the excesses consequent upon the French Revolution, is gradually giving place to sanity. It has ceased to be believed that whole generations of mankind ought to consign themselves to a hopeless inheritance of ignorance and misery, because a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries were incapable of conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquillity of freemen so soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened. That their conduct could not have been marked by any other characters than ferocity and thoughtlessness is the historical fact from which liberty derives all its recommendations, and falsehood the worst features of its deformity. There is a reflux in the tide of human things which bears the shipwrecked hopes of men into a secure haven after the storms are past. Methinks, those who now live have survived an age of despair.

The French Revolution may be considered as one of those manifestations of a general state of feeling among civilised mankind produced by a defect of correspondence between the knowledge existing in society and the improvement or gradual abolition of political institutions. 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. The most generous and amiable natures were those which participated the most extensively in these sympathies. But such a degree of unmingled good was expected as it was impossible to realise. If the Revolution had been in every respect prosperous, then misrule and superstition would lose half their claims to our abhorrence, as fetters which the captive can unlock with the slightest motion of his fingers, and which do not eat with poisonous rust into the soul. 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. Could they listen to the plea of reason who had groaned under the calamities of a social state according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury whilst another famishes for want of bread? Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent? This is the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced 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. Such is the lesson which experience teaches now. But, on the first reverses of hope in the progress of French liberty, the sanguine eagerness for good overleaped the solution of these questions, and for a time extinguished itself in the unexpectedness of their result. Thus, many of the most ardent and tender-hearted of the worshippers of public good have been morally ruined by what a partial glimpse of the events they deplored appeared to show as the melancholy desolation of all their cherished hopes. Hence gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the age in which we live, the solace

of a disappointment that unconsciously finds relief only in the wilful exaggeration of its own despair. This influence has tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds from which it flows. Metaphysics,[2] and inquiries into moral and political science, have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those[3] of Mr. Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph. Our works of fiction and poetry have been overshadowed by the same infectious gloom. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following Poem.

I do not presume to enter into competition with our greatest contemporary Poets. Yet I am unwilling to tread in the footsteps of any who have preceded me. I have sought to avoid the imitation of any style of language or versification peculiar to the original minds of which it is the character; designing that, even if what I have produced be worthless, it should still be properly my own. Nor have I permitted any system relating to mere words to divert the attention of the reader, from whatever interest I may have succeeded in creating, to my own ingenuity in contriving to disgust them according to the rules of criticism.[4] I have simply clothed my thoughts in what appeared to me the most obvious and appropriate language. A person familiar with nature, and with the most celebrated productions of the human mind, can scarcely err in following the instinct, with respect to selection of language, produced by that familiarity.

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[2] I ought to except Sir W. Drummond's *Academical Questions;* a volume of very acute and powerful metaphysical criticism [Shelley's note].

[3] It is remarkable, as a symptom of the revival of public hope, that Mr. Malthus has assigned, in the later editions of his work, an indefinite dominion to moral restraint over the principle of population. This concession answers all the inferences from his doctrine unfavourable to human improvement, and reduces the *Essay on Population* to a commentary illustrative of the unanswerableness of *Political Justice* [Shelley's note].

[4] Shelley is probably glancing at the current controversy between Wordsworth, who insisted that the poet should employ "the language actually used by men," and his critics among the reviewers, who still generally adhered to the taste and theory of the neo-classic period.

There is an education peculiarly fitted for a Poet, without which genius and sensibility can hardly fill the circle of their capacities. No education, indeed, can entitle to this appellation a dull and unobservant mind, or one, though neither dull nor unobservant, in which the channels of communication between thought and expression have been obstructed or closed. How far it is my fortune to belong to either of the latter classes I cannot know. I aspire to be something better. The circumstances of my accidental education have been favourable to this ambition. I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests: Danger, which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. I have been a wanderer among distant fields. I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains. I have seen populous cities, and have watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men. I have seen the theatre of the more visible ravages of tyranny and war; cities and villages reduced to scattered groups of black and roofless houses, and the naked inhabitants sitting famished upon their desolated thresholds. I have conversed with living men of genius. The poetry of ancient Greece and Rome, and modern Italy, and our own country, has been to me, like external nature, a passion and an enjoyment. Such are the sources from which the materials for the imagery of my Poem have been drawn. I have considered Poetry in its most comprehensive sense; and have read the Poets and the Historians and the Metaphysicians [5] whose writings have been accessible to me, and have looked upon the beautiful and majestic scenery of the earth, as common sources of those elements which it is the province of the Poet to embody and combine. Yet the experience and the feelings to which I refer

[5] In this sense there may be such a thing as perfectibility in works of fiction, notwithstanding the concession often made by the advocates of human improvement, that perfectibility is a term applicable only to science [Shelley's note].

do not in themselves constitute men Poets, but only prepare them to be the auditors of those who are. How far I shall be found to possess that more essential attribute of Poetry, the power of awakening in others sensations like those which animate my own bosom, is that which, to speak sincerely, I know not; and which, with an acquiescent and contented spirit, I expect to be taught by the effect which I shall produce upon those whom I now address.

I have avoided, as I have said before, the imitation of any contemporary style. But there must be a resemblance, which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age. They cannot escape from subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live; though each is in a degree the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded. Thus, the tragic poets of the age of Pericles; the Italian revivers of ancient learning; those mighty intellects of our own country that succeeded the Reformation, the translators of the Bible, Shakespeare, Spenser, the dramatists of the reign of Elizabeth, and Lord Bacon;[6] the colder spirits of the interval that succeeded; — all resemble each other, and differ from every other in their several classes. In this view of things, Ford can no more be called the imitator of Shakespeare than Shakespeare the imitator of Ford. There were perhaps few other points of resemblance between these two men than that which the universal and inevitable influence of their age produced. And this is an influence which neither the meanest scribbler nor the sublimest genius of any era can escape; and which I have not attempted to escape.

I have adopted the stanza of Spenser (a measure inexpressibly beautiful), not because I consider it a finer model of poetical harmony than the blank verse of Shakespeare and Milton, but because in the latter there is no shelter for mediocrity; you must either succeed or fail. This perhaps an aspiring spirit should desire. But I was enticed also by the brilliancy and

[6] Milton stands alone in the age which he illumined [Shelley's note].

magnificence of sound which a mind that has been nourished upon musical thoughts can produce by a just and harmonious arrangement of the pauses of this measure. Yet there will be found some instances where I have completely failed in this attempt; and one, which I here request the reader to consider as an erratum, where there is left, most inadvertently, an alexandrine in the middle of a stanza.

But in this as in every other respect I have written fearlessly. It is the misfortune of this age that its Writers, too thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame. They write with the fear of Reviews before their eyes. This system of criticism sprang up in that torpid interval when Poetry was not. Poetry, and the art which professes to regulate and limit its powers, cannot subsist together. Longinus could not have been the contemporary of Homer, nor Boileau of Horace. Yet this species of criticism never presumed to assert an understanding of its own: it has always, unlike true science, followed, not preceded, the opinion of mankind, and would even now bribe with worthless adulation some of our greatest Poets to impose gratuitous fetters on their own imaginations, and become unconscious accomplices in the daily murder of all genius either not so aspiring or not so fortunate as their own. I have sought therefore to write, as I believe that Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton wrote, with an utter disregard of anonymous censure. I am certain that calumny and misrepresentation, though it may move me to compassion, cannot disturb my peace. I shall understand the expressive silence of those sagacious enemies who dare not trust themselves to speak. I shall endeavour to extract, from the midst of insult and contempt and maledictions, those admonitions which may tend to correct whatever imperfections such censurers may discover in this my first serious appeal to the Public. If certain Critics were as clear-sighted as they are malignant, how great would be the benefit to be derived from their virulent writings! As it is, I fear I shall be malicious enough to be amused with their paltry tricks and lame invectives. 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. I cannot conceive that Lucretius, when he meditated that poem [7] whose doctrines are yet the basis of our metaphysical knowledge, and whose eloquence has been the wonder of mankind, wrote in awe of such censure as the hired sophists of the impure and superstitious noblemen of Rome might affix to what he should produce. It was at the period when Greece was led captive, and Asia made tributary to the Republic, fast verging itself to slavery and ruin, that a multitude of Syrian captives, bigoted to the worship of their obscene Ashtaroth, and the unworthy successors of Socrates and Zeno, found there a precarious subsistence by administering, under the name of freedmen, to the vices and vanities of the great. These wretched men were skilled to plead, with a superficial but plausible set of sophisms, in favour of that contempt for virtue which is the portion of slaves, and that faith in portents, the most fatal substitute for benevolence in the imaginations of men, which, arising from the enslaved communities of the East, then first began to overwhelm the western nations in its stream. Were these the kind of men whose disapprobation the wise and lofty-minded Lucretius should have regarded with a salutary awe? The latest and perhaps the meanest of those who follow in his footsteps would disdain to hold life on such conditions.[8]

The Poem now presented to the Public occupied little more than six months in the composition. That period has been devoted to the task with unremitting ardour and enthusiasm. I have exercised a watchful and earnest criticism on my work as it grew under my hands. I would willingly have sent it

[7] *De Rerum Natura.*

[8] The reader may be inclined to feel, in view of this passage, that Shelley had little cause for surprise or complaint at being roughly handled by the reviewers. His aim, however, is obviously to appeal beforehand from the judgment of the reviews to that of the general public. It was not so much critical abuse as public indifference which caused the discouragement so often expressed toward the end of his life.

forth to the world with that perfection which long labour and revision is said to bestow. But I found that, if I should gain something in exactness by this method, I might lose much of the newness and energy of imagery and language as it flowed fresh from my mind. And, although the mere composition occupied no more than six months, the thoughts thus arranged were slowly gathered in as many years.

I trust that the reader will carefully distinguish between those opinions which have a dramatic propriety in reference to the characters which they are designed to elucidate, and such as are properly my own. The erroneous and degrading idea which men have conceived of a Supreme Being, for instance, is spoken against, but not the Supreme Being itself. The belief which some superstitious persons whom I have brought upon the stage entertain of the Deity, as injurious to the character of his benevolence, is widely different from my own. In recommending also a great and important change in the spirit which animates the social institutions of mankind, I have avoided all flattery to those violent and malignant passions of our nature which are ever on the watch to mingle with and to alloy the most beneficial innovations. There is no quarter given to Revenge, or Envy, or Prejudice. Love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the moral world.

A DEFENCE OF POETRY

[*Editor's note.*— *A Defence of Poetry* was first published by Mrs. Shelley in *Essays and Letters from Abroad*, 1840. It was written in February and March, 1821, as an answer to Peacock's essay *The Four Ages of Poetry* and sent to Ollier for publication in his *Literary Miscellany*. It is not known why he did not publish it. Peacock finally secured it from him, and placed it in the hands of John Hunt for publication in *The Liberal*, where it likewise failed to appear.

Peacock's essay is briefer and in a lighter vein than Shelley's. The four ages of poetry are those of iron, gold, silver, and brass, which the author finds to have existed both in ancient and in

modern literature. Much of the piece is entertainingly written, but towards the end Peacock indulges in a rather ill-humoured attack on practically all contemporary poets; and he concludes by arguing (how seriously, it is hard to say) that poetry is necessarily the outgrowth of a more or less primitive view of life, and that in modern society it is a worthless affectation, which had better be abandoned in favour of more practical pursuits.

Shelley's reply insists on the moral value of poetry. Imagination, in fact, is "the great instrument of moral good." We have enough, he says, of the practical knowledge which Peacock urges us to cultivate, but we lack the will — we are too selfish — to apply that knowledge; "man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave." But poetry can lift us "out of the dull vapours of the little world of self"; it arouses us to an attempt to make real, in ourselves and in the world, those ideal goods which we already recognize. It is even of divine origin; for the poet is only the instrument of a power greater than himself. "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man."

One obvious implication of this theory deserves notice. It leaves no room in poetry (or in any art, if the view is pushed to its logical conclusion) for "realism"; that is, the portrayal of life for its own sake, exactly as the artist perceives it, regardless of its moral quality and possible moral effect. Shelley's position is therefore worlds apart from the prevailing attitude of the present generation. If we permit any "interpretation of life" at all, it is at most one "which suppresses nothing essential, but which by emphasizing the significant traits and omitting the irrelevant in its subject-matter (be this, morally speaking, good or bad), attains a vividness of portraiture which actual experience never or rarely affords." (See J. Shawcross, *Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, p. xxxii.) But Shelley is an incurable moralist and idealist. The poet's business is not with *what is*, but with *what ought to be;* or if with what is, then only to illuminate and render more attractive what ought to be. (Most persons doubtless consider that the two realms overlap; but Shelley told Trelawny towards the end of his life, "Wise men of all ages have declared everything that is, is wrong.") The true poet, indeed, has no choice; for he is the involuntary servant of some transcendental "spirit of good."

All this, of course, does not imply that Shelley approves of abstract moralizing in verse; he is perfectly sincere in saying, "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence." And sometimes (notably in the Preface to *The Cenci* and in the play itself) he makes gestures towards a less extremely idealistic conception of the poet's art. But the characteristic Shelleyan creed, the one most consistently preached and practised, holds that it is the poet's business to make men morally better, by inducing them to contemplate the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Like Shelley's major poems, *A Defence of Poetry* draws upon a wide variety of sources, which are fused by the intensity of his imaginative vision into a new and distinctive form. Not only Peacock's essay (to which Shelley made a number of specific references which are omitted in the accepted text), but Aristotle's *Poetics*, Plato's *Ion* (which Shelley told Peacock he had just been reading when he encountered *The Four Ages of Poetry*), Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: all these contributed in one way or another to Shelley's essay, which has now taken its rightful place among them. It stands as one of the boldest and most inspiriting of the many answers which men have given to the elusive and alluring questions, "What is poetry?" and "What is the relation of poetry to life?"

The progress of the thought may be difficult to follow during a first reading, for the main topics are not always kept clear of each other, and the same idea may be discussed in two or three different places. In general, however, the essay has three main divisions. The first discusses the general nature of poetry; the second undertakes, by means of a brief historical survey, to prove that poetry has been morally beneficial to mankind; the third, a specific answer to Peacock's charge that poetry is essentially useless, presents Shelley's theories as to how and why it is of value.]

According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action, which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them as from elements,

other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity. The one is the τὸ ποιεῖν, or the principle of synthesis, and has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself; the other is the τὸ λογίζειν, or principle of analysis, and its action regards the relations of things, simply as relations; considering thoughts, not in their integral unity, but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results. 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.[1]

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. A child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflexion of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it; it will be

[1] Compare Wordsworth's disparaging reference to reason as "that false secondary power, by which, in weakness, we create distinctions" (*The Prelude*, II, 216–17). The consistent depreciation of "reason" in this essay is characteristic of Shelley's mature philosophy; it offers the strongest possible contrast, of course, with the attitude which prevails in his early prose tracts. — In this passage, "Imagination" is conceived of as a more or less normal faculty, rather than as the "divine madness" which it becomes towards the end of the essay. Still, it does not appear to me that the two conceptions are necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive.

the reflected image of that impression; and as the lyre trembles and sounds after the wind has died away, so the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause. In relation to the objects which delight a child, these expressions are what poetry is to higher objects. The savage (for the savage is to ages what the child is to years) expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects in a similar manner; and language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects and of his apprehension of them. Man in society, with all his passions and his pleasures, next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man; an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expressions; and language, gesture, and the imitative arts become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony. The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence, become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. Hence men, even in the infancy of society, observe a certain order in their words and actions, distinct from that of the objects and the impressions represented by them, all expression being subject to the laws of that from which it proceeds. But let us dismiss those more general considerations which might involve an inquiry into the principles of society itself, and restrict our view to the manner in which the imagination is expressed upon its forms.

In the youth of the world, men dance and sing and imitate natural objects, observing in these actions, as in all others, a certain rhythm or order. And, although all men observe a similar, they observe not the same order, in the motions of the dance, in the melody of the song, in the combinations of lan-

guage, in the series of their imitations of natural objects. For there is a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation, from which the hearer and the spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other: the sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers. Every man in the infancy of art, observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results: but the diversity is not sufficiently marked, as that its gradations should be sensible, except in those instances where the predominance of this faculty of approximation to the beautiful (for so we may be permitted to name the relation between this highest pleasure and its cause) is very great. Those in whom it exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word; and the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community. Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. These similitudes or relations are finely said by Lord Bacon to be "the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world"[2] and he considers the faculty which perceives them as the storehouse of axioms common to all knowledge. In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem: the copiousness of lexicography and the distinctions of grammar

[2] *De Augment. Scient.*, cap. i. lib. iii [Shelley's note].

are the works of a later age, and are merely the catalogue and the form of the creations of poetry.

But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. Hence all original religions are allegorical, or susceptible of allegory, and like Janus have a double face of false and true. Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he 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: such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry. 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. The grammatical forms which express the moods of time, and the difference of persons, and the distinction of place, are convertible with respect to the highest poetry without injuring it as poetry; and the choruses of Aeschylus, and the book of *Job,* and Dante's *Paradise,* would afford, more than any other writings, examples of this fact, if the limits of this essay did not forbid citation. The creations of sculpture, painting, and music, are illustrations still more decisive.

Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry;[3] they

[3] Shelley here characteristically identifies "poetry" with creative activity of any kind, so long as it follows an harmonious order or pattern; in other words, so long as it produces what is beautiful and good.

may be called poetry by that figure of speech which considers the effect as a synonym of the cause. But poetry in a more restricted sense expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression. The former is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums of communication. Hence the fame of sculptors, painters, and musicians, although the intrinsic powers of the great masters of these arts may yield in no degree to that of those who have employed language as the hieroglyphic of their thoughts, has never equalled that of poets in the restricted sense of the term; as two performers of equal skill will produce unequal effects from a guitar and a harp. The fame of legislators and founders of religions, so long as their institutions last, alone seems to exceed that of poets in the restricted sense; but it can scarcely be a question, whether, if we deduct the celebrity which their flattery of the gross opinions of the vulgar usually conciliates, together with that which belonged to them in their higher character of poets, any excess will remain.

We have thus circumscribed the word poetry within the limits of that art which is the most familiar and the most perfect expression of the faculty itself. It is necessary, however, to make the circle still narrower, and to determine the distinction between measured and unmeasured language; for the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy.

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each

other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower — and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

An observation of the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular, and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification. The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error.[4] The distinction between philosophers and poets has been anticipated. Plato was essentially a poet — the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic, and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action, and he forbore to invent any regular plan of rhythm which would include, under determinate forms, the

[4] Compare Wordsworth's statement in a note to the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads:* "But much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre." Sidney, in his *Defence of Poesy,* makes a similar assertion.

varied pauses of his style. Cicero sought to imitate the cadence of his periods, but with little success. Lord Bacon was a poet.[5] His language has a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect; it is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy. All the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, nor even as their words unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth; but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse; being the echo of the eternal music. Nor are those supreme poets, who have employed traditional forms of rhythm on account of the form and action of their subjects, less capable of perceiving and teaching the truth of things, than those who have omitted that form. Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton (to confine ourselves to modern writers) are philosophers of the very loftiest power.

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other bond of connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause, and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds.[6] The one is

[5] See the *Filum Labyrinthi,* and the Essay on Death particularly [Shelley's note]. Shelley's great and lasting admiration of Bacon is one of the least comprehensible features of his character. The coldly reasoned, unimpassioned utilitarianism which is dominant in Bacon's work would appear to be precisely the thing to which "poetry" is opposed by both Peacock and Shelley. His proper place, one would say, is among the "mere reasoners" and "promoters of utility" who in this essay are spoken of almost with contempt, and not among the poets who are glorified. True, Shelley might be expected to venerate him as a champion of intellectual liberty; but then why is he so unsympathetic towards Voltaire?

[6] Shelley is here following Aristotle's famous assertion (repeated by Sidney) that poetry is more philosophical than history, in that it deals with the universal rather than with the particular. Shelley's view is rather more extreme, however; and many persons will be inclined to ask.

partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other 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. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. Hence epitomes have been called the moths of just history; they eat out the poetry of it.[7] A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.

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 may be found in the midst of a series of unassimilated portions: a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought. And thus all the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets; and although the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them from developing this faculty in its highest degree, they made copious and ample amends for their subjection, by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images.

Having determined what is poetry, and who are poets, let us proceed to estimate its effects upon society.[8]

after reading the casual remark about "no other connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect," what other connexion is possible. The author's position has been emphasized still more by the common editorial practice of capitalizing the word "creator," thus making it synonymous with "God." But in the MS. the word is not capitalized, and Rossetti's suggestion that Shelley was referring merely to the mind of the *poet* is confirmed.

[7] A. S. Cook, in his helpful edition of *A Defence of Poetry*, compares Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, II, ii, 4: "As for the corruptions and moths of history, which are epitomes, the use of them deserveth to be banished, as all men of sound judgment have confessed, as those that have fretted and corroded the sound bodies of many excellent histories, and wrought them into base and unprofitable dregs."

[8] Here begins the second main section of the essay; a brief historical survey designed to show that poetry has always tended to elevate the moral standard of society, and also to explain *how* such an effect has been produced.

Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight. In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry: for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness; and it is reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the strength and splendour of their union. Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fullness of his fame; the jury which sits in judgement upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers: it must be impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations. A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why. The poems of Homer and his contemporaries were the delight of infant Greece; they were the elements of that social system which is the column upon which all succeeding civilization has reposed. Homer embodied the ideal perfection of his age in human character;[9] nor can we doubt that those who read his verses were awakened to an ambition of becoming like to Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses: the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism, and persevering devotion to an object, were unveiled to the depths in these immortal creations: the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration.[10] Nor let it be objected, that these characters are

[9] It has been held that Shelley in this passage imputes to the work of Homer a moral tendency which in fact it does not possess. — Cook compares Sidney's *Defence of Poesy:* "See whether wisdom and temperance in Ulysses and Diomedes, valour in Achilles, friendship in Nisus and Euryalus, even to an ignorant man carry not an apparent shining."

[10] Compare the comment later in the essay on the emotions aroused by reading Petrarch: "It is impossible to feel them without becoming a portion of that beauty which we contemplate." Compare also *Prometheus Unbound,* I, 450 and n.

remote from moral perfection, and that they can by no means be considered as edifying patterns for general imitation. Every epoch, under names more or less specious, has deified its peculiar errors; Revenge is the naked idol of the worship of a semi-barbarous age; and Self-deceit is the veiled image of unknown evil, before which luxury and satiety lie prostrate. But a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as a temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty. An epic or dramatic personage is understood to wear them around his soul, as he may the ancient armour or the modern uniform around his body; whilst it is easy to conceive a dress more graceful than either. The beauty of the internal nature cannot be so far concealed by its accidental vesture, but that the spirit of its form shall communicate itself to the very disguise, and indicate the shape it hides from the manner in which it is worn. A majestic form and graceful motions will express themselves through the most barbarous and tasteless costume. Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour;[11] and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit, &c., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears.

The whole objection, however, of the immorality of poetry rests upon a misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man.[12] Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life: nor is it for want of admirable doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive, and subjugate one another. But poetry acts in another and a diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the

[11] As perhaps Shelley himself had attempted to do in drawing the character of Prometheus.

[12] The following passage expresses the central idea of Shelley's answer to Peacock, and is perhaps his most original and important contribution to the discussion of the relation of poetry to morality. He recurs to it again, and elaborates it, near the end of the essay.

veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it co-exists. The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. 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.[18] By this assumption of the inferior office of interpreting the effect, in which perhaps after all he might acquit himself but imperfectly, he would resign a glory in a participation in the cause. There was little danger that Homer, or any of the eternal poets,

[18] There may be some difficulty as to where and how the poet is to draw the line between embodying "the ideal perfection of his age" and expressing "his own conceptions of right and wrong." And it is hard to see how a poet could be more forthright than is Shelley himself in presenting to his readers "his own conception of right and wrong." But Shelley is simply making a distinction between a *principle* — for example, justice — and the often mistaken ideas which men have about how to realize it in a particular society. He approved, no doubt, of Spenser's glorification of "Truth" and "Holiness" in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. But to identify Truth with Protestantism or to offer a specific program of moral regeneration (as in the account of the House of Holiness in Canto X), he must have regarded as a mistake.

should have so far misunderstood themselves as to have abdicated this throne of their widest dominion. 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.

Homer and the cyclic poets were followed at a certain interval by the dramatic and lyrical poets of Athens, who flourished contemporaneously with all that is most perfect in the kindred expressions of the poetical faculty; architecture, painting, music, the dance, sculpture, philosophy, and, we may add, the forms of civil life. For although the scheme of Athenian society was deformed by many imperfections which the poetry existing in chivalry and Christianity has erased from the habits and institutions of modern Europe; yet never at any other period has so much energy, beauty, and virtue, been developed; never was blind strength and stubborn form so disciplined and rendered subject to the will of man, or that will less repugnant to the dictates of the beautiful and the true, as during the century which preceded the death of Socrates.[14] Of no other epoch in the history of our species have we records and fragments stamped so visibly with the image of the divinity in man. But it is poetry alone, in form, in action, or in language, which has rendered this epoch memorable above all others, and the storehouse of examples to everlasting time. For written poetry existed at that epoch simultaneously with the other arts, and it is an idle inquiry to demand which gave and which received the light, which all, as from a common focus, have scattered over the darkest periods of succeeding time. We know no more of cause and effect than a constant conjunction of events: poetry is ever found to co-exist with whatever other arts contribute to the happiness and perfection of man. I appeal to what has already been established to distinguish between the cause and the effect.

It was at the period here adverted to, that the drama had its birth; and however a succeeding writer may have equalled or

[14] Compare the *Ode to Liberty*, Stanza v.

surpassed those few great specimens of the Athenian drama which have been preserved to us, it is indisputable that the art itself never was understood or practised according to the true philosophy of it, as at Athens. For the Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind by artists of the most consummate skill, and was disciplined into a beautiful proportion and unity one towards the other. On the modern stage a few only of the elements capable of expressing the image of the poet's conception are employed at once. We have tragedy without music and dancing; and music and dancing without the highest impersonations of which they are the fit accompaniment, and both without religion and solemnity.[15] Religious institution has indeed been usually banished from the stage. Our system of divesting the actor's face of a mask, on which the many expressions appropriated to his dramatic character might be moulded into one permanent and unchanging expression, is favourable only to a partial and inharmonious effect; it is fit for nothing but a monologue, where all the attention may be directed to some great master of ideal mimicry. The modern practice of blending comedy with tragedy, though liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle; but the comedy should be as in *King Lear*, universal, ideal, and sublime. It is perhaps the intervention of this principle which determines the balance in favour of *King Lear* against the *Oedipus Tyrannus* or the *Agamemnon*, or, if you will, the trilogies with which they are connected; unless the intense power of the choral poetry, especially that of the latter, should be considered as restoring the equilibrium. *King Lear*, if it can sustain this comparison, may be judged to be the most perfect specimen of the dramatic art existing in the world; in spite of the narrow conditions to which the poet was subjected

[15] It is interesting to find Shelley deploring the lack of *religion* in modern drama. Compare the remark on Calderón and Shakespeare just below.

by the ignorance of the philosophy of the drama which has prevailed in modern Europe. Calderón,[16] in his religious *Autos*, has attempted to fulfil some of the high conditions of dramatic representation neglected by Shakespeare; such as the establishing a relation between the drama and religion, and the accommodating them to music and dancing; but he omits the observation of conditions still more important, and more is lost than gained by a substitution of the rigidly-defined and ever-repeated idealisms of a distorted superstition for the living impersonations of the truth of human passion.

But I digress.[17] — The connexion of scenic exhibitions with the improvement or corruption of the manners of men, has been universally recognized: in other words, the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form, has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct or habit. The corruption which has been imputed to the drama as an effect, begins, when the poetry employed in its constitution ends: I appeal to the history of manners whether the periods of the growth of the one and the decline of the other have not corresponded with an exactness equal to any example of moral cause and effect.

The drama at Athens, or wheresoever else it may have approached to its perfection, ever co-existed with the moral and intellectual greatness of the age. 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.[18] The

[16] See *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, l. 181 n.

[17] Here the MS. contains the following reference to Peacock's essay: "The author of the *Four Ages of Poetry* has prudently omitted to dispute on the effect of the drama upon life and manners. For, if I know the knight by the device of his shield, I have only to inscribe Philoctetes, or Agamemnon or Othello upon mine to put to flight the giant sophisms which have enchanted him, as the mirror of intolerable light, though on the arm of one the weakest of the Paladins, could blind and scatter whole armies of necromancers and pagans."

[18] Compare *On Love:* "We dimly see within our intellectual nature" etc.

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:[19] even crime is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion[20] 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. Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles. The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is as a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of these elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and

[19] This passage may be compared with Aristotle's doctrine of "catharsis": that the drama "purges" the feelings of the beholder by arousing "pity and terror." Exactly what he meant is still a matter of dispute; but it is doubtful if he envisaged so direct a moral benefit as Shelley evidently has in mind.

[20] Compare Burke's famous remark in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that because of the refinement of manners among the French aristocracy, "vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness." The resemblance, of course, is merely in the wording. — Again, Shelley is offering an interpretation of Greek literature that many critics would question. What is more important is that the doctrine stated in the following sentences, although it echoes what is said in the Preface to *The Cenci,* and although it rests on the fundamental Platonic teaching that men always err involuntarily, through ignorance alone, is inconsistent with the main tendency of Shelley's thought. Over and over Shelley tells us that

> it is our will
> That thus enchains us to permitted ill;

that human beings suffer because, knowing the better, they choose the worse. The point has been sufficiently stressed already; but compare the following passages from the present essay: "Men . . . had become insensible and selfish; their own will had become feeble, and yet they were its slaves"; "there is no want of knowledge respecting . . . what is wiser and better than what men now practice and endure. But we let *'I dare not* wait upon *I would,* like the poor cat in the adage.' "

endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall.

But in periods of the decay of social life, the drama sympathizes with that decay. Tragedy becomes a cold imitation of the form of the great masterpieces of antiquity, divested of all harmonious accompaniment of the kindred arts; and often the very form misunderstood, or a weak attempt to teach certain doctrines, which the writer considers as moral truths; and which are usually no more than specious flatteries of some gross vice or weakness, with which the author, in common with his auditors, are infected. Hence what has been called the classical and the domestic drama. Addison's *Cato* is a specimen of the one; and would it were not superfluous to cite examples of the other! To such purposes poetry cannot be made subservient. Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.[21] And thus we observe that all dramatic writings of this nature are unimaginative in a singular degree; they affect sentiment and passion, which, divested of imagination, are other names for caprice and appetite. The period in our own history of the grossest degradation of the drama is the reign of Charles II, when all forms in which poetry had been accustomed to be expressed became hymns to the triumph of kingly power over liberty and virtue. Milton stood alone illuminating an age unworthy of him.[22] At such periods the calculating principle pervades all the forms of dramatic exhibition, and poetry ceases to be expressed upon them. Comedy loses its ideal universality: wit succeeds to humour; we laugh from self-complacency and triumph, instead of pleasure; malignity, sarcasm, and contempt, succeed to sympathetic merriment; we hardly laugh, but we smile.[23] Obscenity, which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty in life, becomes, from the very veil which it assumes, more active if less

[21] Compare *Adonais*, l. 178.

[22] Compare *Adonais*, ll. 28–36.

[23] Cook quotes two passages from Peacock's *Memoirs* which give striking (but in this instance probably trustworthy) evidence of Shelley's dislike of comedy. His intense aversion to obscene humour of any kind is also well known.

disgusting: it is a monster for which the corruption of society for ever brings forth new food, which it devours in secret.

The drama being that form under which a greater number of modes of expression of poetry are susceptible of being combined than any other, the connexion of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form. And it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of a corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life.[24] But, as Machiavelli says of political institutions, that life may be preserved and renewed, if men should arise capable of bringing back the drama to its principles. And this is true with respect to poetry in its most extended sense: all language, institution and form, require not only to be produced but to be sustained: the office and character of a poet participates in the divine nature as regards providence, no less than as regards creation.

Civil war, the spoils of Asia, and the fatal predominance first of the Macedonian, and then of the Roman arms,[25] were so many symbols of the extinction or suspension of the creative faculty in Greece. The bucolic writers,[26] who found patronage under the lettered tyrants of Sicily and Egypt, were the latest representatives of its most glorious reign. Their poetry is intensely melodious; like the odour of the tuberose, it overcomes and sickens the spirit with excess of sweetness; whilst the poetry of the preceding age was as a meadow-gale of June, which mingles the fragrance of all the flowers of the field, and adds a quickening and harmonizing spirit of its own, which endows the sense with a power of sustaining its extreme delight. The bucolic and erotic delicacy in written poetry is correlative

[24] This thesis is one which the moralist who becomes a critic of art feels bound to maintain; yet historical fact seems hardly to bear it out. The writings of Ruskin offer perhaps the best illustration of the difficulty of the problem.

[25] Compare *Hellas*, l. 691.

[26] Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion [Cook].

with that softness in statuary, music, and the kindred arts, and even in manners and institutions, which distinguished the epoch to which I now refer. Nor is it the poetical faculty itself, or any misapplication of it, to which this want of harmony is to be imputed. An equal sensibility to the influence of the senses and the affections is to be found in the writings of Homer and Sophocles: the former, especially, has clothed sensual and pathetic images with irresistible attractions. Their superiority over these succeeding writers consists 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 a harmony of the union of all. It is not what the erotic poets have, but what they have not, in which their imperfection consists. It is not inasmuch as they were poets, but inasmuch as they were not poets, that they can be considered with any plausibility as connected with the corruption of their age. Had that corruption availed so as to extinguish in them the sensibility to pleasure, passion, and natural scenery, which is imputed to them as an imperfection, the last triumph of evil would have been achieved. For the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and, therefore, it is corruption. It begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core, and distributes itself thence as a paralysing venom, through the affections into the very appetites, until all become a torpid mass in which hardly sense survives. At the approach of such a period, poetry ever addresses itself to those faculties which are the last to be destroyed, and its voice is heard, like the footsteps of Astraea,[27] departing from the world. Poetry ever communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving: it is ever still the light of life; the source of whatever of beautiful or generous or true can have place in an evil time. It will readily be confessed that those among the luxurious citizens of Syracuse and Alexan-

[27] "Astraea," goddess of Justice. Cook compares Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I, 150–51: "Piety lies vanquished, and the virgin Astraea is the last of the heavenly deities to abandon the earth, now drenched in slaughter."

dria, who were delighted with the poems of Theocritus, were less cold, cruel, and sensual than the remnant of their tribe. But corruption must utterly have destroyed the fabric of human society before poetry can ever cease. The sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjoined, which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds, whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth, which at once connects, animates, and sustains the life of all.[28] It is the faculty which contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and of social renovation. And let us not circumscribe the effects of the bucolic and erotic poetry within the limits of the sensibility of those to whom it was addressed. They may have perceived the beauty of these immortal compositions, simply as fragments and isolated portions: those who are more finely organized, or born in a happier age, may recognize them as episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operationg thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world.

The same revolutions within a narrower sphere had place in ancient Rome; but the actions and forms of its social life never seem to have been perfectly saturated with the poetical element. The Romans appear to have considered the Greeks as the selectest treasuries of the selectest forms of manners and of nature, and to have abstained from creating in measured language, sculpture, music, or architecture, anything which might bear a particular relation to their own condition, whilst it should bear a general one to the universal constitution of the world. But we judge from partial evidence, and we judge perhaps partially. Ennius, Varro, Pacuvius, and Accius, all great poets, have been lost. Lucretius is in the highest, and Virgil in a very high sense, a creator. The chosen delicacy of the expressions of the latter, are as a mist of light which conceal from us the intense and exceeding truth of his conceptions of nature. Livy is instinct with poetry. Yet Horace, Catullus, Ovid, and generally the other great writers of the Virgilian age, saw man

[28] This figure is taken from Plato's *Ion*, 533, 536.

and nature in the mirror of Greece. The institutions also, and the religion of Rome were less poetical than those of Greece, as the shadow is less vivid than the substance. Hence poetry in Rome seemed to follow, rather than accompany, the perfection of political and domestic society. The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions; for whatever of beautiful, true, and majestic, they contained, could have sprung only from the faculty which creates the order in which they consist. The life of Camillus, the death of Regulus; the expectation of the senators, in their godlike state, of the victorious Gauls: the refusal of the republic to make peace with Hannibal, after the battle of Cannae, were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shows of life, to those who were at once the poets and the actors of these immortal dramas. The imagination beholding the beauty of this order, created it out of itself according to its own idea; the consequence was empire, and the reward everliving fame. These things are not the less poetry *quia carent vate sacro*.[29] They are the episodes of that cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men. The Past, like an inspired rhapsodist,[30] fills the theatre of everlasting generations with their harmony.

At length the ancient system of religion and manners had fulfilled the circle of its revolutions. And the world would have fallen into utter anarchy and darkness, but that there were found poets among the authors of the Christian and chivalric systems of manners and religion, who created forms of opinion and action never before conceived; which, copied into the imaginations of men, became as generals to the bewildered armies of their thoughts. It is foreign to the present purpose to touch upon the evil produced by these systems: except that we protest, on the ground of the principles already established, that no portion of it can be attributed to the poetry they contain.

It is probable that the poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon,

[29] "Because they lack a sacred poet." See Horace's *Odes*, IV, ix, 28.
[30] This phrase is also derived from the *Ion*.

and Isaiah, had produced a great effect upon the mind of Jesus and his disciples. The scattered fragments preserved to us by the biographers of this extraordinary person, are all instinct with the most vivid poetry. But his doctrines seem to have been quickly distorted. At a certain period after the prevalence of a system of opinions founded upon those promulgated by him, the three forms into which Plato had distributed the faculties of mind underwent a sort of apotheosis, and became the object of the worship of the civilized world.[31] Here it is to be confessed that "Light seems to thicken," and

> The crow makes wing to the rooky wood,
> Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
> And night's black agents to their preys do rouze.[32]

But mark how beautiful an order has sprung from the dust and blood of this fierce chaos! how the world, as from a resurrection, balancing itself on the golden wings of knowledge and of hope, has reassumed its yet unwearied flight into the heaven of time. Listen to the music, unheard by outward ears, which is as a ceaseless and invisible wind, nourishing its everlasting course with strength and swiftness.

The poetry in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, and the mythology and institutions of the Celtic[33] conquerors of the Roman empire, outlived the darkness and the convulsions connected with their growth and victory, and blended themselves into a new fabric of manners and opinion. It is an error to impute the ignorance

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[31] See the *Republic*, IV, 435, and the *Timaeus*, 69–71. The highest faculty (said in the *Timaeus* to be "immortal") is that through which the soul acquires "knowledge" (*i.e.*, true knowledge — of God and the eternal world of Forms or Ideas); the second is an irrational faculty variously described as "spirit," or "passion," and associated with the higher affections; the third is desire, or appetite, arising from man's physical nature. It is obvious that these three faculties are related to the three classes of persons in the ideal Republic (the guardians, the soldiers, and the workers) and their three characteristic virtues (wisdom, courage, and temperance). Exactly how Shelley considered these to correspond to the Christian Trinity is uncertain.

[32] See *Macbeth*, III, ii, 50–53. Shelley misquotes, as usual.

[33] See ***Lines Written among the Euganean Hills***, l. 152 n.

of the dark ages to the Christian doctrines[34] or the predominance of the Celtic nations. Whatever of evil their agencies may have contained sprang from the extinction of the poetical principle, connected with the progress of despotism and superstition. Men, from causes too intricate to be here discussed, had become insensible and selfish: their own will had become feeble, and yet they were its slaves, and thence the slaves of the will of others: lust, fear, avarice, cruelty, and fraud, characterized a race amongst whom no one was to be found capable of *creating* in form, language, or institution. The moral anomalies of such a state of society are not justly to be charged upon any class of events immediately connected with them, and those events are most entitled to our approbation which could dissolve it most expeditiously. It is unfortunate for those who cannot distinguish words from thoughts, that many of these anomalies have been incorporated into our popular religion.

It was not until the eleventh century that the effects of the poetry of the Christian and the chivalric systems began to manifest themselves. The principle of equality had been discovered and applied by Plato in his *Republic*,[35] as the theoretical rule of the mode in which the materials of pleasure and of power, produced by the common skill and labour of human beings, ought to be distributed among them. The limitations of this rule were asserted by him to be determined only by the sensibility of each, or the utility to result to all. Plato, following the doctrines of Timaeus and Pythagoras, taught also a moral and intellectual system of doctrine, comprehending at once the past, the present, and the future condition of man. Jesus Christ divulged the sacred and eternal truths contained in these views to mankind, and Christianity, in its abstract purity, became the exoteric expression of the esoteric doctrines of the

[34] As Gibbon had done in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This statement is in harmony with the relatively temperate attitude towards Christianity that appears in *Hellas* a few months later. — Peacock, also, in *The Four Ages of Poetry*, comments ironically on the fact that the rise of Christianity was accompanied by the decline of classical culture.

[35] Cook refers to the close of Book III.

poetry and wisdom of antiquity. The incorporation of the Celtic nations with the exhausted population of the south, impressed upon it the figure of the poetry existing in their mythology and institutions. The result was a sum of the action and reaction of all the causes included in it; for it may be assumed as a maxim that no nation or religion can supersede any other without incorporating into itself a portion of that which it supersedes.[36] The abolition of personal and domestic slavery, and the emancipation of women from a great part of the degrading restraints of antiquity, were among the consequences of these events.

The abolition of personal slavery is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive. The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love. Love became a religion, the idols of whose worship were ever present. It was as if the statues of Apollo and the Muses had been endowed with life and motion, and had walked forth among their worshippers; so that earth became peopled by the inhabitants of a diviner world.[37] The familiar appearance and proceedings of life became wonderful and heavenly, and a paradise was created as out of the wrecks of Eden.[38] And as this creation itself is poetry, so its creators were poets; and language was the instrument of their art: "Galeotto fù il libro, e chi lo scrisse."[39] The Provençal Trouveurs, or inventors, preceded Petrarch, whose 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: it were super-

[36] This passage suggests that in maturity Shelley was not so totally destitute of the historical sense as some critics, basing their judgment on *Queen Mab*, have asserted.

[37] Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iv, 153–63.

[38] Compare *Epipsychidion*, l. 423.

[39] "A Galeotto was the book, and he who wrote it." The quotation is from Dante's *Inferno*, V, 137, near the close of the famous story of Paulo and Francesca. The latter tells how they were led to fall in love by reading together the old French romance of *Lancelot du Lac*, in which a character Gallehaut acts as go-between for Lancelot and Guenever. The application, both in Dante and in Shelley, is obvious.

fluous to explain how 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. Dante understood the secret things of love even more than Petrarch. His *Vita Nuova* is an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language: it is the idealized history of that period, and those intervals of his life which were dedicated to love. His apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise, and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry. The acutest critics have justly reversed the judgement of the vulgar, and the order of the great acts of the "Divine Drama," in the measure of the admiration which they accord to the Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. The latter is a perpetual hymn of everlasting love. Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients, has been celebrated by a chorus of the greatest writers of the renovated world; and the music has penetrated the caverns of society, and its echoes still drown the dissonance of arms and superstition. At successive intervals, Ariosto, Tasso, Shakespeare, Spenser, Calderon, Rousseau, and the great writers of our own age, have celebrated the dominion of love, planting as it were trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory over sensuality and force. The true relation borne tc each other by the sexes into which human kind is distributed, has become less misunderstood; and if the error which confounded diversity with inequality of the powers of the two sexes has been partially recognized in the opinions and institutions of modern Europe, we owe this great benefit to the worship of which chivalry was the law, and poets the prophets.

The poetry of Dante may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world. The distorted notions of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealized, are merely the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised. 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. Dante at least appears to wish to mark the full extent of it by placing Riphaeus, whom Virgil calls *justissimus unus,* in Paradise,[40] and observing a most heretical caprice in his distribution of rewards and punishments. And Milton's poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system, of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support. Nothing[41] can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in *Paradise Lost.* It is a mistake to suppose that he could ever have been intended for the popular personification of evil.[42] 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; although redeemed by much that ennobles his defeat in one subdued, are marked by all that dishonours his conquest in the victor. Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And

[40] See the *Paradiso,* XX, 67–69, 118–24. Ripheus was a Trojan, whom Virgil describes as "the most just of all the Trojans, and the most observant of right" (*Aeneid,* II, 426–27).

[41] The passage beginning here and ending with "generations of mankind," near the end of the paragraph occurs in almost identical form in Shelley's fragmentary essay *On the Devil and Devils.* Only the sentence beginning "And this bold neglect" is added.

[42] If this statement implies that Milton *intended* to make Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost* and to represent him as morally superior to the Almighty, Shelley is surely wrong. If we wish to regard Satan as the hero (and the Almighty *is* an unsufferable person, as far as his relations with his adversary are concerned), then we must agree with William Blake that "Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it."

this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius. He mingled as it were the elements of human nature as colours upon a single pallet, and arranged them in the composition of his great picture according to the laws of epic truth; that is, according to the laws of that principle by which a series of actions of the external universe and of intelligent and ethical beings is calculated to excite the sympathy of succeeding generations of mankind. The *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* have conferred upon modern mythology a systematic form; and when change and time shall have added one more superstition to the mass of those which have arisen and decayed upon the earth, commentators will be learnedly employed in elucidating the religion of ancestral Europe, only not utterly forgotten because it will have been stamped with the eternity of genius.

Homer was the first and Dante the second epic poet: that is, the second poet, the series of whose creations bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge and sentiment and religion of the age in which he lived, and of the ages which followed it: developing itself in correspondence with their development. For Lucretius had limed the wings of his swift spirit in the dregs of the sensible world;[43] and Virgil, with a modesty that ill became his genius, had affected the fame of an imitator, even whilst he created anew all that he copied; and none among the flock of mock-birds, though their notes were sweet, Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus Calaber, Nonnus, Lucan, Statius, or Claudian,[44] have sought even to fulfil a single condition of epic truth. Milton was the third epic poet.[45] For if the title of epic in its highest sense be refused to the *Aeneid*, still

[43] Shelley is apparently condemning the materialism of Lucretius, who was a believer in the Epicurean philosophy.

[44] The first three of these poets were Greek, the last three Roman. Apollonius Rhodius belongs to the third century B.C., Quintus Calaber (usually known as Quintus Smyrnaeus) and Nonnus to the beginning of the fifth century A.D. Concerning Lucan, see *Adonais*, l. 404 n. In 1815 Shelley wrote to Hogg that he considered Lucan's *Pharsalia* better than Virgil. Statius also lived in the first century A.D. Claudian's work dates from the end of the fourth century A.D.

[45] Compare *Adonais*, l. 36.

less can it be conceded to the *Orlando Furioso*, the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, the *Lusiad*,[46] or the *Fairy Queen*.

Dante and Milton were both deeply penetrated with the ancient religion of the civilized world; and its spirit exists in their poetry probably in the same proportion as its forms survived in the unreformed worship of modern Europe. The one preceded and the other followed the Reformation at almost equal intervals. Dante was the first religious reformer, and Luther surpassed him rather in the rudeness and acrimony, than in the boldness of his censures of papal usurpation. Dante was the first awakener of entranced Europe; he created a language, in itself music and persuasion, out of a chaos of inharmonious barbarisms. He was the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning; the Lucifer of that starry flock which in the thirteenth century shone forth from republican Italy, as from a heaven, into the darkness of the benighted world. His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight.

The age immediately succeeding to that of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, was characterized by a revival of painting, sculpture, music, and architecture. Chaucer caught the sacred inspiration, and the superstructure of English literature is based upon the materials of Italian invention.

[46] These three poems, all written during the sixteenth century, are the respective masterpieces of the Italian poets Ariosto and Tasso and the Portuguese poet Camoëns. G. E. Woodberry has called the *Lusiad* the "only truly modern epic."

But let us not be betrayed from a defence into a critical history of poetry and its influence on society. Be it enough to have pointed out the effects of poets, in the large and true sense of the word, upon their own and all succeeding times.[47]

But poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists,[48] on another plea. It is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful. Let us examine as the grounds of this distinction, what is here meant by utility. Pleasure or good, in a general sense, is that which the consciousness of a sensitive and intelligent being seeks, and in which, when found, it acquiesces. There are two kinds of pleasure, one durable, universal and permanent; the other transitory and particular. Utility may either express the means of producing the former or the latter. In the former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful. But a narrower meaning may be assigned to the word utility, confining it to express that which banishes[49] the importunity of the wants of our animal nature, the surrounding men with security of life, the dispersing the grosser delusions of superstition, and the conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance among men as may consist with the motives of personal advantage.

Undoubtedly the promoters of utility, in this limited sense, have their appointed office in society. They follow the footsteps of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life. They make space, and give time. Their exertions are of the highest value, so long as they confine their administration of the concerns of the inferior powers of our

[47] Here the MS. adds: "and to revert to the partial instance cited as illustration of an opinion the reverse of that attempted to be established in the Four Ages of Poetry."

[48] By "mechanists" Shelley means "inventors" or "mechanical engineers." This is the beginning of the third main section of the essay.

[49] In the MS. the first part of this sentence reads: "But the meaning in which the Author of the Four Ages of Poetry seems to have employed the word utility is the narrower one of banishing" etc. — Shelley's definition of "utility" describes exactly the aims of William Godwin in *Political Justice*.

nature within the limits due to the superior ones. But whilst the sceptic destroys gross superstitions, let him spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men. Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labour, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. They have exemplified the saying, "To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away." [50] The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis [51] of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty.

It is difficult to define pleasure in its highest sense; the definition involving a number of apparent paradoxes. For, from an inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature, the pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior portions of our being. Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of the pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself.[52] And hence the saying, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of mirth." [53] Not that this highest species of pleasure is necessarily linked with pain. The delight of love and friendship, the ecstasy of the admiration of nature, the joy of the perception

[50] See Matthew 25:29. The quotation is inexact.

[51] "Scylla and Charybdis," in ancient myth, a horrible monster and a vast whirlpool, located on opposite sides of the strait between Italy and Sicily. See the *Odyssey*, Book XII.

[52] Compare *To a Skylark*, l. 90.

[53] See Ecclesiastes 7:2. Shelley misquotes again.

and still more of the creation of poetry, is often wholly unalloyed.

The production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers.

The exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau,[54] and their disciples, in favour of oppressed and deluded humanity, are entitled to the gratitude of mankind. Yet it is easy to calculate the degree of moral and intellectual improvement which the world would have exhibited, had they never lived.[55] A little more nonsense would have been talked for a century or two; and perhaps a few more men, women, and children, burnt as heretics. We might not at this moment have been congratulating each other on the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain.[56] But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderón, Lord Bacon, nor Milton, had ever existed; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born; if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated; if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place; if no monuments of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us; and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief. The human mind could never, except by the intervention of these excitements, have been awakened to the invention of the grosser sciences, and that application of analytical reason-

[54] Although Rousseau has been thus classed, he was essentially a poet. The others, even Voltaire, were mere reasoners [Shelley's note].

[55] This and the following sentence are an almost startling recantation of the revolutionary creed which inspired not only *Queen Mab* but also *The Revolt of Islam*. But of course the acceptance of this long-range view does not imply indifference to present evils (as is sufficiently evident from the last paragraph but one); Shelley has merely changed his opinion as to how those evils can be most effectively attacked. Once he had thought to remove them by radical changes in laws, customs, and institutions; now he has learned that (in the words of G. Lowes Dickinson) "to change institutions without changing hearts is idle."

[56] The Spanish Inquisition, first abolished in 1808, had been revived by the vicious and despotic Ferdinand VII; the revolution of 1820 (see *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, l. 175 n.) again forced its suppression.

ing to the aberrations of society, which it is now attempted to exalt over the direct expression of the inventive and creative faculty itself.

We have more moral, political and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes. There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least, what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. But we let *"I dare not* wait upon *I would,* like the poor cat in the adage."[57] 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. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam? Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and the Mammon of the world.

The functions of the poetical faculty are two-fold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce

[57] See *Macbeth,* I, vii, 44–45.

and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good.[58] The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it.

Poetry[59] 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. It is at the same time the root and the blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of things; it is as the odour and the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it, as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship — what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave — and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the

[58] Compare Sidney's *Defence of Poesy:* "I conclude, therefore, that he [the poet] excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserves to be called and accounted good. . . . For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it."

[59] With the first part of this paragraph compare Wordsworth's *Preface:* "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. . . . Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge — it is as immortal as the heart of man."

will.[60] A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it be not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connexion of the spaces between their suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by a limitedness of the poetical faculty itself; for Milton conceived the *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions. We have his own authority also for the muse having "dictated" to him the "unpremeditated song."[61] And let this be an answer to those who would allege the fifty-six various readings of the first line of the *Orlando*

[60] The following passage perhaps owes something to Plato's *Ion*, 533–34; but Shelley is evidently giving an account of his own experience in creating poetry. Compare also the passage in the *Essay on Christianity* beginning "We live and move and think" etc. — Whether such an experience is general among poets has been the subject of some disagreement among critics. Shelley's position is no doubt extreme; on the other hand (despite the pretensions of some critics and psychologists), poetic genius is inexplicable, and the process by which great poetry is created remains a mystery.

[61] See *Paradise Lost*, IX, 21–24:

> Of my celestial Patroness, who deigns
> Her nightly visitation unimplored,
> And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse.

Compare also *To A Skylark*, l. 5.

Furioso. Compositions so produced are to poetry what mosaic is to painting. This instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts; a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship, is essentially linked with such emotions; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe. Poets are not only subject to these experiences as spirits of the most refined organization, but they can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world; 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. Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide — abide, because there is no

portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

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; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty,[62] which is the spirit of its forms.

All things exist as they are perceived;[63] at least in relation to the percipient. "The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."[64] But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being.[65] It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It

[62] Compare *The Witch of Atlas*, l. 571.

[63] The same statement is made in *On Life*, but without the qualifying phrase.

[64] Quoted (almost correctly) from *Paradise Lost*, I, 254–55.

[65] Compare *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV, where Coleridge speaks of "awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

justifies that bold and true word of Tasso: *Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.*[66]

A poet, as he is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men. As to his glory, let time be challenged to declare whether the fame of any other institutor of human life be comparable to that of a poet. That he is the wisest, the happiest, and the best, inasmuch as he is a poet, is equally incontrovertible: the greatest poets have been men of the most spotless virtue, of the most consummate prudence, and, if we would look into the interior of their lives, the most fortunate of men: [67] and the exceptions, as they regard those who possessed the poetic faculty in a high yet inferior degree, will be found on consideration to confine rather than destroy the rule. Let us for a moment stoop to the arbitration of popular breath, and usurping and uniting in our own persons the incompatible characters of accuser, witness, judge, and executioner, let us decide without trial, testimony, or form, that certain motives of those who are "there sitting where we dare not soar," [68] are reprehensible. Let us assume that Homer was a drunkard, that Virgil was a flatterer, that Horace was a coward, that Tasso was a madman,

[66] A favorite quotation of Shelley's which also occurs in the essay *On Life* and in a letter to Peacock. It may be translated: "No one deserves the name of Creator save God and the Poet."

[67] That the power to fashion great works of art is always accompanied by moral excellence is a thesis no less difficult to prove when applied to individuals than when applied to whole societies. We find Shelley himself on one occasion exclaiming in regard to Wordsworth: "That such a man should be such a poet!" And the thesis is considerably qualified in the concluding paragraph of the essay. It is, however, in harmony with Shelley's views concerning the source and nature of poetry.—It will be observed that this is a far different conception from that which often occurs in Shelley's verse, where the poet is represented as a frail, unhappy, hypersensitive outcast from society. I will venture to suggest that the former corresponds more nearly than the latter to Shelley's own life and character.

[68] See *Paradise Lost*, IV, 828–29:

> Ye knew me once no mate
> For you, there sitting where ye durst not soar!

Compare *Adonais*, l. 337.

that Lord Bacon was a peculator, that Raphael was a libertine, that Spenser was a poet laureate.[69] It is inconsistent with this division of our subject to cite living poets, but posterity has done ample justice to the great names now referred to. Their errors have been weighed and found to have been dust in the balance; if their sins "were as scarlet, they are now white as snow": they have been washed in the blood of the mediator and redeemer, Time. Observe in what a ludicrous chaos the imputations of real or fictitious crime have been confused in the contemporary calumnies against poetry and poets; consider how little is, as it appears — or appears, as it is; look to your own motives, and judge not, lest ye be judged.[70]

Poetry, as has been said, differs in this respect from logic, that it is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence have no necessary connexion with consciousness or will. It is presumptuous to determine that these are the necessary conditions of all mental causation, when mental effects are experienced unsusceptible of being referred to them. The frequent recurrence of the poetical power, it is obvious to suppose, may produce in the mind a habit of order and harmony correlative with its own nature and with its effects upon other minds. But in the intervals of inspiration, and they may be frequent without being durable, a poet becomes a man, and is abandoned to the sudden reflux of the influences under which others habitually live. But as he is more delicately organized than other men, and sensible to pain and pleasure, both his own and that of others, in a degree unknown to them, he will avoid the one and pursue the other with an ardour proportioned to this difference. And he renders himself obnoxious to calumny, when he neglects to

[69] The Poet Laureate at this time was Robert Southey, whom Byron and Shelley regarded as a traitor to the cause of liberty. It was he, nevertheless, who made the office again respected, after a period during which it had become an object of general contempt.

[70] The preceding passage obviously has reference to the malicious attacks of the reviewers upon Shelley's own character. It is also interesting for the number of Biblical allusions, of which Cook presents the following list: Daniel 5:27; Isaiah 1:18 and 40:15; Revelation 7:14; Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24; and Matthew 7:1.

observe the circumstances under which these objects of universal pursuit and flight have disguised themselves in one another's garments.

But there is nothing necessarily evil in this error, and thus cruelty, envy, revenge, avarice, and the passions purely evil, have never formed any portion of the popular imputations on the lives of poets.

I have thought it most favourable to the cause of truth to set down these remarks according to the order in which they were suggested to my mind, by a consideration of the subject itself, instead of observing [71] the formality of a polemical reply; but if the view which they contain be just, they will be found to involve a refutation of the arguers against [72] poetry, so far at least as regards the first division of the subject. I can readily conjecture what should have moved the gall of some learned and intelligent writers who quarrel with certain versifiers; I confess myself, like them,[73] unwilling to be stunned by the Theseids of the hoarse Codri [74] of the day. Bavius and Maevius undoubtedly are, as they ever were, insufferable persons. But it belongs to a philosophical critic to distinguish rather than confound.

The first part of these remarks has related to poetry in its elements and principles; and it has been shown, as well as the narrow limits assigned them would permit, that what is called poetry, in a restricted sense, has 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.

The second part [75] will have for its object an application of

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[71] Instead of "observing" the MS. has "following that of the treatise which excited me to make them public. Thus although devoid of" etc.

[72] For "arguers against" the MS. has "Four Ages of" etc.

[73] In the MS. this sentence reads "the gall of the learned and intelligent author of that paper, I confess myself, like him" etc.

[74] "Codrus," a writer attacked by Juvenal at the beginning of his *First Satire*. "Bavius and Maevius," mentioned together by Virgil in the *Third Eclogue*, came to be regarded as the type of all dull and ill-tempered poetasters.

[75] This was never written.

these principles to the present state of the cultivation of poetry, and a defence of the attempt to idealize the modern forms of manners and opinion, and compel them into a subordination to the imaginative and creative faculty. For the literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will, has arisen as it were from a new birth. In spite of the low-thoughted envy which would undervalue contemporary merit, our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty. The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power resides may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with that spirit of good of which they are the ministers. But even whilst they deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve, the power which is seated on the throne of their own soul. It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations; for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

LETTERS

[*Editor's Note.* — The following selection of letters is intended primarily to reveal Shelley's character during his maturity, and to show that he was not the frail, effeminate, or wraith-like creature that he is sometimes thought to have been; not an "ineffectual angel," nor an "eternal child," nor an "inspired idiot," but a manly, many-sided, self-mastered, and intensely human person. That the letters may reflect as accurately as possible the writer's character, they are printed according to the text of the Julian Edition, the editors of which aimed at reproducing exactly the form of the original manuscripts where these were available. The eccentric or careless spelling, punctuation, and syntax are Shelley's own.]

I. TO THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK[1]

Milan,
April 20, 1818.[2]

My dear Peacock,

I had no conception that the distance between us, measured by time in respect of letters, was so great. I have but just received yours dated the 2nd — and when you will receive mine written from this city somewhat later than the same date, I cannot know. I am sorry to hear that you have been obliged

[1] Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866) was one of Shelley's few intimate friends in England and the recipient of some of his finest letters from Switzerland and Italy, as well as the inspirer of *A Defence of Poetry*, as explained in the note to that work. His *Memoirs of Shelley*, written late in life, are one of the most important sources of information regarding the poet's life from 1812 to 1818; but Peacock's detached and ironic attitude towards life prevented him from sympathizing with many of Shelley's most characteristic beliefs and ideals. He is now remembered chiefly for his novels, in one of which, *Nightmare Abbey*, Shelley was delighted to recognize a caricature of himself as Scythrop.

[2] Shelley arrived in Italy early in April, 1818.

to remain at Marlow;[3] a certain degree of society being almost a necessity of life, particularly as we are not to see you this summer in Italy. But this, I suppose, must be as it is. I often revisit Marlow in thought. The curse of this life is, that whatever is once known, can never be unknown. You inhabit a spot, which before you inhabit it, is as indifferent to you as any other spot upon earth, and when, persuaded by some necessity, you think to leave it, you leave it not; it clings to you and with memories of things, which, in your experience of them, gave no such promise, revenges your desertion. Time flows on, places are changed; friends who were with us, are no longer with us; but what had been seems yet to be, but barren and stripped of life. See, I have sent you a study for Night Mare Abbey.

Since I last wrote to you we have been to Como, looking for a house. This lake exceeds anything I ever beheld in beauty, with the exception of the arbutus islands of Killarney. It is long and narrow, and has the appearance of a mighty river winding among the mountains and the forests. We sailed from the town of Como to a tract of country called the Tremezina, and saw the various aspects presented by that part of the lake. The mountains between Como and that village, or rather cluster of villages, are covered on high with chestnut forests (the eating chestnuts, on which the inhabitants of the country subsist in time of scarcity), which sometimes descend to the very verge of the lake overhanging it with their hoary branches. But usually the immediate border of this shore is composed of laurel-trees, and bay, and myrtle, and wild fig-trees, and olives which grow in the crevices of the rocks, and overhang the caverns, and shadow the deep glens, which are filled with the flashing light of the waterfalls. Other flowering shrubs, which I cannot name, grow there also. On high, the towers of village churches are seen white among the dark forests. Beyond, on the opposite shore, which faces the south, the mountains descend less precipitously to the lake, and al-

[3] The suburb of London where Shelley had lived during his last year in England.

though they are much higher, and some covered with perpetual snow, there intervenes between them and the lake a range of lower hills, which have glens and rifts opening to the other, such as I should fancy the *abysses* of Ida or Parnassus.[4] Here are plantations of olive, and orange, and lemon trees, which are now so loaded with fruit, that there is more fruit than leaves — and vineyards. This shore of the lake is one continued village, and the Milanese nobility have their villas here. The union of culture and the untameable profusion and loveliness of nature is here so close, that the line where they are divided can hardly be discovered. But the finest scenery is that of the Villa Pliniana so called from a fountain which ebbs and flows every three hours described by the younger Pliny[5] which is in the courtyard. This house which was once a magnificent palace, and is now half in ruins, we are endeavouring to procure. It is built upon terraces *raised from* the bottom of the lake, together with its garden, at the foot of a semicircular precipice, overshadowed by profound forests of chestnut. The scene from the colonnade is the most extraordinary at once, and the most lovely that eye ever beheld. On one side is the mountain, and immediately over you are clusters of cypress trees, of an astonishing height which seem to pierce the sky. Above you, from among the clouds, as it were, descends a waterfall of immense size, broken by the woody rocks into a thousand channels to the lake. On the other side is seen the blue extent of the lake and the mountains, speckled with sails and spires. The apartments of the Pliniana are immensely large, but ill furnished and antique. The terraces, which overlook the lake, and conduct under the shade of such immense laurel-trees as deserve the epithet of Pythian, are most delightful. We staid at Como two days, and have now returned to Milan, waiting the issue of our negotiation about a house. Como is only 6 leagues from Milan, and its mountains are seen from the cathedral. This cathedral is a most astonishing work of art. It is built of white marble,

[4] Mountains in Asia Minor and Greece, respectively, famous in Greek mythology.

[5] Roman author, 62?–114?

and cut into pinnacles of immense height, and the utmost delicacy of workmanship, and loaded with sculpture. The effect of it, piercing the solid blue with those groups of dazzling spires, relieved by the serene depth of this Italian Heaven, or by moonlight when the stars seem gathered among those clustered shapes, is beyond anything I had imagined architecture capable of producing. The interior, tho very sublime, is of a more earthly character, and with its stained glass and massy granite columns overloaded with antique figures, and the silver lamps, that burn for ever under the canopy of black cloth beside the brazen altar and the marble fretwork of the dome, give it the aspect of some gorgeous sepulchre. There is one solitary spot among these aisles, behind the altar, where the light of day is dim and yellow under the storied window, which I have chosen to visit, and read Dante there.[6]

. . . . . .

Adieu —
Mary and Clare send their kindest remembrances —
Your affectionate friend
P. B. S.

II. TO JOHN KEATS[1]

(HAMPSTEAD)

Pisa,
27 July, 1820.

My dear Keats,

I hear with great pain the dangerous accident that you have undergone, and Mr. Gisborne who gives me the account of it, adds that you continue to wear a consumptive appearance.

[6] The remainder of the letter is omitted.

[1] Although the name of John Keats (1795–1821) is so often linked with that of Shelley, the two poets were not intimate friends; Keats shied off, whether, as Leigh Hunt suggests, because his pride exaggerated their difference in birth, or whether, as one of his letters indicates, he

This consumption is a disease particularly fond of people who write such good verses as you have done, and with the assistance of an English winter it can often indulge its selection; — I do not think that young and amiable poets are at all bound to gratify its taste; they have entered into no bond with the Muses to that effect. But seriously (for I am joking on what I am very anxious about) I think you would do well to pass the winter after so tremendous an accident, in Italy, and if you think it as necessary as I do so long as you could [find] Pisa or its neighborhood agreeable to you, Mrs. Shelley unites with myself in urging the request, that you would take up your residence with us. You might come by sea to Leghorn (France is not worth seeing, and the sea is particularly good for weak lungs), which is within a few miles of us. You ought at all events, to see Italy, and your health, which I suggest as a motive, might be an excuse to you. I spare declamation about the statues, and the paintings, and the ruins — and what is a greater piece of forbearance — about the mountains streams and the fields, the colours of the sky, and the sky itself.

I have lately read your "Endymion" again and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This, people in general will not endure, and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will.

I always tell Ollier to send you copies of my books. — "Prometheus Unbound" I imagine you will receive nearly at the same

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feared Shelley's influence on his poetry. Shelley, on the other hand, was always cordial, although he gave unmixed praise to none of Keats's poems except *Hyperion*. (See the Introduction to *Adonais*.) — Keats acknowledged this letter, and Shelley continued to look forward to his arrival, writing to Marianne Hunt on November 11, 1820: "Where is Keats now? I am anxiously expecting him in Italy, when I shall take care to bestow every possible attention on him. I consider his a most valuable life, and I am deeply interested in his safety. I intend to be the physician both of his body and his soul, to keep the one warm, and to teach the other Greek and Spanish. I am aware, indeed, in part, that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me; and this is an additional motive, and will be an added pleasure." Keats lived only a few months after reaching Italy, however, and the poets did not meet again.

time with this letter. "The Cenci" I hope you have already received — it was studiously composed in a different style

"Below the *good* how far? but far above the *great.*"[2]

In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism; I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan.

Whether you remain in England, or journey to Italy, — believe that you carry with you my anxious wishes for your health, happiness and success wherever you are, or whatever you undertake, and that I am, yours sincerely,

P. B. Shelley.

III. TO WILLIAM GODWIN[1]

Pisa,
August 7, 1820.

Sir,

The purport of this letter is to inform you that I cannot comply with the request contained in yours dated July 21st, and that you ought not to depend on me for any further pecuniary assistance at the present moment. — My affairs are in a state of the most complicated embarrassment: added to which I am surrounded by circumstances in which any diminution of my very limited resources might involve me in personal peril. I fear that you and I are not on such terms as to justify me in exposing to you the actual state of my delicate and emergent situation which the most sacred considerations imperiously require me to conceal from Mary; be it sufficient, without entering into the subject now present to my mind, to

[2] This quotation is the last line of Gray's *The Progress of Poesy.* Shelley misquotes "below" for "beneath," and adds the italics.

[1] For Shelley's relations with William Godwin (1756–1836), see the Introduction. In early life Godwin seems to have possessed many admirable traits, but most of these had apparently disappeared by the time of Shelley's elopement with his daughter. — Finding Shelley impervious to his pleas for money, he at last began addressing his whining importunities, mixed with bitter reproaches, to Mary. At this point even Shelley's forbearance gave way.

state the question in such a manner that any entire stranger who should chance to peruse this letter might without reference to these circumstances perceive that I am justified in withholding my assent to your request. I *cannot* comply, but it will be an additional consolation to me to have shown that I ought not.

I have given you within a few years the amount of a considerable fortune, and have destituted myself for the purpose of realising it of nearly four times the amount. Except for the *goodwill* which this transaction seems to have produced between you and me, this money, for any advantage it ever conferred on you, might as well have been thrown into the seas. Had I kept in my own hands this £4,000 or £5,000 and administered it in trust for your permanent advantage, I should have been indeed your benefactor. The error, however, was greater in the man of mature years, extensive experience, and penetrating intellect than in the crude and impetuous boy. Such an error is seldom committed twice.

You tell me that I promised to give you £500 out of my income of the present year. Never, certainly. How is it possible that you should assert such a mistake? I might have said I could, or that I would if I thought it necessary. I might have been so foolish as to say this; but I must have been mad to have promised what you allege. Thus much at once on the subject of promises. I never but in one instance promised anything unconditionally. And the conditions were, first, that I should *be able* to perform my engagement; and, secondly, that the great sacrifices at which alone it could ever be performed by me should be made available to some adequate and decisive advantage to result to you; such for instance as the compromise of the suit now pending. Had Mr. Gisborne[2] advanced the money, according to the terms proposed by me, its application to this purpose alone would have been secured.

In October, 1819, you wrote to say that the verdict of a jury had been obtained against you for something between £600 and £2,000; and that if you had £500 you believed that you could compromise the claim founded upon that verdict. My

[2] See Letter IX, Note 1.

first impulse was — that I would do everything I could to serve you; as much as that I certainly expressed under a belief of the emergency of your situation. But in fact I could do nothing. A year passes over, and after the decision in a court of common law, the affair remains stationary. Nothing is more unlikely than that, if your opponents can show a legal claim to this ever-increasing sum, they will compromise that claim for a fourth of the whole amount which has accrued. Nothing is more absurd than to pay the sum in question, if they cannot show this legal claim, with a reserve of a liability for the entire sum to those claimants in whose favour the property may be finally adjudged. The affair seems to me a mass of improbabilities and absurdities. You will[3] urge the request of £500. You would take anything in the shape of it that would compel me to make the great sacrifices (if indeed *now* it be not impossible) of paying it from my income, without — you must allow me to say — a due regard to the proportion borne by your accommodation to my immediate loss or even your own ultimate advantage. If you had bills on my income for the sum how would you procure money on them? My credit, except among those friends from whom I never will ask a pecuniary favour, certainly would not suffice to raise it, and your own name is worth as little or less in the money market. That my bills would tell for something, I do not doubt. And when you had procured this money — this £400 — what would be done with it? What is become of the £100 already advanced by Horace Smith?[4] Put your hand upon your heart and tell me where it is. In a letter written *after* your receipt of this sum you state with the most circumlocutory force of expression, and as if you were anxious to leave yourself no outlet for escape, that you have never received a single farthing. This, of course, was only meant for immediate effect, and not for the purpose of ultimately leading into error, and is only a part of that system you pursue

[3] So in the Julian Edition. The earlier editions have *still*, which certainly seems to make better sense.

[4] See Letter XII, Note 1.

of sacrificing all interests to the present one. Suppose after this I were to involve myself in the chance of destruction, to defraud my creditors of what is justly theirs, to withhold their due from those to whom I am the only source of happiness and misery, and send you those bills. The weakness and wickedness of my conduct would admit of some palliation if the money they produced were reserved for the attempt at compromise and re-transmitted to me the moment that attempt, as it must, should fail. Sir Philip Sidney, when dying, and consumed with thirst, gave the helmet of water which was brought to him to the wounded soldier who stood beside him. It would not have been generosity but folly had he poured it on the ground, as you would that I should the wrecks of my once prosperous fortune.

So much for the benefit which you would derive from my concession of your request. The evils — exclusive of that circumstance which makes concession absolutely impossible — were to me immense. I have creditors whose claims amount nearly to £2,000: some of whom are exceedingly importunate; others suffering perhaps more than you suffer, from the delays which my impoverished condition and limited income have compelled me to assign, others threatening to institute a legal process against me, which, not to speak of the ruinous expense connected with it, would expose my name to an obloquy from which you must excuse me if I endeavour to preserve it. Amongst these creditors is the annuitant from whom I procured money to meet Hogan's claim on you, at 25 per cent., and the interest on which you pledged yourself, but have neglected, to pay. To all, or any one of these objects the excess of my income over my expenditure is most justly due.

In any case such reverse as bankruptcy happening to yourself, a circumstance which sometimes surprises the most prosperous concern, and infinitely probable in an embarrassed business conducted by a person wholly ignorant of trade, how would you regret my folly in not having been now severely just?

If you are sincere with me on this subject, why instead of seeking to plunge one person already half ruined for your sake

into deeper ruin, do you not procure the £400 by your own active powers? A person of your extraordinary accomplishments might easily obtain from the booksellers for the promise of a novel, a sum exceeding this amount. Your answer to Malthus[5] would sell at least for £400. Half the care and thought bestowed upon this honourable exertion of the highest faculties of our nature would have rewarded you more largely than dependence on a person whose precarious situation and ruined fortunes make dependence a curse to both.

Mary is now giving suck to her infant, in whose life, after the frightful events of the last two years,[6] her own seems wholly to be bound up. Your letters from their style and spirit (such is your erroneous notion of taste) never fail to produce an appalling effect on her frame. On one occasion agitation of mind produced through her a disorder in the child, similar to that which destroyed our little girl two years ago. The disorder was prolonged by the alarm which it occasioned, until by the utmost efforts of medical skill and care it was restored to health. On that occasion Mary at my request authorised me to intercept such letters or information as I might judge likely to disturb her mind. That discretion I have exercised with the letter to which this is a reply. The correspondence, therefore, rests between you and me, if you should consider any further discussion of a similar nature with that in which you have lately been engaged with Mary necessary after the full explanation which I have given of my views, and the unalterable decision which I have pronounced. Nor must the correspondence with your daughter on a similar subject be renewed. It was even wholly improper and might lead to serious imputations against both herself and you, which it is important for her honour as well as for yours that I should not only repel but prevent. She has not, nor ought she to have, the disposal of money; if she had, poor thing, she would give it all to you.

Such a father (I mean a man of such high genius) can be at no loss to find subjects on which to address such a daughter.

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[5] See Letter IX, Note 7.

[6] The death of Shelley's and Mary's two children, William and Clara.

Do not let me be thought to dictate, but I can only convey to her such letters as are consistent with her peace to read, such as you once proposed to write, containing topics, such as you once proposed to discuss, of literary or philosophical interest. I cannot consent to disturb her quiet, and my own, by placing an apple of discord in her hand. The mode in which I must resent any attempt to contravene this arrangement is simple; it will be such alone as those of my friends may recommend whose knowledge of the world will add authority to their decision. I had thought of inclosing this letter to one of those friends, and requesting him to call on you with it; but I considered that I might wrong you in supposing that you would be capable of disturbing the domestic peace of your daughter and her husband for the purpose of revenging his withholding of money. I content myself with preserving a copy of this letter. I should be sorry to have said anything that wears the appearance of a threat; but imperious events compel one to foretell the consequences of your attempting to agitate her mind. I need not tell you that the neglecting entirely to write to your daughter from the moment that nothing could be gained by it would admit of but one interpretation.

You may address me as usual. There are two modes in which you may understand the concluding part of my letter; and on the choice between them depends as well the nature of our future intercourse as the judgement which I must form with respect to some important circumstances of that which has already passed. I will believe that it must be such as to render the precautions which I have taken quite unnecessary; and that persuasion allow me to express the hope that you will write to me from time to time a frank account of the state of your affairs, and that you will consider my will to assist you as only limited by my power.[7]

. . . . . .

Dear Godwin,
Yours very sincerely,
P. B. SHELLEY.

[7] A few brief comments on unrelated matters are omitted.

IV. TO CLARA MARY JANE CLAIRMONT[1]

Pisa, Tuesday Evening,
[January 16], 1821.

My dear Clare,

Many thanks for your kind and tender letter which Mrs. M[ason] gave me to-day, several days I believe after it had arrived. — I had been very ill, and had not seen her for a fortnight. I had several times been going to write to you, to request you to love me better than you do — when meanwhile your letter arrives. I shall punctually follow all such portions of the advice it contains which are practicable.

I write to-night that I may not seem to neglect you, though I have little time: I am delighted to hear of your recovered health — may I entreat you to be cautious in keeping it? Mine is far better than it has been; and the *relapse* which I now suffer into a state of ease from one of pain, is attended with such an excessive susceptibility of nature, that I suffer equally from pleasure and from pain. You will ask me naturally enough *where I* find any pleasure? The wind, the light, the air, the smell of a flower affects me with violent emotions. There needs no catalogue of the causes of pain.

I see Emily[2] sometimes; and whether her presence is the source of pain or pleasure to me, I am equally ill-fated in both. I am deeply interested in her destiny, and that interest can in no manner influence it. She is not, however, insensible to my

[1] Clara Mary Jane Clairmont (1798–1879), known in the Shelley circle as Clare, was the daughter of Godwin's second wife by her first husband. She accompanied Shelley and Mary on their elopement in 1814, and thenceforward he assumed more or less responsibility for her welfare. The intrigue which she practically forced on Byron in 1816, and which resulted in the birth of a daughter, Allegra, together with her inability to get on well with Mary, made the responsibility at times a source of much uneasiness to Shelley, but it is clear that he liked her and derived pleasure from her friendship. (The charge, made — and later disavowed — by a discharged servant girl, that Clare was Shelley's mistress, has never been supported by any respectable evidence, although it is still repeated.)

[2] Emilia Viviani. See the Introduction to *Epipsychidion*.

sympathy, and she counts it among her alleviations. As much comfort as she receives from my attachment to her, *I lose*.[3]

There is no reason that you should fear any mixture of that which you call *love*. My conception of Emilia's talents augments every day. Her moral nature is fine — but not above circumstances — yet I think her tender and true — which is always something. How many are only one of these things at a time!

So much for sentiment and ethics. The Williamses[4] are come, and Mrs. W. dined here to-day, an extremely pretty and gentle woman, apparently not *very* clever. I like her very much. I have only seen her for an hour, but I will tell you more another time. Mary will write you sheets of gossip. I have not seen Mr. W. The Greek expedition appears to be broken up. No news of any kind that I know of.

You delight me with your progress in German, in spite of the reproach which accompanies the account of it. Occupy, amuse, instruct, multiply yourself and your faculties — and defy the foul fiend. I wish to Heaven, my dear girl, that *I* could be of any avail to add to your pleasures or diminish your pain — how ardently you cannot know; you only know, as you frequently take care to tell me, how vainly. I can do you no other good than in keeping up the unnatural connection between this feeble mass of diseases and infirmities and the vapid and weary spirit doomed to drag it through the world [here some words are blotted out by Miss Clairmont]. I took up the pen for an instant only to thank you, — and, if you will, to kiss you for your kind attention to me, and I find I have written in ill spirits, which may infect you. Let them not do so! I will write again to-morrow. Meanwhile, yours most tenderly,

S.

[3] Perhaps Shelley is referring to Mary's jealousy of Emilia, which comes out with rather painful clearness in some of Mary's letters of a little later date.

[4] Edward and Jane Williams were intimate friends of the Shelleys during the last year of the poet's life. Jane was the recipient of some of his loveliest lyrics. Williams died with him when their boat was capsized in the Bay of Lerici.

V. TO THE EDITOR OF *THE EXAMINER*[1]

Pisa,
June 22, 1821.

Sir,

Having heard that a poem, entitled "Queen Mab," has been surreptitiously published in London, and that legal proceedings have been instituted against the publisher, I request the favour of your insertion of the following explanation of the affair as it relates to me.

A poem, entitled "Queen Mab," was written by me at the age of eighteen,[2] I dare say in a sufficiently intemperate spirit — but even then was not intended for publication, and a few copies only were struck off, to be distributed among my personal friends. I have not seen this production for several years; I doubt not but that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature. I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression; and I regret this publication, not so much from literary vanity, as because I fear it is better fitted to injure than to serve the cause of freedom. I have directed my solicitor to apply to Chancery for an injunction to restrain the sale; but after the precedent of Mr. Southey's "Wat Tyler"[3]

[1] This letter was called forth by the first of many pirated editions of *Queen Mab*. The publisher was one W. Clark, whom Shelley refers to in a letter as "one of the low booksellers in the Strand." The same letter (to John Gisborne) suggests that Shelley was rather amused than annoyed by the publication, although he made an attempt to secure an injunction, which was refused on the curious ground that "the work being calculated to do injury to society had ceased to be the property of the author."

[2] Shelley is in error here. At the time of writing *Queen Mab* he was about twenty.

[3] Robert Southey, at this date Poet Laureate and Tory of Tories, had begun, like Shelley, as a radical; *Wat Tyler*, the dramatic expression of the youthful revolutionist's enthusiasm, which the author had not published, was issued in an unauthorized edition in 1817. Like Shelley, he tried to have it suppressed, but his appeal was denied on the same ground.

(a poem, written, I believe, at the same age, and with the same unreflecting enthusiasm), with little hopes of success.

Whilst I exonerate myself from all share in having divulged opinions hostile to existing sanctions, under the form, whatever it may be, which they assume in this poem, it is scarcely necessary for me to protest against this system of inculcating the truth of Christianity and the excellence of Monarchy however true or however excellent they may be, by such equivocal arguments as confiscation, and imprisonment, and invective, and slander, and the insolent violation of the most sacred ties of nature and society.

Sir, I am,
Your obliged and obedient servant,
PERCY B. SHELLEY.

VI. TO MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY[1]

Ravenna,
Friday. August 10, 1821.

My dearest Mary,

. . . . . .

We ride out in the evening, through the pine forests which divide this city from the sea. Our way of life is this, and I have accommodated myself to it without much difficulty. L. B.[2] gets up at two, breakfasts; we talk read etc., until six; then we ride, and dine at eight; and after dinner sit talking till four or five in the morning. I get up at 12, and am now devoting the interval between my rising and his, to you.

L. B. is greatly improved in every respect. In genius in temper in moral views, in health in happiness. The connexion

[1] This excerpt is from a letter written during the early part of a ten days' visit to Byron at Ravenna. (Shelley and Mary were living at Pisa.) It was the first meeting of the two poets in almost three years.
[2] Lord Byron.

with la Guiccioli[3] has been an inestimable benefit to him. He lives in considerable splendour, but within his income, which is now about 4,000 a-year:[4] — 1,000 of which he devotes to purposes of charity. He has had mischievous passions, but these he seems to have subdued, and he is becoming what he should be, a virtuous man. The interest which he took in the politics of Italy, and the actions he performed in consequence of it, are subjects not fit to be *written,* but are such as will delight and surprise you.[5] He is not yet decided to go to Switzerland: a place indeed little fitted for him: the gossip and the cabals of those anglicised coteries would torment him, as they did before, and might exasperate him into a relapse of libertinism, which he says he plunged into not from taste, but despair. La Guiccioli and her brother (who is L. B.'s friend and confidant, and acquiesces perfectly in her connexion with him), wish to go to Switzerland; as L. B. says merely from the novelty and pleasure of travelling. L. B. prefers Tuscany or Lucca, and is trying to persuade them to adopt his views. He has made *me* write a long letter to her to engage her to remain — an odd thing enough for an utter stranger to write on subjects of the utmost delicacy to his friend's mistress. But it seems destined that I am always to have some active part in everybody's affairs whom I approach. I have set down, in lame Italian, the strongest reasons I can think of against the Swiss emigration — to tell you truth, I should be very glad to accept, as my fee, his establishment in Tuscany. Ravenna is a miserable place; the people are barbarous and wild, and their language the most infernal patois that you can imagine. He would be in every respect better among the Tuscans. I am afraid he would not like Florence, on account of the English there. What think

[3] The Countess Teresa Guiccioli, "a beautiful and sentimental Italian Lady" of twenty (at this date), married to and separated from a wealthy husband three times her age, lived with Byron as his mistress from 1819 to 1823.

[4] Elsewhere Shelley speaks of Byron's income as from £12,000 to £15,000.

[5] Byron was aiding the Carbonari, a secret society of Italian patriots dedicated to freeing Italy from Austria.

you of Lucca for him — he would like Pisa better if it were not for Clare, but I really can hardly recommend him either for his own sake or for hers to come into such close contact with her. Gunpowder and fire ought to be kept at a respectable distance from each other. There is Lucca, Florence, Pisa, Sienna, and I think nothing more. What think you of Prato, or Pistoia, for him — no Englishman approaches those towns; but I am afraid no house could be found good enough for him in that region. — I have not yet seen Allegra, but shall to-morrow or next day: as I shall ride over to Bagnacavallo for that purpose.

He has read to me one of the unpublished cantos of Don Juan, which is astonishingly fine. It sets him not above but far above all the poets of the day: every word is stamped with immortality. I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may, and there is no other with whom it is worth contending. This canto is in style, but totally, and sustained with incredible ease and power, like the end of the second canto. There is not a word which the most rigid asserter of the dignity of human nature would desire to be cancelled: it fulfills, in a certain degree, what I have long preached of producing something wholly new and relative to the age, and yet surpassingly beautiful. It may be vanity, but I think I see the trace of my earnest exhortation to him to create something wholly new. He has finished his *life* up to the present time and given it to Moore[6] with liberty for Moore to sell it for the best price he can get, with condition that the bookseller should publish it after his death. Moore has sold it to Murray for *two thousand pounds.* — I have spoken to him of Hunt,[7] but not with a direct view of demanding a contribution; and though I am sure that if asked it would not be refused — yet there is something in me that makes it impossible. Lord Byron and I are excellent friends, and were I reduced to poverty, or were I a writer who had no claims to a higher station than I possess — or did I

[6] Thomas Moore, the Irish poet, friend and biographer of Byron. The autobiography of Byron mentioned here was burned by Murray.

[7] Byron had previously offered to lend Leigh Hunt money to go to Italy. Eventually Hunt did come (arriving a day or two before Shelley's death) and collaborated with Byron in editing the ill-fated *Liberal.*

possess a higher than I deserve, we should appear in all things as such, and I would freely ask him any favour. Such is not now the case. The demon of mistrust and of pride lurks between two persons in our situation poisoning the freedom of their intercourse. This is a tax, and a heavy one which we must pay for being human. I think the fault is not on my side nor is it likely, I being the weaker. I hope that in the next world these things will be better managed. What is passing in the heart of another rarely escapes the observation of one who is a strict anatomist of his own.[8]

Write to me at Florence, where I shall remain a day at least and send me letters or news of letters. How is my little darling?[9] And how are you, and how do you get on with your book?[10] Be severe in your corrections, and expect severity from me, your sincere admirer. I flatter myself you have composed something unequalled in its kind, and that, not content with the honours of your birth and your hereditary aristocracy, you will add still higher renown to your name. Expect me at the end of my appointed time. I do not think I shall be detained. Is Claire with you, or is she coming? Have you heard anything of my poor Emilia, from whom I got a letter the day of my departure, saying that her marriage was deferred for a *very short* time, on account of the illness of her sposo? How are the Williams's, and Williams especially? Give my

[8] Shelley's relations with Byron present an intricate and baffling problem. Shelley's early admiration of his brother poet, so strongly expressed in 1818 in the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills,* had by this time been considerably qualified; and later references to Byron in his letters are often unflattering and sometimes harsh, especially in the last months of his life. The precise reasons for the change are nowhere fully stated. According to observers, Byron's attitude towards Shelley was invariably friendly, sometimes to the point of deference. The latter could hardly have helped being influenced, however, by Byron's treatment of Clare (a story of which he doubtless heard but one side) and may have blamed him for Allegra's death. (See the note on the following letter.) He also suspected Byron (how justly, is not clear) of repeating the scandalous rumors by which he was so constantly pursued.

[9] Shelley's and Mary's only surviving child, Percy Florence (born November 12, 1819).

[10] *Valperga.*

very kindest love to them, and pray take care that they do not want money.

Lord B. has here splendid apartments in the house of his mistress's husband: who is one of the richest men in Italy. *She* is divorced, with an allowance of 1200 crowns a year, a miserable pittance from a man who has 120,000 a-year. — Here are two monkeys, five cats, eight dogs, and ten horses, all of whom (except the horses), walk about [the] house like the masters of it. *Tita* [the] Venetian is here, and operates as my valet; a fine fellow, with a prodigious black beard, and who has stabbed two or three people, and is the most good-natured looking fellow I ever saw.

We have good rumours of the Greeks here, and a Russian war. I hardly wish the Russians to take any part in it. My maxim is with Aeschylus: — τὸ δυσσεβὲς—μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει, σφετέρᾳ δ' εἰκότα γεννᾷ.[11] There is a Greek exercise for you. How should slaves produce anything but tyranny — even as the seed produces the plant?

Adieu, dear Mary.

Yours affectionately,

S.

VII. TO MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

Ravenna,
15 Aug[ust], 1821.

My dearest Love,

. . . . . .

I went the other day to see Allegra[1] at her convent, and stayed with her about three hours. She is grown tall and

[11] Quoted, with a slight omission, from the *Agamemnon*, ll. 758–60. It is paraphrased by Shelley himself in *Hellas*, ll. 729–30.

[1] See Letter IV, Note 1. Byron, whose conduct towards Clare and Allegra has given rise to much controversy and recrimination among biographers, had decided to have the child cared for and educated in a convent. At this date she was about three and a half years old. She died April 19, 1822.

slight for her age, and her face is somewhat altered. Her traits have become more delicate, and she is much paler: probably from the effect of improper food. She yet retains the beauty of her deep blue eyes and of her mouth, but she has a contemplative seriousness which mixed with her excessive vivacity which has not yet deserted her has a very peculiar effect in a child. She is under very strict discipline as may be observed from the immediate obedience she accords to the will of her attendants. This seems contrary to her nature, but I do not think it has been obtained at the expense of much severity. Her hair, scarcely darker than it was, is beautifully profuse, hangs in large curls on her neck. She was prettily dressed in white muslin and an apron of black silk with trousers. Her light and airy figure and her graceful motions were a striking contrast to the other children there — she seemed a thing of a finer and a higher order. At first she was very shy, but after a little caressing and especially after I had given her a gold chain which I had bought at Ravenna for her she grew more familiar and led me all over the garden and all over the convent running and skipping so fast that I could hardly keep up with her. She showed me her little bed and the chair where she sat at dinner and the carozzina in which she and her favourite companions drew each other along a walk in the garden. I had brought her a basket of sweetmeats, and before eating any of them she gave her companions and each of the nuns a portion — this is not much like the old Allegra. I asked her what I should say from her to her mama and she said —

"Che mi manda un bacio e un bel vestitino."

"E come vuoi il vestitino sia fatto?"

"Tutto di seta e d'oro," was her reply.[2]

Her predominant foible seems the love of distinction and vanity, and this is a plant which produces good or evil according to the gardener's skill. I then asked what I should say to

[2] The dialogue may be translated as follows:
"That she send me a kiss and a pretty dress."
"And how do you wish the dress made?"
"All of silk and gold."

papa? "Che venga farmi un visitino e che porta seco la *mammina,*"[3] a message which you may conjecture that I was too discreet to deliver. Before I went away she made me run all over the convent, like a mad thing. The nuns, who were half in bed were ordered to hide themselves, and on returning Allegra began ringing the bell which calls the nuns to assemble, the tocsin of the convent sounded, and it required all the efforts of the prioress to prevent the spouses of God to render themselves dressed or undressed to the accustomed signal. Nobody scolded her for these scappature,[4] so I suppose she is well treated, as far as temper is concerned. Her intellect is not much cultivated here — she knows certain orazioni[5] by heart, and talks and *dreams* of Paradise and angels and all sorts of things, and has a prodigious list of saints, and is always talking of the Bambino. This [—] will do her no harm, but the idea of bringing up so sweet a creature in the midst of such trash till sixteen!

. . . . . .

VIII. TO LORD BYRON

Pisa, Oct. 21, 1821.

My dear Lord Byron,

I should have written to you long since but that I have been led to expect you almost daily in Pisa, and that I imagined you would cross my letter on your road. Many thanks for "Don Juan." — It is a poem totally of its own species, and my wonder and delight at the grace of the composition no less than the free and grand vigour of the conception of it perpetually increase. The few passages which any one might desire to be cancelled in the first and second Cantos are here reduced almost to nothing. This poem carries with it at once the stamp of originality and a defiance of imitation. Nothing has ever been

[3] "That he come make me a visit and bring Mamma with him."
[4] Escapades.
[5] Prayers.

written like it in English, nor, if I may venture to prophesy, will there be; without carrying upon it the mark of a secondary and borrowed light. — You unveil and present in its true deformity what is worst in human nature, and this is what the witlings of the age murmur at, conscious of their want of power to endure the scrutiny of such a light. We are damned to the knowledge of good and evil, and it is well for us to know what we should avoid no less than what we should seek. The character of Lambro — his return — the merriment of his daughter's guests, made, as it were, in celebration of his funeral — the meeting with the lovers — and the death of Haidée, — are circumstances combined and developed in a manner that I seek elsewhere in vain. The fifth Canto, which some of your pet Zoili [1] in Albemarle St.[2] said was *dull*, gathers instead of loses, splendour and energy — the language in which the whole is clothed — a sort of chameleon under the changing sky of the spirit that kindles it — is such as these lisping days could not have expected, — and are, believe me, in spite of the approbation which you wrest from them, little pleased to hear.

One can hardly judge from recitation, and it was not until I read it in print that I have been able to do it justice. This sort of writing only on a great plan, and perhaps in a more compact form, is what I wished you to do when I made my vows for an epic. — But I am content. You are building up a drama, such as England has not yet seen, and the task is sufficiently noble and worthy of you.

When may we expect you? The Countess G. is very patient, though sometimes she seems apprehensive that you will *never* leave Ravenna. I have suffered from my habitual disorder and from a tertian fever since I have returned, and my ill

[1] Zoilus was a Greek critic of the 4th century B.C., notorious for his attacks on Homer; hence, the name came to mean any "censorious, malignant, or envious critic" (Oxford English Dictionary).

[2] Albemarle Street in London was the location of the publishing house of John Murray, Byron's publisher and a rigid Tory (also the publisher of *The Quarterly Review*). Murray was one of a circle of Byron's friends who deplored his attacks on religious orthodoxy, political conservatism, and the vanity and vices of high society. They did their utmost to alienate Byron, first, from Shelley, and later, with more success, from Leigh Hunt.

health has prevented me from showing her the attentions I could have desired in Pisa. I have heard from Hunt, who tells me that he is coming out in November, by sea I believe. — Your house is ready and all the furniture arranged. Lega, they say, is to have set off yesterday. The Countess tells me that you think of leaving Allegra for the present at the convent. Do as you think best — but I can pledge myself to find a situation for her here such as you would approve in case you change your mind.

I hear no political news but such as announces the slow victory of the spirit of the past over that of the present. The other day, a number of Heteristi, escaped from the defeat in Wallachia,[3] past through Pisa, to embark at Leghorn and join Ipsilanti in Livadia. It is highly to the credit of the actual government of Tuscany, that it allowed these poor fugitives 3 livres a day each, and free quarters during their passage through these states.

Mrs. S. desires her best regards.

My dear Lord Byron,

Yours most faithfully,

P. B. SHELLEY.

IX. TO JOHN GISBORNE[1]

Pisa,
October 22, 1821.

My dear Gisborne,

At length the post brings a welcome letter from you, and I am pleased to be assured of your health and safe arrival. I expect with interest and anxiety the intelligence of your progress in

[3] Now a part of Rumania, where the Greeks suffered a defeat in their struggle for independence from the Turks.

[1] John Gisborne was a not very successful merchant, whose rather colourless personality was completely overshadowed by that of his charming and talented wife, Maria, to whom Godwin had once proposed marriage, and who was the recipient of Shelley's famous verse *Letter to Maria Gisborne*. Although to his friends Shelley sometimes made fun of Gisborne, he nevertheless addressed to him some of his most interesting letters.

England, and how far the advantages there compensate the loss of Italy. I hear from Hunt that he is determined on emigration, and if I thought the letter would arrive in time, I should beg you to suggest some advice to him — such as the sending of beds, linen etc., which would greatly diminish his expenses here. But you ought to be incapable of forgiving me in the fact of depriving England of what it must lose when Hunt departs.

Did I tell you that Lord Byron comes to settle at Pisa, and that he has a plan of writing a periodical work in connection with Hunt? His house — Madame Felichi's — is already taken and fitted up for him, and he has been expected every day these six weeks. La Guiccioli his cara sposa attends him impatiently, is a very pretty sentimental, innocent superficial Italian, who has sacrifized an immense fortune to live for Lord Byron; and who, if I know anything of my friend, of her, and of human nature, will hereafter have plenty of leisure and opportunity to repent her rashness. Lord Byron is however quite cured of his gross habits — as far as habits — the perverse ideas on which they were formed are not yet eradicated.

We have furnished a house at Pisa, and mean to make it our headquarters. I shall get all my books out, and entrench myself like a spider in a web. If you can assist Peacock in sending them to Leghorn you would do me an especial favour; but do not buy me Calderon, Faust, or Kant, as H[orace] S[mith] promises to send them me from Paris, where I suppose you had not time to procure them. Any other books you or Henry [2] think would accord with my design Ollier [3] will furnish you with.

I should like very much to hear what is said of my Adonais, and you would oblige me by cutting out, or making Ollier cut out, any respectable criticism on it, and sending it me. You know I do not mind a crown or two in postage. The Epi-

[2] Henry Reveley, Mrs. Gisborne's son by a former husband.

[3] Charles Ollier was the publisher of most of Shelley's later works. He also published Keats's first volume, as well as a number of works by Leigh Hunt.

pschidion [sic] is a mystery — As to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton, as expect any thing human or earthly from me. I desired Ollier not to circulate this piece except to the *ουνεrοl*,[4] and even they, it seems are inclined to approximate me to the circle of a servant girl and her sweetheart. But I intend to write a Symposium [5] of my own to set all this right.

I am just finishing a dramatic poem, called *Hellas*, upon the contest now raging in Greece — a sort of imitation of the Persae of Aeschylus, full of lyrical poetry. I try to be what I might have been, but am not successfull. I find that (I dare say I shall quote it wrong)

"Den herrlichsten, den sich der Geist emprängt
Drängt immer fremd und fremder Stoff sich an." [6]

The *Edinburgh Review* lies. Godwin's answer to Malthus [7] is victorious and decisive; and that it should not be generally acknowledged as such is full evidence of the influence of successful evil and tyranny. What Godwin is compared with Plato and Lord Bacon we well know. But compared with these miserable sciolists, he is a vulture (you know vultures have considerable appetites) to a worm.

[4] Intelligent people.

[5] The *Symposium* (the Banquet) is Plato's famous dialogue (translated by Shelley) in which the doctrine of "Platonic love" is most fully set forth.

[6] See the First Part of Goethe's *Faust*, ll. 634–35. The first line should read, according to the standard text, "Dem Herrlichsten, was auch der Geist empfangen." It may be translated: "Upon what is noblest that the mind conceives, some ever more alien substance is always intruding." — It is hard to believe that Shelley, even though he had not a scholar's knowledge of German, did not write "empfängt" rather than "emprängt."

[7] Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) wrote his famous *Essay on Population* (first edition, 1798) as an answer to some essays of Godwin's and was in turn answered, in 1820, by the work here referred to, which Shelley elsewhere speaks of as "a dry but clever book, with decent interspersions of cant and sophistry." Shelley's opinion of Malthus varied, but was generally marked by antipathy towards what he regarded as an acceptance and justification of the *status quo*.

The Smiths[8] dont come. Mrs. S. is ill and the hot climate of Italy, more especially the parching winds of December, Jan. and March might hurt her. So the Docs. say, and poor Smith bewails his lot. I read the Greek dramatists and Plato for ever. You are right about Antigone[9] — how sublime a picture of a woman! and what think you of the choruses, and especially the lyrical complaints of the godlike victim? And the menaces of Tiresias, and their rapid fulfilment? Some of us have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie. As to books, I advise you to live near the British Museum and read there. I have read since I saw you the Jungfrau von Orleans of Schiller — a fine play, if the 5th Act did not fall off. Some Greeks escaped from the defeat in Wallachia have passed through Pisa to re-embark at Leghorn for the Morea; and the Tuscan Government allowed them during their stay and passage, 3 lire each per day and their lodging. That is good. Remember me and Mary most kindly to Mrs. Gisborne and Henry, and believe me,

Yours most affectionately,

P. B. S.

You cd. not do me a greater benefit than in promoting the embarkation of my books.

X. TO LEIGH HUNT

Pisa,
April 10, 1822.

My dear Friend,

I write in the firm hope and persuasion that you have already set sail,[1] and that this letter will undergo the lingering and

[8] See Letter XII, Note 1.

[9] The protagonist of a play by Sophocles. When Shelley's body was recovered after his drowning, a volume of Sophocles was found in the pocket of his jacket.

[1] Hunt and his family had planned to leave England in September, 1821, but the departure of their vessel was delayed until November 15, and then the weather was so bad that five weeks later they had still been

obscure revolutions of those which are directed by people who return from a voyage round the world by Cape Horn, to those who set off on a voyage round the world by the Cape of Good Hope.

You will, I hope, have received the £220 from Brookes[2] before this; as well as my order upon them, which I *think* I sent to you. It is of no consequence whether I did or not, as Brookes's have orders to pay this sum to you and would have done so even without your application, — though it was quite right to take this precaution.

Lord Byron has the greatest anxiety for your arrival, and is now always urging me to press you to depart. I know that you need no spur. I said what I thought with regard to Lord Byron, nor would I have breathed a syllable of my feelings in any ear but yours, but with you, I would, and I may think aloud. Perhaps time has corrected me, and I am become, like those whom I formerly condemned, misanthropical and suspicious. If so do you cure me; nor should I wonder, for if friendship is the medicine of such diseases I may well say that mine have been long neglected — and how deep the wounds have been, you partly know and partly can conjecture. Certain it is, that Lord Byron has made me bitterly feel the inferiority which the world has presumed to place between us and which subsists nowhere in reality but in our own talents, which are not our own but Nature's — or in our rank, which is not our own but Fortune's.

I will tell you more of this when we meet. I did wrong in carrying this jealousy of my Lord Byron into his loan to you, or rather to me; and you in the superiority of wise and tranquil nature have well corrected and justly reproved me. And plan your account with finding much in me to correct and to reprove. Alas, how am I fallen from the boasted purity in which you knew me once exulting!

unable to get out of the English channel. At this point, Mrs. Hunt, always in poor health during this period, became so ill that the party went ashore, and waited until May, 1822, to begin the journey again.

[2] Shelley's banker.

How is poor Marianne?[3] My anxiety for *her* is greater than for any of you, and I dread the consequences of the English winter from which she could not escape. Give my most affectionate love to her, and tell her we will soon get her well here. Write before you set off. Your house is still ready for you. We are obliged to go into the country both for mine and Mary's health, to whom the sea air is necessary; but the moment I hear of your arrival, I shall set off, if already in the country, and join you.

Yours affectionately and ever,

P. B. S.

XI. TO JOHN GISBORNE

Lerici,
June 18, 1822.

My dear Gisborne,

In my doubt as to which of your most interesting letters I shall answer, I quash the business one for the present, as the only part of it that requires an answer, requires also maturer consideration. In the first place I send you money for postage, as I intend to indulge myself in plenty of paper and no crossings. Mary will write soon; at present she suffers greatly from excess of weakness, produced by a severe miscarriage, from which she is now slowly recovering. Her situation for some hours was alarming, and as she was totally destitute of medical assistance, I took the most decisive of resolutions, by dint of making her sit in ice, I succeeded in checking the hemorrhage and the fainting fits, so that when the physician arrived all danger was over, and he had nothing to do but to applaud me for my boldness. She is now doing well, and the sea-baths will soon restore her.

I have written to Ollier to send his account to you. The "Adonais" I wished to have had a fair chance, both because it is a favourite with me and on account of the memory of

[3] Mrs. Hunt.

Keats, who was a poet of great genius, let the classic party say what it will. "Hellas" too I liked on account of the subject — one always finds some reason or other for liking one's own composition. The "Epipsychidion" I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace.[1] If you are anxious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal.[2] Hogg is very droll and very wicked about this poem, which he says, he likes — he praises it and says: —

tantum de medio sumptis accedit honoris.[3]

Now that, I contend, even in Latin, is not to be permitted.

Hunt is not yet arrived, but I expect him every day. I shall see little of Lord Byron, nor shall I permit Hunt to form the intermediate link between him and me. I detest all society — almost all, at least — and Lord Byron is the nucleus of all that is hateful and tiresome in it. He will be half mad to hear of these memoirs.[4] As to me, you know my supreme indifference to such affairs, except that I must confess that I am sometimes amused by the ridiculous mistakes of these writers. Tell me a little of what they say of me besides my being an Atheist. One

[1] Emilia Viviani, whose friendship with Shelley had been the occasion of *Epipsychidion*, had shown herself, after all, to be of very human clay, and Shelley's admiration and affection had changed to regretful pity. — The myth to which he refers tells how Ixion, a mortal, aspired to the love of the Queen of the Gods, and was foiled by Jupiter in the manner described. He was later punished by being bound to a constantly revolving fiery wheel in Tartarus.

[2] This sentence is often quoted as a commentary on Shelley's persistent quest for the ideal.

[3] Quoted from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, l. 243. Smart's translation is: "such grace may be added to subjects merely common."

[4] A sensational volume about Byron and his friends, by one John Watkins; one of the earlier representatives of a vogue which has unfortunately persisted to the present day.

thing I regret in it, I dread lest it should injure Hunt's prospects in the establishment of the journal, for Lord Byron is so mentally capricious that the least impulse drives him from his anchorage. I hardly know what to think of your scheme of settling at the Land's End. Physical food is much cheaper, but you can have no intellectual food, except what is already dried and salted in folios, &c., and an unmixed diet of this sort, without any supply of fresh provisions, is bad for the spiritual digestion. The absence of care about money is certainly a great benefit, and whatever else you do, the vesting of your property in land, immediately under your own inspection, is certainly prudent. But why the Land's End? Why not choose the immediate neighborhood of London, where the pulsations of that heart of activity and thought would reach you easily? This would be better for Henry too. I wish you would return to Italy for my own sake; but for yours, I think you are better where you are. Mrs. Gisborne's lessons would be an immense resource, if she obtained more pupils. You do not tell me how her health is. I am rejoiced to find that yours is improved, and this is a strong motive for remaining in England. As to me, Italy is more and more delightful to me, and yours and Mrs. Gisborne's presence here is almost the only accessory I could desire, though, if my wishes were not limited by my hopes, Hogg would be included. I only feel the want of those who can feel, and understand me. Whether from proximity and the continuity of domestic intercourse, Mary does not. The necessity of concealing from her thoughts that would pain her, necessitates this, perhaps. It is the curse of Tantalus, that a person possessing such excellent powers and so pure a mind as hers, should not excite the sympathy indispensable to their application to domestic life.[5] The Williams's are now on a visit to us, and they are people who are very pleasing to me. But words are not the instruments of our intercourse. I like Jane more and more, and I find Williams the most amiable of companions.

[5] Shelley has been censured for speaking of his wife in such a manner. The passage at any rate throws a good deal of light on the relations between them during their last months together.

She has a taste for music, and an elegance of form and motions that compensate in some degree for the lack of literary refinement. You know my gross ideas of music, and will forgive me when I say that I listen the whole evening on our terrace to the simple melodies with excessive delight. I have a boat[6] here which was originally intended to belong equally to Williams, Trelawny,[7] and myself, but the wish to escape from the third person induced me to become the sole proprietor. It cost me £80, and reduced me to some difficulty in point of money. However, it is swift and beautiful, and appears quite a vessel. Williams is captain, and, we drive along this delightful bay in the evening wind, under the summer moon, until earth appears another world. Jane brings her guitar, and if the past and the future could be obliterated, the present would content me so well that I could say with Faust to the passing moment "Remain, thou, thou art so beautiful."[8] Clare is with us, and the death of her child[9] seems to have restored her to tranquillity. Her character is somewhat altered. She is vivacious and talkative; and though she teases me sometimes, I like her. Mary is not, for the present, much discontented with her visit, which is merely temporary, and which the circumstances of the case rendered indispensable. Lord Byron is at Leghorn. He has fitted up a splendid vessel, a small schooner on the American model, and Trelawny is to be captain. How long the fiery spirit of our pirate will accommodate itself to the caprice of the poet remains to be seen.

As to Hunt, he can neither see nor feel any ill qualities from which there is a chance of his personally suffering. I write

[6] The ill-fated *Ariel* (first christened the *Don Juan*), in which Shelley and Williams went to their death.

[7] Edward John Trelawny (1792–1881), although apparently never regarded by Shelley as an intimate friend, remained to the end of his life one of the poet's most devoted admirers. His *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (first published in 1858, revised and extended as *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*, 1878) is the fullest and best contemporary account of Shelley during the last months of his life.

[8] See *Faust*, Part I, l. 1700: "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!"

[9] Allegra had died on April 19, 1822.

little now. It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write. Imagine Demosthenes[10] reciting a Philippic to the waves of the Atlantic. Lord Byron is in this respect fortunate. He touched a chord to which a million hearts responded, and the coarse music which he produced to please them disciplined him to the perfection to which he now approaches. I do not go on with "Charles the First."[11] I feel too little certainty of the future, and too little satisfaction with regard to the past to undertake any subject seriously and deeply. I stand, as it were, upon a precipice, which I have ascended with great, and cannot descend without *greater*, peril, and I am content if the heaven above me is calm for the passing moment.

You don't tell me what you think of "Cain."[12] You send me the opinion of the populace, which you know I do not esteem. I have read several more of the plays of Calderon.[13] "*Los Dos Amantes del Cielo*," is the finest, if I except one scene in the "Devocion de la Cruz." I read Greek and think about writing.

I do not think much of her[14] pupils for *not* admiring Metastasio;[15] the *nil admirari*,[16] however justly applied, seems to me a bad sign in a young person. I had rather a pupil of mine had conceived a frantic passion for Marini[17] himself, than

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[10] Demosthenes (384?–322 B.C.), the famous Athenian orator and patriot, was the leader in opposing Philip of Macedon in his conquest of Greece.

[11] A projected drama for stage production, which Shelley left in a fragmentary state.

[12] A play by Byron, published in December, 1821, which Shelley elsewhere praises extravagantly, and which the general public regarded as definitely blasphemous.

[13] See *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, l. 181 n.

[14] Mrs. Gisborne's.

[15] The pseudonym of the Italian poet Pietro Trapassi (1698–1782), in his own day famous as a writer of opera librettos, said to be beautiful but sentimental.

[16] "Not to be excited by anything" — which, says the Roman poet Horace, is the "proper thing."

[17] An Italian poet (1569–1625) noted for making popular an affected and highly ornamented style. "Marinism" had much in common with the contemporary English prose style known as Euphuism.

that she had found out the critical defects of the most deficient author. When she becomes of her own accord full of genuine admiration of the finest scene in the "Purgatorio," [18] or the opening of the "Paradiso," [18] or some other neglected piece of excellence, hope great things. Adieu, I must not exceed the limits of my paper however little scrupulous I seem about those of your patience.

P. B. S.

I waited three days to get this pen mended, and at last was obliged to write.

XII. TO HORACE SMITH [1]

Lerici,
June 29, 1822.

My dear Smith,

I believe I have as much cause to be obliged to you by your refusal,[2] as I should have been by your grant of the request contained in my last letter — I wrote in compliance with my engagement to do so and with some regret, as I have been long firmly persuaded that all the money advanced to Godwin so long as he stands engaged in business is absolutely thrown away. Your advice to him is excellent, and although I do not think that he will follow it of his own choice, there is every probability that circumstances will compel him to submit to some such measures as you recommend: and I have absolutely no funds to prevent that necessity, nor the most remote intention of anticipating further upon a patrimony already too much diminished —

[18] The second and third parts of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

[1] Horace (or Horatio) Smith (1779–1849), a London banker and man of letters, co-author with his brother James of the witty and once famous volume of parodies entitled *Rejected Addresses*, was one of Shelley's most loyal friends, and performed many friendly and generous services for him after his departure from England.

[2] To make Shelley a loan of £400, to be "thrown away" on Godwin.

Pray thank Moore for his obliging message.[3] I wish I could as easily convey my sense of his genius and character. I should have written to him on the subject of my late letter, but that I doubted how far I was justified in doing so; although, indeed, Lord Byron made no secret of his communication to me. It seems to me that things have now arrived at such a crisis as requires every man plainly to utter his sentiments on the inefficacy of the existing religion, no less than political systems, for restraining and guiding mankind. Let us see the truth, whatever that may be. The destiny of man can scarcely be so degraded that he was born only to die — and if such should be the case, delusions, especially the gross and preposterous ones of the existing religion, can scarcely be supposed to exalt it. If every man said what he thought, it could not subsist a day. But all, more or less, subdue themselves to the element that surrounds them, and contribute to the evils they lament by the hypocrisy that springs from them —

England appears to be in a desperate condition, Ireland still worse; and no class of those who subsist on the public labour will be persuaded that *their* claims on it must be diminished. But the government must content itself with less in taxes, the landholder must submit to receive less rent, and the fundholder a diminished interest, or they will all get nothing. I once thought to study these affairs, and write or act in them — I am glad that my good genius said, *refrain* — I see little public virtue, and I foresee that the contest will be one of blood and gold, two elements which however much to my taste in my pockets and my veins, I have an objection to out of them. —

Lord Byron continues at Leghorn, and has just received from Genoa a most beautiful little yacht, which he caused to be built there. He has written two new cantos of *Don Juan,* but I have

[3] Byron had shown Shelley a letter from Thomas Moore, in which the latter had cautioned Byron against Shelley's "influence on his mind, on the subject of religion," mentioning *Cain* as an instance. Shelley had asked Smith, as a mutual friend, to "assure him that I have not the smallest influence over Lord Byron in this particular"; adding, "if I had, I certainly should employ it in eradicating from his great mind the delusions of Christianity."

not seen them. — I have just received a letter from Hunt, who has arrived at Genoa. As soon as I hear that he has sailed, I shall weigh anchor in my little schooner, and give him chase to Leghorn, when I must occupy myself in some arrangements for him with Lord Byron. Between ourselves, I greatly fear that this alliance [4] will not succeed; for I, who could never have been regarded as more than the link of the two thunderbolts, cannot now consent to be even that, — and how long the alliance may continue, I will not prophesy. Pray do not hint my doubts on the subject to any one as they might do harm to Hunt, and they *may* be groundless. —

I still inhabit this divine bay, reading Spanish dramas and sailing, and listening to the most enchanting music. — We have some friends on a visit to us, and my only regret is that the summer must ever pass, or that Mary has not the same predilection for this place that I have, which would induce me never to shift my quarters.

Farewell. — Believe me ever your obliged and affectionate friend,

P. B. SHELLEY.

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[4] In editing *The Liberal*. Shelley's misgivings proved well founded, although if he had lived he might, despite his statement here, have held the partnership together a little longer. But Hunt was not the man to manage Byron, and the periodical ceased after the third number.