Mythology as History:
Theories of Origins and Formulations of the Past
in the works of Shelley.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines Shelley's interest in the mythologies of non-Christian cultures. It argues that Shelley's use of mythology can be best understood as an artistic response to his perception of contemporary historical events and within the context of the hostility of the younger Romantic poets towards the religious and political beliefs of the elder generation. The theological defence of the Mosaic account of the origins of the world by orthodox Christians set against the sympathy towards pagan culture expressed by secular historians and antiquarians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries forms a recurrent theme in the background to Shelley's interest in myth.

While criticism has often seen Romanticism itself as a mythological tendency in defiance of Enlightenment scepticism, the starting-point for Shelley's examination of the origins of religious belief, witnessed in "Mont Blanc," is his refutation of Christian monotheism and his preference for an explanation of the basis of religion and mythology in the primitive fear of Nature. Combined with his Enlightenment optimism in historical progress, the use of Zoroastrianism encourages the invention of his own myths of origins and of historical destiny in Prometheus Unbound and "The Witch of Atlas", which overcome the regressive doctrine of original sin and defy the historical actuality of the failure of the French Revolution.

The presence of the Orient in Shelley's mythological poetry can be interpreted in terms of a critique of "Romantic Hellenism", a category which has failed to account for his sympathy with the popular natural religion of Bacchus, a figure associated in classical history with the East, who represents the antithesis of the rational, Hellenic Apollo.

In the final two years of his life, Shelley develops a different kind of mythologised history in which an idealist defence of the poet is incorporated into the Enlightenment concept of philosophical history. It is this investment which he questions in "The Triumph of Life".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My principal debt is to my supervisor, Marilyn Butler, whose encouragement, patience and interest, have sustained me throughout. Her generosity both with her knowledge of the historical background to the Romantic period and with her time in commenting on drafts of chapters of this thesis, has far exceeded what I could have expected. Paul Hamilton also supervised this thesis at an early stage and encouraged me to question my argument. He has read it subsequently, giving it much time and thought. His suggestions have always been inspiring to pursue, and his goodwill limitless. This thesis could not have been completed without their support. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the faults and inconsistencies in what follows.

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The Master and Fellows of Balliol College provided me with accommodation during the final year after my grant had expired, which greatly eased the circumstances under which this thesis was written. My thanks also to Adam Swift and Peter John for generously allowing me to use their word-processor. Denis Noble, whose Prinfix word-processing program I used, helped me patiently with the new technology at various stages of its production.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CI	Critical Inquiry
EC	Essays in Criticism
ELH	Journal of English Literary History
ES	Essays and Studies (By Members of the English Association)
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
JHI	Journal of the History of Ideas
KSMB	The Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin
KSJ	Keats-Shelley Journal
LRB	London Review of Books
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MP	Modern Philology
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
RES	Review of English Studies
SiR	Studies in Romanticism
SN	Studia Neophilologica
SP	Studies in Philology
TLS	Times Literary Supplement

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON EDITIONS OF SHELLEY USED

All references to Shelley's poetry are, where possible, to Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, A Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1977), otherwise to Shelley: Poetical Works ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd ed., corrected by G. M. Matthews, Oxford Standard Authors (Oxford: OUP, 1970). All references to Shelley's prose are to The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols., The Julian Edition (London: Ernest Benn, 1926-30), with the exception of the texts of "On Love", "On Life" and A Defence of Poetry in the Norton edition cited above and the texts of works relating to Plato in "Shelley's translations from Plato: A Critical Edition," Part III of The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind, ed. James A. Notopoulos (Durham: Duke UP, 1949), 375-603.

PRINCIPAL SHORT FORMS OF CITATIONS OF PRIMARY SOURCES

Bod. Ms. Manuscript in The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Circle Shelley and His Circle, 1773-1822: Being an Edition of the Manuscripts...in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library. Ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron and Donald H. Reiman. 8 vols. to date. Vols. I-IV, ed. Cameron. Vols. V-VIII, ed. Reiman. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1961-1986.

Hutchinson Shelley: Poetical Works. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson. 1905.

2nd ed. Corrected by G. M. Matthews. Oxford Standard Authors. Oxford: OUP, 1970.

Journals The Journals of Mary Shelley. Ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1987.

Julian The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. 10 vols. The Julian Edition. London: Ernest Benn, 1926-30.

Letters The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ed. Frederick L. Jones. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.

Norton Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton, 1977.

Notopoulos "Shelley's Translations from Plato: A Critical Edition." Part III of The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind. Durham: Duke UP, 1949. 375-603.

Introduction

The area of my research is the interest of Shelley in the mythology of non-Christian cultures. The subject of my thesis is the poetry which manifests this interest in the years 1816-22, this being the period of Shelley's mature work.

My aim is to show that the use of mythology by Shelley and the younger Romantic poets is best understood as a conscious means of self-definition in relation both to the historical moment in which they wrote and to other writers, especially the senior poets of their day. Mythology offered the younger generation of poets an opportunity to criticise existing interpretations of the relationship between society and its historical past in such works as Wordsworth's The Excursion (1814) and Coleridge's The Statesman's Manual (1816) in which the past was subsumed within the broader formulation of human destiny advanced by orthodox Christianity. In the works of Shelley and Peacock in particular, the mythologies of the East, as well as the sexually liberal themes within the familiar canon of Greek myth explored also by Hunt and others at Marlow in 1817, provided an opportune medium for the introduction of an original terminology to counter the explanation of the origins of the world and the early history of society upheld by the literary guardians of the Christian establishment. Mythology, reinforced by a conception of the invigorating force of poetry, was a means of advancing a polemical and consciously partisan reading of the past.

There are three principal areas from which source material is drawn. First, Shelley's debt to the eighteenth-century debate on the origins of religious belief, especially to the anti-Christian

tradition represented in England by Hume and Gibbon and in France by Holbach's atheistic materialism. These writers perceive institutionalised religion as the exploitation of man's fears of the natural world by a priesthood intent on making religion an instrument of political control.

Second, the evidence advanced by some secular writers of the late eighteenth century that the tenets of those religions to which the Mosaic account had refused to give credence were less vindictive than the morality of institutionalised Christianity, and their versions of the origins of human society more benign and optimistic. Shelley and his contemporaries drew on the substantive evidence documented and transmitted in the researches of eminent British and Continental secular scholars and antiquarians such as Sir William Jones, Richard Payne Knight and Sir William Hamilton into the antiquities of Greece, Italy, India and Egypt. The research into the artifacts discovered in Egypt and Greece publicised by these figures, had been filtered into public consciousness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, through many media, including art and design, the popular tales of adventure and also historical, documentary literature.

The younger Romantics thus followed a precedent established in secular intellectual circles which sought to redress the marginalisation or outright dismissal of the history of the non-Christian world by academic and political figures most, though not all, identifiable with the Church. The Mosaic account of the origins of man is defended in the works of several writers in Shelley's period including Faber, Maurice, and Coleridge, the latter

influenced by a view of history as a continually unfolding drama of symbolic truths put forward in the German "Higher Criticism". From a variety of sources the younger Romantics were acquainted with the materials necessary to expose the suppression of alternative versions of man's history by those practitioners of establishment Christian historiography. However the commonplace that the Romantics turned to Greek mythology and to the East for spiritual renewal, to fill the vacancy left by the Enlightenment attack on Christianity should be qualified. For example, the hostility of such contemporary statements as James Mill's History of British India in which Hindu mythology is dismissed in as much as it reflects a superstitious and backward society, is given qualified endorsement by Shelley in "A Philosophical View of Reform".[1]

Third, these poets use mythology partly in order to wrest their sense of history from readings of events advanced by the older generation of poets. The French Revolution, the Restoration settlement at the end of the Napoleonic war and the instability of England and Southern Europe which erupted in a series of insurrections in the years 1819-21 are seen as evidence of the vital force of radical ideas dismissed by Wordsworth and Coleridge. To this end, these poets engage with a view of history as the progress of civil society, expounded by Scottish Enlightenment historians and political economists of the previous century who were especially

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1 Julian vii, 17-18. For Mill's remarks on Indian religion, see The History of British India, 3 vols. (London, 1817), 198-286.

interested in the history of republican societies. The context of Shelley's idealism is not religion but a secular belief in the value of poetry and its influence upon republican history.

The first chapter argues that the dominant interpretation of Shelley's use of mythology is from within a critical tradition which views Romanticism as an essentialist enterprise. Two further influential interpretations are equally ahistorical. The first traces the preoccupation with myth common to Romantic poets to Milton and earlier precedents within an exclusively literary and largely Christian canonical tradition. The second, initiated by Bloom, sees Romantic myth-making as the manifestation of a psychological struggle of the poet against his precursors in the quest for originality. My thesis is that such views ignore the secular thought of the Enlightenment which made mythology for Shelley an engagement with his historical moment.

The second chapter examines Shelley's rejection of Christianity which is the starting-point for his interest in alternative explanations of the origins and history of society. "Mont Blanc" represents a primal scene of conflict between the human mind and Nature which the poem does not resolve. Instead of the conventional response that revealed religion is confirmed through the sublime effect of the Alpine landscape, however, Shelley borrows a psychological explanation of religious faith from secular eighteenth-century philosophers such as Hume. Their theory, that religious belief is merely the expression of the fears of primitive beings, is used by Shelley to reject Christianity and to analyse the contemporary historical situation. In the mountain Shelley

perceives a symbol of the destructive tyrannies of Restoration Europe, but also reflects on the mind's potential freedom from externally imposed authority. Thus he distinguishes himself from Wordsworth and Coleridge who felt that the sublime response evoked by such scenery was a divine rebuke of political radicalism. The possibility of historical change is no longer advocated through crude materialism or the arbitrary doctrine of Necessity as it had been in Queen Mab but is tentatively argued to arise from the human mind.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how Shelley's use of non-Christian mythologies is advanced in Prometheus Unbound through his interest in Zoroastrianism and his faith in the imagination to achieve the Enlightenment which Kant defined as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage".[2] The "lyrical drama" in its resolution reflects a belief that Good will triumph over Evil through the ultimate power of love and beneficence, suggested by Zoroastrian and other pagan versions of the origins of the world. This reflects the interest within the Marlow circle in the Cupid and Psyche myth in which the division between human and divine is overcome through the imagination in conjunction with the expression and fulfilment of sexual desire. Prometheus Unbound also suggests the first

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2 Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", trans. Lewis White Beck, rpt. (modified) in German aesthetic and literary criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, ed. and introd. David Simpson (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 30.

intimations of the incorporation of the Bacchic into Shelley's historical vision. The bleak first act superimposes an essentially Hebraic conflict between God and man onto Aeschylus's drama, while the final act expresses its democratic and feminist objectives through a form of Dionysian play.

Chapter 4 shows how "The Witch of Atlas" continues and develops the elements of sexuality and the feminine in Prometheus Unbound and applies them to subvert conventional notions of deity in Christian and Hellenic religions as male, rational, and authoritarian. The poem shows evidence of Shelley's interest in the mythologies of the East and the investigation of the Orient by scholars such as Jones as opposed to those theologians who were interested in the East only as the supposed location of the original monotheism out of which paganism arose such as Faber and Maurice. The Orient is used as a critique of Hellenism and Christianity in the mythological poetry of 1820 demonstrating Shelley's awareness of a conflict between the Apollonian, or conventional Hellenism of Greek culture and Bacchus who, according to ancient tradition, was associated with the East and returned to threaten the tranquility of the Hellenic ideal.

Chapter 5 argues that Shelley's interest in Ancient Greece cannot be understood simply within the misleading category of "Romantic Hellenism". In addition to the implicit critique of Hellenism through his promotion of Bacchus outlined in Chapter 4, Shelley was unable to reconcile himself to repressive aspects of Athenian society including the attitude to women and slaves. He uses Greek republican history and thought to represent a symbolic historical model at a time when modern Greece was under threat, and

the Western powers seemed indifferent to the traditional values which it had embodied.

Chapter 6 argues that Shelley attempts to link the republican tradition with which he was familiar in his investigation of Ancient Greece to his faith in poetry as the motivating force of historical change. Shelley's theory of history in the period 1819-1820 is based upon an optimistic belief that the downfall of the monarchies of Restoration Europe was imminent. Shelley distinguishes himself from Enlightenment historians such as Gibbon and Robertson by substituting commerce with poetry as the motivating force of the republican historical tradition. In A Defence of Poetry his reaction against Peacock's utilitarian argument in The Four Ages of Poetry is combined with despair at the contemporary political situation. This leads him to combine the republican precedent with idealism as the only means to optimism. A Defence of Poetry embodies the conflict between radical and idealist elements in his theory of history.

The final chapter argues that "The Triumph of Life" is not simply a refutation of Shelley's political and poetical idealism but a document which demonstrates Shelley's most profound engagement with the history and personalities of the Enlightenment. The acute self-consciousness of the poem reflects his view of the difficulties of taking refuge in a theory of the role of the poet in historical progress.

For Shelley, therefore, the use of mythology is more than simply the adoption of traditional literary sources for the purposes of poetic embellishment. The criterion of my choice of texts in

this thesis has been to examine those works which demonstrate the use of mythology to arise out of the intellectual and formal demands of historical and literary contexts. The reason for excluding Adonais, often seen as the *locus classicus* of Shelley's use of mythology because it is the most traditional in terms of form and content, is that its genealogy is literary rather than historical, and that the myth of the poet's legacy to posterity is presented with more complexity in A Defence.

CHAPTER ONE.

MYTHOLOGY AGAINST HISTORY: CRITICISM OF SHELLEY AND ROMANTICISM

1.0 Introduction: Mythology as History in the work of Shelley

1.1 Enlightenment versus essentialism: some twentieth-century perspectives of mythology

1.2 Romanticism and Mythology: some recent critical recuperations

1.3 Mythology or History? Shelley and his critics

1.4 Conclusion

1.0 Introduction: Mythology as History in the work of Shelley

It will be the object of this thesis to offer an interpretation of Shelley's use of mythology which avoids the imposition of the anti-rational and ahistorical assumptions underlying the treatment of myth in much twentieth-century writing upon the historical, Enlightenment methodology of his thought. In the first section of this chapter I sketch how this conflict between historical and essentialist explanations characterises many twentieth-century explanations of myth. In the second section I demonstrate how this lack of a historically relativist treatment of the subject is compounded by the largely essentialist premises of the literary criticism of the Romantic period. In the third section I extend this argument to the critical fortunes of Shelley in this century.

In the twentieth century the two terms, mythology and history, are often perceived as mutually exclusive categories: mythology is commonly associated with primitive religion and oral culture; history is a self-conscious examination of the past undertaken in a rational, civilised and literate society. In very general terms, a society with a degree of historical consciousness is likely to be sceptical towards myth.[1] The Enlightenment, the period which most

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1 For the abuse of history through the use of myth, particularly in the twentieth century, see Philip Rahv, "The Myth and the Powerhouse," Partisan Review 20 (1953), 635-648, rpt. in Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice, ed. J. B. Vickery (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1966), 109-118; Roland Barthes, "Myth on the Right," Mythologies, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (1972; London: Granada, 1981), 148-159.

influenced Shelley's thought, is characterised by the rise of a history based on scientific and rational explanations of the origins of the human race and the beginnings of civilised society. It is in the eighteenth century, with the political attack on the institutional aspects of the Church and philosophical scepticism towards religious belief, that the threat to Christianity is inaugurated by an increased respect for historical understanding. The promotion of progress and reason is achieved through the denigration or, frequently, the sentimentalising of the primitive.

Shelley's poetry emerges out of the culmination of this conflict in intellectual thought in France and Britain during and after the 1790's. His response to the Enlightenment is shaped partly by the French Revolution, and is mediated through the counter-offensive against the radical activity of the 1790's, endorsed in what was for the younger Romantics Wordsworth's most significant poem, The Excursion (1814). The effect of this historical vantage-point is to arouse in Shelley a critical attitude towards some of the manifestations of Enlightenment reason.[2] Combined with

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2 In the Preface to The Revolt of Islam Shelley is sceptical of the uses of reason for merely mystifying ends, "Metaphysics, and inquiries into moral and political science have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr. Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph", Hutchinson, 34. See also his critique of the rise of commerce in the eighteenth century in A Philosophical View of Reform, "The means and sources of knowledge were thus increased together with knowledge itself, and the instruments of knowledge. The benefit of this increase of the powers of man became, in consequence of the inartificial forms into which society came to be distributed, an instrument of his additional evil", Julian vii, 10. See also the distinction between poets and philosophers in A Defence of Poetry, "The exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau and their disciples, in favour of oppressed and deluded humanity, are entitled to the

a practical, reforming zeal, his poetry shows in its employment of mythological characters and themes, a desire for a poetic form which would embrace idealised versions of the origins of human life, the beginnings of society and its future. An interest in other cultures, other religions and mythologies offered the means to a critique of what he saw as a dangerously monotheistic establishment intent on repressing all criticism.[3]

Given his familiarity with Enlightenment thought, it is misleading to see Shelley's use of mythology as a displaced religious impulse to recover a domain of eternal verities and values. His early atheism, although later tempered by sympathy towards the non-institutional aspects of Christianity, necessarily led him to a sympathetic interest in non-Christian religions and

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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.[*] ([*] "I follow the classification adopted by the author of the Four Ages of Poetry. But Rousseau was essentially a poet, the others, even Voltaire, were mere reasoners"), Norton, 502.

3 See L527, To the Editor of The Examiner [Leigh Hunt], 3 Nov. 1819, Letters, ii, 136-148. Shelley uses the trial and conviction of Richard Carlile for publishing Paine's Age of Reason as a pretext for protesting that the requirement that a jury be Christian becomes a political weapon in the hands of the establishment: "In prosecuting Carlisle [sic] they have used the superstition of the Jury as their instrument for crushing a political enemy, or rather they strike in his person at all their political enemies", Letters, ii, 143. For the background to Carlile's imprisonment, see Olivia Smith, The Politics of Language, 1791-1819 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1984), 164-5, and E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 791-803.

cosmogonies, particularly of Ancient Greece and the East.[4] His own variety of syncretism, a practice in which the myths of different cultures are reconciled, can be seen less as an organicist bid to recover a timeless and unchallengeable order, frequently the aim of the syncretism practised by Christian theologians forced to defend monotheism against the evidence of Enlightenment science, than as a form of cultural relativism.[5] His rejection of a purely materialist explanation of the origins and future of the world, of the kind to which he had subscribed in Queen Mab, with its implicitly arbitrary view of history, enabled him to perceive mythology as an inevitable cultural formation rather than as simply wrong-headed.[6] Moreover, mythology was not merely a scholarly pursuit; it permitted him to combine his moral and political views with a viable literary form. His fascination with the literature and natural religion of Ancient Greek republican society, and with the Zoroastrian view of history as alternate reigns of good and evil, encouraged him to devise new explanations of human origins and

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4 See "Essay on Christianity," Julian vi, 227-252, and "On the Devil and Devils," Julian vii, 87-104.

5 For a useful discussion of the forms of syncretism in this period see Albert J. Kuhn, "English Deism and the Development of Romantic Mythological Syncretism," PMLA 71 (1956), 1094-1116, especially 1094-95. Kuhn argues that "syncretic mythography in the Romantic period had its principal roots in seventeenth-century Christian apologetics; but its character and form were determined primarily by English deism", 1097.

6 For his definition of Necessity, see Queen Mab VI, 197-238.

development based partly on a scholarly interest shared with Peacock, and partly on his own view of social responsibility as the prerogative of the poet.[7]

Shelley's use of mythology must be distinguished at the outset from the essentialist associations of myth in German Romantic thought.[8] Friedrich Schlegel's demand for a new mythology in order to revitalise German poetry, and Schelling's view of myth as a new philosophical form anticipate modern tendencies to view myth as a separate ontological category, an area which cannot be given full treatment here.[9] In the speculations of these writers, myth contributes to the reification of abstract thought which acts as a stable resource of aesthetic order. The essentialist status granted to mythology in Germany in this period gives rise to the popular

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7 For the influence of Peacock on Shelley's classical and mythological interests, see Marilyn Butler, Peacock: A Satirist in His Context (London: RKP, 1979), especially 19-25 and 103-109.

8 For a useful selection and commentary see "German Romanticism and myth", The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860, ed. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972), 302-364.

9 See Friedrich Schlegel, "Our poetry, I maintain, lacks a focal point, such as mythology was for the ancients; and one could summarise all the essentials in which modern poetry is inferior to the ancient in these words: We have no mythology. But, I add, we are close to obtaining one or, rather, it is time that we earnestly work together to create one", "Talk on Mythology," Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms, trans. and introd. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1968), 81; F. W. J. Schelling, "Mythology, as a history of the gods, thus as mythology properly speaking, is surely begotten in life; but it demands to be lived," Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, trans. by the editors, Feldman and Richardson, 324.

concept of a unified culture based on theories of race and language which could be used to guarantee the political power denied by historical circumstance.[10] However the appeal of mythology to Shelley is not for such philosophical or cultural purposes. Nor indeed is it in any sense populist as his admission that "Prometheus was never intended for more than 5 or 6 persons", emphasizes.[11]

Mythology for Shelley in the repressive period in England and Europe after the end of the Napoleonic wars is neither a static category confined to prehistory nor a neutral aesthetic domain into which the artist can retreat. A myth can be fashioned according to the needs of the historical moment while its authority as a popular form is assured; tradition can be invented through myth.[12] Myth from classical times has been distinguished from realism generically since it neither relies on logical, rational argument nor, unlike legend and saga, is it bound to contain elements of historical

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10 See Isaiah Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment", in Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas (London: Hogarth, 1976), 145-216; Charles Taylor "The Claims of Speculative Reason", Part I of Hegel (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), 3-124, especially 13-25.

11 L683, To John Gisborne [hereafter cited as JG], 26 Jan 1822, Letters ii, 388. See also Shelley's comment on Prometheus Unbound that it "will not sell - it is written only for the elect. I confess I am vain enough to like it", L568, To Leigh Hunt [hereafter cited as LH], 26 May 1820, Letters, ii, 200.

12 For interesting reflections on this, see The Invention of Tradition, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: CUP, 1983).

truth.[13] This thesis suggests, however, that the use of myth is historically determined in the work of Shelley, and its authority consciously relies upon the artist's prerogative in interpreting its value in the particular historical moment.[14]

1.1 Enlightenment versus essentialism: some twentieth-century perspectives of mythology.

In this brief survey of some twentieth-century views of mythology the conflict between Enlightenment scepticism towards mythology and idealist defences of its value and purpose are discussed. This selective version of the twentieth-century debate about mythology is chosen because it represents the development of an opposition inherited recognisably from Shelley's own period in which Enlightenment reason was challenged by the religious and spiritual persuasions of Coleridge and German Romantic thinkers. As the following section will demonstrate, much modern criticism has

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13 For an excellent discussion of classical and modern attitudes to myth see Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Reason and Myth", Myth and Society in Ancient Greece, trans. Janet Lloyd (London: Methuen, 1982), 186-242, especially 200-207 and 233-240.

14 See, in contrast, Angela Carter's view: "...I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice...I'm in the demythologising business...I'm interested in myths...just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree", "Notes from the Front Line," On Gender and Writing, ed. Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora, 1983), 71.

viewed the work of all the English Romantic poets from within the anti-Enlightenment tradition as it has emerged in the twentieth century.[15]

The association of myth with the primitive as a reminder of our pre-rational origins, a stronghold against progress and science, is apparent in the dominant view of Romanticism as a reaction against Enlightenment confidence in the power of reason. Jung's view that myth is a necessary aspect of the primitive within us all, part of the "collective unconscious" which cannot be repudiated without serious social and psychological consequences, has been applied equally to Romanticism.[16]

The emphasis on scientific and historical progress in the work of Freud and Marx is clearly hostile to an evaluation of myth as intrinsic to our spiritual origins. Freud sees myth, like religion, as a feature of primitive society which will be superseded eventually by science; "in the long run nothing can withstand knowledge and experience."[17] Religion is an illusion "comparable

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15 See Ernst Cassirer, Mythical Thought, vol. 2 of The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, trans. R. Mannheim, introd. C. W. Hendel, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955); Gaston Bachelard, On Poetic Imagination and Reverie: Selections from the Works of Gaston Bachelard, trans. and introd. Colette Gaudin, The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971).

16 Jung, "In reality we can never legitimately cut loose from our archetypal foundations unless we are prepared to pay the price of a neurosis, any more than we can rid ourselves of our body and its organs without committing suicide", C. J. Jung and C. Kerenyi, Introduction to a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: RKP, 1951), 105-106.

17 Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, rpt. in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. and trans. J. Strachey et al., 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953-74),

to a childhood neurosis", which will be surmounted "just as so many children grow out of their similar neurosis."[18] Freud's is apparently an Enlightenment stance at its most assured. His views echo many Enlightenment thinkers including Boulanger, Buffon and Hume who saw mythology as the expression of primitive fears of the natural world.[19] Marx, like Freud, sees religion as an illusion or abstraction projected by the mind onto the external world, a willing submission to a false concept of an external force controlling human destiny.[20] Mythology is a form of what Marx terms disparagingly "ideology" or "false consciousness".[21]

Most "enlightened" views of myth appeal to science or history to prove its fabulous, chimerical foundations. The structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, however, applies a scientific methodology in a

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xxi, 54.

18 Freud, Standard Edition, xxi, 53.

19 See Chapter 2.1.

20 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Part I of The German Ideology, in The German Ideology, Part I with selections from Parts II and III, together with Marx's "Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy," ed. and introd. C. J. Arthur, 2nd ed. (1974; London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 37-95.

21 For the meanings of "ideology", see Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, (London: Fontana, 1976), 126-130.

sympathetic attempt to understand myth, and gives "depth" to its meaning, just as Jung and Freud, with conflicting aims, seek to reveal in myth the deep and invisible layers of the psyche. Myth is perceived by structuralists as a systematic form of cultural representation in which the story is less important than the relationship of its features to those of other stories. Myths operate on such a model, like languages, through terms related in "binary opposition" which are located at a deeper level than the mere linear sequence of events of a narrative.[22] The structural method apparently gives myths an autonomy and respect by refusing to measure them against external standards like science or reason.[23] But the organising principle of "structure", as has been noted, is dangerous because it pre-determines the patterns which it claims myths to reveal and while successful in relation to the myths of totemistic societies, works badly with Greek and Indo-European myths which have weak classificatory systems.[24]

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22 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (1963; London: Allen Lane, 1968), 210.

23 See Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning, The 1977 Massey Lectures (London: RKP, 1978).

24 For critiques of Lévi-Strauss, see Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Writing and Difference, trans. and introd. Alan Bass (London: RKP, 1978), 278-293; G. S. Kirk, Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 42-83; Edmund Leach, Lévi-Strauss, Fontana Modern Masters (1970, rev. ed.; London: Fontana, 1974), 54-83; Dan Sperber, "Claude Lévi-Strauss," Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida, ed. and introd. John Sturrock (Oxford: OUP, 1979), 19-51; Vernant, 226-233.

Nevertheless, structuralism provides the basis for an analysis of mythology as a form of representation rather than a repository of absolute and timeless truths. It is this fluid and dynamic character which artists like Shelley can find liberating in their refashioning of myths. Indeed the analysis of myth as a form of representation is as applicable to modern Western societies as to the ancient world or to "primitive" tribes. One successful example of an analysis of modern cultural representation is Barthes' Mythologies. Barthes was motivated to apply semiological analysis to the "mythologies" of bourgeois culture in France in the 1950's because he "resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn."[25] He objected to a modern society which presented its past as organic and "natural" rather than historically determined.[26] Barthes, at this early stage, sets out to demythologise since "analysing myths is the only effective way for an intellectual to take political action."[27] Later he sees "semioclasm" or the destruction of the sign, rather than the analysis of it, as the most viable form of direct intervention, "it is no longer the myths which

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25 Barthes, Preface to Mythologies, 11.

26 See Barthes, "Myth Today," Mythologies, 109-159; in particular his view that "what is sickening in myth is its resort to a false nature," 126n.

27 Barthes, "Maîtres et esclaves," Lettres Nouvelles, (March 1953), 108, cited in Jonathan Culler, Barthes, Fontana Modern Masters, (London: Fontana, 1983), 40.

need to be unmasked...it is the sign itself which must be shaken...."[28] In his later work demystification is less important than submission to the inevitability of symbolic orders, including mythology.[29] The violence against the sign is replaced by a fascination with the enduring power of all symbolic language, which Barthes, despite his political radicalism, details with such affection.

The scientific tradition sketched here can be perceived as the outcome of Enlightenment confidence in the power of reason to overcome religion. Much of Shelley's hostility towards religion and superstition can be seen within the Enlightenment tradition from which ultimately these approaches emerge. It is within such a tradition, rather than an idealist and spiritual order alien to his loyalties, that Shelley's historical use of mythology can be best understood. But the career of Barthes, in particular, demonstrates the difficulty of treating myth as a symbolic order which can be exploded by historical or materialist explanations. The role of myth as conveying ideology either in its content or form cannot simply be removed or translated into literal terms. The conclusion of certain recent theorists of history is that all historical discourse and logic is, like fiction, dependent on artificial or

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28 Barthes, "Changer l'objet lui-mêême," [Barthes' title: "La mythologie aujourd'hui"], Esprit (April 1971), rpt. as "Change the Object itself: Mythology Today," in Image-Music-Text, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 167.

29 For his awareness of this see "doxa/ paradoxa", Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), 71.

symbolic codes which are used to present a desired perspective.[30] Instead of myth being re-defined either in historical or scientific terms, it becomes apparent that all historical and cultural explanations are already to some degree mythological. The distinction between myth and history is therefore eroded, and the opportunity arises for a historically conscious artist such as Shelley, to create an alternative historical perspective using mythology to demonstrate his freedom from the version of history imposed by an authority such as the Church.

Finally it is worth noting briefly the parallel between Shelley's interest in the Dionysian cults of Ancient Greece, and the modern revival of Nietzsche's epistemology which celebrates the liberating aspects of paganism.[31] The cult of Dionysus had populist origins and was anti-authoritarian in contrast to the rigidity of Apollonian reason and, implicitly, to Christian monotheism.[32] The contemporary Parisian philosopher Jean-François

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30 See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, trans.^(1974; London: Tavistock, 1985); Edward W. Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983; London: Faber, 1984); Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973) and "Rhetoric and History," Hayden White and Frank E. Manuel, Theories of History, Papers read at a Clark Library seminar, Mar. 6, 1976 (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1978), 3-25.

A.M. ^ Sheridan Smith

31 See Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis Golffing, Anchor Books (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

32 See E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley: U of California P, 1951), 64-101. For the relevance of Dionysus to Shelley, see Ross G. Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1964), 23-39.

Lyotard values the pagan as the marginal viewpoint because it has none of the pretensions to universal authority of the "grand narrative" of progress and reason initiated by the Enlightenment, which he sees as repressive and exclusive.[33] Although Lyotard's hostility to the confident legacy of the Enlightenment is clearly far removed from Shelley's basic sympathy for it, his view of paganism as a critique of reason and authority forms an interesting comparison to Shelley's sense of Bacchic release as radically libertarian, and in "The Triumph of Life", as a disordering presence in the ideal dream of reason.

1.2 Romanticism and Mythology: some recent critical recuperations

The aim of this section is to question the structuralist, psychoanalytical, and deconstructive strategies to which Romantic poetry has been subjected. It examines those modern assessments of mythology in Romantic poetry which assume an ontological affiliation between the treatments of myth examined in the previous section and Romanticism as a literary and historical category. Literary

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33 For Lyotard's most lucid statement (in translation) of the dangers of the "grand narrative", see The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Foreword Fredric Jameson, Theory and History of Literature 10 (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984). For the destabilising power of the pagan, see Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, "Second Day: The Three Pragmatic Positions," in Just Gaming, trans. Wlad Godzich, Theory and History of Literature 20 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985), 19-43.

criticism and the analysis of mythology in the twentieth century have mirrored each other in their exclusion of the historical evidence which this thesis argues to be necessary to an understanding of Romantic myth-making.

Twentieth-century methodologies, in particular structuralism and psychoanalysis, which have influenced the investigation of mythology, have likewise influenced literary criticism. Their methods have been used to uncover the deeper levels of literary texts as yet concealed by formalist criticism. According to such methods, texts and their authors are unaware of the strategies and symbolic levels through which they operate to which the critic, who reveals such otherwise unrealised meanings, has unique access. The fact that myth challenges both the convention of individual authorship and defies rational explanation has possibly contributed to the application of deconstruction and reception theory in the criticism of Romantic poetry. Within such criticism the workings of myth are explained in terms of the susceptibilities of the reader, the covert strategies of the text, or the separate rules of "mythopoeia" but rarely through historical criticism. Myth, then, is not simply a compulsion to return to an ineluctable past either real or imagined as argued by Freud and by Bloomian critics of Romantic poetry, but can be seen equally as a visionary cultural form, the use to which it is put in Prometheus Unbound.[34] The

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34 See Freud's argument in "The Uncanny", Standard Edition, xvii, 217-256.

versatility of myth is a historical matter: the notable production of Anouilh's Antigone in occupied Paris is proof that myths endure because of their critical counterpoint to the historical moment, not because they possess a trans-historical meaning.[35] Myth is in fact already implicated both within and outside history, especially literary history.

The principal works of criticism before the post-war era of Romantic studies treat mythology and Romanticism uncritically as mutually reinforcing terms. Bush regards the poets' interest in pagan mythology as simply reflecting Romantic preoccupations with Nature and sensuality.[36] Bush's explanations of mythology in Romantic poetry are formulated through self-affirming statements such as, Wordsworth's "ideas of Greek myth were really rooted in his deepest intuitions", within an exclusively literary context so that, for example, Wordsworth's legacy to Keats, in itself questionable, is nothing more than "a noble and poetic conception of mythology as a treasury of symbols rich enough to embody not only the finest sensuous experience but the highest aspirations of man."[37]

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35 See Jean Anouilh, Antigone: a tragedy, trans. L. Galantiere (1951; London: Methuen, 1960). See also George Steiner, Antigones: the Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought (Oxford: OUP, 1984).

36 See Douglas Bush, Introduction, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1937), xi-xvi. See also "The Romantic Revival" in his Pagan Myth and Christian Tradition in English Poetry, Jayne Lectures for 1967 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1968), 32-59.

37 Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, 56; 70.

Hungerford demonstrates a similar, uncritical fusion of the concepts of mythology and Romanticism which confirms prejudgements about both terms rather than questions them. Mythology, he suggests, is equivalent to the extraordinary or supernatural, the invocation of a lost world for which Romanticism is celebrated, and the mythographers are portrayed as peculiar, ghostly forms: "their pallid and disembodied shades walk with the living poets, like the unburied dead of Ancient times."[38] Hungerford's study of some of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century mythographers examined in this thesis, is pioneering but is impeded by a tone of pity and nostalgia entirely inappropriate to the confident rationalism of some of the Enlightenment thinkers he examines.[39] Neither treatment permits a critical gap between the two terms "mythology" and "Romanticism" which collapse helplessly into each other.

Frye

Romanticism has been formulated most influentially in the post-war era by Frye, Abrams and Bloom for whom it is a

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38 Edward B. Hungerford, Shores of Darkness (New York: Columbia UP, 1941), 3. For another analysis of the background to the eighteenth-century interest in mythology, see Ruthven Todd, Tracks in the Snow: Studies in English Science and Art (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1946), 29-60.

39 Hungerford's treatment of mythology in Romantic poetry is frankly weak; see his comments on Shelley's Prometheus, 191.

self-evidently "mythical" project. Thus the Romantic poets have already in some sense been mythologised, in a largely Judaeo-Christian setting; their attitudes towards the issues of mythology, poetry and history have been defined in the language of these critics' preoccupation with the view that myth is literature, and that all extrinsic factors, including history, can either be ignored or subsumed. The use of myth is an enclosed dialogue between the writer and the literary choices which myths present, and this self-reference is further sealed by the argument that modern poetry grows out of the Romantic tradition.

The central example of a critic who has adopted some of the strategies used in the twentieth century to examine myth and applied them to literary texts, is Northrop Frye. Frye established "archetypal" criticism as a literary method in Anatomy of Criticism after his work on Blake's mythology. It arises from his view that "if criticism exists, it must be an examination of literature in terms of a conceptual framework desirable from an inductive survey of the literary field".[40] The use of archetypes contextualises literary criticism and can be seen as a direct challenge to the New Critics' dissociation of literature from all but its formal, internal relations and their consequent distaste for the moral and

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40 Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 7. See "The Road of Excess" in Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications, ed. B. Slote (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1963), 3-20, rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), 119-132.

aesthetic ambitions of the Romantic poets.[41] Mythology for Frye is a primary order from which all codes, literary and sociological, derive:

> ...I think that an ideology is always a secondary and derivative thing, and that the primary thing is a mythology. That is, people don't think up a set of assumptions or beliefs; they think up a set of stories, and derive the assumptions and beliefs from the stories....I regard mythology as prior to ideology, and ideology as taking its shape from the mythology that it derives from.[42]

Although ultimately associated with biblical codes, Frye's Anatomy does not simply foreshadow the modern structural approaches to literature, but provides a socio-cultural context for criticism to which even Marxist critics, such as Jameson, are indebted.[43]

Abrams and Hartman

For Abrams, "the Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos" through the biblical and Neoplatonist language

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41 See also Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1947), 147-186.

42 Northrop Frye, Interview, in Criticism in Society: Interviews with Jacques Derrida et al., ed. Imre Salusinszky, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1987), 31. See also Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (London: Athlone, 1980), 2-26.

43 See Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Methuen, 1981), 68-74 and 104-107.

of crisis and redemption.[44] The view that Romanticism is displaced religion, evinced by Hulme is, however, misleading given the hostility of the younger generation of poets towards Christianity.[45] This secularised theology manifests itself in three unfortunate ways in Abrams' work: the imposition of the theological and aesthetic preoccupations of German Romanticism onto English Romantic poetry; a view of the radicalism of the 1790's purely in terms of religious millenarianism at the cost of acknowledging the secular, often atheistic aspects of English radical thought; and a view of Wordsworth's Prelude as the model for all Romantic poetry.[46]

Abrams places the Romantics' views of myth and their conception of history entirely in a Christian framework and thereby expresses his Hegelian critique of the Enlightenment:

> ...they undertook, either in epic or some other major genre - in drama, in prose romance, or in the visionary "greater Ode" - radically to recast, into terms appropriate to the historical and intellectual circumstances of their own age,

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44 M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), 65-66.

45 T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion", Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art, ed. Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, 1936), 118.

46 For radical millenarianism and Romantic poetry see Abrams, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," in Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers of the English Institute, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia UP, 1963), 26-72, rpt. in The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism (New York: Norton, 1984), 44-75.

> the Christian pattern of the fall, the redemption, and the emergence of a new earth which will constitute a restored paradise.[47]

The problem with Natural Supernaturalism, as has been frequently noted, is that it "presents the familiar spectacle of a book about Romanticism which is permeated through and through with Romantic assumptions".[48] It fuses indiscriminately the terminology of a variety of spiritual traditions in such a way as to generalise the syncretism of all the Romantic poets into a coherent ideology, a view which resists the evidence of an explicit conflict between the younger and elder generations.

Hartman, like Abrams, presents a view of Romantic poetry on a Hegelian model, arguing that it posits not the need to recover an idyllic past but to pass through intellectual division in order to attain artistic integrity; "the intelligence is seen as a perverse

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47 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 29.

48 J. Hillis Miller, "Tradition and Difference," rev. of Natural Supernaturalism by M. H. Abrams, Diacritics 2 (Winter 1972), 8. The argument and methodology in Natural Supernaturalism have provoked much debate. See Wayne C. Booth, "M. H. Abrams: Historian as Critic, Critic as Pluralist," CI 2 (Spring 1976), 411-445; the debate entitled, "The Limits of Pluralism" in CI 3 (Spring 1977), 407-447, which includes Booth, ""Preserving the Exemplar": or, How Not to Dig Our Own Graves," 407-423, Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel," 425-438, and Miller, "The Critic as Host," 439-447; Morse Peckham, "The Infinitude of Pluralism," CI 3 (Summer 1977), 803-816; Jerome McGann, The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), 21-31.

though necessary specialisation of the whole soul of man, and art as a means to resist the intelligence, intelligently."[49] Myth is the formal expression of the way in which the poet's self is burdened with the need for this transcendence:

> His art is linked to the autonomous and the individual; yet that same art, in the absence of an authoritative myth, must bear the entire weight of having to transcend or ritually limit these tendencies...Subjectivity - even solipsism - becomes the subject of poems which seek qua poetry to transmute it.[50]

His conclusion, like Abrams', is that ultimately Romanticism has a function analogous to religion, thus "Eden, Fall, and Redemption merges wih the new triad of Nature, Self-Consciousness, and Imagination."[51] Mythology is simply the form in which this religious recovery is achieved.

Bloom

Bloom serves as an important example of the anti-historical tendencies of the criticism of the Romantics.[52] Where Abrams and

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49 Geoffrey Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-Self-consciousness," Centennial Review 6 (1962), 553-65, rpt. in Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970), 302.

50 Hartman, 306.

51 Hartman, 307.

52 See below for separate treatment of Shelley.

Hartman tend to view the fusion of mind and world as the purpose and achievement of the Romantic imagination, Bloom sees a fundamental division within the psyche which prevents the union of mind and Nature.[53] Bloom terms this the struggle of Prometheus against "the Real man", Imagination:

> In the Prometheus stage, the quest is allied to the libido's struggle against repressiveness, and nature is an ally, though always a wounded and sometimes a withdrawn one. In the Real Man, the Imagination, stage, nature is the immediate though not the ultimate antagonist.[54]

This argument has the consequence of de-politicising the radical poetical and political motivations of the Romantic poet. Since this struggle is played out at a sub-conscious level, the mythical model which Bloom uses to describe Romanticism is ultimately Freud's Oedipus not Prometheus, the mythical character used by Shelley and Byron to symbolise their aspirations:

> An implied anguish throughout this book is that Romanticism for all its glories, may have been a vast visionary tragedy, the self-baffled enterprise not of Prometheus but of blinded Oedipus, who did not know that the Sphinx was his Muse.[55]

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53 Bloom, "The Internalisation of Quest Romance," Introduction to Romanticism and Consciousness, rpt. The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971), 13-35.

54 Bloom, "Internalisation," 22.

55 Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York: OUP, 1973), 10.

Bloom's work has influenced assumptions about mythology in Romantic poetry more than any other recent critic. As a result of his preoccupation with "strong" readings, with the vertical struggle between younger and older Romantic poets, and with the relationship between the Romantics and Milton, mythology is always treated as the manifestation of a personal crisis or trauma, a drama of the self.[56] Displacement thus never has any reference except to a philosophy based on the self and its spiritual energies.[57]

Bloom's preoccupations are conspicuous in Cantor's Creature and Creator in which the influence of theories of origins on Romantic mythology through Rousseau's Discourse On the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men.[58] Cantor argues somewhat disingenuously that Rousseau is not simply offering a nostalgic view of idyllic pre-civilisation but rather, the possibility of man recovering Paradise in this world:

> ...in his idea that we are what we make of ourselves, Rousseau pointed to man assuming the traditional prerogatives of God.

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56 See Harold Bloom, "Prometheus Rising: the Backgrounds of Romantic Poetry," The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry, (1961 rev ed.; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971), xiii-xxv.

57 For critiques of Bloom see Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1982), 116-125; Lentricchia, 318-346.

58 See Paul A. Cantor, Preface to Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), xii - xiii.

> Romantic myth-makers dreamed of the creator in man remaking the creature into something divine.[59]

Although this model presents itself as aligned against the conservatism of orthodox Christian theories of origins, that "man cannot hope to recapture paradise by his own efforts", it in fact reinstates the mythological preoccupations of the Romantic poets within Abrams' framework.[60] In his statement that "the Romantic quest for origins is profoundly connected with the Romantic quest for originality", he also fails to escape from either Bloom or Milton.[61] He locates originality in the psyche of the poet, rather than pointing to the ways in which the poetry is visionary in a political context.

de Man

De Man argues that the use of myth is a dimension of the Romantic rhetoric of temporality which desires permanence through poetic form.[62] This desire, frequently expressed by Wordsworth,

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59 Cantor, 24.

60 Cantor, xiv.

61 Cantor, xii.

62 For other analyses of romantic rhetoric see Rene Wellek, "The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History," Comparative Literature 1 (1949), 1-23 and 147-172, rpt. in Concepts of Criticism (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), 128-198. See also W. K. Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery," in The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (1954; London: Methuen, 1970), 103-116, rpt. in English Romantic Poets, ed. Abrams, 25-36.

manifests itself as the wish to escape from time and history through mythology and so to have recourse to an idealised and imagined past. Inevitably "this movement is essentially paradoxical and condemned in advance to failure", since language itself cannot achieve this permanence and is forced back into self-consciousness.[63]

For de Man Romantic poetry is locked in this quest for permanence through forms such as myth:

> It selects, for example, a variety of archetypal myths to serve as the dramatic pattern for the narration of this failure; a useful study could be made of the romantic and post-romantic versions of Hellenic myths such as the stories of Narcissus, of Prometheus, of the War of the Titans, of Adonis, Eros and Psyche, Proserpine, and many others; in each case, the tension and duality inherent in the mythological situation would be found to reflect the inherent tension that resides in the metaphorical language itself.[64]

But he in fact brings the issue of mythology down to a purely formal choice of language and rhetoric. The movement outward to realise inner needs in a concrete form is accompanied by a movement inwards which is not psychological but a simple acknowedgement of despair at

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63 Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," first printed in a slightly different French version, as "Structure intentionnelle de l'image romantique," in Revue internationale de philosophie 51 (1960), 68-84, trans. by the author, rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Bloom, 65-77, rpt. in The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 7.

64 de Man, "Intentional Structure", 7.

the inadequacy of language and form.[65] Nature and mythology manifest the desire to escape both self-consciousness and an awareness of the eroding force of time:

> At times, romantic thought and romantic poetry seem to come so close to giving in completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perception, between an expressive or constitutive and a mimetic or literal language.[66]

Thus mythology, like the poet's communion with Nature, is a means of escaping time which is presented in his view of Shelley as a desire to escape history.[67] But the nostalgia he senses in the poetry is also acutely present in his own criticism, which refuses to threaten the carefully located conflicts in romantic poetry which it sets up. The desire to create a permanent order of meaning through poetry accompanied by a knowledge that such an enterprise is impossible, actually returns us to the preconception that Romanticism resorts to mythology in order to escape from the self or history, which is

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65 See de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in Interpretation: Theory and Practice, ed. Charles Singleton, The Johns Hopkins Humanities Seminars (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1969), 173-209, rpt. in Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, 2nd ed., introd. Wlad Godzich (London: Methuen, 1983), 187-228.

66 de Man,"Intentional Structure", 7.

67 de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in Deconstruction and Criticism, ed. Bloom et al. (London: RKP, 1979), 39-73, rpt. in Rhetoric of Romanticism, 93-123. See below chapter 7.0

effectively a version of the position of Abrams, Hartman and Bloom.

Romantic Irony

Recent arguments about interpretation have treated Romantic literary theory from pure reason to romantic irony as exemplary. The issues which the Romantics raised by their literary use of symbolic orders including the mythological has become a dimension of the contemporary debate about the status of theory. It is perhaps no coincidence that the promotion of interpretation and the question of the authority of criticism arise amongst just that group of scholars, Hartman, Bloom, de Man and Hillis Miller, known collectively as the "Yale School", whose main work centres on Romantic poetry. The self-consciousness of deconstruction has found itself mirrored conveniently in the work of Romantic ironists like Friedrich Schlegel who argue that the reader not the author creates the meaning of the text.[68] This attention to interpretive strategies, however, treats the form and content of the literary usage of myth as just another kind of textual provisionality.

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68 For assessments of Romantic irony see Paul Hamilton, Coleridge's Poetics, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 12-26; David Simpson, Irony and Authority in English Romantic Poetry (London: MacMillan, 1979), 166-200. For selected texts and commentaries see German aesthetic and literary criticism: the Romantic Ironists and Goethe, ed. Kathleen Wheeler (Cambridge: CUP, 1984). For readings in romantic irony see Kathleen Wheeler Sources, processes and methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (Cambridge: CUP, 1980); Anne Mellor English Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980).

The consequence of this approach is that the past can only be acknowledged as a representation, another kind of artifact; myth is merely an exercise on behalf of the reader's awareness of this fact. This variety of deconstruction is present in Aske's view of Keats' attitude to the classical past:

> Keats appeals to antiquity as a supreme fiction, that is, an ideal space of possibility whose imaginative rehabilitation might guarantee the authority of modern poetry.[69]

As the notion of rehabilitation and authority imply, a major source for Aske's view is Harold Bloom.[70] Aske's argument is disappointing not simply because he entrenches the use of myth in an exclusively literary context but because mythology is treated almost incidentally as the formal embodiment of the issue of the authority of fictions rather than a historically determined form.

However, this reader-oriented deconstruction does not have to be be imposed from without in order to recover the radical and subversive aspects of Romanticism since, as Rajan points out, they are already historically placed within it:

> the current debate between organicist and deconstructionist

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69 Martin Aske, Keats and Hellenism: An Essay (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 1.

70 Aske, 2.

> critics over the nature of Romanticism was originally waged by the Romantics themselves and was not resolved in favour of either side.[71]

Rajan's central point with regard to Abrams and Frye, which could be applied to Cantor's argument also, is that their definition of Romanticism can be seen as conservative as much as radical:

> In transferring the creative initiative from God to man, and in replacing revelation with imagination, the Romantics are thought to have overthrown a Christian pessimism which denied man direct access to the ideal. But in fact, a case can be made for saying that it is precisely this claim of a natural supernaturalism based on the imagination which is the most conservative element in a literature that stands on the edge of modernism, in a universe already recognized as discontinuous rather than organic. The Romantic rhetoric of affirmation avoids breaking with the past, and simply restates with reference to imagination the optimistic humanism urged by the Enlightenment with reference to reason.[72]

Rajan implies that these critiques perceive Romanticism in a liberal tradition which can accommodate imagination as well as reason. The alternative philosophical background she explores successfully shows how the poetry can be seen to operate in the opposite direction towards a critique of liberalism, which favours discontinuity and doubt. The basis of her critique of Romanticism does not lie in the division between religion and enlightened atheism but in the optimism

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71 Tilottama Rajan, Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (1980; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 19.

72 Rajan, 15.

they share on the one hand, and the scepticism and disruption of the self-conscious tradition initiated by Schiller, on the other; her deconstruction is thus historicised.

McGann and the "Historical Method"

Historical critics have sought to emphasise the impossibility of defining Romanticism as a coherent enterprise and their methods offer a way of examining myth which acts as a brake on the more undisciplined ways in which myth and Romanticism are conflated.[73] The recurrent theme of McGann's critique of Romanticism is the pernicious idealism introduced by Coleridge into literary criticism through theological and aesthetic speculation. He locates usefully the origins of some of the misnomers of essentialist uses of mythology within Romanticism in the work of Coleridge.[74] For the

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73 For applications of various historical methods to Romanticism see A. O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1948), 228-253, rpt. in English Romantic Poets, ed. Abrams, 3-24; "Romantic" and its cognates: the European history of a word, ed. Hans Eichner (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972); Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830 (Oxford: OUP, 1981); Jerome McGann, "Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism," MLN 94 (1979), 988-1032, rpt. The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1985), 17-65; McGann, "Introduction: A Point of Reference," Historical Studies and Literary Criticism, ed. McGann (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985), 3-21.

74 See McGann, "The Ancient Mariner: the Meaning of the Meanings," CI 8(1981), 35-67 rpt. in The Beauty of Inflections, 135-172.

biblical critics and philosophers in Germany whom Coleridge studied, the value of myth is as a symbolic language purveyed solely by the clerisy which affords a unique mode of interpretation. Mythology is the artistic and rhetorical form which best articulates the resistance of German philosophy to historical and political argument. It neutralises criticism by absorbing all opposition into its undifferentiated order. Coleridge's poetry and criticism are used to demonstrate the conjunction of a theology, mythology and aesthetics which is hostile to the Enlightenment reason of the sceptics and radicals whom Shelley admired.

The historical method, however, appears unable to criticise this nexus without destroying it altogether. Even if the transcendent impulse of Romantic poetry is shown to be historically determined, the process of the repression or exclusion of history which subsequent critics have described as the essence of Romanticism requires analysis and not simply hostility. McGann's appeal to the materialism of history in his critique of the Romantic ideology is itself insufficiently conscious of the illusion of an authoritative historical discourse. To attempt to discover in the works of the Romantic poets that "the past is the heuristic measure, re-erected in the present, for establishing the securities of a future" overtaxes the problem of disinterested historical evaluation.[75] However, McGann demonstrates effectively that

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75 See McGann, Introduction to The Beauty of Inflections, 13.

Romantic poems frequently exhibit a historical consciousness neglected by critics. It is especially the anti-historical legacy in the work of Coleridge and Wordsworth which requires a historical location such as that initiated by Levinson.[76]

The archetypal "myth-criticism" of Frye, the conflated German and Neoplatonist idealism of Abrams, and the Hebraic and Freudian broodings of Bloom, are all examples of the ahistorical imposition of extraneous mythologies upon Romantic poetry. Even the rhetorical analysis of de Man and the theorists of Romantic irony perceives myth only as an extension of a formalist view of Romantic poetry as a self-conscious struggle for poetic expression. The practitioners of the "historical method" restore, at least, a contextual background through which the formal, psychological and visionary themes of Romantic poetry can be explored. Such a method offers the critical distance requisite for a proper examination of the otherwise dangerously unspecific topic of mythology.

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76 See Marjorie Levinson "Wordsworth's Intimations Ode: A Timely Utterance," in McGann, Historical Studies, 48-75.

1.3 Mythology or History? Shelley and his critics

In examining the modern criticism of Shelley, the paradigm of conflict and resolution is frequently reiterated. On the one hand, there is the affirmative, utopian and idealistic element in his verse embodied in Prometheus Unbound and Alastor and on the other, the contrary awareness of personal, historical and philosophical limitations reflected in "Julian and Maddalo" and "The Triumph of Life". These opposite facets of the poet and his work contribute to an (inaccurate) biographical division of his ideas between the early atheistic materialism and the later aspiration towards transcendence and idealism. As a biographical model, for those who wish to rehabilitate him, this can be perceived as a maturing vision which rejects the adolescent utopianism for which he has been vilified by critics such as Arnold, Leavis and Eliot. Such a view, however, has the consequence of undervaluing some of the important influences behind his early atheism and materialism which he in fact did not abandon. Alternatively the idealist "intellectual philosophy" discussed in "On Life", redeems him in the eyes of those who insist on quasi Christian or Platonist readings by ignoring the atheistic or materialist content of the early work.[77] The imposition of this bifurcation or false unity reaffirms itself in all the stages and

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77 See Robert Browning "...had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians," "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley," in Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, The Percy Reprints no. 3, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1923), 78.

forms of Shelley criticism over the past decades.[78]

The Nineteenth Century

The contemporary reaction to Shelley's poetry in the periodicals foreshadows the two paths of critical debate in the twentieth century: his density of style and diction, and his contentious moral views.[79] Contemporary reviewers such as Hazlitt, Lockhart and Walker interfuse moral and formal criticism much as Leavis and the New Critics do later.[80] The problem of form is

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78 For surveys of modern and nineteenth-century criticism see: Frederick A. Pottle "The Case of Shelley," PMLA 67 (1952), 589-608, rpt. in Shelley, Modern Judgements, ed. and introd. R. B. Woodings (1969; Nashville: Aurora, 1970), 35-51; Sylva Norman, Flight of the Skylark: The Development of Shelley's reputation (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1954); R. B. Woodings, "Introduction," Shelley, ed. Woodings, 11-28; Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977), 1-32; Paul H. Fry, "Made Men: A review article on Recent Shelley and Keats studies" Texas Studies in Literature and Language 21 (1979), 433-454; Miriam Allott, "Attitudes to Shelley: the vagaries of a critical reputation," in Essays on Shelley, ed. M. Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1982), 1-38.

79 For collections of contemporary reviews see, The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and his contemporary critics, ed. Newman Ivey White (1938; New York: Octagon Books, 1966); The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers, ed. Donald H. Reiman, 8 vols. (New York: Garland, 1972); Shelley: The Critical Heritage, ed. James E. Barcus, (London: RKP, 1975).

80 See [William Hazlitt], [attrib.], rev. of Posthumous Poems by Shelley, Edinburgh Review [hereafter cited as ER] 40 (July 1824), 494-514; [J. G. Lockhart], [attrib.], rev. of The Revolt of Islam, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine [hereafter cited as Blackwood's] 4 (Jan. 1819), 475-482; [W. S. Walker], [attrib.], rev. of Prometheus Unbound, Quarterly Review [hereafter cited as QR] 26 (Oct. 1821), 168-180.

paramount in this contemporary criticism, and it compounds the critics' perplexity at the role of mythology and idealism in his work. Thus Hazlitt finds the "ideal idolatries" of "The Witch of Atlas" incompatible with Shelley's radical views on superstition and imposture.[81] Lockhart is offended that Shelley deliberately perverts the meaning of Aeschylean drama which he believes to be compatible with the Christian model of punishment and salvation.[82] The contemporary reception of his use of mythology is, as such views demonstrate, at least historically conscious.

After his death, biography intruded upon criticism in many ways. The nineteenth-century view of Shelley as impulsive and child-like is achieved through a defence of his work based upon its lyrical force rather than its contentious subject-matter. Mary Shelley initiates the view that mythology is merely one of the ideal forms in which this effusive lyrical energy manifested its propensities:

> Such a gift is, among the sad vicissitudes of human life, the disappointments we meet, and the galling sense of our own mistakes and errors, fraught with pain; to escape from such, he delivered up his soul to poetry, and felt happy when he sheltered himself from the influence of human sympathies, in the wildest regions of fancy.[83]

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81 See below, chapter 4.1.

82 See [Lockhart], [attrib.], rev. of Prometheus Unbound, Blackwood's 7 (Sept. 1820), 679-687, especially 679-80. See chapter 3.0.

83 Mary Shelley, Preface to The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Mary Shelley, 4 vols. (London, 1839), i, xi-xii.

For Bagehot, Shelley "evinces a remarkable tendency to deal with mythology in [a] simple and elementary form" which is symptomatic of his immaturity as a writer.[84] Francis Thompson's portrait of Shelley similarly links the use of mythology with the innocence of his creative vision which, "made him, in the truest sense of the word, a mythological poet. This childlike quality assimilated him to the childlike peoples among whom mythologies have their rise."[85] This also reinforces the myth of Shelley, the child, which many Victorian critics seem to invoke.[86] Arnold etherialises the man in order to nullify the value of visionary poetry:

> The man Shelley, in very truth, is not entirely sane, and Shelley's poetry is not entirely sane either. The Shelley of actual life is a vision of beauty and radiance, indeed, but availing nothing, effecting nothing. And in poetry, no less than in life, he is "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain."[87]

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84 Walter Bagehot, "Percy Bysshe Shelley" in Vol. 1 of The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, ed. Norman St John-Stevas (London: The Economist, 1965), 448.

85 Francis Thompson, Shelley, introd. George Wyndham (London: Burns and Oates, 1911), 46-47.

86 See Webb, A Voice Not Understood, 1-32.

87 Matthew Arnold, "Shelley," in Essays in Criticism: Second Series (1888; London: Macmillan, 1911), 251-252.

This view is also manifest in Santayana's comment that Shelley was an other-worldly political idealist; "Being a finished child of nature, not a joint product, like most of us, of nature, history and society...."[88] Mythology rather than reality, the visionary rather than the real in Shelley's poetry, confirm for the critics of the nineteenth century all their suspicions and unease about his personality.[89]

Yeats' assessment of Shelley signals a pervasive tendency to view Shelley's mythology as a manifestation of the authority of a supernatural and mystical realm. Yeats in fact radically misreads Shelley's idealism and is indifferent to his early radicalism. Instead in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" he sees Shelley as a mystic in the tradition of the ancient bards and Neoplatonist cults. Thus he sees the eternal spiritual order to which Shelley alludes

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88 George Santayana, "Shelley: or the Poetic Value of Revolutionary Principles," in Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion (1913; London: Dent, 1926), 155-185, rpt. in Selected Critical Writings of George Santayana, 2 vols. ed. N. Henfrey (Cambridge: CUP, 1968) ii, 160.

89 The popular awareness of his political ideas should not be ignored: see Kenneth Muir, "Shelley's Heirs," The Penguin New Writing 26 (1945), 117-132. See also Engels' view that "Byron and Shelley are read almost exclusively by the lower classes," in Marx and Engels on Literature and Art (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 162; Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Shelley's Socialism: Two Lectures, ed. and introd. M. Saha (1888; Calcutta: Chitta Biswas, 1976).

in "The Witch of Atlas" and Adonais as a dimension of a mystical hierarchy more suited to Blake's later prophetic books, of which Shelley was patently sceptical:

> ...his poetry becomes the richer, the more emotional, and loses something of its appearance of idle fantasy when I remember that these are ancient symbols, and still come to visionaries in their dreams.[90]

Shelley's use of mythology is thus made into a latent manifestation of Yeats' authoritarian views of the visionary realm. Yeats later replaces the power of symbol in Shelley with a view of primal conflict between infinite desire and the dark nightmare realm of Demogorgon which leads him to a Freudian conclusion, close to Bloom's:

> Shelley was not a mystic, his system of thought was constructed by his logical faculty to satisfy desire, not a symbolical revelation received after the suspension of all desire.[91]

The Twentieth Century

The hostile attitude to Shelley dates from the beginnings of English as an academic discipline, when the nineteenth-century

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90 W. B. Yeats, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," rpt. in Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), 89-90. See also 77-78 for confirmation of this mystical view.

91 Yeats, "Prometheus Unbound," rpt. in Essays and Introductions, 421-422. See also the reference to a belief in Shelley as a substitute for orthodox religion, 424.

predisposition towards his lyrical energy is challenged first by the rigours of practical criticism and then by the New Critics' demand for neo-classical coherence. Although the formal defects are ostensibly the reason for undermining Shelley's abilities as a poet, the biographical facts, or distortions of them, are used to foment a tone of moral outrage. Leavis's vitriolic assessment in which he claims that Shelley's "poetic faculty...demands that active intelligence shall be, as it were, switched off," and Eliot's view that his are "ideas of adolescence" have been extremely influential.[92] To promote Shelley's "urbanity" in order to overcome the exigencies of his style can be seen as a defensive reflex against this formalist onslaught.[93]

A recent defender of Shelley in formalist terms is William Keach who attempts a reading of Shelley using the premises of the New Criticism.[94] Keach sees the principles of tension, ambiguity,

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92 F. R. Leavis, "Shelley" in Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry (1936; London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), 210; T. S. Eliot, "Shelley" in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, 1933, rpt. in Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1976), 81. For the New Critics' hostility see, Yvor Winters, Forms of Discovery: Critical and Historical Essays on the Forms of the Short Poem in English ([no place given]: Alan Swallow, 1967), 177-8; Allen Tate, "Understanding Modern Poetry," in Reason in Madness: Critical Essays (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1941), 96-97 and "The Unilateral Imagination; Or, I, too, Dislike It," rpt. in Essays of Four Decades (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1968), 456-458, 460-461.

93 See Donald Davie, "Shelley's Urbanity," in Purity of Diction in English Verse (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), 133-159; also Ann Thompson, "Shelley's "Letter to Maria Gisborne": Tact and Clutter," in Allott, 144-159.

94 William Keach Shelley's Style (New York: Methuen, 1984). For Shelley's view of language as deconstructive, see Jerrold Hogle, "Shelley's Poetics: the Power as Metaphor," KSJ 31 (1982), 159-197. See also chapter 6.0.

irony and even wit, at work in Shelley's poetic theory and practice, qualities which Empson and Ricks claim are reprehensibly absent from his work.[95] This partial and refined debate about formalist principles evidently governs the critical climate even today, as the defensive and aggressive titles of recent works such as Shelley: A Voice not Understood and Red Shelley suggest.[96] Such parameters mean that either the content of his work is discussed only as an adjunct to form or, alternatively, that the form is such an embarrassment as to be necessarily excluded when examining content. This accentuates the difficulty of relating the visionary and ideal language of Shelley's poetry to his use of mythology, and partially explains the dogged insistence that his idealism is modelled on Platonic doctrine.[97]

Bloom

The major influence on recent Shelley studies has been Harold

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95 See William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, 3rd ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1953), 20 and 156-161; Christopher Ricks, The Force of Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1984), 48-49. See also Iain McGilchrist, "Airy Heights and Hidden Depths," rev. of Allott, TLS (5 Nov. 1982), 1213.

96 Webb, A Voice not understood; Paul Foot, Red Shelley (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980).

97 See Notopoulos and Carl Grabo, The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1936).

Bloom whose attitudes to Romanticism have been outlined above. His early view of Shelley's mythopoeia as a religious impulse and his later view of it through the Freudian model of desire have made "strong" readings of Shelley's poetry almost *de rigueur*.[98] Bloom defines his premises in Shelley's Mythmaking in terms of Martin Buber's philosophy of "I-Thou" which is preoccupied with projections of the self. He is uncompromising in his refusal to explain or justify his model:

> The use of Buber in this study is of course heuristic; I hardly know what a reductive use of the I-Thou, I-It dialectic would be, since what Buber calls "relationship" has to vanish when analyzed, or discussed.[99]

Bloom reinstates Shelley as the lyric poet *par excellence* and this enables him to read Shelley as a Hebraic poet of Old Testament proportions, for example in his comparison of the Song of Deborah with the "Ode to the West Wind".[100] This Old Testament background renders poetry and mythology part of a process which excludes all

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98 See Harold Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking (1959; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1969).

99 Bloom, Preface to Shelley's Mythmaking, vii.

100 Bloom Shelley's Mythmaking, 65-90. See also Bloom, Introduction, Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry, ed. Bloom, The Signet Classic Poetry Series (New York: New American Library, 1966), ix-xlv, rpt. as "The Unpastured Sea: An Introduction to Shelley," The Ringers in the Tower, 87-116.

social and historical reference, and concentrates instead on the terrors and powers of the self:

> what is most terrifying about Shelley is his Orphic integrity, the swiftness of a spirit too impatient for the compromise without which societal existence and even natural life are just not possible.[101]

This kind of criticism mirrors the confinement by the Victorians of the politically neutered lyric poet.

Bloom defines Shelley's use of mythology in a similarly constricting fashion. He distinguishes "mythopoeia" from mythography, the study of the parallels between mythologies, and mythological poetry which is "unicultural, or at least unitraditional".[102] In mythopoeic poetry, the poet can extend the range of significance of a given mythology without violating its spirit, or he can embody a primitive perception of the power of natural objects, "a confrontation of life with life", or finally, the usage which Bloom favours, he can project a radical and religious engagement with God.[103] Bloom explicitly offers a Hebraic definition of myth in contrast to the usual bias towards

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101 Bloom, Anxiety of Influence, 131.

102 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 5.

103 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 4-5. See also the view that Shelley "formulates his religion by the actual writing of his poems, the making of his myths...", 67.

Hellenism:

> From the concrete, primitive I-Thou relationship with God, the Jews formulated the abstract, complex myth of the Will of God. Similarly, from his concrete I-Thou relationships, the poet can dare to make his own abstractions, rather than adhere to formulated myth, traditionally developed from such meetings. This third kind of mythopoeia, as it is manifested in the major poems of Shelley, is my subject in the following chapters.[104]

Shelley then is not simply writing poems that employ mythological elements rather "their myth, quite simply, is myth: the process of its making, and the inevitability of its defeat".[105] For Bloom, as for Yeats, Shelley's mythology is rooted in desire; "Shelley chants the apotheosis, not of the poet, but of desire itself".[106] Bloom reads Shelley according to his view of Blake and Yeats' Byzantium poems, where the embodiment of desire in concrete form is always frustrated.

The paradigm that Bloom wishes to impose on Shelley, like all the Romantic poets, is Oedipus and not Prometheus, indicating his interest in unconscious as opposed to conscious or material struggles. Bloom does not lament the indeterminacy that results

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104 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 8.

105 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 8.

106 Bloom, "Unpastured Sea", 88.

from this struggle, rather he makes Shelley into the commodity that best sells his own theory of poetry. Shelley's myths are either Freudian "drives" or the poetry of the Bible, but they are never the consequence of any choices that he made in his historical moment.[107]

Wasserman

Both Abrams and Wasserman perceive Shelley's use of mythology either in terms of contemporary mythological syncretism or the synthesis of inner and outer worlds in post-Kantian philosophy. The conclusion of Prometheus Unbound, which signals the "regeneration of man in a renovated world" is seen by Abrams as a clear example of the displaced religious impulse of Romanticism.[108] Abrams sees Shelley's use of mythology as a synthesis of opposed traditions, the fusion of "the pagan myth of a lost Golden Age with the Biblical design of a fall, redemption, and millenial return to a lost felicity...."[109] Prometheus is a divided self ultimately reintegrated by the shadowy figure of Demogorgon who becomes for Abrams equivalent to the Kantian noumenal realm of the categorical

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107 See Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," in Deconstruction and Criticism, ed. Bloom et al., 19-22.

108 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 30.

109 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 299.

imperative which we can never know.[110] In terms of Abrams' millenial view of the French Revolution, the drama "crosses Greek myth with Christian chiliasm."[111]

Wasserman, while acknowledging the sceptical and materialist tradition, locates his analysis of Shelley, like Abrams, within a purely idealist framework. In fact his criticism makes plain that he regards the sceptical and political context of Shelley's views as subordinate to the immanent structure of the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel.[112] His book is a critique of Shelley's work through the perspective of the pure philosophy of the Self:

> With no a priori God or institution to declare the nature of perfection....What might otherwise have been a Christian journey of the mind to God becomes an atheistic journey of the soul to the divine soul within it, projected as its own object.[113]

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110 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 302.

111 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 343.

112 For investigation of the sceptical background to Shelley's philosophy see C. E. Pulos, The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism (1954; Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1962), and K. N. Cameron, The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951).

113 Earl Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971), 21.

Absolute truth is transferred from external authority to the autonomy of the individual mind which posits the objective world and is not subsumed by it.

While he correctly notes the influence of syncretist mythography on Shelley's thought, he sees it merely as a useful tool through which the poet creates a "higher" realm of thought which reflects an ontological belief in the conformity of the external world to the undifferentiated unity of the one Mind:

> This tradition of syncretism was part of Shelley's intellectual heritage, and his mentalistic ontology provided it with a special philosophical justification. If, then, all mythic data, from Jupiter to King Bladud, are real and valid, the various received myths are not to be thought of as discrete narratives or distinct national faiths, but only as variant efforts of the mind to apprehend the same truth. Hence, the stuff of all myths is, collectively and indiscriminately, available to the mythopoeist for his task of compelling thoughts to their most nearly perfect structure.[114]

This is to argue that mythology is merely the manifestation of the ontological structure of Schelling's view of the One Mind and Wasserman reveals that it is only a further step from this position to the archetypal formulae of Frye.[115] Wasserman's philosophy

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114 Wasserman, Critical Reading, 271. See also 269-82.

115 Wasserman, Critical Reading, 305.

actually excludes all possible ideas of a context for Shelley's use of mythology, just as Bloom does. Any particular or specific characteristic of a myth merely corroborates evidence that the perceiving mind is partial and inadequate to the total structure which it can only recognise if it conforms to predetermined, or archetypal, categories.[116]

Contextual Views

Much recent criticism of Shelley has sought to place his work in the context of historical and political thought of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Although this has provided an opportunity for a healthier judgement of Shelley's poetry than the confines of a formalist debate, there is still a somewhat defensive tendency within this criticism.[117]

Historical criticism, unlike archetypal or Platonist interpretations of mythology, gains a necessary detachment from the suggestive resonances of mythology which, as shown in the previous section, can be converted too easily into the language of religious

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116 Wasserman, Critical Reading, 273.

117 This is apparent in assessments of Shelley's politics, see P. M. S. Dawson, The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980) and M. H. Scrivener, Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982).

belief. Curran gives a detailed historical account of Shelley's view of myth which is admirable in its open-minded analysis. He uses a concept of Shelley's "sceptical idealism" to read Shelley's work, especially Prometheus, as a defence of dualism, basically the ability to hold conflicting and seemingly contrary mythological explanations of origins and society in one's mind.[118] Curran's is a generous liberal view of Shelley's use of syncretism.[119] Prometheus Unbound shows the harmonising of all different creeds since the purpose of Shelley's scepticism is to "free one from those external forms that settle questions by tyrannising the mind".[120] This creates a "readerly" view of Prometheus Unbound as offering a universal synthesis of different cultural perspectives. Ultimately, however, this reading, as I demonstrate in chapter 3, denies the radical element to Shelley's mythology. Marilyn Butler introduces two other contexts for the syncretism of the second generation of Romantic poets, first the conflict between the two generations of poets, and second, the historical climate in which they wrote. [121]

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118 For a definition of sceptical idealism, see Stuart Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of An Epic Vision (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1975), 95-96. For his definition of dualism see 199-204.

119 "Indeed, Shelley's deliberate aim is to transcend the legendary limits of the simple myth or of the Greek pantheon that contains it, gathering reverberations from remote times and diverse cultures. The learning is provided and the authority assured by the massive thrust of contemporary scholarship in syncretic mythology ", Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 43.

120 Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 205.

121 Marilyn Butler, "Myth and myth-making in the Shelley Circle," ELH 49 (1982), 50-72, rpt. (modified) in Essays from the Gregynog conference, ed. Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1983), 1-19. See also Webb, A Voice Not Understood, 157-190 on the

Such contextual research proves the use of mythology by Shelley to be grounded in his historical moment and his relationship to other poets.

The confusions of a biographical myth of Shelley perpetrated in the nineteenth century and the formalist attack in the twentieth have been challenged by a thorough investigation of the historical background to the ideas of his poetry. My argument in the following chapters is indebted to this scholarship, in particular to the work of critics who have demonstrated the conjunction of historical and literary relations. My thesis argues, however, that the use of mythology is inseparable from a consideration of Shelley's theory of history and his dissatisfaction with the moral and social consequences of the Christian concept of the Fall. Shelley's use of mythology represents the adaptation of a radical form of syncretism in order to overcome the shortcomings of the Christian Church's engagement with the past. It can be understood best through a critical method which is conscious of Shelley's appeal to myth as the poetic expression of the redemptive possibilities of history.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the need to rescue an interpretation of Shelley's use of mythology from a purely

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Christian mythology.

essentialist and idealist tradition which is inappropriate to the influences of the Enlightenment on his work. Although traditionally science and history have been hostile to myth, the awareness of its power as an ideological form in the writings of Barthes has been shown to be more useful in the understanding of Shelley's work than the frequently held notion that myth is resorted to by Romantic poets solely as a domain of values abstracted from history. The use of mythology is the expression of a critical engagement with history in the work of Shelley. The need for a methodology to explain this historical use of myth is all the more urgent since much influential criticism has overlooked the engagement with history in Shelley's poetry through imposing archetypal, psychological or Neoplatonist patterns onto his work.

Myth for the Romantic poets is a means of appealing to the authority of a hypothesised past to which the poetic imagination has access. Often this imaginative act is fraught with issues of loss, provisionality and imprisonment. In the case of Prometheus, Antigone and Faust, all mythical figures of some significance in the Romantic period in Europe, each undergoes an incarceration or self-sacrifice which is necessary for the sake of the moral, political and imaginative victory which will be achieved in a deferred, symbolic realm. The mythical world is often therefore the repository of the tragic recognition that loss is conditional upon any such attempt to escape a human condition to which history appears to be indifferent. But Shelley, in the confident final act of Prometheus Unbound, provides an optimistic, even comical, solution to the stern rationale of such classical treatments of

these myths.

The issue common to many of the approaches to Shelley and Romantic poetry examined in this chapter is the interpretation and definition of Romantic mythological syncretism. Syncretist appropriations of myth are made either by those who wish to defend the authority of their religious loyalties, or by those who seek to undermine such authority. Shelley's own syncretist practice incorporates the value of the poet in interpreting the historical past, and this self-validation comes to prevail over his earlier sceptical and atheistical desire to see Christianity reduced to its origins in human credulity. In effect, Shelley reaches the same position as Barthes for whom mythology was the inevitable manner in which a culture represents itself. Mythology, therefore, provides him and the other Romantic poets with the opportunity to criticise, not to escape from, the problems of such representations. In addition, the myths of the Titans and the Olympians are recognised by Keats and Shelley as symbolic dramatisations of conflicts applicable to their own historical moment. In the use of an eternal realm of divinities, the poets appeal not to theological or philosophical authority but rather seek to invoke the status of their own poetic art. Mythology thereby becomes a collective resource in a way that religion is not; it is the means by which the present can be criticised. The grander scale and moral flexibility of the ancient mythologies diminish the status of the rigid and literalistic contemporary defences of Mosaic history but also emphasise the privilege of the poet's art.

CHAPTER 2.

"MONT BLANC": SHELLEY AND RELIGION

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Shelley's atheism: the Enlightenment background

2.2 Nature and Revelation: Wordsworth's The Excursion and Coleridge's The Statesman's Manual

2.3 Necessity and Power: Shelley's view of History in "Mont Blanc"

2.4 Conclusion

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the starting point of Shelley's use of mythology: his rejection of Christianity. "Mont Blanc" is chosen for analysis because the poem is a primal scene of terror and doubt, a psychological portrait of the raw contact between mind and Nature influenced by the secular eighteenth-century philosophers for whom religion is the expression of human fears. The mountain, however, is presented in the poem as an ambivalent historical symbol, representing either destructive tyranny, or the kind of power necessary to "repeal/ Large codes of fraud and woe...."(80-81) The poem, in its concluding stanza, offers the tentative possibility, later to be developed fully in Prometheus Unbound, that such historical change can also be sought in the realm of the imagination.

The characteristic response to the two major lyrics of 1816 is to see them as the avowal of a personal, if secular, creed.[1] This

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1 See, for example, Judith Chernaik who refers to "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" as "one of Shelley's first attempts to create a personal and secular myth, to deny the authority of dogma or Scriptural revelation...while implicitly granting the validity of the irrational yet profound human needs that traditional religion claims to satisfy", The Lyrics of Shelley (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), 36. See also Earl R. Wasserman, "In effect Mont Blanc is a religious poem, and the Power is Shelley's transcendent Deity", "Shelley: "Mont Blanc"," in The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1959), 232.

is useful because it provides criticism with what it regards as statements of permanent value and because it enables critics to patronise Shelley by implying that for all his determined atheism and radicalism, he redeems himself in their eyes, by succumbing to the terror inherent in unbridled Nature. Bloom sees Shelley's poem as a paradigm of Moses on the mountain, and the notion of the poet figure as prophet is not absent from contemporary readings.[2] Such a view of "Mont Blanc", as constituting a revelation of Old Testament proportions, in fact facilitates a neutralising of the poem's import. More precisely, it sees in the poem a personal statement rather than a radical comment made from a particular point in history. Bloom's comment exemplifies this negation, when he says that the poem is, "one of the opening affirmations of Shelley's beliefs *as* a poet, or poetic beliefs, as opposed to his beliefs *of* a poet caught up in history and in an age".[3] This de-historicisation verges on a species of biographical fallacy, and yields a reading of "Mont Blanc" as the confession of a private anxiety, finally

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2 Bloom, "The myth of the I-Thou relationship does not precede the 1816 Hymns; it comes into being as those poems work themselves out", Shelley's Mythmaking, 8. See also John Rieder, "Shelley's "Mont Blanc": Landscape and the Ideology of the Sacred Text", ELH 48 (1981), 778-798, in which a parallel is drawn between the poet in "Mont Blanc" as interpreter of Nature-as-text, and Coleridge's discussion of the authority of the sacred text in The Statesman's Manual. This hieratic view is obviously not compatible with my reading in section 2.3.

3 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 21.

surfacing in the form of quasi-religiosity. Chernaik, for example, neutralises both 1816 lyrics by viewing them as attempts "to counter the pessimistic strain in his thought with a secular substitute for faith in God and immortality."[4]

Many critics view Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" as the model for Shelley's "Mont Blanc" and likewise see the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" as modelled on the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality". Barrell argues that "Mont Blanc" expresses the sentiments of "Tintern Abbey"; "Shelley's fundamental conviction is simply that there is "A motion and a spirit, that impels/All thinking things..."."[5] Chernaik asserts that "Shelley, like Wordsworth, attempts to affirm the continuity of experience, through memory, imagination, and love" even though she qualifies this by pointing out that Shelley's insistence on the human mind as the final referent of value is a departure from Wordsworth.[6] Leavis's essay on Shelley analyses "Mont Blanc" and censures the author for "bewildered confusion" in contrast to Wordsworth's "sublime bewilderment" which he finds cogent.[7] His accusation of

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4 Chernaik, 35.

5 Joseph Barrell, Shelley and the thought of his time: A Study in the History of Ideas, Yale Studies in English 106 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1947), 129-30.

6 Chernaik, 34.

7 Leavis, 212-213; 213.

"viciousness and corruption" is levelled in the belief that Shelley is surrendering to an incoherent emotional response to Nature.[8] Leavis's disappointment that the poem does not offer any confirmation of moral values is an index of Shelley's refusal to interpret the natural environment in a conventional, affirmative way.[9]

Shelley uses the mountain for a critical examination of his historical and philosophical interests. Yet the poem stops short of affirming the power of human reason; indeed, it stresses its limitations. While Shelley challenges the idea of a divine presence in Nature, he finds it difficult to evaluate the power he witnesses. This is not to say that he seeks a spiritual solution to the dilemma, as many of the critics above imply. His position is one of sceptical doubt but his emotional and political sympathies attempt to see the mountain as embodying the energy required to achieve historical change.

The poem brings into conflict a rationalist and religious view of Nature and the destiny of human society. This conflict is also present in modern critics of the Enlightenment who regard its rationalism as responsible for the "deconsecration" of modern society. Goldmann echoes the anti-Enlightenment sentiments of

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8 Leavis, 216.

9 "The effect of Shelley's eloquence is to hand poetry over to a sensibility that has no more dealings with intelligence than it can help...", Leavis, 210.

Romantic thinkers like Coleridge who, as was shown in Chapter 1, incorporated myth and religion into their explanations of history, and encouraged its function as a repository of abstract philosophical values.[10] This particular Romantic revival of myth can be seen, in part, as a reaction against the way that mythology in the eighteenth century had become the particular target of the new disciplines of science and history. To evaluate explanations of the past was to enter the debate between Church and Reason; mythologies, as the various cultural explanations of the origins of the world, were the testing ground by which the success of the new historical and scientific methods could be measured. For the philosophes, Christianity became another kind of mythology.

Shelley had many reasons to be dissatisfied with the morality of institutionalised Christianity. Its version of human origins in primal sin, its explanation of morality in terms of the crude struggle between God and Satan, its resistance to sceptical philosophical inquiry, and on account of its monotheism, its denial of any historical validity to other cultures, was not simply anathema in ideological terms, but also a negation of literary

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10 Lucien Goldmann, The Philosophy of The Enlightenment: the Christian Burgess and the Enlightenment, trans. Henry Maas (London: RKP, 1973). Goldmann's critique is based on the view that the *philosophes* "lack all sense of the dialectical relation between knowledge and action, between self-awareness and practice", 2. For Hegel on the Enlightenment see, G. W. F. Hegel, "Self-alienated Spirit: The Enlightenment," Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A. V. Miller, analysis of the text and foreword J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977), 328-355.

possibilities. Shelley's Peter Bell the Third and Byron's Vision of Judgment, used combative satire to attack Wordsworth and Southey for the vindictive religious views expressed in their work. Their method was not to adopt another set of beliefs from other religious faiths since they would be as vulnerable as Christianity to the power of reason and science. To argue against the elder generation required the exposition of the political and religious content which the natural or other-worldly settings of their poetry attempted to deny. Where Wordsworth's fusion of Nature and primitive, unsocialised man in The Excursion circumvents any engagement with the past, partly because it is consciously opposed to the inquiring spirit of the Enlightenment, Byron and Shelley locate their works often within a recognisably contemporary frame of reference and sometimes use polemical notes to provide political and historical information.[11]

In the first section of this chapter, I examine the influence of Enlightenment thought on Shelley's view of Christianity. Shelley's philosophical refutation of religious belief is derived mainly from the sceptical tradition of Hume and Drummond. The political and historical arguments against Christian institutions and practices are inherited directly from the writings of radicals of the late eighteenth century including Holbach, Volney, Paine and Godwin. Shelley's early avowal of atheism can be seen also,

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11 But see Shelley's comment on the use of notes, Chapter 4.1.

however, within the context of his hostility to the Christian explanation of the origins of the human race through divine intervention. It is the rational, psychological explanation of the origins of religion to which "Mont Blanc" obliquely alludes. The connection between physical change in the natural world and rational progress is also a key aspect of Enlightenment thought questioned in the poem.

In the second section, I contrast Shelley's theory of origins and history as developed early in his career with the contemporary works of the senior poets, in particular Wordsworth's The Excursion and Coleridge's The Statesman's Manual which condemn the political radicalism of the 1790's. Wordsworth's definition of Nature excludes the possibility that historical change is foreshadowed in the activity of matter in the physical world as defined by atheistical materialists like Holbach. Coleridge's faith in revealed religion argues that all effort at political change has been anticipated and condemned by the Bible. "Mont Blanc" recoils at the fusion of inner and outer worlds which Wordsworth was later to present so convincingly in "The Simplon Pass" passage of The Prelude, and equally challenges Coleridge's use of the Alpine setting to confirm his belief in revealed religion, in "Hymn Before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni".

In the third section, I present my reading of "Mont Blanc" as expressing the tensions between Shelley's desire for a purely materialist account of historical change and his reservations about the possibility of such hope in pure matter. The poem does confirm Shelley's Enlightenment view that speculation about "unknown causes"

need not result in religious belief.

2.1 Shelley's atheism: the Enlightenment background

During the summer of 1816 as they toured the Alps, Shelley and Byron were deeply aware that most travellers were there in order to confirm their religous beliefs.[12] Like Byron, Shelley fulminates against the tourists "whose stupidity, avarice & imposture engenders a mixture of vices truly horrible & disgusting".[13] Hazlitt later commented that "the crossing of the Alps has, I believe, given some of our fashionables a shivering-fit of morality".[14] It is in this overtly religious environment that Shelley wrote "I am a lover of mankind, democrat, and atheist" in Greek in the column for observations, and "L'Enfer" as his and Mary's destination in the register of the Hotel de Londres at Chamonix on July 23 1816, the

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12 See Byron's laconic comment, "I am going to Chamouni (to leave my card with Mont Blanc)...", [To Augusta Leigh], 27th Aug. 1816, "So Late into the Night," Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1976-1982) [hereafter cited as BLJ], v, 89. See also the "Alpine Journal," [To Augusta Leigh], Sept. 18-29 1816, BLJ, v, 96-105.

13 L358, To Thomas Love Peacock [hereafter cited as TLP], 25 July 1816, Letters, i, 500-501. See also BLJ, v, 97.

14 William Hazlitt, "On the Jealousy and Spleen of Party" in The Plain Speaker: Opinions on Books, Men and Things, in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: Dent, 1930-1934), xii, 368.

day on which he composed "Mont Blanc".[15] Shelley's provocative denial of the locus of the European gentry's belief in revealed religion, was publicised two years later in the Quarterly in a passage of invective directed squarely at Shelley's private life:

> ...-if we were told of a man who, thus witnessing the sublimest assemblage of natural objects, should retire to the cabin near, and write [Greek translation of "atheist"] after his name in the album, we hope our own feeling would be pity rather than disgust...[16]

Mont Blanc was therefore, a *cause celebre* of the Establishment defence of religion which Shelley sought so vehemently to attack. Although it clearly impressed him, the uses to which it was put, did not.[17]

"Mont Blanc" reflects possible ways to interpret the historical situation in Europe at the end of the Napoleonic wars, either as a

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15 The entries were possibly in response to the piety of the preceding visitor who wrote: "Such scenes as these, then, inspire most forcibly the love of God...HWW, C:M, Methodist", cited in Gavin de Beer, "An Atheist in the Alps" KSMB 9 (1958), 9-10. For a summary of the four separate Greek atheist inscriptions by Shelley in various hotel registers, see de Beer, 11. Byron later in the summer is supposed to have erased the entries. Southey reputedly noted them a year later and spread the story. See also Letters i, 494n; Newman Ivey White, Shelley, 2 vols. (1940; London: Secker and Warburg, 1947) i, 456; Richard Holmes, Shelley: The Pursuit (1974: London: Quartet, 1976), 342.

16 [?J. T. Coleridge], [attrib.], rev. of Foliage; or, Poems Original and Translated by Leigh Hunt, QR 18 (Jan. 1818), [Issue appeared June 1818], 329.

17 Later at the falls of Terni he remarked, "The glaciers of Montanvert & the source of the Arveiron is the grandest spectacle I ever saw", L487, To TLP, [20] Nov. 1818, Letters, ii, 55-6.

return to the old order of royalty and mystery which the mountain's inaccessible power suggests, or as a cleansing destructive force which will sweep away the old institutions.[18] The "Power" (16, 96) can signal hope or despair. It is denied moral force by Shelley's philosophical and political refusal to accept that Mind and Nature are bonded through orthodox faith, and by the emotional terror registered in the poem. The poem deliberately eschews the language of religion and mystery used by most beholders but suggests that the act of rational thought itself is threatened by the immediacy of the scene.

In fact he turns to the Enlightenment "fear theories" which explained the origins of primitive religion in the worship of Nature not the manifestation of Christian monotheism. His secular apocalypse, repeated later in his poetry in images of earthquake, volcano and wind, is formulated in such a way that the forces of Nature bear the weight of the Enlightenment argument against religious belief.[19] One argument is that such a use of natural imagery can be seen as a more credible device for proving the advance of change than merely human will; in effect, it constitutes a transcendent realm of political agency.[20] The conclusion of

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18 For an account of the effect of the Napoleonic wars on British society, see Clive Emsley, British Society and the French Wars, 1792-1815 (London: Macmillan, 1979).

19 See G. M. Matthews, "A Volcano's Voice in Shelley," ELH 24 (1957), 191-228 in which the language of Shelley's symbols of Nature is discussed.

20 P. M. S. Dawson argues of Prometheus and the poems of 1819; "Volcanic outbreaks, unlike fires, cannot be caused by human agency, and to view revolution under this image, as somehow inevitable and produced by impersonal forces is to be relieved from responsibility

"Mont Blanc", however, is more ambivalent. No such faith in Nature can be surmised, and there is little opportunity to reconcile physical force and historical change.

Hume's Essays were read by Shelley and Hogg in their first term at Oxford and his philosophy can be seen as the basis of Shelley's critique of religion.[21] Shelley's most important philosophical pronouncements on Christian belief, The Necessity of Atheism (1811), and A Refutation of Deism (1814), reflect directly the implications of Hume's Natural History of Religion and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. In the latter deism is argued to be untenable since religion cannot withstand rational inquiry; religion was born not out of reason but out of passions.[22] Hume attacks the theory that "natural religion", or deism, is more acceptable than revealed religion by undermining the supposedly "rational" qualities of Christian belief. In eroding the distinction between Christianity

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for them", P. M. S. Dawson, 44-45.

21 "Hume's Essays were a favourite book with Shelley, and he was always ready to put forward in argument, the doctrines they uphold", Thomas Jefferson Hogg, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 2 vols. (London, 1858), i, 99. For Shelley's philosophical arguments against Christianity, see The Necessity of Atheism (1811), Julian v, 201-209; L45, To Timothy Shelley, Feb. 6 1810 [for 1811], Letters, i, 50-51; L38, To Thomas Jefferson Hogg [hereafter cited as TJH], [11 Jan. 1811], Letters, i, 42.

22 See Frank E. Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1959), 172.

and paganism he also concluded that polytheism, or the mythologies of the ancient world had preceded monotheism, a historical point refuted by Christian theologians.[23]

Shelley uses Hume's theory of causation as his central argument against Christianity in The Necessity of Atheism and elsewhere. Thus he does not hypothesise about causes but reasons from effects. This means that the emphasis of "Mont Blanc", perhaps disconcerting to many readers, is on the manifestations and consequences of the "Power" rather than on the nature of the agency which produces them. The very rawness of the uncompromising path of destruction wrought by the glaciers places the observer within the context of a pre-religious response to Nature. The sense of mystery, present in the poem most intensely at the beginning of stanza 3, is as yet not projected onto the orders of deity. The poem's reflection on the activity of the observing mind in stanza 1 and stanza 2, (34-40), is both an anatomy of the earliest human responses to Nature and an application of the Enlightenment desire not only to establish a science of the natural world but a science of the mind.[24] Shelley is clearly tantalised by the observation, made by Hume and others, that it is ignorance about the origins of human life which has resulted in religion. As he remarks later in "On Life":

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23 For commentary on Hume, see Feldman and Richardson, 157-160 and Manuel, Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 168-183.

24 For the "science of mind" see "Speculations on Metaphysics," Julian vii, 62-63. See also Chapter 6.1.

> What is the cause of life?-that is, how was it produced, or what agencies distinct from life, have acted or act upon life? All recorded generations of mankind have wearily busied themselves in inventing answers to this question. And the result has been..Religion.[25]

In The Natural History of Religion, Hume explains the superstitious mythological fantasies of early man in terms of the exploitation of fear; "No topic is more usual with all popular divines than to display the advantages of affliction, in bringing men to a due sense of religion...."[26] This fear and speculation develops from the fact that we can never "know" the causes of natural phenomena. As Hume argued,

> These *unknown causes*, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers, on which we have so entire a dependance.[27]

Hume, however, is relatively sympathetic towards the myths of the ancients for the purpose of challenging the supposedly "rational"

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25 "On Life," Norton, 478.

26 David Hume, The Natural History of Religion, ed. A. W. Colver, in The Natural History of Religion and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. A. W. Colver and J. V. Price (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1976), 36.

27 Hume, Natural History, 33.

defences of Christianity:

> the whole mythological system is so natural, that, in the vast variety of planets and worlds, contained in this universe, it seems more than probable, that, somewhere or other, it is really carried into execution.[28]

This ironical undermining of Christian faith is embodied in Hume's celebrated phrase, "Our evidence, then, for the truth of the *Christian* religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses...."[29] Hume narrows the gap between modern rational society and the primitive beliefs of the ancients, maintained so insistently in Enlightenment historiography, by arguing that *all* religions are based on illusion:

> Survey most nations and most ages. Examine the religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are other than sick men's dreams...[30]

In A Refutation of Deism Shelley echoes Hume's sentiments, pointing out that the intensity of religious belief does not depend on reason but is "precisely proportioned to the degrees of excitement" of the

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28 Hume, Natural History, 64.

29 Hume, "Of Miracles," Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding, and Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1975), 109.

30 Hume, Natural History, 94.

believer.[31]

Hume's use of the Socratic dialogue form is repeated in many contemporary and subsequent discussions of the competing claims of orthodoxy, deism and atheism, as the vehicle best equipped to display the ironic strategies necessary to disguise the author's true sentiments. It also provides the most dramatic form of exposing the weakness of each position.[32] In A Refutation of Deism, Shelley transforms the subtleties of this method into a satirical condemnation of the logic of both the deist, Theosophus, and the orthodox Christian, Eusebes, who are both forced in the end to argue against their original positions and to acknowledge the power of atheism.[33] In this essay and in Queen Mab, Shelley comes close to the methods of Paine and Volney which mix polemic and satire.[34] Shelley later argues such a position with devastating

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31 Julian, vi, 39.

32 Sir William Drummond uses the dialogue form in order to defend deism, Academical Questions, vol i [Only one volume published] (London, 1805), 218-281; Shelley uses it to defend atheism, and Hume retreats from any explicit avowal of a position. Shelley attacks Drummond's deism in the Notes to Queen Mab, Hutchinson, 818.

33 Julian, vi, 57. For influences on A Refutation of Deism, see Cameron, Young Shelley, 274-287. Later in 1819 Shelley defends Carlile's deism, "What men of any rank in society from their talents are not Deists whose understandings have been unbiassed by the allurements of worldly interest?" L527, To the Editor of The Examiner [Leigh Hunt], 3 Nov. 1819, Letters, ii, 142. See 12, note 3.

34 Queen Mab, Canto VII, 106-266, Hutchinson, 789-792.

irony in "On the Devil and Devils" (1819) by using a comparative analysis to show how the Devil is purely an invention of the Christian religion. This satirical method is probably influenced by Paine's Age of Reason and Volney's Ruins, where the many oppressive aspects of institutionalised Christianity are exposed. Paine remarks sarcastically on how Christian theologians have sought to defend the miracles of their faith:

> It is upon this plain narrative of facts...that the Christian mythologists, calling themselves the Christian Church, have erected their fable, which for absurdity and extravagance is not exceeded by anything that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients.[35]

The centrepiece of Volney's brilliant critique of religious confusion in the Ruins is the satire of all religious systems in chapter xii, "Origin and Genealogy of religious ideas."[36] Although the concept of the "Être Supreme" is never alluded to directly by Shelley, it represents the kind of rationalist attempt to embody the

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35 Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology, ed. M. D. Conway (New York, 1896), 28. Paine remarks "As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me as a species of atheism; a sort of religious denial of God", 50.

36 [Constantin Francois de Chasseboeuf, Comte de] Volney, The Ruins, Or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires, to which is added, The Law of Nature, trans., 4th ed. (London, 1801), 176-239. For the influence of Ruins on The Revolt of Islam, see Kenneth Neill Cameron, "A Major Source of The Revolt of Islam," PMLA 56 (1941), 175-206.

values of the Enlightenment in a non-Christian, higher being with which he might have sympathised, had he not been fully aware of the abuses of such forms ultimately demonstrated by the French Revolution. [37]

Volney's Ruins surveys both the transience of empires and the exploitation of human credulity by religion. His analysis of the real ends of religious creeds is political:

> Religion, losing its object, was now nothing more than a political expedient by which to rule the credulous vulgar; and was embraced either by men credulous themselves and the dupes of their own visions, or by bold and energetic spirits, who formed vast prospects of ambition.[38]

Like Hume, Volney argues the basis of the Christian religion to be psychological and sociological in the same way that all religions and mythologies in all ages have been:

> ...if those miraculous facts have had no real existence in the physical order of things, they must be regarded solely as productions of the human intellect: and the nature of man, at this day, capable of making the most fantastic combinations, explains the phenomenon of these monsters in history.[39]

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37 See "Decree Recognising the Supreme Being," 18 floréal an II, 7 May 1794, rpt. in French Revolution Documents 1792-95, ed. John Hardman, vol. 2 of French Revolution Documents, ed. John Hardman and J. M. Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 244-245.

38 Volney, Ruins, 225.

39 Volney, Ruins, 178.

The final conclusion of the populace is that all religions are the same, and they attack theology as irrelevant to their material existence.

Volney's conclusion to Ruins is that "the whole history of the spirit of religion, is merely that of the fallibility and uncertainty of the human mind."[40] An early passage in Ruins is a particularly moving testimony of the need to preserve this doubt from imposture. The narrator-dreamer feels that he will be admonished by the Genius for his incapacitating confusion and misery at the evidence of man's own destruction of his civilisation. The Genius's consolation is levelled at the very same issue of the pretence to authority of religion which Shelley confronts in "Mont Blanc":

> And what is doubt, replied he, that it should be regarded as a crime? Has man the power of thinking contrary to the impressions that are made upon him?...If it [truth] be uncertain and equivocal, how is he to find in it what does not exist?...Violence is the argument of falsehood; and to impose a creed authoritatively, is the index and proceeding of a tyrant.[41]

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40 Volney, Ruins, 239.

41 Volney, Ruins, 93-94.

Such a view is somewhat at odds with Volney's loyalty to the Enlightenment beliefs of The Law of Nature which are appended as an optimistic answer to the despair of Ruins.[42] Such laws, based on reason, should allow man to seize the initiative for historical change from his own resources. Hume's conclusion to the Natural History of Religion is likewise sceptical of the possibility of a rational understanding of religion:

> This whole is a riddle, an aenigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspence of judgment appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny, concerning this subject.[43]

Doubt, both of philosophical sceptics such as Hume, and the doubt of any kind of historical permanence which the cycles of history demonstrate to Volney, is central to an understanding of "Mont Blanc". It gives force to arguments against tyranny but cautions against a radicalism which is too optimistic.

This sceptical acknowledgement of the limitations of the mind, is also the position of Drummond in Academical Questions. Drummond asserts, like Hume, that the assignment of causes is always necessarily speculative, and invariably associated with what Volney

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42 Volney, The Law of Nature, or Principles of Morality, Deduced from the Physical Constitution of Mankind and the Universe, [1793], in Ruins, 325-392.

43 Hume, Natural History, 95.

termed "the index and proceeding of a tyrant":

> To assign causes for every thing has been the vain attempt of ignorance in every age. It has been by encouraging this error, that superstition has enslaved the world. In proportion as men are rude, uncultivated, and uncivilized, they are determined in their opinions, bold in their presumptions, and obstinate in their prejudices. When they begin to doubt, it may be concluded, they begin to be refined.[44]

Drummond's argument, like Hume's, conducts us towards an awareness of the limitations of reason rather than its power:

> My experience, as far as it can instruct me, shows me the very limited powers of human understanding; and, instead of rendering me confident in my belief, makes me deeply sensible of the uncertainty of all my knowledge.[45]

Drummond's attitude towards Christianity was also familiar to Shelley. Although Shelley remained unconvinced by his rational approach to religion, Oedipus Judaicus shows Drummond to be a fundamentally sceptical Christian.[46] Like Richard Payne Knight's

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44 Drummond, Academical Questions, 39. For Shelley's favourable view of Drummond, see Preface to The Revolt of Islam, Hutchinson, 34n; "On Life," Norton, 476; A Refutation of Deism, Julian, vi, 55; Letters, ii, 142. Shelley orders Academical Questions, in L296, To William Laing, 27 Sept. 1815, Letters i, 433. For comment on Drummond's influence, see Pulos, The Deep Truth, 24-41; G. S. Brett "Shelley's relation to Berkeley and Drummond," Studies in English by Members of University College, Toronto, Collected by Principal Malcolm W. Wallace (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1934), 170-202; Wasserman, Critical Reading, 138-140.

45 Drummond, Academical Questions, 154.

46 Drummond, The Oedipus Judaicus (London, 1811). See Shelley's comment "I do not think that Sir W[illiam] Drummonds arguments have much weight. His Oedipus [Judaicus (1811)] has completely failed in making me a convert", L222, [To Thomas Hookham] 26 Jan. 1813, Letters i, 350.

Symbolical Language of Ancient Art (1818), discussed in Chapter 4, he treats the stories of the Bible as mythologies formulated in symbolic language, particularly astronomical science. Drummond effectively argues that the only way to make sense of the inconsistencies of the Bible is to understand the allegory of the Scriptures since the literal interpretation of the God of the Old Testament shows him to be a "quarrelsome, jealous, and vindictive being" and therefore inconsistent with the proper notion of deity.[47]

Shelley also shows awareness of the important Enlightenment attempts to prove that the forces of the physical world are possible to understand and predict. Buffon's history of the epochs of Nature, although veiled by compromising gestures towards the Church, managed to secure the wrath of Barruel.[48] His geological theories were carefully disguised in order not to offend orthodox doctrine which often sought to neutralise the consequences of a scientific proof of the origins of the world different from that argued in Mosaic history, by recruiting science to the side of the establishment.[49] Buffon portrays a romantic view of the terrors of the primitive which cannot be surmounted entirely even with the

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47 Drummond, Oedipus, vi. Drummond refers to Bailly, Dupuis, Jones and Pococke in his notes.

48 Abbé Barruel, "The Antichristian Conspiracy," vol. i of Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism, trans. R. Clifford, 4 vols. (London, 1797), i, 283-284. For Shelley's reading of Buffon, see Hogg i, 455.

49 See Manuel, Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 138-140.

advance of reason:

> ...all these sentiments based upon terror from then on possessed the heart and the mind of man forever. Even today he is hardly yet reassured by the experience of time, by the calm which has succeeded these centuries of storms, even by the knowledge of the effects and of the operations of Nature; a knowledge which could only be acquired after the establishment of some great society in peaceful lands.[50]

Shelley's utopianism struggles against the terrifying scene which embodies forces inimical to humanity.[51] Writing to Peacock the day after "Mont Blanc" was composed, he refers to Buffon when commenting on the encroachment on the vale of Chamonix by glaciers: "I will not pursue Buffons sublime but gloomy theory, that this earth which we inhabit will at some future period be changed into a mass of frost."[52] Buffon's version of a force of Necessity in the natural world, which upset theological notions of divine creation, evidently presented Shelley with a difficulty in asserting some basis for human hope.

Unlike Buffon, Holbach's Système de la Nature, which Shelley had begun to translate at Lynmouth in early 1812, uncompromisingly

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50 Comte de Buffon [George Leclerc], Les Époques de la Nature, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Paris, 1790), ii, 161, trans. in Manuel, Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 140.

51 "there is something inexpressibly dreadful in the aspect...", L358, To TLP, 23 July 1816, Letters, i, 499.

52 L358, To TLP, 24 July 1816, Letters, i, 499.

condemned Christianity in many ways not least by offering manifold theories of the true origins of religion.[53] The kind of materialist arguments offered by Holbach view the forces of Nature as the product of Necessity which is purely arbitrary. This necessity is universal and consists of the "infallible and constant tie of causes to their effects".[54] Holbach is basically sympathetic towards the mythologies of Nature which proliferate in the origins of the world, and explains their existence in terms similar to Hume and Volney. But other Enlightenment thinkers sought to relate the forces of change in the physical world to the idea of human progress through reason. This connection between moral and physical change is made by Volney, Drummond and Godwin. Drummond sees power as essentially the same whether it is mental or physical:

> Power is that, which unites every efficient cause with its effect, being that, by which change is supposed immediately to be produced;....It seems, then, impossible to admit a distinction between moral motives, and physical causes, by which it might be understood, that power is always combined with the latter but not with the former.[55]

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53 For Holbach's influence on Shelley, see Notes to Queen Mab, Canto VII, Hutchinson, 815-818; L191 To William Godwin, 3 June 1812, Letters, i, 303. For commentary see Cameron, Young Shelley, 259 and 409-410; Manuel, Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 228-241; for selections see Feldman and Richardson, 177-184.

54 Feldman and Richardson, 177.

55 Drummond, Academical Questions, 191. See Book II, chapter 2, 169-193. See also Volney; "Self-love, the desire of happiness, and an aversion to pain, are the essential and primary laws that nature herself imposed on man, that the ruling power, whatever it be, has established to govern him: and these laws, like those of motion in the physical world, are the simple and prolific principle of every thing that takes place in the moral world" Ruins, 29.

By 1816, this connection between perfectibility in the sphere of reason espoused by Godwin, and the physical causes of change in the natural world alleviates Shelley's anxieties about the arbitrary view of history which Holbach's purely amoral and anarchic theory of materialism presented. Godwin's version of Necessity links its existence in the material universe with the operations of the mind, and his aim is to apply this philosophical argument to the political world.[56] "Mont Blanc", as has been argued above, maintains a sceptical distance from any definitive conclusions about the "Power" he beholds in Nature, but it does offer a tentative connection between the power and activity of the mind and the ceaseless energy of the natural scene. The problem which the poem does not resolve explicitly is how to reconcile an optimistic theory of Necessity with a sceptical view of the mind and its understanding.

2.2 Nature and Revelation: Wordsworth's The Excursion and Coleridge's The Statesman's Manual

Wordsworth

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56 William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its influence on Morals and Happiness, 1793, 3rd ed. 1798, ed. F.E.L. Priestley, 3 vols.(Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1946), i, 361-397. For Godwin's belief in Necessity operating with the same force in mind as in matter, see 372-373.

For Shelley, the most significant reaction against the Enlightenment tradition outlined in the preceding section, came from Wordsworth and Coleridge. Both were hostile to pagan mythology, and both insisted that religious faith was the obvious concomitant of the mind's interaction with Nature. Above all, they both attacked the notion of progress and radical politics so important to Shelley.

In retrospect the most pertinent contemporary contrast to Shelley's equivocal response to Mont Blanc is Wordsworth's description of the Alps in The Prelude, Book VI.[57] Wordsworth and his friend "grieved/ To have a soulless image on the eye/ Which had usurped upon a living thought/ That never more could be", and this usurpation of the imagination appears to be reinforced when they realise that they have crossed the Alps unawares.[58] However, instead of disappointment, Wordsworth uses the experience to launch into his most powerful peroration on the imagination.[59] The poet

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57 The passage was published as "The Simplon Pass" in 1845, and in The Prelude (1850), VI, 553-572.

58 The Prelude VI, 453-456. All references are to the 1805 version in William Wordsworth: The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill, A Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1979) unless stated otherwise.

59 See Paul Hamilton, Wordsworth, New Readings (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 114-125.

then reads back onto Nature the now religious symbols of eternal power registered in the imagination itself, "Characters of the great apocalypse,/ The types and symbols of eternity,/ Of first, and last, and midst, and without end" (VI, 570-2). For Wordsworth the mountain becomes a source of sublime thoughts upon the divine power of the human mind and the divine face of Nature. In Shelley's "Mont Blanc", by contrast, the poet is defeated by the desolation he beholds.

Wordsworth's response to the world of mythology and paganism is largely negative, as is his rejection of Enlightenment science and radicalism. His explicit comments on classical mythology are, for the most part, derogatory or defensive. In the "Ode to Lycoris" (1817) he fears that the use of mythology and classical allusion will seem "too far-fetched and therefore more or less unnatural and affected" to his readers.[60] He espouses the common eighteenth-century view of the "hackneyed and lifeless use into which mythology fell" after its use in works such as Milton's Lycidas.[61] Milton, "Hebrew in soul" is advanced, along with the Holy Scriptures and Spenser, as "the grand store-house of

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60 Note to the "Ode to Lycoris", in The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1940-1949) [hereafter cited as de Selincourt], iv, 422. All subsequent references to Wordsworth's poetry cited from this edition unless otherwise stated.

61 de Selincourt iv, 423.

enthusiastic and meditative imagination" in preference to the writers of ancient Greece and Rome because,

> ...the anthropomorphitism of the Pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries too much to the bondage of definite form; from which the Hebrews were preserved by their abhorrence of idolatry.[62]

Wordsworth's aesthetic objection to mythology is that it is outworn, but his moral objection is that it is idolatrous and incompatible with the demands of the sublime imagination.

Paganism is antithetical to the spirit of his poetry, despite modern critical arguments to the contrary.[63] Symptomatic of his use of myth is "Laodamia" (1815) in which Protesilaus's spirit implores Laodamia to display "A fervent, not ungovernable, love" (76).[64] The poem is phrased in the language of Christian morality: Protesilaus's death at Troy symbolises self-sacrifice in the interests of public virtue, while Laodomia fails to exercise restraint and fortitude over her "rebellious passion" (74). He

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62 Preface to Poems (1815), The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), iii, 34. For reference to Milton, see iii, 35.

63 Bush is mistaken to argue that Wordsworth "could not despise ancient mythological religions as idle superstitions...for the first time in many generations a great English poet set forth a really glowing conception of pagan myths as vital symbols of the religious imagination and established mythology as the language of poetic idealism." Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, 60.

64 The myth is described with some pathos in John Lempriere, A Classical Dictionary; containing a copious account of all the Proper Names mentioned in Ancient Authors, 10th ed. (London, 1818), 391-392.

counsels self-denial and the diversion of love to the end of meeting the highest spiritual ambitions of the soul; "Learn, by a mortal yearning, to ascend-/ Seeking a higher object. Love was given,/ Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end;" (145-147).[65]

The most celebrated view of mythology is presented in the Wanderer's soliloquy in Book IV (631-762) of The Excursion which Hunt noted had exercised an influence over Keats.[66] Hazlitt singled out the passage for praise since it demonstrated the "expansive and animating principle" of "the immediate intercourse of the imagination with Nature" among savage societies in favourable contrast with "the cold, narrow, lifeless spirit of modern philosophy."[67] The passage is often wrongly taken to express Wordsworth's unequivocal endorsement of pagan nature worship. In fact it states clearly a criticism of pagan religion which is used only relatively, as Hazlitt noted, as part of the argument against modern philosophy.

The passage occurs during the Wanderer's lengthy correction of

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65 See de Selincourt ii, 267-272.

66 [Leigh Hunt], [attrib.], rev. of Poems (1817) by John Keats, The Examiner (6 July 1817), 429. For Keats' comments on The Excursion, see Beth Lau, "Keats's Reading of Wordsworth: An Essay and Checklist," SiR 26 (1987), especially 137-144.

67 [William Hazlitt], [attrib.], "Character of Mr Wordsworth's New Poem, The Excursion," The Examiner (28 Aug. 1814), 556.

the despondency of the Solitary. The Wanderer states that even superstitious ignorance is preferable to the pretensions of Enlightenment reason which the Solitary has espoused:

> Yet rather would I instantly decline
> To the traditionary sympathies
> Of a most rustic ignorance...
> .....than see and hear
> The repetitions wearisome of sense,
> Where soul is dead, and feeling hath no place.[68]

The pagan is set against the modern, worldly claims of reason as it is in the earlier sonnet "The world is too much with us" (1807) in which the cry against the material world of "Getting and spending" takes the form of a nostalgia for a pre-civilised past: "Great God! I'd rather be/ A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn..." (9-10).[69] In fact even during the presentation of pagan polytheism in The Excursion, the forms and character of a Christian monotheistic theory of origins is apparent. It is "- Jehovah - shapeless Power above all Powers," (IV, 651) who overlooks the primitive and is registered by him as a higher being, controlling human destiny and dwarfing man's reason:

> Not then was Deity engulfed; nor Man,
> The rational creature, left, to feel the weight

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68 The Excursion IV, 613-15; 619-621.

69 William Wordsworth, ed. Stephen Gill, The Oxford Authors (1984; Oxford: OUP, 1986), 270, 707n.

> Of his own reason, without sense or thought
> Of higher reason and a purer will,
> To benefit and bless, through mightier power:(IV, 666-670)

The description of the nature worship of the Persian, Chaldean and Greek (IV, 671-762) stresses the universality of the human imagination in its dealings with Nature, "the imaginative faculty was lord/ Of observations natural"(IV, 707-708). Indeed the attack on the philosophy as well as idolatry of the Greeks is explicit and forceful (IV, 724-35). Their religion is only redeemed by Wordsworth because it shows some signs of being commensurate with "SPIRIT" (IV, 735) which implies the imaginative relationship to Nature which The Excursion argues is the prerogative of Christianity, "triumphant o'er this pompous show/ Of art, this palpable array of sense,/ On every side encountered"(IV, 729-31).[70] It is no accident that later the Solitary, rebuked by the Pastor for his defeatism, uses the example of Prometheus as the type of heroic resistance to human fate, implicitly a figure to be censured not praised by Wordsworth.[71]

Shelley's view of The Excursion is succinctly described in Mary's simple entry in her Journal, "[Shelley] brings home

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70 For continuation of the argument about paganism, see IV, 919-940.

71 See The Excursion VI, 538-557.

Wordsworths Excursion of which we read a part - much disapointed [sic] - He is a slave -".[72] The poem bears the stamp of Wordsworth's "peculiar system" as Jeffrey terms it, which Wordsworth in some sense intended.[73] Shelley implicitly criticises Wordsworth in his eschewal of didacticism most explicitly in the Preface to Prometheus and again in a letter to Keats, "In Poetry *I* have sought to avoid system & mannerism; I wish those who excel me in genius, would pursue the same plan.-"[74] The keynote of Jeffrey's hostile review which opens "This will never do", is Wordsworth's employment of heroes from the lower class, objectionable both on moral and aesthetic grounds - "why should Mr Wordsworth have made his hero a superannuated Pedlar?"[75] The choice of the inarticulate peasant as hero is moral as well as aesthetic, and is clearly related to the wider morality of the poem:

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72 Journals, 14 Sept. 1814, i, 25.

73 "It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system:...the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself." Preface to the Edition of 1814, de Selincourt, v, 2.

74 L579, To John Keats, 27 July 1820, Letters ii, 221. There appears to be a subconscious reprimand in this remark to Keats especially in the light of the earlier comment about Keats, "He has a fine imagination and ought to become something excellent; but he is at present entangled in the cold vanity of systems", L476, To Charles Ollier [hereafter cited as CO], 16 Aug. 1818, Letters, ii, 31. Shelley implies that in Endymion Keats' use of myth is less than original.

75 [Francis Jeffrey], [attrib.] rev. of The Excursion, being a Portion of The Recluse, a Poem by William Wordsworth, ER 24 (Nov. 1814), 1 and 29-30.

> .....How little can be known -
> This is the wise man's sigh; how far we err -
> This is the good man's not unfrequent pang!
> And they perhaps err least, the lowly class
> Whom a benign necessity compels
> To follow reason's least ambitious course; (V, 590-5)

Jeffrey's Enlightenment temperament is also hostile to the "moral and devotional ravings" which characterised the poem, what he terms "the mystical verbiage of the methodist pulpit".[76] In a basically sympathetic review, the Quarterly refers to the "Natural Methodism" of the poem and endorses its ambition "to abate the pride of the calculating understanding, and to reinstate the imagination and the affections in those seats from which modern philosophy has laboured but too successfully to expel them."[77] The favourable response of the Quarterly confirms that the poem embodies revealed religion

> the visible and audible things of creation present, not dim symbols, or curious emblems, which they have done at all times to those who have been gifted with the poetical faculty; but revelations and quick insights into the life within us, the pledge of immortality.[78]

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76 [Jeffrey], ER 24 (Nov. 1814), 4.

77 [Charles Lamb], [attrib.], rev. of The Excursion; a Poem by William Wordsworth, [revised by William Gifford], QR 12 (Oct. 1814), 106-107.

78 [Lamb], QR 12 (Oct. 1814), 103.

Such a largely justified evaluation of the poem as the endorsement of revealed religion enables us to understand Shelley's disappointment with Wordsworth.

Hazlitt goes some way towards explaining the disappointment as registered explicitly in the volume of poems which Shelley published in 1816 which included "To Wordsworth" and Alastor, in noticing the way that Wordsworth excludes the realm of politics from his visionary poetry: "Mr Wordsworth's poems in general are the history of a refined and contemplative mind, conversant only with itself and nature."[79] Hazlitt's own visionary language to describe the dream which the French Revolution symbolised is in explicit contrast:

> yet we will never cease, nor be prevented from, returning on the wings of imagination to that bright dream of our youth; that glad dawn of the day star of liberty; that spring-time of the world, in which the hopes and expectations of the human race seemed opening in the same gay career with our own;...[80]

For Wordsworth, the failure of the Revolution is a divine rebuke, "the law,/ By which mankind now suffers, is most just" (IV, 303-304). The criticism of Enlightenment reason, "a proud and most presumptuous confidence" (II, 235) and the attack on Voltaire (II,

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79 [Hazlitt], Examiner (2 Oct. 1814), 636.

80 [Hazlitt], Examiner (28 Aug. 1814), 558.

438-491) demonstrate how he aligns the imagination with religion against reason and politics. In Book II, Wordsworth differentiates between the Solitary's vain revolutionary aspirations associated with the French Revolution characterised as "new and shapeless wishes" (II, 226), and the narrator's vision of the golden city of the Book of Revelation, "That which I *saw* was the revealed abode/ Of spirits in beatitude" (II, 873-4).[81] Wordsworth discriminates between the vain hopes of political change which are merely fantastic, and the moral truths of revealed religion realised through the mind's sublime interaction with Nature.

In The Excursion, then, there is a conflict between the invalid hopes of the political visionary and the sublime transactions of the mind with Nature. Shelley addresses and refutes this mutual exclusion in The Revolt of Islam where the sublime visionaries Laon and Cythna participate in a renewed spirit of political optimism in a natural setting. But for Wordsworth, historical and geographical location are circumvented by his view of Nature as creating a home for the soul with God. The Wanderer's philosophy "to relinquish all/ We have, or hope, of happiness and joy,/ And stand in freedom loosened from this world," (IV, 132-4) suggests the abandonment of the material world altogether. The "visionary gleam"(56), regretted

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81 Shelley attempts to restore a political complexion to the visionary in the original title of The Revolt of Islam: Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century, printed in October/November 1817 but suppressed, pending revision, by the publishers C & J Ollier. Hutchinson, 31.

in the first part of the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807) only to be censured in the second part as representing his early political loyalties, is part of the self-division evident in "Tintern Abbey" and The Prelude.[82] Yet the "Abundant recompence" (89) which is found in "Tintern Abbey" in the dialogue with Nature is at least dramatised in some form. The Excursion, however, disavows this personal, political past completely. Now there is neither a dramatised conflict between a present and past self nor even a struggle between self and Nature. The mind's aspirations for confirmation of religious faith can be achieved through creating a self-sufficient private paradise:

> .....Paradise, and groves
> Elysian, Fortunate Fields-like those of old
> Sought in the Atlantic Main-why should they be
> A history only of departed things,
> Or a mere fiction of what never was?("Prospectus", 47-51)

If the mind can create paradise as "a simple produce of the common day" ("Prospectus", 55), then all exchange with the material world is superfluous. Origins and history are not important since the only radical force is the mind which is looking to the external world for conformity and assurance of divine truths. The "Prospectus" originally appended to "Home at Grasmere" in 1800, takes on a different character in the context of The Excursion since

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82 See Marjorie Levinson, "Wordsworth's Intimations Ode: A Timely Utterance," discussed above, chapter 1.2.

the paradise invoked is so evidently the after-life of Christianity rather than the visionary powers of the imagination: "how exquisitely the individual Mind/...to the external World/ Is fitted:-and how exquisitely, too-.../The external World is fitted to the Mind" ("Prospectus", 63-8). Blake's angry annotation, "You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted I know better & Please your Lordship" also serves as true for Shelley's reply to The Excursion, Alastor composed in 1815.[83] In Alastor the poet's visionary ambition cannot be realised through Nature despite his relentless quest. His self-destruction illustrates both Shelley's scepticism about Wordsworth's confident proclamation of the compatability of mind and Nature, and the uncompromising heroism of the imagination, expressed in the Preface, which can find no home either in Nature or religion but only in death.[84] Shelley's "Mont Blanc", then, continues to challenge the idea of "fitting and fitted" which so incensed Blake.

Coleridge

"Mont Blanc" also engages importantly with Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sun-Rise, In the Vale of Chamouni" the genesis of which is

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83 William Blake, Annotations to The Excursion, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, commentary Harold Bloom (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 656.

84 See Martin Crucefix, "Wordsworth, Superstition, and Shelley's Alastor," EC 33 (1983), 126-147; Wasserman, Critical Reading, 11-46.

explained in Coleridge's note:

> Indeed, the whole vale, its every light, its every sound, must needs impress every mind not utterly callous with the thought - Who would be, who could be an Atheist in this valley of wonders![85]

The language of the poem, the rivers which "Rave ceaselessly" (5) and the "dread and silent Mount!" (13), is echoed in the physical descriptions of Shelley's poem. But Coleridge makes the sounds of Nature sing the praises of the God of revealed religion and invokes the idea of the mountain as a monarch and positive source of authority:

> Thou kingly spirit throned among the hills,
> Thou dread ambassador from Earth to Heaven,
> Great Hierarch! tell thou the silent sky,
> And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun
> Earth, with her thousand voices, praises GOD. (81-85)

Shelley is clearly uncomfortable with such a political and religious interpretation, even though he shares with Coleridge the desire to read the mountain symbolically.

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85 Coleridge: Poetical Works, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, Oxford Standard Authors (1912; Oxford: OUP, 1980), 377. In the Morning Post (Sept. 11 1802) and the Poetical Register (1802) the explanatory note preceded the poem. The poem was published in The Friend xi (26 Oct. 1809) and Sibylline Leaves (1817). E. H. Coleridge describes it as "an expansion, in part, of a translation of Friederika Brun's "Ode to Chamouny," addressed to Klopstock, Poetical Works, 376-377.

By 1816, Coleridge's historical theory registers explicit hostility to those sources of Enlightenment influence upon Shelley's poem explored in the previous section. In The Statesman's Manual, he sets out to attack the basis of the kind of history written by Hume which presents historical events as influenced chiefly by the motives of human protagonists:

> This inadequacy of the mere understanding to the apprehension of moral greatness we may trace in this historian's cool systematic attempt to steal away every feeling of reverence for every great name by a scheme of *motives*, in which as often as possible the efforts and enterprizes of heroic spirits are attributed to this or that paltry view of the most despicable selfishness.[86]

Coleridge in fact claims that the books of the Old Testament offer a more genuine and vital account of the past, than the banal empiricist view that human agents might be responsible for historical events:

> The histories and political economy of the present and preceding century partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy, and are the *product* of an unenlivened generalizing Understanding. In the Scriptures they are the living *educts* of the Imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses

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86 The Statesman's Manual; or the Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight: A Lay Sermon addressed to the Higher Classes of Society in Lay Sermons, vol. 6 of The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. R. J. White, Bollingen Series 75 (London: RKP, 1972), 22-23. For criticisms of Coleridge's theory of history, see McGann, The Romantic Ideology, 4-10.

> by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*.[87]

The "system of symbols" through which history can be read is to be interpreted by "the higher classes of society" to which the work appeals. The definition of "symbol" is the basis of Coleridge's syncretism through which history becomes mythologised.[88] The contents of the Bible "present to us the stream of time continuous as Life and a symbol of Eternity, inasmuch as the Past and the Future are virtually contained in the Present."[89] All difference between history and prophecy, human events and divine insight is negated so that "the Sacred History becomes prophetic, the Sacred Prophecies historical...."[90]

The Statesman's Manual was published in the same year as "Mont

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87 Coleridge, Lay Sermons, 28-29.

88 Coleridge, Lay Sermons, 30-31.

89 Coleridge, Lay Sermons, 29.

90 Coleridge, Lay Sermons, 29. In discussing the French Revolution, he avoids the standard explanations of its causes and argues instead that, "the Prophet Isaiah revealed the true philosophy of the French revolution more than two thousand years before it became a sad irrevocable truth of history", 34.

Blanc". Coleridge had reneged on his earlier radical sympathies and instead resolved on a form of historical faith which refuted Enlightenment optimism. Paradoxically Shelley also sought a leap of faith beyond science and reason in "Mont Blanc", but for a different kind of political future.

2.3 Necessity and Power: Shelley's view of history in "Mont Blanc"

"Mont Blanc" can be said to be concerned with interconnected themes in Shelley's early work: the relationship of human society to the natural world, the deduction of a theory of necessity from theories of nature and the mind, and the role of the poet in interpreting and prophesying the relationship of these themes.

Through literary metaphor and argument Shelley connects the workings of the human mind with the largely destructive forces of the natural world manifest in the vale of Chamouni. His view of Nature has been shown to be largely defined by the Enlightenment thinkers such as Buffon and Holbach, and it is used in the poem to defy and refute the standard religious response to the Alps. However, Mont Blanc is an equivocal symbol of the power of Nature. On the one hand, it represents authority, which is "Remote, serene, and inaccessible" (97) to human understanding, that is, it is a symbol of the tyranny and secrecy of Crown and Church which the Enlightenment challenges. On the other, it can, if interpreted by those with privileged and enlightened insight, that is poets, be a symbol of the power of historical necessity which will "repeal/ Large codes of fraud and woe." (80-81) Shelley's creed, as such, is

based not on Belief, but on the evidence of impersonal forces at work in the material world, that we, as perceivers, might be able to imitate, to the end of instituting change in our own material existence.

The poem describes the subordination of the mind to the external scene in terms of a metaphor of the river as the world of sense-experience which "ceaselessly bursts and raves" (11) and overwhelms the "feeble brook" (7) of the mind's thoughts:

> [Mont Blanc] was composed under the immediate impression of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe; and as an undisciplined overflowing of the soul, rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity from which those feelings sprang.[91]

Yet although this powerful description of sense-experience seems to confirm an empiricist view of the mind as a passive receiver, the mind is also shown to have a limited autonomy - "where from secret springs/ The source of human thought its tribute brings/ Of waters" (4-6).[92] The word "tribute" suggests that the mind has assumed the character of servant and worshipper. This opposition between mind

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91 [Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley], History of a Six Weeks' Tour through A Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland (London, 1817), vi.

92 The philosophical allegiances which this reveals have been well documented. See articles by I. J. Kapstein, "The Meaning of Shelley's "Mont Blanc"," PMLA 62 (1947), 1046-1060; Charles H. Vivian, "The One "Mont Blanc"," KSJ 4 (1955), 55-65; Pulos, The Deep Truth, 63-66.

and Nature is founded upon a metaphor of subordination, yet the abrupt beginning of the poem *in medias res* ensures that the question of the sources of the power of Nature and the mind is unanswered.[93] The cause, for scepticists such as Hume and Drummond, as demonstrated above, could not be known. The result of the opening stanza then, is to reason from effects which are as energetic within the mind as they are in the external world.

The second stanza fills out the sublimated metaphor of the first, beginning with the Ravine itself as subjected, like the mind to power, here the physical erosion of the river; "Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,/ Thou art the path of that unresting sound-" (32-33). The pattern of the stanza moves through the natural scene only to return to the mind itself and in particular the making of poetry. The source of the natural energy in the vale remains invisible yet comes to be associated with, and indeed endorses the value of the poetry which produces it. In this transition from the theme of the power of Nature to the poet's inspiration, Shelley intimates not nature-worship but rather a secular freedom from the authority of religion. This is achieved through suggesting that the power which the river symbolises resembles the deities of the natural world worshipped by early

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93 "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", in choosing to address a spirit, is only tentatively sceptical. It was composed one month previously to "Mont Blanc", 23 June 1816. See L373, To LH, 8 Dec. 1816, Letters i, 517. For discussion, see Richard Cronin, Shelley's Poetic Thoughts (London: MacMillan, 1981), 224-230.

polytheistic societies:

> .....awful scene,
> Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
> From the ice gulphs that gird his secret throne,
> Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
> Of lightning through the tempest; (15-19)

The image of the secret throne and bolts of lightning suggesting the tyrannical power of Jupiter, the God of Gods on Olympus, anticipates the later status accorded to the mountain. The forms of mysterious worship are also intimated in the subsequent passage:[94]

> .....thou dost lie,
> 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 etherial waterfall, whose veil
> Robes some unsculptured image; (19-27)

The images of subjugation, and the rhythms and forms of the religious service with censers, music and scent suggest a form of worship based on fear and imposture which the Enlightenment philosophers and mythographers sought to explain. Even within the waterfall an iconic offering is suggested, whose insubstantiality clothed in veils, suggests the mysteries of orthodox religion.[95]

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94 It is worth remembering that Shelley and Byron were reading Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound together at this stage, see Charles E. Robinson, Shelley and Byron: the Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 30-31.

95 See Mary's description of two waterfalls, "The first fell in two parts;- & struck first on an enormous rock resembling precisely {those a} some colossal Egyptian statue of a female deity. It

Shelley's emotional language is a deliberate strategy by which to authenticate the forms of earliest worship. Yet the self-consciousness of his response permits reflection on the capacities of the beholding mind, an enlightened and rational attempt to explain his feelings:

> Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate phantasy,
> My own, my human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around; (34-40)

The introspection which is initiated has a dream-like quality so that the "my own separate phantasy" endorses the disparity between the scene and the mind's version of it. The "phantasy" to which Shelley alludes suggests Enlightenment explanations of the way that humans made their Gods, namely through projection of internalised fears. But Shelley also attempts to secularise this reaction in order not to yield to the language of religious mystery. Directly following his intense response to Nature he explains his wish to use the experience for future restoration, yet this is not to be

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struck the head of the visionary Image & gracefully dividing then fell in folds of foam, more like cloud than water, imitating a viel [for veil] of the most exquisite woof...", Journals, 21 July 1816, i, 113.

achieved through his own or another's memory, as it is for Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey", but through the mocking creation of another deity, poetry itself:

> 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! (41-8)[96]

The creation of a repository for poetic thoughts removed from the mortal sphere parallels the invisible power of Nature in the vale of Arve which is portrayed in terms of religious worship. Poetry, as the home of "legions of wild thoughts" by this analogy, constitutes a secular force of change, which is both parallel yet superior to the immanent physical laws of the Universe, and more lastingly influential since it is forever available to alter human consciousness in a way that Nature, which effects change in an arbitrary way, cannot.

Shelley further explains the outcome of his response to the natural scene in the way that a poem works upon its listener:

> All was as much our own as if we had been the creators of such impressions in the minds of others, as now occupied our own. - Nature was the poet whose harmony held our spirits more breathless than that of the divinest.[97]

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96 The transcendent realm of poetry is returned to in "The Witch of Atlas", see chapter 4.

97 L358, To TLP, 22 July 1816, Letters, i, 497.

Nature here is converted into an active agency such as Shelley wished to attribute to the poet speaking to man. Nature speaks to Shelley as he wished the poet to speak to his audience, holding it in thrall, an idea which he later develops into a fully-fledged theory of the power of the poet to effect change.[98]

In stanza III the argument attempts to convert the personal reaction to the scene to political advantage. The solutions to the questions of wonder at the beginning of the stanza are offered in terms of the interpretive abilities of the poet.[99] In his questions, Shelley can come to no definite conclusions about the status to accord the experience except that it approaches the level of dream or even death:

> .....I look on high;
> Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
> 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!(52-9)

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98 See below, chapter 6.3.

99 The mind's sublime response is related to Shelley's concept of the poetic imagination rather than simply illustrating his doubts about the materialist philosophy, as Angela Leighton implies in Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 48-72.

To confront Mont Blanc, the symbol of deity and authority, in such a way is to encourage the very reification of religious authority which the poem sets out to challenge. The failing of the spirit before the "secret throne" (17) and the "subject mountains" (62) suggests the monarchies of the *anciens régimes*.[100] As he noted to Peacock it would be easy to anthropomorphise the mountain into a tyrant, "One would think that Mont Blanc was a living being & that the frozen blood forever circulated slowly thro' his stony veins".[101] The desolation is seen as a result of the destructive tyranny of the mountain itself:

> A desart 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, envelope once this silent snow?
> None can reply-all seems eternal now. (67-75)

Humanity is only present in so far as it is fossilised, and the only speculations which the poet can offer to explain this are

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100 See David Pirie's reading of "Mont Blanc" in David B. Pirie and Timothy Webb, "Shelley," Units 15-16, in Romantic Poetry: A Third Level Course for The Open University (Milton Keynes: The Open University P, 1984), 29-33.

101 L358, To TLP, 25 July 1816, Letters, i, 500.

mythological tales of giants and geological phenomena. However "None can reply" suggests that speculations of the kind made by Buffon, are only interesting in that they disprove theological explanations of the origins of the world. The very fact that its history is sealed from view permits the poet to develop an independent interpretation of the destruction he beholds.

This is the point in the poem where Shelley seems to define his new secular faith:

> 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. (77-84)

The complex syntax of this passage suggests that religious belief arises out of the inability of man to reconcile his sublime terror with nature itself.[102] The "awful doubt, or faith so mild" both obstructs a reconciliation yet in its scepticism shows Shelley's preference for a secular belief in the force of history. Hence his tempering, in "or faith so mild", so that it becomes virtually equivalent to, or a repetition of, "awful doubt", an admission of the need for some form of good faith amidst what one critic terms, "an ironic silence."[103] Only such faith can reconcile human

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102 See Judith Chernaik and Timothy Burnett, "The Byron Shelley Notebooks in the Scrope Davies Find," in RES n.s. 29 (1978), 36-49; Joan Rees, " "But for such faith": A Shelley Crux," RES n.s. 15 (1964), 185-186.

103 Gerald McNiece, "The Poet as Ironist in "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn

thought and make it commensurate with the power of Nature, a conclusion which philosophers of Necessity such as Godwin, argued was possible.

Nature teaches us that absolutes, such as monarchy, religion, and all that is encoded in our social institutions, are in fact temporal aberrations, merely institutionalised evils, invalidated by the stronger absolute laws of Nature. "The mysterious tongue", or "voice", is clear enough, and requires not so much exegesis, as dissemination by those, implicitly poets, who in Wordsworthian terminology, "deeply feel". Shelley's desire for such an impersonal historical theory is evident in a letter to Hogg, nine months earlier, in which he emphasises his wish to see contemporary events as foreseen within the scheme of history:

> In considering the political events of the day I endeavour to divest my mind of temporary sensations, to consider them as already historical. This is difficult. Spite of ourselves the human beings which surround us infect us with their opinions: so much as to forbid us to be dispassionate observers of the questions arising out of the events of the age.[104]

To see events and consequences as "already historical" is to place the onus for the interpretation of these events on the poet himself.

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to Intellectual Beauty"," SiR 14 (1975), 320. See also 320-321.

104 L291, To TJH, [end of August 1815], Letters, i, 430.

Stanza IV is frequently dismissed by critics who ignore the sceptical elements in the background to the poem as a failure to resolve the breach established between mind and Nature in the earlier stanzas.[105] This stanza however attempts to relate the destruction in the natural world to a wider theory of historical growth and decay discussed in Volney's Ruins and Peacock's Palmyra.[106] The animated world which we behold is ephemeral, "All things that move and breathe with toil and sound/ Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell" (94-95). The inexorable tide of waste consumes the haunts of animals, "Their food and their retreat for ever gone/ So much of life and joy is lost" (116-117). Yet instead of inducing an elegiac strain, the fact of these laws justifies their being conceived as inevitable material forces which govern existence. It is in this context that the issue of Necessity as a historical force is most lucidly expounded:

> 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

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105 Wasserman attempts to compromise this breach by arguing that "It would be wholly wrong to read this [the destructive images in stanza IV] as an evaluation: the poet is merely discovering that the universe is not homocentric", "Shelley: "Mont Blanc"," Subtler Language, 228.

106 Peacock's poem is in two versions: the first, in Palmyra, and Other Poems (London, 1806); the second, in The Genius of the Thames, Palmyra, and other Poems, 2nd ed. (London, 1812).

Teach the adverting mind. (96-100)

The cause and source of the power which effects the natural world is made clear in the scene before him but the cause remains unknown.

If the emphasis of the conclusions of the previous stanzas is upon the imagination of the poet, stanza IV concludes with the material and historical consequences of the powers of the natural world which although destructive must offer some kind of profitable instruction, "The glaciers creep/ Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,/ Slow rolling on;..."(100-102). The unconditional indifference of such natural phenomena, piled up "in scorn of mortal power" (103), is also a repeated theme of the letters:

> These glaciers flow perpetually into the valley ravaging in their slow but irresistible progress the pastures & the forests which surround them, & performing a work of desolation...[107]

The immutable laws of Nature suggest a fluidity that compels Shelley to correct his image of a "city of death" (105) to the more accurate "flood of ruin/...that from the boundaries of the sky/ Rolls its perpetual stream..." (107-109). A recurrent theme of this stanza is the relationship between the worlds of the dead and the living, "the

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107 L358, To TLP, 23 July 1816, Letters, i, 498.

rocks drawn down/ From yon remotest waste, have overthrown/ The limits of the dead and living world,/ Never to be reclaimed."(111-114) The terror that inheres in Nature is mitigated by the knowledge that, though man is excluded from the scene, there are germinal resources generated in this chaos that provide for the sustaining of distant communities;

> .....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 the tumult welling
> Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,
> 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. (117-126)

Out of the relentless destruction of this environment, some redeeming elements can be perceived. The evidence of such positive effects emanating from the wilderness is a perfect analogue to the status given to "the secret strength of things" (139) in the final stanza.

Another source of tentative hope is raised in Shelley's casual aside to Peacock, in a letter from Switzerland on the subject of "Ahrimanes", Peacock's unfinished poem of 1814 to be discussed in the following chapter

> Do you who assert the supremacy of Ahriman imagine him throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death & frost, sculptured in this their terrible magnificence by the unsparing hand of necessity, & that he casts around him as the first essays of his final usurpation avalanches, torrents, rocks & thunders - and above all, these deadly glaciers at once the proofs & the symbols of his reign.[108]

The implication is that the scene affords evidence of a historical principle at work that must bring down the existing evil reigns of the *anciens régimes* and their successors. For Ahrimanes' reign in Zoroastrian mythology is one of frost and evil, but it is also, and Shelley may have known this, a temporary and temporal aberration in the eternal reign of the spirit of Good, Ahura Mazda.[109] Shelley can afford, therefore, without appearing a victim of perverse whim, to be excited and triumphant that the effects of the invisible agency manifest in the valley of the Arve, should be a "city of death" (105), a "flood of ruin" (107), and that the power should be, like the force of history, and the laws of physical Nature, "Remote, serene and inaccessible" (97). In the destruction before his eyes, he could see the demonstration of a sustaining hope.

The question with which the poem ends embarks on a tentative resolution to the earlier problem of "awful doubt" which marks the relationship between mind and Nature.[110] The point of the

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108 L358, To TLP, 22 July 1816, Letters, i, 499.

109 See below chapter 3.1.

110 Wasserman sees the answer as confirming a resounding victory for the imagination: "The mystery of the final lines of the poem, then, is not the muddle of philosophic confusion but the mystery of religion itself", "Shelley: Mont Blanc"," Subtler Language, 235.

description is not so much to provide an analogue of the human mind and thereby to confirm the value of the poetic imagination, but rather to reveal the possibly benign resources of the power. As the Zoroastrian religion argued, the positive reign of light would succeed to the dark destruction of evil. Having reached the source of the external symbol of power Shelley is also bound to intimate his view of the internal power:

> 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. (127-129)

Shelley emphasises both the mind's ultimate ignorance of this independent power of Nature, and in this final stanza, the sense that an awareness of such power is a necessary correlative to the belief in the mind itself:

> .....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? (139-144)[111]

Shelley is, after all, all too conscious that "silence and

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111 Compare "On Life" where Shelley argues that philosophy "leaves, what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy", Norton, 477. Mary, Shelley and Byron discussed "the principles of life" at Geneva; Mary W. Shelley, Introduction to Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus, 1818, ed. M. K. Joseph, The World's Classics (1969; Oxford: OUP, 1984), 8-9.

solitude..."(144), are essentially vacancies that are filled by our own "imaginings", hence the susceptibility of our all too vacant minds to religious imposture. The power of the imagination revises the Wordsworthian view that Mind and Nature are linked in their relation to God. The mind is, after all, taught the value of Enlightenment science that "the secret strength" is in fact a law which implies human involvement.[112] There is also a consoling neutrality about this force, "Its home/ The voiceless lightning in these solitudes/ Keeps innocently..." (136-138). The silence of these wastes seems consciously to conjure the setting of Volney's Ruins, or Peacock's derivative Palmyra, informing us not just of man's delusory wish for permanence and for grandeur, but also of the silent but inexorable cycles of History, that can alter man lastingly.[113] This power, like History, and like the springs in the caves, is available for exploitation, even though apparently remote from our condition. The condition of heightened consciousness to which the poem addresses itself in its opening lines, is shown to be a resource that, conjoined with the cause of that tumult, the literal potency of Nature itself, can contribute to a permanent redress of existing evil. Nevertheless this can only be the most tentative of conclusions.

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112 See Mary Shelley "Clouds had overspread the evening & hid the summit of Mont Blance [sic] - Its base was visible from the Balcony of the Inn", Journals, 21 July 1816, i, 114.

113 For a view of the poem as pure irony, see Rieder, "...only a consciousness of the radical irony of all fictions could serve Shelley as the basis of that [his poetic] practice.", 796.

This chapter has demonstrated that Shelley's hostility to Christianity is influenced by Enlightenment thought. Not only does his work in the period upto 1816 show a debt to the philosophical and political criticisms of Christianity undertaken by Hume, Drummond, Paine and Volney but its context is also the fascination of eighteenth-century historians and philosophers with the origins of religious belief in the primitive world.

"Mont Blanc" represents a primal scene in which ostensibly fear and doubt rather than faith arise from the mind's confrontation with Nature. Yet the dramatic portrayal of the destruction beheld in the vale of the Arve can be seen as a measure to counteract the view expressed by Wordsworth and Coleridge that the sublime power of Nature is a manifestation of divine authority and a condemnation of the radical Enlightenment concepts of perfectibility and the independence of humanity to be gained through scientific knowledge. Although the poem is sceptical about evaluating the authority of the power which creates the scene, it successfully conveys evidence that change is a continuous process in the physical world. Furthermore it stresses the integrity of an active consciousness which is troubled and excited by the outward scene and encourages the activity without to be reflected inward, towards a view of revolution which is buoyed up by a sense of the ceaseless thought of the poet.

Remarkably "Mont Blanc" seeks hope for historical change in Restoration Europe without resorting to deity or faith in a transcendent sphere. Because of the critique of religion this is

undertaken without resorting to mythology. Yet in its acknowledgement of the chaos or terror of the scene it also acts as a critique of the materialist confidence in Necessity as a force of change. Shelley enforces the sense of the need for inward creativity in order for a political future to be realised, paradoxically reclaiming the right of individuals to create their own mythologies. In his wish to undermine the rational defence of religion, he strives to connect the poet's imagination, as the highest form of the mind itself, with the activity of the universe. Paradoxically this works as a critique of the Enlightenment effort to use historical progress to distance civil society from its primitive origins. Shelley becomes a primitive himself in the poem in order to demonstrate not simply that faith and religious belief are understandable reactions to the terrors of Nature, as psychological theorists had done, but to begin to define the autonomous power of the imagination. In this sense it is clear that he is closer to Coleridge's definition of the imagination in terms of revealed religion in The Statesman's Manual than Wordsworth's more rational defence of religion in The Excursion. Imagination suggests to Coleridge and Shelley, in entirely different ways, a power which can transcend the historical moment. This becomes the visionary effort undertaken in Prometheus Unbound which entails the explicit use of myth for historical purposes.

CHAPTER 3

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND: MYTH AS VISIONARY HISTORY

3.0 Introduction: Shelley's Prometheus

3.1 History Mythologised: Zoroastrian theories of origins

3.2 Sexuality and the Psyche: Cupid and Psyche in the poetry of Shelley's contemporaries

3.3 Prometheus Unbound: Myth as Visionary history

3.4 Conclusion

3.0 Introduction: Shelley's Prometheus

Prometheus Unbound can be seen as an attempt by Shelley to escape from the dramatic and poetical constrictions which the martyred condition of the hero in Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound suggests.[1] The severity of Act I is demonstrated both in its strict classical form and the negative tragic consciousness of the protagonist. This must be transcended in order that a genuine revolution can take place. After Act I, the "lyrical drama", as Shelley entitles it, tells quite a different story. It moves from tragedy to comedy and celebration, demonstrating the transition from a Hebraic to a Dionysian mythical order. The poem is transformed from depicting an individual's pain to a collective joy.

Shelley arrives at the concept of human destiny expressed in Prometheus Unbound by examining existing accounts of human origins and the past. He offers the dualist view of morality and history present in Zoroastrianism, which acknowledges evil but also provides

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1 See Aeschylus, Suppliant Maidens, Persians, Prometheus Bound, Seven Against Thebes, trans. H. Weir Smyth, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1952). For modern approaches to the myth see Mircea Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, 3 vols., vols. 1 and 2 trans. Willard R. Trask, vol. 3 trans. Alf Hiltebeitel and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978-1985), i, 247-263; Vernant, "The Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod," in Vernant, 168-185; for the background to Shelley's use of Prometheus see Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum Edition, ed. L. J. Zillman (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1959), 27-33 and 723-731; Stuart Curran, "The Political Prometheus", SiR 25 (Fall 1986), 429-455.

an optimistic theory of ultimate progress well-suited to the Enlightenment, in order to overcome the fatalism inherent in the Christian doctrine of the Fall, and the classical notion of the Golden Age.[2] Clearly the poem incorporates Shelley's dissatisfaction with Christian morality and its scepticism of human progress; he conflates the tyrannical and authoritarian aspects of divine injustice in Christianity against which Satan rebels in Paradise Lost, with the tyranny of Jupiter, in whom Prometheus has mistakenly entrusted power as well as knowledge: "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" (II, iv, 43-46). Shelley uses the Greek mythology to question the conventional Christian understanding of divinity as both immortal, since Prometheus is tortured physically and by human doubts, and eternal, since Jupiter is removed and his abuse of power terminated. There is also little secular apocalypse in the transformation which is eventually achieved; indeed its confident levity verges on the bathetic; "and all/ Were somewhat changed, and after brief surprise/ And greetings of delighted wonder, all/ Went to their sleep again..." (III, iv, 70-73). But he also challenges the most influential classical account of the origins of the world, Hesiod's Theogony, which depicts the legacy of violence amongst the Gods in vivid detail.[3]

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2 For a useful discussion of religious dualism in the poem see A. A. Prins, "The Religious Background of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound", English Studies supp. (1964), 223-234.

3 See Hesiod, Hesiod's Theogony, trans. and introd. Norman O. Brown, A Liberal Arts Press Book, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill,

In terms of Shelley's literary interpretation of the myth, the conversion of Aeschylus's dark tragedy into a comedy of light and happiness, challenges the modern Freudian view that any rebellion against authority is merely an unsuccessful attempt to displace the figuration of patriarchy.[4] Shelley presents Prometheus as recovering the freedom which he had already won for mankind, described by Asia (II, iv, 59-97); the rebel is Jupiter, but the revolutionary is Prometheus who successfully overcomes the language and psychology of power and replaces it by love.[5] Prometheus's struggle is to efface his divinity, to become fully human, even though in his suffering he is already, as Earth says, "more than a God/ Being wise and kind" (I, 144-145). As Schlegel, whose Lectures on Dramatic Art Shelley was reading in the summer of 1818, notes, Aeschylus's tragedy is "an image of human nature itself"; for Shelley, Prometheus's secret strength is in his superiority to the power who tortures him, but he wilfully negates his ability to transcend his position as victim.[6] As the phantasm of Jupiter,

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4 Bloom seems to wilfully misread the poem by seeing it as Shelley's awareness that "apocalypse can roll over into the fallen state again", Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 95.

5 See Cronin, Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, 133-168, and "Shelley's language of dissent," EC 27 (1977), 203-214.

6 A. W. Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans. John Black, 2 vols. (London, 1815), 112. See L467, To JG, [11-31] May 1818, Letters, ii, 17.

repeating Prometheus's imprecation states with irony, "O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power/ And my own will" (I, 273-274).

The contemporary debate about the merits of a literary use of pagan mythology by modern poets is influenced by both moral and aesthetic arguments. Wordsworth's hostile attitude to pagan morality, discussed in Chapter 2, is reflected in Hartley Coleridge's article, "On the Poetical Use of the Heathen Mythology" which acknowledges that "Keats, Cornwall and Shelley, have breathed a new life into the dry bones of old mythology" but complains that modern poetry has become too refined, no longer possessing the stern simplicity of the classical writers.[7] His censorious view is based upon his belief in the superiority of Christian morality to paganism: "The Grecian Age was hot, fantastic youth....We are grown up to serious manhood, and are wedded to reality."[8] He is condescending towards the claims of myth to seriousness:

> As articles of faith they cannot be commended; but yet, they are beautiful fancies: and if they were ever pernicious, they now have lost their venom, and may serve to show how much, and how little, the unaided intellect can effect for itself...[9]

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7 [Hartley Coleridge], [attrib.], "On the Poetical Uses of Heathen Mythology," The London Magazine 5 (1822), 113.

8 [Hartley Coleridge], 119.

9 [Hartley Coleridge], 120.

Jeffrey, from an aesthetic standpoint, criticises Keats' poetry because, "His subject has the disadvantage of being mythological":[10]

> He deals too much with shadowy and incomprehensible beings, and is too constantly rapt into an extramundane Elysium, to command a lasting interest with ordinary mortals...[11]

Nevertheless Jeffrey sees the pagan mythology as bestowing upon the poetry of Keats and Cornwall an "original character and distinct individuality".[12]

Within the context of such criticism, the response to Prometheus Unbound, aside from the significant degree of incomprehension and anger amongst reviewers, is largely formulated in terms of its view of religion and morality.[13] Lockhart sees Shelley as denying the basically Christian sentiments of classical drama in general:

> No one, however, who compares the mythological systems of

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10 [Jeffrey], [attrib.], rev. of Endymion: A Poetic Romance and Lamia etc. by John Keats, ER 34 (August 1820), 204.

11 [Jeffrey], ER 34 (August 1820), 206.

12 [Jeffrey], ER 34 (August 1820), 206.

13 See for example, [W. S. Walker], [attrib.] rev. of Prometheus Unbound, QR 26 (Oct. 1821), 168-180.

> different races and countries, can fail to observe the frequent occurrence of certain great leading ideas and leading symbolisations of ideas too - which Christians are taught to contemplate with a knowledge that is the knowledge of reverence.[14]

Having presented Aeschylus as a writer for the modern age as much as for the Athenians, he goes on to stress how far Prometheus Unbound departs from the austere civic morality propounded by Aeschylus;

> Mr Shelley looks forward to an unusual relaxation of all moral rules - or rather, indeed, to the extinction of all moral feelings, except that of a certain mysterious indefinable kindliness, as the natural and necessary result of the overthrow of all civil government and religious belief.[15]

Nevertheless Lockhart elsewhere notes the political relevance of the drama in terms which are markedly close to Shelley's own interest in the character of Prometheus:

> The main object of Aeschylus in writing this tragedy, was to exhibit to his countrymen, in Jupiter, a ferocious tyrant, stained with every crime; and in Prometheus, a suffering patriot. Among the Athenians, such a subject could not fail to awaken the deepest interest.[16]

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14 [Lockhart], [attrib.], rev. of Prometheus Unbound, Blackwood's 7 (Sept. 1820), 680. Schlegel sees Aeschylus's tragedies as evidence that "poetry in its original appearance approaches always the nearest to the reverence of religion, whatever form the latter may assume among the various races of man", Lectures, 114.

15 [Lockhart], Blackwood's 7 (Sept. 1820), 680.

16 [Lockhart], "Remarks on Greek Tragedy," No. 1, Blackwood's 1 (April 1817), 40. See also "It was the love of independence, and the hatred of tyranny, and the unquenchable daring of a lofty mind, that rendered it [the tragedy] the delight of the Athenians", 41. Schlegel also notes that "Aeschylus flourished in the very first vigour of the Grecian freedom", Lectures, 93.

Lockhart's attempt at a syncretism of pagan myth and Christian morality has parallels with Schlegel's view of the ancient mythology as symbolical. Even though their syncretism has entirely different origins, Shelley clearly uses the definition of the symbolical in his drama which Schlegel provides:

> ...that is symbolical which has been created by the imagination for other purposes, or which has a reality in itself independent of the idea, but which at the same time is easily susceptible of a symbolical explanation; and even of itself suggests it.[17]

Some reviewers, however, responded directly to Shelley's aim in the Preface "to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence," by noting the contemporary relevance of the poem:[18]

> This poem is more completely the child of the *Time* than almost any other modern production: it seems immediately sprung from the throes of the great intellectual, moral, and political *labour* of nations.[19]

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17 Schlegel, Lectures, 105.

18 Preface to Prometheus Unbound, Norton, 135.

19 [John Scott], [attrib.], "Literary and Scientific Intelligence", The London Magazine 1 (June 1820), 706.

Prometheus is therefore recognisable as a hero relevant to his age, "Prometheus, the friend and the champion of mankind, may be considered as a type of religion oppressed by the united powers of superstition and tyranny."[20] Even if the language of their appreciation is incongruous, Shelley's secular critique of Christianity is endorsed,

> [Shelley]...exhibits a noble illustration of the intuitive powers and virtues of the human mind. This is the system that he is anxious to disseminate, and a more sublime one was never yet invented. It appeals at once from nature to God, discards the petty bickerings of different creeds, and soars upward to the Throne of Grace as the lark that "sings at Heaven's gate" her matin song of thanksgiving.[21]

Paradise Lost clearly provides an important model for a poem which was understood by some contemporary reviewers to be a critique of Christianity. Milton is frequently argued to be the unquestioned precursor of all Romantic myth-making, either for those like Wordsworth who endorse the orthodoxy of the Christian faith or its critics like Blake, for whom Milton's Satan is the unconscious version of the true, radical God. But it is with scepticism towards

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20 "On the Philosophy and Poetry of Shelley," The London Magazine, and Theatrical Inquisitor 3 (Feb. 1821), 124.

21 The London Magazine, and Theatrical Inquisitor 3 (Feb. 1821), 125.

both these points of view and with a sense of his own independence from a narrow and systematic use of mythology, that Shelley argues in "On the Devil and Devils" that, "As it is, Paradise Lost has conferred on the modern mythology a systematic form...".[22] In this essay Shelley applauds Milton's vivid mythologising of the Devil in contrast to the attempts of the Church to prove his literal existence which he satirises ruthlessly; "Milton divested him of a sting, hoofs, and horns; clothes him with the sublime grandeur of a graceful but tremendous spirit - and restored him to the society."[23] The relationship of Jupiter's power to first, the eternal suffering of Prometheus, then the anticipation of eternity in Act III and its achievement in Act IV, are modelled on Shelley's view that in Milton, "...God is represented as omnipotent and the Devil as eternal. Milton has expressed this view of the subject with the sublimest pathos."[24] Nevertheless, Shelley is extremely careful to differentiate the moral characteristics of Prometheus from Satan,

> 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

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22 "On the Devil and Devils", Julian vi, 91. See the addition of Dante in Defence, "The Divina Commedia and Paradise Lost have conferred upon modern mythology a systematic form," Norton, 499.

23 Julian, vi, 92.

24 Julian, vii, 96.

> 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.[25]

To adopt a "religious feeling" towards Paradise Lost is in fact to deny the full force of its dramatic form which Shelley later interprets as a critique of the content of Christianity; "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."[26] This "strange and natural antithesis" distinguishes Shelley's formal interests from Wordsworth's self-conscious borrowing of Milton's high argument in The Excursion, discussed above.[27] Shelley in fact uses Milton's Satan as evidence that "It is difficult to determine... whether Milton was a Christian or not."[28]

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25 Preface to Prometheus Unbound, Norton, 133. See also "On the Devil and Devils", Julian, vii, 91.

26 Defence, Norton, 498.

27 See [Lamb], "Those who hate the Paradise Lost will not love this poem. The steps of the great master are discernible in it; not in direct imitation or injurious parody, but in the following of the spirit, in free homage and generous subjection", QR 12 (1814), 111.

28 Julian, vii, 91.

Shelley thus continues what he perceived Milton as setting out to do, "Milton so far violated all that part of the popular creed which is susceptible of being preached and defended in argument, as to allege no superiority in moral virtue to his God over his Devil."[29] But the artistic difficulties of the latter part of Prometheus Unbound are also anticipated:

> It requires a higher degree of skill in a poet to make beauty, virtue, and harmony poetical, that is, to give them an idealised and rhythmical analogy with the predominating emotions of his readers, - than to make injustice, deformity, discord and horror poetical - there are fewer Raphaels than Michael Angelos."[30]

The first two sections of this chapter introduce the background material through which my reading in the third section develops. In section 2.1, I examine the hope which Zoroastrian mythology provides, that the reign of evil is temporary. In section 2.2, I examine the contemporary interest in the myth of Cupid and Psyche and the relationship between sexuality, and the division between the divine and the human which the myth expresses. In section 2.3, I provide a reading of the poem based on the concept of visionary history which appeals to a timeless order and to the idealism of the human mind.

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29 Julian, vii, 91.

30 Julian, vii, 101.

3.1 History Mythologised: Zoroastrian theories of origins

The Zoroastrian view of the origins and historical destiny of man under alternate reigns of Good and Evil permits Shelley to incorporate the theories of perfectibility and progress which he had absorbed from the Enlightenment tradition discussed in Chapter 2. Its cyclical version of history as an oscillation between periods of good and evil, presents the possibility of looking beyond the immediate crisis which Shelley saw in contemporary England and Europe in 1818-1819, the period of the composition of Prometheus Unbound.[31] The effect of such a view of history is to give Shelley the pretext for a visionary hope, and to demonstrate that an optimistic historical view depends on a radical revision of the relationship of humanity to its origins and to its deities, glossed in the dialogue between Asia and Demogorgon (II, iv). To establish a theory of origins is essential to the creation of a new historical perspective which embraces both East and West.[32]

Not only, then, did Zoroastrianism answer the moral and historical needs of Enlightenment radicals but it was also recognised to be a natural religion in which the role of the sun and the elements, so important to the philosophes' attack on Christian monotheism, was central.[33] But the principal interest of

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31 For genesis of the text see Zillman, Variorum Edition, 3-8.

32 For discussion of Shelley and the Orient, see chapter 4. See also Joseph Raben, "Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: Why the Indian Caucasus?", KSJ 12 (1963), 95-106.

33 Volney sees Zoroastrianism as an Ur-myth, "Jews, Christians, Mahometans, however lofty may be your pretensions, you are, in your spiritual and immaterial system, only the blundering followers of Zoroaster", Ruins, 159.

Zoroastrianism in Prometheus Unbound is that it provides support for the central thesis of the poem, the power of humanity to alter its historical destiny, in Asia's words "Man looks on his creation like a God/ And sees that it is glorious" (II, iv, 102,3).[34] As one modern commentator puts it, "In Zoroaster's new mythic view.. the world, as it was, was corrupt - not by nature but by accident - and to be reformed by human action."[35]

The revitalising role of Nature in the poem, especially at the beginning of Act II, is based on the regenerative powers of the sun, and powerful light characterises Asia's dream of Prometheus (II, i, 120-123). As Shelley himself noted the sun was a central tenet of Magian (ie. Zoroastrian) myth,

> The Magian worship of the sun as the creator and preserver of the world, is considerably more to the credit of the inventors. It is in fact a poetical exposition of the matter of fact, before modern science had so greatly inlarged the

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34 See also the chorus of spirits, "We will take our plan/ From the new world of man/ And our work shall be called the Promethean" (IV, 156-158).

35 Joseph Campbell, Occidental Mythology, vol. 3 of The Masks of God (1964; London, Souvenir, 1974), 191, cited in Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 87. See also R. C. Zaehner, "Zoroastrianism is the religion of free will *par excellence*", The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1961), 41, cited in Curran, 87. The most lucid account of the influence of Zoroastrianism on Shelley can be found in Curran, 67-94. For other introductions to Zoroastrianism see Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, Symbols and Values in Zoroastrianism: Their Survival and Renewal (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), and The Western Response to Zoroaster, Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, 1956 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1958); Eliade, History of Religious Ideas, i, 303-333.

> boundaries of the sensible world, and was, next to pure Deism or a personification of all the powers whose agency we know or can conjecture, the religion of the fewest evil consequences.[36]

"A poetical exposition of a matter of fact" emphasises Shelley's sympathies with a form of religious belief which could answer the dramatic needs of his poem, to incorporate the restorative powers of the sun within a vision of moral regeneration in the universe. Other Enlightenment mythographers such as Dupuis provide evidence for their theories of solar worship as the founding principle of all religions by using evidence from Zoroastrian and Mithraic faith in which Ormusd's reign of good is associated with the sun.[37]

Dupuis is an example of an influential exponent of the

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36 "On the Devil and Devils", Julian, vii, 100. See Shelley's mocking conclusion, "If we assign to the Devil the greatest and most glorious habitation within the scope of our senses, where shall we conceive his mightier adversary to reside?" 100. Gibbon notes that the worship of fire, light and sun constitute the basis of Mithraic belief, Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 6 vols., introd. Christopher Dawson, Everyman (1910; London: Dent, 1954) i, 194.

37 Dupuis, "According to the phrases of this cosmogony [Zoroastrianism], winter is the evil which was brought into the world. The restorer is the God of Spring, or the Sun on his entrance into the sign of the Lamb; whence the Christ of the Christians takes his forms: for he is the Lamb that takes away the evils of the world, and he is represented under this emblem in early Christian monuments", Christianity, a form of the Great Solar Myth; from the French of Dupuis , trans. (London, 1873), 14.

importance of the worship of solar and sexual principles in the natural religions of the origins of the world.[38] Dupuis' poetic dramatisation of the polarities between dark and light, male and female, good and evil, joy and gloom of which primitive societies were aware, constantly plunders supposedly "scientific" authority for ideas such as fertility cults based on astrological worship and the worship of vitalising sexual forces imagined to reside in the sun.[39] Through Dupuis's narrative, the more usual preoccupation with the terrifying, inexorable aspects of Nature noted by Buffon and Boulanger and registered by Shelley in "Mont Blanc" are converted into a joyful acount of the creative and beneficent forces motivated by the sun at work in the universe. The primitives' fear at night becomes allayed by their knowledge of the stronger power of the sun; "Here is the principle of our veritable existence, without which our life would be only a sensation of continued weariness."[40]

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38 See Charles-Francois Dupuis, Origine de tous les Cultes, ou Religion universelle, 3 vols. (Paris, 1794). For commentary on Dupuis, see Feldman and Richardson 276-278, and Manuel, Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 259-270. Volney is supposed to have composed the Ruins after a conversation with Charles Dupuis, Feldman and Richardson, 278.

39 Le Batteux propounded the thesis "that all philosophies and religions were reducible to a conflict between two principles, one active and one passive, and had assimilated sexual symbolism in myth to this universal", Manuel, Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 264.

40 From The Origin of all religious Worship, trans., in Feldman and Richardson, 279.

Manuel sees this spirit of joyful release and the theories of sexuality and fertility in which it is grounded as connected with Dupuis's direct involvement in the French Revolution especially since his book is dedicated to the French National Assembly.[41] Dupuis, like Erasmus Darwin, a scientist as well as man of letters, establishes the autonomous life-giving forces of Nature, as a means to allaying despair.[42]

Asia's entry in Act II directly echoes Dupuis's description of day, ridding itself of darkness (II, i, 13-27) and the parallel with Dupuis is furthered in Panthea's use of sun and fire imagery in her description of her dreamed sexual fulfilment with Prometheus.[43] The association of light and fertility, so explicit in Dupuis and the Zendavesta is most explicit in (II, v), where Asia is about to be re-united with Prometheus. The light emitted by Asia is so intense that Panthea correspondingly pales and recalls the tale of

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41 See Manuel; "Writing in the free uninhibited spirit of *An* III of the Republic, a rare moment in modern history when *ideologue* savants discussed sexuality with freedom and ease, before the religious repressions of the nineteenth century were imposed, Dupuis could view the ancient myths as pulsating with fertility symbols and become honored as one of the great theoretical minds of the Directorate", Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, 266.

42 Erasmus Darwin, The Botanic Garden (1791; Menston: Scolar P, 1973), and The Temple of Nature: or the Origin of Society: A Poem with Philosophical Notes (London, 1803). See also The Essential Writings of Erasmus Darwin, ed. Desmond King-Hele (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968).

43 See Feldman and Richardson, 279.

Asia's birth:

> ...The Nereids tell
> That on the day when the clear hyaline
> Was cloven at thy uprise, and thou didst stand
> Within a veined shell...
> ...love, like the atmosphere
> Of the sun's fire filling the living world,
> Burst from thee, and illumined Earth and Heaven...(II, v, 20-23, 26-28)

Asia's birth echoes Venus's conception out of the waves, and the power of the sun is emphasized in (III, ii, 18-34), in the important conversation between Apollo and Oceanus in which the natural world, in particular the power of the sun and the ocean is restored.

Fire also, the element in the Prometheus myth which symbolises the intellectual and creative power which he gives to man, is "the purest symbol of divine attributes" in Zoroastrian myth.[44]

Peacock's knowledge of Zoroastrianism from his reading in eighteenth – and early nineteenth-century scholarship is an important context for Shelley's understanding of such symbols.[45] His "Spirit of Fire" recounts the covert resistance of the Magians, symbolised by their fire-worship, to the overthrow of their religion by the Moslems. In the notes to the poem, he cites Drummond to emphasise the intellectual freedom, and therefore the poetical interest to Shelley

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44 Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 85.

45 He comments that "the worship of fire was universal in the first ages", Advertisement, "The Spirit of Fire," in The Philosophy of Melancholy: A Poem in Four Parts with a Mythological Ode (London, 1812), 105.

of a symbol for the independence and creativity of the psyche.[46]

The fundamental attraction of Zoroastrianism to Shelley was its incorporation of a view of evil which did not involve the guilt of original sin. Shelley discusses evil in his essay "On the Devil and Devils", composed in the autumn of 1819 probably just after the completion of Prometheus Unbound.[47] Just as his sympathy for eighteenth-century theories of the origins of religion based on psychology appealed to Shelley in his earlier years so he appreciates the dualist view of good and evil as confirming human experience:

> The Manichaean philosophy respecting the origin and government of the world, if not true, is at least an hypothesis conformable to the experience of actual facts. To suppose that the world was created and is superintended by two spirits of a balanced power and opposite dispositions, is simply a personification of the struggle which we experience within ourselves, and which we perceive in the operations of external things as they affect us, between good and evil.[48]

It is important to emphasise the satirical and comical

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46 Peacock "Fire, light, and air, were long the symbols of the mental principle among oriental nations; and the tenuity of those fine essences continued for ages to be thought nearly similar to that of the soul", cited from Academical Questions, Note to Epode I v, 14, The Philosophy of Melancholy, 124.

47 See Stuart Curran and Joseph Wittreich, Jr., "The Dating of Shelley's "On the Devil and Devils," KSJ 21 (1972), 83-94, who suggest November 1819 as its date of composition.

48 "On the Devil and Devils", Julian, vii, 87.

characteristics of the essay which accords with contemporary exercises in the same vein discussed above, but the serious point which Shelley emphasises is not simply that "The vulgar are all Manichaeans" but, as he suggests in the "Essay on Christianity", that, "Good and evil subsist in so intimate an union that few situations of human affairs can be affirmed to contain either of the principles in an unconnected state."[49] Shelley stresses how the Christian explanation of the devil undermines the claims of monotheism since the authority of God is based upon the need to dispose of the inconvenience of evil in the world:

> ...endeavouring to reconcile omnipotence, and benevolence, and equity, in the Author of an Universe where evil and good are inextricably intangled and where the most admirable tendencies to happiness and preservation are for ever baffled by misery and decay. The Christians, therefore, invented or adopted the Devil to extricate them from this difficulty.[50]

Shelley even goes so far as to suggest that the machinery of the Christian mythology is so lacking in credibility as to be "approaching extinction".[51]

"On the Devil and Devils" is an important document through

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49 Julian, vii, 87. "Essay on Christianity", Julian, vi, 228.

50 Julian, vii, 89.

51 Julian, vii, 93. See also Defence, Norton, 499.

which to understand the view of religion and mythology presented in Prometheus Unbound which leads Shelley to sympathise with Zoroastrianism. It signals Shelley's desire to represent the relationship between God and the Devil as a politically cynical attempt by the Church to wash its hands of evil: "These two considerable personages are supposed to have entered into a sort of partnership, in which the weaker has consented to bear all the odium of their common actions...."[52] The problem of exposing the invention of the devil in the Christian mythology, however, is that the admission of dualism which he appreciated in Zoroastrianism does not permit any lasting resolution of the opposition between good and evil.

The solution, however, is offered in a contentious late addition to Zorostrian doctrine, the figure of Zurvan within whom Ahriman and Ormusd are subsumed, whom Anquetil Du Perron calls "le Tems sans bornes."[53] Zurvan, basically allied to the figure of Ormusd, is ironically probably an adoption resulting from the influence of the monotheism of either Christianity or Islam.[54]

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52 Julian, vii, 94. The political metaphor to enforce the idea that "The dirty work is done by the Devil", is illustrated, 94.

53 H. Anquetil Du Perron, trans., Zend-Avesta: Ouvrage de Zoroastre, 3 vols. (Paris, 1771), ii, 414-415. See Gibbon, Decline and Fall, i, 193.

54 Sir William Jones and Volney doubted the authenticity and reliability of Anquetil Du Perron's translation of the Zend Avesta. Zurvan is now recognised as a late addition to Zoroastrian doctrine which superimposes a monotheistic structure on its dualism, Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 84-85 and 226, n75. For discussion of Zurvan see Duchesne-Guillemin, Symbols and Values in Zoroastrianism, 42-48. Gibbon confirms the hypothesis that Zurvan is a later addition to Zoroastrianism: "The modern Persees (and in some degree the Sadder) exalt Ormusd into the First and omnipotent cause, whilst

Whatever the theological explanation of this concept, it offers Peacock and Shelley an ultimately optimistic view of historical destiny. Curran offers Zurvan as a model for Demogorgon whose incorporeal identity is summarised as "Eternity - demand no direr name" (III, i, 52), and Peacock's detailed note on Demogorgon in Rhododaphne suggests the fascination which such an authoritative mythological figure and about whom so little is known, would have had for Shelley.[55]

The issue of how Zoroastrian mythology could be compatible with the Enlightenment view of progress is addressed by Peacock in his unpublished poem Ahrimanes of which two versions survive.[56]

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they degrade Ahriman into an inferior but rebellious spirit. Their desire of pleasing the Mahometans may have contributed to refine their theological system", Decline and Fall, i, 194. For Volney's criticisms see Curran, 221, n50; for Jones' criticisms see Arthur Waley, "Sir William Jones and Anquetil Du Perron," History Today 2 (1952), 23-33. Richardson summarises the dispute in A Dissertation on the Languages, Literature and Manners of Eastern Nations, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1778), 11-20.

55 "The silence of mythologists concerning him, can only be attributed to their veneration for "his dreaded name;" a proof of genuine piety which must be pleasing to our contemporary Pagans, for some such there are", Rhododaphne: or, The Thessalian Spell. A Poem (London, 1818), 180-181. See also "Demogorgon, a tremendous Gloom" (207) in Earth's problematic speech (I, 191-218) about "The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child" meeting "his own image in the garden". The speech is best understood in terms of Shelley's dramatic interests rather than Zoroastrian mythology. Earth misunderstands the importance of Prometheus confronting his past self, by analogy with Zoroaster, because of her own unhealthy desire to recall the inexorable fate he has brought upon himself. Certainly the underworld which she discloses is full of inequality and oppression and is not a repository of moral hope (I, 204-211).

56 For Peacock's Ahrimanes, see The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. (London: Constable, 1924-1934) [hereafter cited as Halliford], vii, 265-286 for the longer verse version with brief prose continuation, and vii, 420-434; 513-522 for the shorter verse version and longer prose outline.

Ahrimanes, composed between 1813 and 1815, not only reveals the depth of Peacock's knowledge about the background to Zoroastrianism but also demonstrates how it could be combined with a version of historical Necessity.[57] In the longer version of the poem, Peacock weaves the Zoroastrian principles around a story of adventure and romance.[58] Darassah, struck with melancholy on the island of Araxes, beholds a spirit, and tells it of the gradual encroachment of the evil principles of Ahriman onto the island.[59]

The problem of the extent and power of the reign of Ahriman is addressed by Peacock at the opening of the second version of the poem. Here the concept of Necessity is a basically benign influence which ensures that historical destiny is under a greater form of control:

> Parent of being, mistress of the spheres,
> Supreme Necessity o'er all doth reign.

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57 For the dating of, and commentary upon, Ahrimanes, see Butler, Peacock Displayed, 66-67, and "Myth and Myth-making in the Shelley Circle", ELH 49 (1982), 58-60; J-J Mayoux, Un Epicurien Anglais: Thomas Love Peacock (Paris: Les Presses Modernes, 1932), 91-97; Carl Dawson, His Fine Wit, A Study of Thomas Love Peacock, (London: RKP, 1970), 43-45; Cameron notes the relationship of Ahrimanes to The Revolt of Islam, "Shelley and Ahrimanes," MLQ 3 (1942), 287-295.

58 The opening of the poem is similar to both Volney's Ruins and Shelley's Queen Mab. The plot of the poem resembles Southey's The Curse of Kehama (London, 1810).

59 Peacock's notes to the shorter version of the poem are fascinating. He cites Drummond, Volney, the Zend Avesta, Dupuis and Bryant.

She guides the course of the revolving years,
With power no prayers can change, no force restrains:
Binding all nature in her golden chain,
Whose infinite connection links afar
The smallest atom of the sandy plain,
And the last ray of heaven's remotest star,
That round the verge of space wheels its refulgent car.[60]

In this version, Peacock discourses briefly on the reign of light and good symbolised as primordial love in the figure of El-Oran (I, iv, 32-36).[61] Necessity is a version of Zurvan, who delegates control to two gods, Oromaze who is essentially a spirit of democracy and justice and Ahriman, under whose evil reign Araxes has fallen. Both in the primordial world and in the reign of Oromazes without priests and temples, love is instrumental.[62] The fourth and final phase is that of Mithra the restorer:

So rose the empire of the evil power,
That still must last, till from the ocean-tides
Shall rise the genius, in appointed hour,
(Who deep meanwhile in central caves abides,
And o'er the unpolluted spring presides
Whence healing flows to man's degenerate line)
To tell that Mithra, the restorer, guides
His flaming chariot through the destined sign,
To bring back peace on earth and harmony divine. (I, ix,

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60 Peacock, Ahrimanes, I, i, 1-9 (see also longer version, I, xvii, 145-153). All references are to the shorter version of Ahrimanes unless indicated otherwise because its notes are a useful indication of Peacock's interest in mythology.

61 See also Peacock's note on "Primogenial, or Creative Love", Rhododaphne, 171-172.

62 Ahrimanes, longer version, I, xii, 190-198.

73-81)

It is crucial to the effect of the drama that we understand the way that tyranny corrupts the inner heart. It is this subconscious, internalised tyranny which is also addressed in Prometheus Unbound:

> Yea, even to Oromaze they raised their call:
> But Ahrimane received their baleful prayer.
> Not in the name that from the lips may fall,
> But in the thought the heart's recesses bear,
> The sons of earth the power they serve declare. (I, xvi, 136-140)

Darassah falls victim to just this corruption throughout the rest of the poem as he suddenly becomes both faithless and tyrannical. The poem not only attacks priests and kings who are "the peculiar objects of the care of Ahrimanes" but it also is an allegory of the contemporary political situation in Europe after the French Revolution.[63]:

> Spake the dark genius truly, when she said,
> That Ahrimanes rules this mundane ball?
> That man, in toil and darkness doomed to tread,
> Ambition's slave and superstition's thrall,
> Doth only on the power of evil call,
> With hymn, and prayer, and votive altar's blaze?
> Alas! wherever guiltless victims fall,
> Wherever priest the sword of strife displays,
> Small trace remains, I ween, of ancient Oromaze.[64]

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63 Ahrimanes, prose continuation to shorter version, vii, 431.

64 II, i, 1-9, of the longer version of Ahrimanes, see also prose continuation to longer version, 286.

This echoes Shelley's own sentiment in the Preface to The Revolt of Islam that "gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the age in which we live."[65] Both poets address the situation of England after the end of the Napoleonic wars. For Shelley, as for Peacock in this poem, the Zoroastrian view of the ultimate return of good afforded a means to escape a historical impasse. Prometheus Unbound opens in the third of the four trimillenia of Zoroastrianism when the reign of Ahriman/ Jupiter is about to end; "Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours/ And moments...these are mine empire" (I, 12, 13-15).[66]

Peacock's "Ahrimanes" synthesises the importance of light and love in the theories of cosmogony in Phoenician, Greek, Hindu and Zoroastrian mythologies.[67] Peacock associates the principle of Light with his moral belief in the ultimate triumph of love. Gibbon conflates Zoroastrianism with Orphic images of the creation by

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65 Hutchinson, 33.

66 Dupuis's discussion that according to Zoroastrianism, the evil and good spirits reign for six millenia each, "Christianity, a Form of the Great Solar Myth", 11.

67 Note particularly the shorter fragment. Peacock's four eras on the Zoroastrian model, are as follows: El Oran, the creative power which cause love, Oromaze, Ahriman, Mithra, the restorer who like the spirit of the Hour guides a flaming chariot.

presenting Ahriman's violation of the harmony of Ormusd as the piercing of an egg.[68]

The prophet Zoroaster, a social as well as spiritual leader, is attractive to those Enlightenment thinkers who looked to religion to supply social as well as spiritual needs. Despite Gibbon's customary scepticism at any form of credulousness and his dislike of the sacerdotal aspects of the religion of Mithra, his respect for Zoroaster as a social leader is evident:

> But there are some remarkable instances, in which Zoroaster lays aside the prophet, assumes the legislator, and discovers a liberal concern for private and public happiness, seldom to be found among the grovelling or visionary schemes of superstition....We may quote from the Zendavesta a wise and benevolent maxim, which compensates for many an absurdity. "He who sows the ground with care and diligence, acquires a greater stock of religious merit, than he could gain by the repetition of ten thousand prayers."[69]

All mythological compendiums of the time contain references to Zoroaster's unique contribution to political legislation.[70]

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68 Gibbon, Decline and Fall, i, 193. See also Ahrimanes the longer verse fragment, stanza xix, 272 where the birth of Love is described both in terms of Greek and Zoroastrian myth.

69 Gibbon, Decline and Fall, i, 195. Citation from Zend-Avesta, i, 224.

70 Zoroaster goes from the mountain having heard the dictates of Ormusd to the city of Balkh, where he establishes a school for the Magi and the Temple of Fire. See Curran, 69 and 221-222. See also Peacock's note to The Philosophy of Melancholy, cited from Anquetil Du Perron, 71, and "Analysis of the First Part", 3.

Zoroaster is a model of the law-giver, the inventor of the Arts and Sciences, just as Balkh was reputedly the early seat of Science and Learning; clearly in some sense he is a model for Prometheus.[71]

Zoroaster provides a possibly syncretic link between Shelley's interest in the character of Jesus Christ in the "Essay on Christianity" and the figure of Prometheus.[72] Christ's faith is necessary to Prometheus in Act I, a hope formulated by Shelley in terms of the Zoroastrian idea that the reign of Ormusd will eventually be victorious over Ahriman:

> Thus much is certain that Jesus Christ represents God as the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world...According to Jesus Christ, and according to the indisputable facts of the case, some evil spirit has dominion in this imperfect world. But there will come a time when the human mind shall be visited exclusively by the influences of the benignant power.[73]

Christ's definition of "God", more than the Pagan worship of Nature but less than the mystery of revealed religion, is a synthesis of

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71 The melancholy of Act I of Prometheus Unbound can be seen in the context of the role of melancholy in Zoroastrianism explained by Peacock: "Not the gloomy melancholy of the monastic cloister, but that sublime and philanthropical sentiment, the source of energetic virtue, which filled the mind of Zoroaster, when he retired to the mountains of Balkhan," "Analysis of the First Part" of The Philosophy of Melancholy, 3.

72 See D. G. Wait, "Wherefore have the Ancients recorded a variety of men under the name of Zoroaster?", Classical Journal, 7 (Mar. 1813), 220-226. "Essay on Christianity" dated Sept. - Dec. 1817, in P. M. S. Dawson, 283.

73 "Essay on Christianity", Julian, vi, 235.

the moral hopes of all religions, related closely to the poetic conception of the future which Shelley grants Prometheus;

> He is neither the Proteus nor the Pan of the material world. But the word God, according to the acceptation of Jesus Christ, unites all the attributes which these denominations contain, and is the interfused and overruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things.[74]

Clearly Shelley appreciated the combination of autonomy and freedom from institutional imposition which Zoroastrianism afforded since as he commented in a fragment associated with the Essay on Christianity, "If acted upon, no political or religious institution could subsist a moment. Every man would be his own magistrate and priest."[75] It is the complete absence of institutions which marks the final phase of Prometheus Unbound, an absence which is the mark of true progress since God is not an absolute figure but simply an idealisation dependent upon the enlightenment of its conceivers,

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74 Julian, vi, 230. Christ is also close to Shelley's definition of the poet: "It is important to observe that the author of the Christian system had a conception widely differing from the gross imaginations of the vulgar relatively to the ruling Power of the universe", vi, 230. Also Christ is shown to have the historical knowledge crucial to the poet: "Jesus Christ probably studied the historians of his country with the ardour of a spirit seeking after truth", Julian, vi, 229.

75 "The Moral Teaching of Jesus Christ", Julian, vi, 255.

> The image of this invisible mysterious being is more or less excellent and perfect, resembles more or less its original and object in proportion to the perfectness of the mind on which it is impressed. Thus, the nation which has arrived at the highest step in the scale of moral progression will believe most purely in that God the knowledge of whose real attributes [has] been considered as the firmest basis of the true religion.[76]

This idealisation then is simply the projection of the character which conceives it, and divine and human are fused, "The perfection of the human mind and the divine character is thus asserted to be the same."[77]

3.2 Sexuality and the Psyche: The myth of Cupid and Psyche in the poetry of Shelley's contemporaries.

Prometheus Unbound argues that it is within the power of the mind to refashion history, and only after this internal revolution will the external world be reformed accordingly as the speeches of the Spirit of the Earth (III, iv, 33-85) and the Spirit of the Hour (III, iv, 98-204) emphasise. The imagination and the act of love, in its broadest sense of social and moral responsibility as well as

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76 Julian, vi, 238-239.

77 Julian, vi, 239.

sexuality, are the means through which this revolution is achieved. The force of the myth of Cupid and Psyche is that it relates sexual desire to wider political, philosophical and even theological issues. Although this section examines the works of contemporaries of Shelley who use the myth explicitly, Prometheus Unbound can be seen to express the union of male and female and the realisation of divine knowledge in human form.

This section examines the interest in the theme of sexual freedom in the face of institutional repression and consequent individual inhibition which dominates the works of the Shelley circle; Peacock, Horace Smith and Hunt, in the years 1817-21.[78] The political attack levelled against the repression of institutionalised religion is most effectively situated in the realm of the relationship between the sexes. It is there that historically both philosophy and religion have felt most threatened and have consequently devised the most abstruse methods of suppressing or diverting energies that, free to run their course, might undermine morality and institutions.[79]

Sexual love is an important element in the criticism of the Christian account of origins and history. Interpreting it as the basis of all mythologies was a controversial means of emphasising

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78 See Marilyn Butler, Peacock Displayed, 102-109, and Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries, 113-137, and "Myth and Myth-making in the Shelley Circle", ELH 49 (1982), 50-72.

79 See Plato, Phaedrus, 246-257, in Phaedrus and the Seventh and Eighth Letters, trans. and introd. Walter Hamilton (1973; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 50-66.

those aspects of human life which Neoplatonism and institutionalised Christianity sought to exclude. Knight's Discourse on the Worship of Priapus is an example of the success of a well-constructed, feasible argument smuggling in a significant degree of gratuitious detail, intended both as a calculated breach of decorum, and to reflect the immunity of contemporary religious belief to rational argument or even indelicate scepticism.[80] His search for a common source of religious symbols may seem curiously reductive in its results but his methodology is advanced gracefully and with scholarly confidence:

> But the forms and ceremonials of a religion are not always to be understood in their direct and obvious sense; but are to be considered as symbolical representations of some hidden meaning, which may be extremely wise and just, though the symbols themselves, to those who know not their true signification, may appear in the highest degree absurd and extravagant.[81]

Shelley and Peacock were aware of the subversive potential of this symbolic reading of religious belief since it exposed the repressive character of religion, which in the wofds of the Furies who taunt Prometheus, leaves "the self-contempt implanted/ In young spirits, sense-enchanted,/ Misery's yet unkindled fuel:" (I, 510-512).[82]

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80 Richard Payne Knight, A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus and its Connexion with the Mystic theology of the Ancients (London, 1786).

81 Knight, Discourse, 24.

82 Self-contempt and shame with regard to sexual feeling is only one aspect of "the dark idolatry of the self", The Revolt of Islam, 3390.

The open discussion of sexual love, is not simply a reckless assertion of freedom from externally imposed restraint; for Shelley and Peacock it is the recovery of an essential and permanent feature of human life.[83]

The relationship between knowledge and desire, expressed in the Cupid and Psyche myth, develops this interest of eighteenth-century mythographers polemically. The "Marlow group" were fascinated by references to Bacchic rites in the classical authors whom they read and in particular they wished to use sexuality as an index of the freedom necessary to overcome the Neoplatonism of Thomas Taylor and the related Christian idea of the body as the prison of the soul. Both Orphism and the Dionysian cults explore, in very different ways, the relationship of the human to the divine. In the older, Dionysian ritual, arousal to a pitch of excitement takes the form of a collective, festive occasion through which access to the world of the Gods is obtained by release and orgiastic joy. Orphism is, by contrast, disciplined, individualistic and ascetic - associated with the Olympian God Apollo.[84] As such, it has been interpreted as a

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83 See Chapter 5.

84 See W. K. C. Guthrie, The Greeks and their Gods (London: Methuen, 1950), 315. According to Guthrie, Orpheus was a Hellene living in Thrace (the traditional centre of the Dionysian cult). He offered an opposing religion to that of Dionysus in the latter's native land. Orpheus's death is ordered by Dionysus and he is torn to pieces by Maenads, in true Bacchic fashion. (Aeschylus's lost play, the Bassarids is supposed to document this). Dionysus came to Greece from Egypt and embodies a spirit alien to Greek culture. See also Guthrie, The Greeks and their Gods, 172-3.

strategic absorption by the Greek civilisation of the Dionysian cult, certainly well established in Thrace, which neutralised its most threatening aspects.[85] Dionysian cults were engaged in by the most subjugated elements in Greek society, especially women, as Euripides' Bacchae demonstrates.[86] The more rigorous and disciplined tenets of Orphic religion are clearly designed to exclude socially inferior elements of Greek society from redemption, or participation in rituals which provide symbolic access to the divine realm. By emphasising personal responsibility for redemption, Orphism organises itself on principles very much akin to later faiths such as Christianity, as well as providing an acceptable framework for Plato's theory of the immortality of the soul.[87]

Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche incorporates the conflicting elements of these two theories which are based on the

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85 For introductions to Orphism see: Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, ii, 180-209; Guthrie, The Greeks and their Gods, 307-332; Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement (London: Methuen, 1935).

86 For background to Dionysus see Guthrie, The Greeks and their Gods, 145-182; Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational, 64-101 and 270-282; Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, i, 357-373; Euripides, Bacchae, ed. and introd. E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1960).

87 The Orphic theogony is particularly attractive to later Christian thinkers since it was fundamentally monotheistic. Conflating the myth of Zeus's swallowing of Venus with its own cosmogony (Zeus swallows the first principle of love, Phanes and his whole creation) it emerges with the idea that the God who rules the world (Zeus) is also its creator. This is very different from Hesiod's cosmogony.

relationship between sexual fulfilment and knowledge of the divine.[88] According to a Dionysian view Psyche attains divine status through sexual love; this joyous interpretation suits the mood of Apuleius' tale well which Shelley and Peacock clearly enjoyed.[89] But according to the Neoplatonist interpretation of Orphism which stresses the punitive side of the tale after Psyche has been ejected from heaven and labours on earth, the myth recounts the suffering and temptations necessary for atonement and above all, the rigid division between body and soul.[90] The Christian allegory of earthly suffering as necessary to the after-life, certainly features as the main element of Mary Tighe's "Psyche" and Thomas Taylor's translation and introduction to the tale.[91]

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88 See, The Transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as The Golden Ass, trans. Robert Graves (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950).

89 "I am in the midst of Apuleius - I never read a fictitious composition of such miraculous interest & beauty. - I think generally, it even surpasses Lucian, & the story of Cupid and Psyche any imagination ever clothed in the lan[g]uage of men. Peacock is equally enchanted with it." L398, To TJH, 8 May 1817, Letters, i, 542. See also Mary Shelley, [Fragment of translation from Apuleius], Bod. Ms. Shelley adds. e. 2, and J. de Palacio, "Mary Shelley's Latin Studies; her unpublished translation of Apuleius," Revue de littérature comparée 38 (1964), 564-571.

90 See E. H. Haight Apuleius and his influence (London, 1927), 135-160.

91 The Late Mrs Henry [Mary] Tighe, Psyche, With Other Poems, 3rd ed. (London, 1811) and The Fable of Cupid and Psyche, trans. Thomas Taylor (London, 1795). See also Hudson Gurney, Cupid and Psyche: A Mythological Tale, from The Golden Ass of Apuleius, 3rd ed. (London, 1801).

Perhaps Taylor's influential Neoplatonist rendition explains in part why Shelley never directly adopts the myth, though the issues it raises seem to be central to Shelley's own uses of mythology. The burden of Taylor's interpretation is that the myth represents "the lapse of the human soul from the intelligible world to earth."[92] The soul's desire for divinity and immortality can only be achieved after a realisation of, and subsequent purgation of corporeal yearnings and at the expense of prolonged earthly labour and suffering.[93] This is close to the medieval interpretation of the myth in art, when the Christian fathers transform Plato's metaphysical theory of love into a theory of divine caritas, fusing the human love object and the religious symbolic figure - Cupid thereby becomes a symbol of the difficulty of beholding and attaining the divine without being destroyed.[94]

Taylor's "Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus" addresses itself to the primacy of the soul, and castigates modern

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92 Taylor, Introduction, The Fable of Cupid and Psyche, iii.

93 Taylor, Introduction, The Fable of Cupid and Psyche, i-xvi.

94 Erwin Panofsky, "Blind cupid," Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance (1939; New York: Icon, 1972), 99. Panofsky points out that only in the Middle Ages, does Cupid become blinded and associated with the wrong side of the moral world connoting illicit sensuality.

philosophy for its unique preoccupations with the senses and empirical experience.[95] Taylor uses the authority of Plato to argue that sin has cut our soul off from its original divine nature by enclosing us in physical bodies.[96] Though Taylor's reductive discourse is crude, it is an important outline of one particular version of a common idea in many mythologies - that of the immortality of the soul and its transmigration into different bodily forms. At various times, Shelley seems attracted to such a notion in its most generalised form, yet is unable to subscribe to the idea of transmigration since it contradicts his empiricist loyalties.[97] More importantly, he refuses the primary assumption made by Taylor that the body is a prison to the soul and that our sensual existence is a punishment for primordial crime.

Yet within the myth is another, latent version of human desire; for while the Neoplatonist tradition suppresses the sexual element of Psyche's arousal to a pitch of frenzy when she beholds Cupid, and renders it an indictable folly, the loss of reason and the temporary

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95 "The belief indeed of the man, who looks no higher than sense, must be necessarily terminated by appearances. Such a one introduces a dreadful chasm in the universe;...," "A Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus," in The Hymns of Orpheus, With a Preliminary Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus, (London, 1792), 14.

96 On the relationship between God, intellect and soul and their difference from the body, see Taylor, "Dissertation," 33-36.

97 See "On a Future State," Julian, vi, 205-209.

triumph of the irrational nevertheless emerge as the most powerful and disruptive features of the tale. From being a manifestation of folly, the irrational physical attraction and loss of reason suddenly become the focus for a subversion and inversion of the prevalent interpretation, not simply of this myth but of sexuality itself.[98] Paradoxically, it gives unfettered sexual fulfilment divine status, the desire is guaranteed only in the deferred realm and is associated with the transcendence of mortality.

The discovery of freedom, outside the strictures of a culture that demands worship of an abstract deity as opposed to fulfilment of human and physical desire, is the theme of Peacock's Rhododaphne.[99] Peacock's setting, a festival to celebrate Love, brilliantly exposes the slavish aspects of all ritual by siding with Pandemian against the Uranian Love, endorsing magic, play and promiscuity, the very opposite of the Platonic emphasis on Love as ultimately deriving from a mental, metaphysical source.[100] With this in mind, the "mere Atticism" of 1817 takes the shape, less of a somewhat eccentric diversion as it is styled in the banter of the Peacock-Hogg-Shelley correspondence, than a serious effort to

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98 Unfortunately there is no space for treatment of Keats' "Ode to Psyche" here.

99 Peacock, Rhododaphne: or The Thessalian Spell. A Poem (London, 1818). For commentary see Mayoux, 246-260; Butler, Peacock Displayed, 106-108 and Carl Dawson, 46-54.

100 See Peacock, Note to Rhododaphne, I, line 14, Halliford, vii, 91.

recover and exercise a freedom buried beneath centuries of sophistical jargon.[101]

It is important that Peacock's setting for Rhododaphne, the magical city of Thessaly, indicates that he is prepared to address himself directly to the irrational, and specifically to the indiscriminate nature of sexual attraction.[102] Peacock delights in Apuleius's tone of prosaic mischief and sly innocence - "Nor did I believe any thing which I saw in that city (Hypata) to be what it appeared" - which is the reverse of serious Platonic philosophising.[103]

With this in mind, the fate of Anthemion in Peacock's Rhododaphne is an example of the damaging consequences of this suppression and furthermore of the fragility of the state of fulfilment. The climax in Canto VI, where the spirit of Apuleius is most evident, occurs when the palace and speaking statues of

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101 SC520, TJH to TLP, 29 April 1819, Circle, vi, 802. Peacock styles the flavour of the summer at Marlow as consisting in "tea Greek & pedestrianism", SC422, TLP to TJH, 26 Sept. 1817, Circle, v, 300.

102 Peacock, Preface to Rhododaphne: "The ancient celebrity of Thessalian magic is familiar, even from Horace, to every classical reader", 3. Shelley describes the poem as "a story of classical mystery and magic - the transfused essence of Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius", L424, To TJH, 28 Nov. 1817, Letters, i, 569. In an unpublished review, Shelley notes "The story itself presents a more modern aspect, being made up of combinations of human passion which seem to have been developed since the Pagan system has been outworn", "On Rhododaphne, or The Thessalian Spell," Julian, vi, 274. Mary Shelley finished transcribing Rhododaphne for Peacock on 10 Dec 1817, Journals i, 186.

103 Preface, Rhododaphne: Or, The Thessalian Spell (London, 1818), v.

Rhododaphne's magical world are destroyed by the figure of Apollo, a conflict which becomes important in Shelley's view of Greece:

> It was not Love's own shaft, the giver
> Of life and joy and tender flame;
> But, borrowed from Apollo's quiver,
> The death-directed arrow came.[104]

Rhododaphne is not rejected and there is no equivocation, as there is in Keats' Lamia, about the metamorphosis of the female:

> He knelt beside her on the ground:
> On her pale face and radiant hair
> He fixed his eyes, in sorrow drowned.
> That one so gifted and so fair,
> All light and music, thus should be
> Quenched like a night-star suddenly,
> Might move a stranger's tears; but he
> Had known her love; such love, as yet
> Never could heart that knew forget! (VII, 295-303)

Peacock refuses to let the destruction of the imaginative realm of fulfilment be the final word, for it gives place in fact to the correlative of Anthemion's ability to satisfy and not purge his corporeal yearnings, namely his reunion with Calliroe. By knowing his sexuality in the semi-real world of Rhododaphne's palace, he becomes fit to know love in the real world. Such a conclusion revolutionises the understanding of the Psyche myth: Psyche's desire to know her lover and to penetrate the veil which shrouds his

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104 Rhododaphne, VII, 240-243.

symbolical invisibility becomes a moment where ideal and physical, so long divided, can merge lastingly. The destruction of Rhododaphne by the old order of Apollo, is therefore, of marginal importance, since Anthemion, the real subject of the poem, has shown himself to be a successful pupil, no longer enchained in a binary opposition between body and soul. Peacock has successfully ridiculed the fear of promiscuous sexuality; love is only damaging and unpredictable so long as it is given the status of the divine and unattainable.

But Peacock's poem also illustrates the interest in the Shelley circle in the cult of nympholepsy, a particular kind of divine frenzy associated with the nymphs of the Ancient world. Shelley discusses nympholepsy in a letter to Peacock in a such a way as to suggest that the sexual release associated with Bacchic frenzy is connected with his sense of his own poetic fluency:

> Pray, are you yet cured of your Nympholepsy? 'Tis a sweet disease: but one as obstinate and dangerous as any - even when the Nymph is a Poliad. Whether such be the case or not, I hope your nympholeptic tale is not abandoned. The subject, if treated with a due spice of Bacchic fury, and interwoven with the manners and feelings of those divine people, who, in their very errors, are the mirrors, as it were, in which all that is delicate and graceful contemplates itself, is perhaps equal to any. What a wonderful passage there is in Phaedrus - the beginning, I think, of one of the speeches of Socrates - in praise of poetic madness, and in definition of what poetry is, and how a man becomes a poet. Every man who lives in this age and desires to write poetry, ought, as a preservative against the false and narrow systems of criticism which every poetical empiric vents, to impress himself with this sentence, if he would be numbered among those to whom may apply this proud, though sublime, expression of Tasso: Non c'e in mondo chi merita nome di creatore, che Dio ed il Poeta.[105]

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105 L475, To TLP, 16 Aug. 1818, Letters, ii, 29-30. Peacock abandoned his projected nympholeptic tale when he saw the

Shelley was clearly conscious of the poetic interest of the theme which preoccupied Peacock, at this point, just before he began composing Prometheus Unbound.[106]

In Horace Smith's Amarynthus, the Nympholept, the hero arrives in the vale of Tempe, suddenly conscious of the liberty which Nature offers - freedom to both the mind and the senses.[107] In contrast to the superior Athenian intellectual, Celadon, who totally misjudges the natural world as a place of promiscuity and resorts to rape, Amarynthus is bewildered and tormented by the beauty and freedom he experiences; his inhibited personality, similar to Anthemion, cannot enjoy freedom. Amarynthus's punishment for transgressing the realm of the nymphs is possession, but his madness is soon converted to a blessing and is, like Anthemion's experience,

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announcement of Smith's Amarynthus, Letters, ii, 29n.

106 See also his comment on Childe Harold, "You saw those beautiful stanzas in the 4th Canto about the Nymph Egeria. Well, I did not whisper a word abo[ut] nympholepsy, I hope you acquit me.- And I hope you will not carry delicacy so far as to let this suppr[ess] any thing nympholeptic", L483, To TLP, 8 Oct. 1818, Letters, ii, 44.

107 See Smith, Preface to Amarynthus, the Nympholept: A Pastoral Drama, in Three Acts. With Other Poems (London, 1821), "The [Nympholepts] of the Greeks, and the Lymphati or Lymphatici of the Romans, were men supposed to be possessed by the Nymphs, and driven to phrensy, either from having seen one of those mysterious beings, or from the maddening effect of the oracular caves in which they resided", v.

equivalent to an initiation. It is important to note Smith's inversion of the Cupid and Psyche myth from a struggle of the human to achieve divinity to the opposite idea of the deity becoming human. Urania, a nymph of the air is cast down to earth, and given degrading wings as punishment for her love for Amarynthus whom she deems to be a wood-god. This spiritual figure thus feels she is punished by her earthly predicament while Amarynthus the mortal is enthralled or blinded by his own divine madness, relieved only by the Nymph herself, who with her wings, embodies Psyche. The overcoming of such a breach between divine and mortal is symbolic of the erosion of class divisions and can be contrasted with a class reading of Reynolds' "The Naiad" (1816) another poem with parallel interests to "Rhododaphne".[108] In "The Naiad" the ideological position towards Hubert, a chivalric figure "morally spotless" riding to meet his bride, is hostile. After he has been entrapped by the Naiad, Reynolds concludes with sympathy for the betrayed bride, Angeline, and the Naiad is seen as nothing more than a sorceress, who like Cupid can tempt with a magical realm, but implicitly does not give real joy. Like the traditional version of the tale, the idea that sexual fulfilment is corrupting is propounded; moreover, decent men who are already betrothed should know better than to be tempted by ignoble maidens.

In Hunt's writing on mythology, the relationship between the

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108 John Hamilton Reynolds, The Naiad. A Tale, With Other Poems (London, 1816).

levelling themes of these writers' use of Greek myths and the pastoral world is clarified. By refusing to extend the implicitly social connotations of the division between divine and earthly, Nature and the pastoral world become the locus of new values and ideals, in which such divisions do not exist. Hunt's weekly Indicator, the first issue of which appeared in 1819 seems dedicated to the subject of mythology as his editorial introduction suggests: "The INDICATOR will attend to no subject whatsoever of immediate or temporary interest. His business is with the honey in the old woods."[109] Hunt's journal is full of translations of classical literature and occasional pieces about Greek mythological characters or topics including his translation of Tasso's celebrated "Ode to the Golden Age" and the last Act of Tasso's "Amyntas".[110] Hunt's article, "Spirit of the Ancient Mythology", is essentially a defence of pagan myth designed to advance its values in opposition to Christianity:

> the ordinary run of pagans were perhaps more impressed with a sense of the invisible world, in consequence of the very visions presented to their imagination, than the same description of men under a more shadowy system.[111]

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109 The Indicator 1 (13 Oct. 1820) in The Indicator, ed. Leigh Hunt, 2 vols. (London, 1822),i, 1.

110 The Indicator 23 (15 Mar. 1820), i, 183-184; The Indicator 70 (7 Feb. 1821), ii, 141-144.

111 Hunt, "Spirit of the Ancient Mythology," The Indicator 15 (19 Jan. 1820), i, 115.

For Hunt, the Greek religion offers a viable alternative morality; "In all this there is a deeper sense of another world, than in the habit of confronting oneself with a few vague terms and embodying nothing but Mammon".[112]

Nevertheless it should be pointed out that Hunt's seemingly topical interest is diluted by a rather forced sense of "good cheer" and an unfocussed nostalgia for pastoral values. The main thrust of his Preface to Foliage; or Poems original and translated (1818) is his identification of a "new school of poetry" which seeks to restore the validity of mythology, and a corresponding and familiar attack on eighteenth-century poetry.[113] The radical difference is, however, obscured by the vague intention: "The main features of the book are a love of sociality, of the country, and of the fine imagination of the Greeks."[114] Hunt's obeisance to Shakespeare's view of mythology is dangerously open to appropriation by those for whom the Grecian spirit is nothing more than basking in a land of plenty:

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112 Hunt, "Spirit of the Ancient Mythology," i, 116.

113 Leigh Hunt, Foliage; or Poems Original and Translated (London, 1818), 10.

114 Hunt, Foliage, 18.

> the elevation of the external world and of accomplished humanity to the highest pitch of the graceful, and as embodied essences of all the grand and lovely qualities of Nature.[115]

Hunt's "The Nymphs" in Foliage seems to lapse into this evaluation of the Grecian spirit, but it should be appreciated at the same time that the protection and care for Nature, for which the Nymphs are responsible is, as Akenside's Hymn to the Naiads (1746) was, by its very nature a challenge to monotheistic notions of God the patriarch as Nature's ruler.[116]

Hunt's interests in myth are perhaps the most literary and self-conscious of the group of writers discussed here.[117] His two mythological poems, "Hero and Leander," and "Bacchus and Ariadne" (1819) owe much to the context of Peacock and Shelley. "Hero and Leander" is a drama of crossed love in which true, unfettered loyalty overcomes constraints, but Hero's role as priestess at the

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115 Hunt, Foliage, 24.

116 "The Nymphs", v-xxxvii. For comment see C. D. Thorpe, "The Nymphs," KSMB 10 (1959), 33-47. Akenside, "Hymn to the Naiads", The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside, with memoir and critical dissertation by the Rev. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh, 1857), 237-254.

117 See "Hero and Leander" and "Bacchus and Ariadne" in The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt, ed. H. S. Milford (London: OUP, 1923), 37-44 and 44-51.

Temple of Love where she has a key role in its festival is similar to the opening of "Rhododaphne". Instead of Bacchus taking Ariadne against her will he can be identified with his more traditional, historical role as liberator: Bacchus's festive train offers direct fulfilment and protection, where Theseus the noble lord is indifferent and treacherous.

Hunt's "Amyntas", or translation of Tasso's "Ode to the Golden Age", crystallises the ideological impulse behind the preoccupation with Greek pastoral, in a way that his "original" poems do not.[118] The translation was published in The Indicator and stands as a rallying cry for the forces of dissent in 1819 and 1820.[119] The central point is that the "Golden Age" is to be valued not as an idyllic land of milk and honey, but rather because it was a time when (false) religion and oppressive social hierarchies were non-existent. More than any other sort of oppression, that of sexual inhibition is seen as the most devastating of the effects of this ideology of constraint which has been bolstered by a sophisticated discourse alien to the claims of Nature:

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118 The Indicator 23 (15 March 1820), i, 183-184. See Shelley's criticisms: "I am sorry to hear that you have employed yourself in translating the "Aminta" though I doubt not it will be a just and beautiful translation. You ought to write Amyntas. You ought to exercise your fancy in the perpetual creation of new forms of gentleness and beauty", L530, To LH, [14-18 Nov. 1819], Letters, ii, 152.

119 The translation is referred to by Horace Smith in his Preface to "Amarynthus," viii.

> But solely that that vain
> And breath-invented pain,
> That idol of mistake, that worshipped cheat,
> That Honour, - since so called
> By vulgar minds appalled,
> Played not the Tyrant with our nature yet. (14-19)

Hunt's attack on the falsity of "Honour", is not simply an attack on manners but on the insidious effect of a class-based concept on the generality of mankind - "Twas thou, thou, Honour, first/ That didst deny our thirst/ Its drink" (40-42). This is tantamount to a refusal to accept the imposition of an alien morality from above - "We here, a lowly race/ Can live without thy grace" (61-62). By reading the poetry of Peacock, Smith and Hunt, and their ideological adversaries such as Reynolds, with this in mind, it is possible to distinguish certain motives beneath seemingly conventionalised themes, of sexual frustration and fulfilment. It is precisely such themes which lie at the heart of the reunion of Asia and Prometheus in Prometheus Unbound.

3.3 Prometheus Unbound: Myth as Visionary history

The perception of the past undergoes a significant change during Prometheus Unbound. Act I begins with Prometheus haunted by the memory of his curse and tortured by the visions which depict the ostensible failure of all radical individuals and movements to inaugurate historical change, presented by Mercury and the Furies. The central account of history occurs in Asia's speech (II, iv, 33-109). The change which is initiated through Asia's understanding

of the autonomy of the imagination amounts to a rejection of history altogether. The remaining acts of the poem describe the effective dissolution of time and its replacement by an eternal cosmic joy.

Mercury gives most pain by providing Prometheus with evidence of recent historical failures including the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, but also, as Cameron suggests, by showing Prometheus's own propensity to succumb to the enveloping imagery of the old order[120]:

> Whilst I behold such execrable shapes,
> Methinks I grow like what I contemplate
> And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy. (I, 449-451)[121]

Prometheus's knowledge that the reign of Jupiter, like that of Ahrimanes, is one of "brief Omnipotence" (I, 402), does not diminish his despair but he demonstrates Mercury's concept of time to be flawed. Ironically the secret that Prometheus witholds is the certainty that Jupiter's reign will end; to that degree he controls his destiny. Mercury's question "Thou knowest not the period of Jove's power?" (I, 412) inadvertently confirms the temporality and conclusion of his master's reign, even as he invites Prometheus to conceive of the eternal suffering which he must undergo (I,

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120 See Curran, Shelley's Annus Mirabilis, 98. "Mercury represents Prometheus' immediate impulse, upon revoking his curse, to surrender as well the entire rationale for his resistance."

121 Kenneth Neill Cameron, "The Political Symbolism of Prometheus Unbound," PMLA 58 (1943), 728-753, esp. 728-738.

416-423). Prometheus, however, behaves with equanimity; he is offhand where Mercury is pedantic, "I know but this, that it must come" (I, 413).

But the historical failure of the Enlightenment is emphasized relentlessly by the Furies:

> 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. (I, 561-3)

The image of the "disenchanted nation" (I, 567), presumably post-revolutionary France, is used to symbolise the inevitability of the failure of history which founders because of the timeless errors in the hearts of human beings (I, 618-631). Shelley dramatises his disillusion with contemporary radical efforts since to look back to the past for examples of hope is impossible; the evidence simply contradicts such optimism. Indeed the only way to persevere is to obliterate memory and to envisage the later acts of the drama where historical memory does not exist:

> The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
> With new endurance, till the hour arrives
> When they shall be no types of things which are. (I, 643-5)

Prometheus resigns himself to despair in the concluding speech of the act on account of his separation from Asia. He is willing to slip back into the original chaos of matter; "I would fain/ Be what it is my destiny to be,/ The saviour and the strength of suffering man,/ Or sink into the original gulph of things.../ There is no agony and no solace left..." (I, 815-818).

It is Asia's imagination and her own syncretic intellect, morally responsible, sexually vitalising and entirely intuitive which inject hope into the poem in Act II. She offers a feminine version of time and history which is circular and cyclical rather than linear, perceiving that the history of the Gods so far does not signal a destiny for humanity but is the arbitrary tale of strife and confusion. Memory is less important than love, and hope and the sexual and natural themes examined in section 3.2 are invoked to counter the historical despair.

Asia's fundamental question to Demogorgon in Act II scene iv centres on the controlling force of human destiny, and the problematical theological question of why any divinity should find evil acceptable, the theme of "On the Devil and Devils." Demogorgon simply reflects back the fallacious expectations of a tyrannised populace, or the powers of a historical interpretation and a view of origins which Asia comes to understand as legitimately her own. Demogorgon is simply the emptiness we choose to address as God, the "vacancy" noted in "Mont Blanc" to reflect our own capacity to invent deities; "Ungazed upon and shapeless - neither limb/ Nor form - nor outline; yet we feel it is/ A living Spirit." (II, iv, 5-7). Asia's question of origins, "Who made the living world?" (II, iv, 9) attempts to discover the source of evil. It is "God" who made the world, and "all/ That it contains - thought, passion, reason, will,/ Imagination?" (II, iv, 9-11) and who is responsible for its beauty. But the question of evil, Demogorgon simply answers by bluffing with the words "He reigns" (II, iv, 28,31,32).

In retrospect, Asia therefore understands that Demogorgon is

simply parodying conventional questions and defences of divine authority. Her long explanation of historical development from the chaos with which the world began to Prometheus's sacrifice in creating the human race shows the common tale of history, characterised by strife and change, and denies that there can be any overall guiding principle in the historical destiny of humanity. The answer to Asia's question of who rules the universe, since she denies that it can be Jove, in fact shows that it is man who is now paradoxically the source of strength which incenses the tyrant, making him into a kind of slave,

> .....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? (II, iv, 100-105)

Her question elicits the answer that no deity in fact "reigns" but that historical explanations of the past and origins are inevitable:

> *Asia*:.....Declare/
> Who is his master? Is he too a slave?
>
> *Demogorgon*: All spirits are enslaved who 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. (II, iv, 108-120)

Demogorgon's "I spoke but as ye speak" shows that his earlier rejoinder "He reigns" is applicable to Jupiter alone, who is enslaved to an evil, Ahrimanic principle. Asia's persistent logical question of who, then, "is the master of the slave" is answered in terms which are appropriate to Shelley's revision of both cyclical views of history explored by the dreamer in Queen Mab and Volney's Ruins, and the neutral concept of historical Necessity. For Shelley "the deep truth" of the historical future is indeed "imageless" and temporal change is not something easily rationalised or absorbed. The solution is rather in the attitude of the individual and the power of love which transcends historical circumstance, "To these/ All things are subject but eternal Love." Asia who reverses the drama towards hope has in fact anticipated this answer, "my heart gave/ The response thou hast given;" (II, iv, 121-122).

If enslavement is a question of will, then as was shown in Act I, Prometheus is culpable. Prometheus, "Withering in destined pain" (II, iv, 100), is a representative of the radicals of Shelley's generation who must perceive themselves not as alienated outcasts, like the Wandering Jew, or even Byron's disillusioned and cynical Manfred, but as sources of renewed energy.[122] The cultural

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122 Of Manfred, Shelley comments, "it made me dreadfully melancholy, and I fear other friends in England, too. Why do you indulge this despondency?", L401, To LB, 9 July 1817, Letters, i, 547.

representation of humanity to itself must be converted from the eternal sacrifice of Christ, mirrored by Prometheus's suffering in Act I, to the original image of Prometheus as the legitimate creator of the myriad benefits bestowed upon human existence. Asia derives from Demogorgon a vision of Prometheus as a renewed solar force, "Prometheus shall arise/ Henceforth the Sun of this rejoicing world:/ When shall the destined hour arrive?" (II, iv, 126-128)

Shelley effectively needs to dispense with the idea of history in order to put his visionary future into operation. The conflict between different Spirits of the Hour which Asia beholds is dramatised through the imagery of Zoroastrianism, the forces of darkness and light. The spirit of darkness foreshadows the future reign even as it promises to destroy the existing order:

> *Spirit*: I am the shadow of a destiny
> More dread than is mine aspect - ere yon planet
> Has set, the Darkness which ascends with me
> Shall wrap in lasting night Heaven's kingless throne. (II, iv, 146-149)

The vision of the movements of these spirits and the ascent of Demogorgon, provides Asia with the response to her earlier insistent questionings, "Thus I am answered - strange!" (II, iv, 155). Panthea eventually beholds the spirit of the future who is characterised in terms of light and hope:

> .....-the young Spirit
> That guides it, has the dovelike eyes of hope.
> How its soft smiles attract the soul! - as light
> Lures winged insects through the lampless air. (II, iv, 159-162)

By associating the cause of revolutionary freedom with the freedom of the human imagination, Prometheus can symbolise the artistry of creating the hitherto unimaginable which is the essence of poetry. Just as the future represented by Demogorgon is literally "imageless" (II, iv, 116), so the mind itself in the new world will be able to give shape and solidity to what is at first merely intuited:

> And lovely apparitions dim at first
> Then radiant - as the mind, arising bright
> From the embrace of beauty (whence the forms
> Of which these are the phantoms) casts on them
> The gathered rays which are reality -
> Shall visit us, the progeny immortal
> Of Painting, Sculpture and rapt Poesy
> And arts, though unimagined, yet to be. (III, iii, 49-56)

As such, the new order requires not so much legislation as a refusal of the historical past and its methods. Likewise, the character of Earth, entirely absorbed in the past in the opening act, is forced to look forward.[123]

It is through an acceptance of mutability that Prometheus attains his vision of the new age. In language whose pathos echoes Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia, Prometheus envisages his new life, "Where we will sit and talk of time and change/ As the world

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123 See M. S. McGill, "The Role of Earth in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound." SiR, 7 (1967), 117-128. "Earth's voice of melancholy reconstructs the negative elements of the world of the actual; the golden age desired by hopeful men has turned into fallen nature", 121.

ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged-/ What can hide man from Mutability?" (III, iii, 23-25) The theme of the speeches of the Spirit of the Earth (III, iv, 33-85) and of the Spirit of the Hour (III, iv, 98-204) is that the possibility of reformation is crucial to the renewed cosmic vision. Shelley's description negates the power by which the rest of the drama is weighed down:

> 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. (III, iv, 164-172)

All forms of imperial rule and imposture eventually amount to the same demise. It is not that they are physically razed to the ground but rather that they "Stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now" (III, iv, 179). Without the outward form, the inner essence remains, "Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed" (III, iv, 194).

Act IV sees the past and our view of the past dismissed. Written after Peterloo, when Shelley's correspondence is littered with references to the inevitability of rebellion, he felt justified in the confident stage direction,"*A Train of dark forms and Shadows passes by confusedly, singing*":

> Here, oh here!
> We bear the bier
> Of the Father of many a cancelled year!
> Spectres we
> Of the dead Hours be,
> We bear Time to his tomb in eternity. (IV, 9-14)[124]

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124 "Every thing is preparing for a bloody struggle", L523, To JG, 6

In Act IV Shelley dissolves the whole of the history of mankind into a series of pasts indifferent to one another, a series of cycles of triumph and decay. If there is a moment of triumph, it is when the past is finally dispensed with by the light of the now united Heaven and Earth that casts into oblivion the mortality of the sepulchred past:

> the beams flash on
> And make appear the melancholy ruins
> Of cancelled cycles; anchors, beaks of ships...
> ...sepulchred emblems
> Of dead Destruction, ruin within ruin! (IV, 287-288, 294-295)

The world of ruined empires is nearly telescoped and made merely a part of the past in which on the human model, some beasts were monarchs over others.[125] History is now a series of unsavoury layers; under the wreckage of cities "Jammed in the hard black deep"

Nov. 1819, Letters ii, 149; "I suppose we shall soon have to fight in England", L543, To LH, 23 Dec. 1819, Letters ii, 167; "...a civil war impends from the success of ministers and the exasperation of the poor", L564, To TLP, [?2 May 1820], Letters ii, 193; "I fear that in England things will be carried violently by the rulers, and that they will not have learned to yield in time to the spirit of the age", L530, To LH, [14-18 Nov. 1819], Letters ii, 153.

125 The point is made by V. A. de Luca in "The Style of Millenial Announcement in Prometheus Unbound," KSJ 28 (1979), 96-97.

(IV, 302) lie the "The anatomies of unknown winged things" (IV, 303) and under that the first monsters which inhabited the earth:

> The jagged 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
> Wrapt Deluge round it like a cloak, and they
> Yelled, gaspt and were abolished;...(IV, 309-316)

Shelley's mocking irreverence surfaces again with wry malevolence in his final version of how mankind could have emerged from this natural wilderness:

> .....or some God
> Whose throne was in a Comet, past, and cried -
> "Be not!" - and like my words they were no more. (IV, 316-318)

In his cosmic vision, he perceives both the possibility of a different version of human origins and the end of historical memory.

3.4 Conclusion

Prometheus Unbound represents Shelley's principal encounter with a classical myth whose political relevance was apparent even to those like A. W. Schlegel and Lockhart without radical sympathies. The unbinding of Prometheus counters Aeschylus's stern classicism and converts an essentially human tragedy into a form of divine comedy. Where Lockhart and Schlegel are attracted to the Hebraic characteristics of the story, which makes it appropriate to their

Christian sympathies, Shelley adds a Dionysian element of comedy to make it into a pagan celebration.

The incorporation of elements of Zoroastrianism is important not simply as a way to synthesise elements from different religions, as has been argued ably by Stuart Curran, but because it gives a credible acknowledgement of evil in the world and provides a historical theory which offers an optimistic faith to overcome the arbitrary view of the cyclical nature of history in the work of Volney. Indeed the principal dimension of the Zoroastrian faith evident in the pervasive light of the drama is the Magian worship of the sun, which was associated with the use of theories of solar and sexual principles in the natural world, advanced by Enlightenment theorists like Dupuis and Knight, to undermine Christianity.

Prometheus Unbound also dramatises an important element of Greek myth, the relationship of the divine to the human realm. The poem seeks to emphasize that the human world can attain divine status through the individual, Prometheus, realising his capacity for self-knowledge. The myth of Cupid and Psyche as expressed in the work of Shelley's contemporaries, demonstrates the attainment of the divine through sexual fulfilment, in contrast to the interpretation of Psyche's fall by Neoplatonists like Thomas Taylor, as a punishment for presumption. Horace Smith's Amarynthus and Peacock's Rhododaphne firmly relate sexual inhibition to wider forms of repression, and their two youthful protagonists are shown to achieve self-fulfilment when released from such inhibitions. The union of Prometheus and Asia similarly defeats the tyranny of Jupiter through the realisation of knowledge and physical love.

Finally the drama portrays the end of history itself: Asia's account of the struggle between the Titans and Olympians is to be replaced by a timeless cosmology. Thus mythology is converted from the possibly conservative formulation of a classical given order of things into the free rein of the imagination. The past becomes the anticipation of the future, history becomes prophetic. This view of myth as an essentially flexible medium with which the artist can freely experiment, is expressed most clearly in Shelley's next major poem, "The Witch of Atlas".

CHAPTER 4

SHELLEY AND THE ORIENT: "THE WITCH OF ATLAS" AND THE MYTHOLOGICAL POEMS OF 1820

4.0 Introduction: the literary context

4.1 Critical attitudes to "The Witch of Atlas"

4.2 The Golden Age and the European syncretism of Eastern myth: Faber, Knight and Jones

4.3 Ironies of origins: order and subversion in "The Witch of Atlas" and the mythological poetry of 1820

4.4 Conclusion

4.0 Introduction: the literary context

My aim in this chapter is to show that the comic spirit of "The Witch of Atlas" conceals a serious challenge to conventional accounts of the origins of religious belief and the civil institutions that uphold it. As an original myth without any obvious single literary or cultural model, the poem is formally innovative and marks a significant stage in Shelley's use of the mythological in his poetry.

The poem functions satirically to expose human investment in deities at all times and in all cultures while also advancing a version of history that accords with Shelley's renewed confidence in the political events of the summer of 1820. It also develops existing themes in his work.[1] First, he aligns himself with the other younger Romantic poets in defining the poem in an antithetical relationship to the pronouncements on poetic form and content being made by the elder generation. Secondly, his "boasted spirit of Love", which Hazlitt complains pervades the poem is a conscious reminder that all accounts of the origins of the human race are constructs founded upon the morality of the particular ethical values of their advocates. Thirdly in dispensing with the usual formalities of respect and seriousness accorded to the divine, Shelley emphasizes subversive and anti-authoritarian themes present

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1 See [Hazlitt], [attrib.], rev. of Posthumous Poems by Shelley, ER, 40 (July 1824), 505. For discussion of Hazlitt's remarks, see below 4.1.

in his and Mary's contemporary works on Greek myth which continue the polarity of Apollo versus Bacchus or Pan already found in the circle's work in 1818. Finally the poem achieves an effect of inclusiveness through the symbolic force of the Witch's journey, her trajectory becoming analogous to a journey through time that traces the development of humanity from its primitive origins to an early example of civilised society. Through these various perspectives, the "visionary rhyme" (8) ironically counters the rigid defensiveness so often noticeable in existing formulations of human origins advanced by Christian apologists who insistently assert the historically verifiable nature of their arguments. The hypothetical originary realm delineated in the early part of the poem firmly defies these supposedly empirical, though in fact transparently autocratic, projections onto a historical past of arguments about human destiny.

"The Witch" therefore embodies clear continuities in relation to Shelley's earlier work. Since his provocative critique of the European gentry's belief in revealed religion in "Mont Blanc", Shelley had established an allegiance with those Enlightenment thinkers who sought to expose religion as contingent on a particular stage in human history. From this sketch of the motives for the human impulse to make deities, Shelley moves in Prometheus Unbound to one of the most celebrated articulations of human resistance to divine authority in Western myth, while also consciously adumbrating and revolutionising the terms of the conflict in the Miltonic Christian tradition between Satan and God. "The Witch of Atlas" is significant because it marks the stage at which he can dispense with

specific references, and engage in his own ironic story of the development of human society. The arch tone of "The Witch" can be distinguished from the jubilant but unspecified atmosphere of Bacchic release that informs the final act of Prometheus Unbound, precisely because it addresses an existing version of the history of society.[2] His "Dedication" that prefaces the poem not only differentiates his poetry from the kind that Wordsworth is writing but also serves as a critique of the conception of God manifested in Wordsworth's Peter Bell. The irreverence of his deity and her delightful practical jokes with the minds of the dreaming populace of Ancient Egypt are exaggerated transpositions of the Enlightenment scepticism about religion which Shelley espoused. This kind of attack on the premises of Christianity, familiar from the work of Paine and Volney, is thus an accepted form in which to communicate his serious views on the dangers of credulity and subservience in religious belief. Firstly as a female, and secondly as a fallible and capricious, but basically well-disposed deity she is far removed from those patriarchal divinities like Zeus and Milton's God against whom Shelley's protagonists are aligned.

Although it received relatively slight treatment from both contemporary critics and, it must be said, the author himself, the immediate literary sources of the poem's style and tone have been acknowledged by several recent critics.[3] His adoption of the

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2 Prometheus Unbound was published at more or less the time that "The Witch of Atlas" was written. See Zillman, Variorum Edition, 7.

3 It has been seen as "the most completely and obviously literary poem Shelley ever wrote", Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1948), 207.

ottava rima metre employed in Byron's Don Juan Cantos I and II and Beppo and experimented with in his "infinitely comical" "Hymn to Mercury" is a significant stylistic ploy.[4] But these models, especially Don Juan, also offered Shelley the opportunity to experiment with the subversive potentiality that the traditional use of this stanza form and the all-encompassing plots of their narratives encouraged. [5] These features Shelley took directly from Byron's models, the eighteenth-century Italian imitators of the Renaissance poets such as Forteguerri whose Ricciardetto Shelley and Mary had been reading aloud at the Casa Ricci.[6] The influence of Ricciardetto on "The Witch" is apparent both in the plot and its wider purpose. Like Byron's narratives its geographical scope is extensive, involving the protagonists, a group of hapless warriors

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4 Shelley's postscript in L577, Mary Shelley to Maria Gisbo rne, 19 July 1820, Letters, ii, 218.

5 Shelley clearly admired Don Juan: "With what flashes of divine beauty have you not illuminated the familiarity of your subject towards the end! The love letter, and the account of its being written, is altogether a masterpiece of portraiture; of human nature laid with the eternal colours of the feelings of humanity. Where did you learn all these secrets? I should like to go to school there", L567, To LB, 26 May 1820, Letters, ii, 198. For comment on the influence of Don Juan on "The Witch of Atlas", see Cronin, Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, 55-58.

6 "We are reading Ricciardetto. I think it admirable, especially the assaults of the Giants, and Terran's conversion of them", L571, To JG and MG, 30 June 1820, Letters, ii, 207. They read Forteguerri in the summer, see Journals, June 26, 29, 30, July 1, 3-12, 1820, i, 324-325. See White, Shelley, ii, 219-221, for its significance.

under Charlemagne, in battle against the Pagan threat in the East. There are several witches, or Maga, in Forteguerri's poem, two of them benign and one evil; one, Livina, becomes the principal guardian of the hero and rescuing him by her magic from numerous evils, travels to Egypt. However the principal target of the work's burlesque is the Christian Church.[7] The reception of the poem in Shelley's own period reveals an unease at its intentionally irreverent tone; indeed the only significant and well-annotated translation in the period covers only the first Canto on the grounds that the rest of the poem was unsuitable for English taste at the time.[8] That this caution is justified can be witnessed by the hostile review of Forteguerri in the Quarterly of April 1819, the issue in which Shelley had discovered the attack on The Revolt of Islam.[9]

Shelley described "The Witch" to his publisher as "a fanciful poem, which, if its merit be measured by the labour which it cost, is worth nothing" and subsequent criticism has tended to confirm

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7 See J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, Historical View of the Literature of the South of Europe, trans. T. Roscoe, 4 vols. (London, 1823), iii, 51-54.

8 Forteguerri, The First Canto of Ricciardetto, ed., introd., and trans., Sylvester (Douglas) Lord Glenbervie (London, 1822). See also the anonymous The Two First Cantos of Richardetto, Freely translated from the original Burlesque Poem of Niccolo Fortiguerra (sic) otherwise Carteromaco (London, 1820).

9 [Ugo Foscolo], [attrib.], "Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians," QR 21 (April 1819), 486-556.

this assessment by judging it to be a lightweight and overwrought fantasy.[10] Shelley appeals to its youthful energy as evidence that it does not warrant comparison with the work of the more illustrious poets,

> What hand would crush the silken-winged fly,
> The youngest of inconstant April's minions,
> Because it cannot climb the purest sky
> Where the swan sings, amid the sun's dominions? (9-12)

Yet beneath this self-effacement and the attempt to shield the poem from another onslaught from the Quarterly, Shelley's rejoinder "O, let me not believe/ That anything of mine is fit to live!"(23-4) reflects a troubled acknowledgement of the negligible sales of his works. [12] His disingenuous assertion of indifference to the critics is virtually a necessary recognition of the slight acknowledgement of his works and one that helps him to defend his use of the supernatural and his ideal mythologising. In the light of the unwillingness of Ollier to publish his more political work of the previous autumn, and of Hunt to find a publisher for his more recent and patiently argued A Philosophical View of Reform, Shelley's

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10 L602, To CO, 20 Jan 1820 [for 1821], Letters, ii, 257. For chronology see White, Shelley, i, 213-214. Ollier did not publish it and it was first published in Posthumous Poems, (London, 1824).

11 The image suggests Byron who is portrayed as a "tempest-cleaving swan" (174) in "Lines Written among the Euganean Hills" (1818).

12 See, "To thy fair feet a Winged Vision came/ Whose date should have been longer than a day" (17-18) probably a reference to [J. T. Coleridge], [attrib.] rev. of The Revolt of Islam, QR, 21 (April 1819), 460-471.

self-deprecating remarks possibly conceal a growing sense of frustration.[13] It may have been the difficulty of getting political poetry published in the new atmosphere that led him to use an oblique poetic form.[14]

But the peculiar force of "The Witch" may also derive from a new personal confidence in the course of European politics. The hopes expressed in the final act of Prometheus, the "Ode to the West Wind" and the "Ode to Liberty" (completed in July) seemed to be borne out by a series of simultaneous rebellions in Spain, Naples and Sicily, in the spring and summer of 1820.[15] This is reflected in the correspondence of both Mary and Shelley of this period.[16] In a letter written to Southey the day after the first draft of "The Witch" was completed he is clearly calm in his assurance that ""But there is a tide in the affairs of men" - it is rising while we speak".[17] "The Witch" therefore can be seen as an imaginative

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13 See L568, To LH, 26 May 1820, Letters, ii, 200-201. For his sense of isolation see "I have confidence in my moral sense alone; but that is a kind of originality", L530, To LH, [14-18 Nov. 1819], Letters, ii, 153.

14 "I wish then that you would write a paper in the Examiner on the actual state of the country...", L543, To LH, 23 Dec. 1819, Letters, ii, 166.

15 See E. J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1878 (1962; London, Abacus, 1984), 139.

16 See Vol. 1 of The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 133-175. England is now "Castlereagh land", To Marianne Hunt, 24 Feb [for Mar.] 1820, 137; "How enraged all our mighty rulers are at the quiet revolutions which have taken place", To Amelia Curran, 17 Aug. [1820], 158.

17 L583, To Robert Southey, 17 Aug. 1820, Letters, ii, 231. The quotation is from Shakespeare, Julius Caesar (IV, iii, 216).

anticipation of the crumbling of all the regimes of Restoration Europe after five years of repression. The proof of the prophecies made in his verse of the previous autumn legitimised the surfacing of a spirit of freedom and fancy. Immediately after "The Witch" Shelley embarked on his more direct comment on recent events, the "Ode to Naples" and, following that, completed Oedipus Tyrannus, a ribald experiment in popular satire of the comical antics in the trial of Queen Caroline.

4.1 Critical attitudes to "The Witch of Atlas"

Criticism has regarded "The Witch of Atlas" as the archetypal Shelleyan poem in its resistance to interpretation and consequently has tended to trivialise its fanciful quality.[18] The poem explicitly anticipates its critical reception in the first four lines of the "Dedication",

> 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? (1-4)

Even if not explicitly formalist most recent defenders of the poem have seen it as a self-conscious exploration of the descriptive powers of language. Furthermore its literary bearings have been

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18 See Eliot's dismissal of the poem as "a trifle" in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, rpt. in Eliot, Selected Prose, ed. Kermode, 84n.

established less through the above-mentioned works of Byron and Forteguerri than classical authors and the major Renaissance poets of the Christian tradition, Milton and Spenser.[19] Apart from one Neoplatonist reading, critics seem to have been unwilling to acknowledge in any great detail the contemporary historical or ideological influences operative in the poem.[20] Rather surprisingly the historical and geographical scope of the poem seems to have been overlooked and the poem treated as a static meditation on the writing of poetry. This is perhaps on account of the patent resistance to any such clear source-hunting that the poem presents, located as it is deliberately in a pre-moral era. Yet Shelley's defiance of the critics in the first stanza of the "Dedication" should not prevent some tentative suggestions as to the areas of contemporary debate and interest to which the poem refers.

There seem to have been two major interpretations of the poem. Those who have agreed that its major characteristic is its uncompromising visionary quality in turn divide into those (amongst whom are included Hazlitt and Mary Shelley) to whom such fantasy amounts to little more than indulgence, and more recently, under the initiative of Bloom, those who regard the Witch as an ideal creation, an image of the value of the human imagination.[21] Bloom's claims

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19 See Carlos Baker, "Literary Sources of Shelley's "The Witch of Atlas"," PMLA 56 (1941), 472-479; Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 164-204.

20 Carl Grabo, The Meaning of "The Witch of Atlas" (Chapel Hill, U of North Carolina P, 1935). Grabo's exposition of the poem is basically Neoplatonist, and uses Taylor and Cudworth.

21 See also G. Wilson Knight, "The Naked Seraph: An Essay on Shelley," in The Starlit Dome: Studies in the Poetry of Vision (1941;

for the poem are disconcertingly assured:

> ...it is Shelley's best long poem, the most individual and original of his visions, and the supreme example of myth-making poetry in English.[22]

Having made the point that the poem is "anticritical", Bloom then reinforces its impenetrability by projecting onto it his own self-referential terminology.[23] For Bloom and derivative critics, the Witch is the embodiment or personification of the elusive ideal present elsewhere in Shelley's work in other guises, most obviously in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", and therefore justifies a Freudian treatment of the poem's subject as the apotheosis of desire.[24] Many critics are prepared to see the poem simply as a

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London: OUP, 1971), 224-234. Wilson Knight regards the witch as "a dream-projection and, partly, an incarnation of poetry itself", 226. Mary Shelley is frustrated at the obscurity of "The Witch of Atlas": "This poem is peculiarly characteristic of his tastes - wildly fanciful, full of brilliant imagery, and discarding human interest and passion, to revel in the fantastic ideas that his imagination suggested....I felt sure that, if his poems were more addressed to the common feelings of men, his proper rank among the writers of the day would be acknowledged...", "Notes on The Witch of Atlas by Mrs Shelley," Hutchinson, 388.

22 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 165

23 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 165.

24 See the "Letter to Maria Gisbourne", completed on 1 July 1820, in which Shelley projects his idea that the poet is a magician: "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 clergy men and grind/ The gentle spirit of our meek reviews/ Into a powdery form of self-abuse" (106-11).

highly self-conscious exercise in poetic art.[25] Such readings in fact have affinities with the quasi-spiritual approach of an early reviewer who remarked, "if this is not religion, it is something not wholly unallied to it."[26]

A more recent tendency has seen the poem as a critique of such idealism but this sceptical interpretation has tended to confine itself to the formalist/post-structuralist concern with language itself.[27] The visionary nature of the poem, especially the Witch and her magical transforming qualities, are explicable especially for post-structuralist critics as references to the poet's consciousness of the impossibility of fixed meanings. The ironic and parodic elements of the poem are for these critics seen to operate on a purely linguistic level; its preoccupations are with

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25 See D. Rubin, "A study of Antinomies in Shelley's "The Witch of Atlas"," SiR 8 (1969), 216-228. Rubin sees its coherence to be achieved through a series of resolutions of oppositional elements and images; Frederic S. Colwell, "Shelley's "Witch of Atlas" and the mythic geography of the Nile," ELH 45 (1978), 69-92. Colwell sees the poem as moving from myth to satire, gradually undermining the idealised portrayal of the Witch.

26 Rev. of Posthumous Poems, Knight's Quarterly Magazine 3 (Aug. 1824), 186.

27 The most able exponent of this argument is Cronin who sees "The Witch" as "a skeptical myth designed to explore the function of poetry", "Shelley's Witch of Atlas," KSJ 26 (1977), 100. See also "The Witch of Atlas" in Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, 55-76. See also Brian Nellist, "Shelley's Narratives and "The Witch of Atlas"," in Allott, 160-90, which argues that "The Witch of Atlas" "becomes a means, as it were, to deconstruct narrative", 176. See also Andelys Wood, "In "The Witch of Atlas," then, Shelley is a romantic ironist, mocking ideals which he is nevertheless unprepared to reject", "Shelley's Ironic Vision: "The Witch of Atlas"," KSJ 29 (1980), 82.

the indeterminacies of language which they interpret the poem not only to discuss but to celebrate.[28] The stances of Bloomian and Derridean critics unite however in seeing in "The Witch" a kind of Jungian exposition of unconscious impulses either towards the affirmation of absolutes (Bloom) or the absolute suspension or non-realisation of ideal definitions (Derrida).

The arguments for the sceptical view of the poem are thus directed towards the philosophical debate about language but Shelley's poem can be seen rather as addressing one specific area of indeterminate meaning not so much in language itself or in the human psyche but rather the way that history is written. The poem operates more as a concise history of the development of society from its primitive origins, including a critique of the impulse to construct deities. The moral ambivalence of the idealised deity who is clearly a magician and the consequent comedy noted by criticism seems to derive from the poem's critical basis. In opposition to Bloom I would argue that "The Witch" as deity constitutes a deconstruction, or un-making of myth that has specific historical sources. Bloom's version of the poem as a development "from an

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28 See Jerrold E. Hogle, "Metaphor and Metamorphosis in Shelley's "The Witch of Atlas"," SiR 19 (1980), 327-353. Hogle sees the poem as celebrating the necessary deferral of meaning through metaphor; "Whether it emphasizes the metaphoricity of personal thinking or the metamorphosis of figural orders across recorded time, the cave of the Witch's birth and education is a collective unconscious of ciphers on ciphers without beginning or end, all of them "wondrous works of substances unknown" (201) building up the treasury of desire", 339. For criticism of Hogle, see Keach, xiii.

attempt to mix vision and history, he had moved to vision alone," is misleading because it seeks to seal off the poem from any frame of reference.[29]

As a radicalised Muse figure, and as a consciously artistic being in her own right, the witch's express interest in the welfare of humanity and her learnedness reflect the priorities of her creator. Her divine qualities are closely related to Shelley's own projection of the concept of the poet as determining and foreshadowing social development in history as expressed in A Philosophical View of Reform.[30] It is the human relevance of her interest in poetry that is the main focus of attention. In "broidering the pictured poesy/ Of some high tale upon her growing woof" (252-253) she is less the embodiment of claims for poetry per se than a learned interpreter of other histories, "All day the wizard lady sate aloof/ Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity,/...and ever she/ Added some grace to the wrought poesy" (249-250, 253-256). Shelley later expands this point into a fully articulated theory of the interrelationship between Poetry and History in the Defence. In the context of "The Witch" it is interesting that he notes "all the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets;...".[31]

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29 Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 167.

30 See chapter 6.3.

31 Defence, Norton, 486.

Hazlitt's hostility towards "The Witch" illuminates precisely the origins of Bloom's arguments, taking its uncompromising visionary quality as evidence of its ahistorical sense. Hazlitt's review of Posthumous Poems complains of a stubborness that amounts to introspective indulgence; "all that appears clear, is the passion and paroxysm of thought of the poet's spirit."[32] Hazlitt's implication that the excesses of the fantasy are an obstacle to the clarity of the poet's thoughts is typical of his overall objection to Shelley's work. Hazlitt argues that Shelley's poetic methods confound the stated intentions of his work, and imperil the wider causes of reform by an ambitious attempt to include every conceivable aspect of the inimical opposition:

> By flying to the extremes of scepticism, we make others shrink back, and shut themselves up in the strongholds of bigotry and superstition - by mixing up doubtful or offensive matters with salutary and demonstrable truths, we bring the whole into question, fly-blow the cause, risk the principle, and give a handle and a pretext to the enemy to treat all philosophy and all reform as a compost of crude, chaotic, and monstrous absurdities.[33]

Hazlitt's main complaint about the employment of the supernatural in "The Witch" is that it is inconsistent with Shelley's professed

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32 [Hazlitt], ER 40 (July 1824), 504.

33 [Hazlitt], ER 40 (July 1824), 498.

desire to attack all forms of superstitious belief. According to Hazlitt, Shelley's arguments should be focussed on more concrete targets and not on projecting his own ideals into merely another kind of superstition. Hazlitt seems to acknowledge the scale of Shelley's mythology but regards the medium of its expression as incongruous with its moral motivation, since "To be convinced of the existence of wrong, we should read history rather than poetry".[34] Quoting stanzas 38 and 39, he attacks the awkwardness, even the contradiction, of Shelley's position:

> This we conceive to be the very height of wilful extravagance and mysticism. Indeed it is curious to remark every where the proneness to the marvellous and supernatural, in one who so resolutely set his face against every received mystery, and all traditional faith...To every other species of imposture or disguise he was inexorable; and indeed it is his only antipathy to established creeds and legitimate crowns that ever tears the veil from his *ideal* idolatries, and renders him clear and explicit. Indignation makes him pointed and intelligible enough, and breathes into his verse a spirit very different from his own boasted spirit of Love.[35]

The debate about poetic form in the "Dedication" seems to answer these charges of inconsistency between method and content, for here Shelley seems to attack Wordsworth's philosophy through an ironic treatment of his poetic method.[36] He consciously defies the

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34 [Hazlitt], ER 40 (July 1824), 498.

35 [Hazlitt], ER 40 (July 1824), 505.

36 For discussion about the argument with Wordsworth see Cronin, Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, 63; John E. Jordan, "Wordsworth and "The Witch of Atlas"," ELH 9 (1942), 320-325; R. A. Duerksen, "Wordsworth and the Austral retreat in Shelley's Witch of Atlas," KSJ 34 (1985), 18-20. Shelley's self-effacing remonstrations in the "Dedication" are in marked contrast to Wordsworth's asseverations in the prefatory letter to Southey that his work took nineteen years to

solemn declamations of the senior poets in the establishment on the correct and legitimate methods the poet should use. The debate with Wordsworth that had been effectively suppressed by Ollier's clear reluctance to publish Peter Bell the Third is revived explicitly in Shelley's "Dedication" and continues subliminally within the poem itself.[37] Shelley's "*ideal* idolatries", as Hazlitt scornfully terms them, are indirectly concerned with wresting some broad sense of the historical from the anti-historical tendencies of poets such as Wordsworth. He uses Wordsworth as representative of the position he is attacking, that there is a reserve of common human experience and empirical Nature to which the poet can appeal. He consciously abstains from committing himself to a Wordsworthian concept of actuality just because he knows it to be tainted. Part of his own integrity, he argues, lies in this sceptical stance towards what constitutes human experience.

In so doing Shelley endorses Leigh Hunt's attack on Wordsworth's "philosophy of violence and hopelessness" in his review

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publish because he wished "...to fit it for filling permanently a station, however humble, in the Literature of our Country", de Selincourt, ii, 331. Shelley acknowledges this statement with irony in the Preface to Peter Bell the Third, Hutchinson, 346-347.

37 There is much debate about whether Shelley actually read Wordsworth's poem or whether he gleaned its outline from Hunt's review in The Examiner (2 May 1819), 282-283, and John Hamilton Reynolds' anonymous spoof, Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad, 3rd ed. (London, 1819). For a view that he did read it, see J. B. Gohn, "Did Shelley know Wordsworth's Peter Bell?" KSJ 28 (1979), 20-24.

of Peter Bell in The Examiner and implies that Wordsworth's philosophy determines his version of the actual and cannot therefore be regarded as an authentic representation of the true state of affairs.[38] Hunt goes to the heart of Wordsworth's magnanimous claims, arguing them to be akin to those of Methodism:

> What pretty little hopeful imaginations for a reforming philosopher! Is Mr Wordsworth in earnest or is he not, in thinking that his fellow-creatures are to be damned? If he is, who is to be made really better or more comfortable in this world, by having such notions of another? If not, how wretched is this hypocrisy?[39]

The implication of Shelley's comment on Wordsworth is that the artifice of his portrayal of human behaviour is therefore as far-fetched as any fantasy of the order of "The Witch",

> 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; (41-44)

Shelley thereby turns on its head Wordsworth's most recent pronouncement that the Imagination, "may be called forth by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life."[40] It is not so much an idle fancy that

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38 [Leigh Hunt], [attrib.] rev. of Peter Bell, A Tale by William Wordsworth, The Examiner (2 May 1819), 282.

39 [Hunt], The Examiner (2 May 1819) 283. See also Hunt's opening remark, "This is another didactic little horror of Mr Wordsworth's, founded on the bewitching principles of fear, bigotry, and diseased impulse", 282.

40 See Preface to Peter Bell: A Tale (1819), de Selincourt, ii, 331.

Shelley proffers instead but rather a qualification of the confidence of Wordsworth's belief in the aesthetic of the commonplace. Shelley seeks to underplay his poem's seriousness, but also to maintain his own artistic integrity in contrast to Wordsworth's over-contrivance, his "killing tears" (27). Indeed Wordsworth's art affronts Nature and therefore ironically backfires on his own use of Nature as a moral agency in Peter's education. Eventually his art is corrupted by his unnatural morality as Shelley's image successfully demonstrates:

> 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. (25-32)

Shelley thus parodies Wordsworth's boasted attempt "to make my peace with the lovers of the supernatural" by using a Christianised version of it while in the Prologue the narrator flamboyantly dispenses with all vulgar vehicles of the supernatural.[41] Shelley announces with wry humour in the final stanza that the hitherto credible tale is only now about to become far-fetched:

> .....what she did to sprites
> And gods, entangling them in her sweet ditties

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41 de Selincourt, ii, 331.

> To do her will, and shew their subtle slights,
> 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. (666-672)

Where Shelley's goddess will subvert the Pantheon with her tricks in a deferred realm, Wordsworth's God is entirely absorbed in working through actuality. The visionary is asserted over the philosophy of luminous truths that underpins Peter Bell in which "scarcely believing much more than we can see" is a philosophy that encourages fear and constrains the spirit. The opening lines of "The Witch" assert the hypothetical realm of the primeval to be one of the free spaces left for the poet to occupy, and locates it in a period before the Wordsworthian polarity of "Error and Truth" (51) has been invoked and "left us nothing to believe in, worth/ The pains of putting into learned rhyme"(53-54).

Yet there is also a significant discrepancy in method between Shelley and poets whose work he admired. Shelley's limited specifity about the location of the poem firmly removes it from a directly or easily identifiable context, instead the range of reference of the poem is multiple. He refuses to subscribe to the poetic method of many of his contemporaries whose poetry operates through a series of decipherable references in the form of accompanying notes through which the author can lend credence to the authority of his verse. Shelley's criticisms of Medwin's "The Pindarees" are formulated throught his belief in the self-contained character of poetry:

> The only general error, if it be such, in your Poem, seems to me to be the employment of Indian words, in the body of the piece, & the relegation of their meaning to the notes. Strictly, I imagine, every expression in a poem ought to be in itself an intelligible picture. But this practice, though foreign to that of the great Poets of former times, is so highly admired by our contemporaries that I can hardly counsel you to dissent. And then you have Moore & Lord Byron on your side, who being much better & more successful poets than I am, may be supposed to know better the road to success, than one who has sought & missed it.[42]

Shelley seeks to make his poetry "an intelligible picture", thus precluding the necessity of elaborating a factual or invented historical or geographical context. Where the notes in his contemporaries' works act as a network of further texts whose detailed records of customs, scenery and religious practices are intended to elucidate and make more durable the fiction, Shelley seeks to invest such allusions in the poetry itself, internalising its historical reference.

4.2 The Golden Age and the European syncretism of Eastern myth: Faber, Knight and Jones

"The Witch of Atlas" appears to draw upon several aspects of the debate about the origins of religious belief and the history of civil society. The geographical scope of the poem is perhaps its

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42 L559, To Thomas Medwin, 16 April 1820, Letters, ii, 184.

most significant element and suggests an ironic awareness of the arguments about the origins of Christianity and of the human race in the East. Though Shelley uses Ancient Egypt as the focus of his satire of religious belief, his poem at least gives prominence to the emphasis of secular historians on the sophisticated nature of Near Eastern cultures.[43] Another of the poem's features has a long history in serious polemic; the determinedly sexual principle underlying the Witch's birth is also present in her creation of the Hermaphrodite who fuses the optimum qualities of both sexes and in the Witch's quasi-erotic spiritual mingling with the dreaming inhabitants of the Ancient Egyptian city (572-95). Shelley draws on contemporary speculations about the early worship of the physical universe through sexual symbols particularly in Eastern mythology. Finally he counters the constrictions of the belief in a Golden Age from which mankind has ineluctably fallen and suggests a more benign and less oppressive narrative which holds out the possibility of attaining a more equable human condition.

The location of the Witch's abode on "Atlas' mountain/ Within a cavern, by a secret fountain" (55-56) appears to bear reference to the contemporary dispute about the authenticity of the accounts in many mythologies of the mountain which the very oldest of the pagan deities inhabited. That it might be possible to ascertain the source of this common symbol, and that the prototype might be

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43 See S. R. Swaminathan, "Possible Indian Influences on Shelley," KSMB 9 (1958), 30-45.

identified in the present-day East was a preoccupation of establishment mythographers, especially those seeking to endorse Bryant's arguments.[44] For Faber, a reductive syncretism of all pagan practices could be proclaimed to prove that the conflation of Atlas, Olympus, Meru and the Caucasus were Pagan distortions of the Mosaic Ararat, upon which Noah's ark was reputed to have been grounded, and whence the forbears of the world's different races dispersed. [45] With this in mind the location of "The Witch" assumes a greater significance. Instead of the official option of the Indian Caucasus favoured as containing the mountain from which all races sprung, Shelley chooses the unspecified interior of Africa, a continent as yet unexploited in these religiously motivated inquiries. Since the Caucasus had been exhaustively appropriated by the Christian mythographers the transition to North Africa can be seen as a conscious dissociation from the Establishment attempts to argue for a single original monotheistic religion. Shelley also successfully retains through indirect

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44 See E. S. Shaffer, "Kubla Khan" and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770-1880 (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), 115-123.

45 For discussion of the accordance of all pagan religions with the location of Paradise at Ararat, see George Stanley Faber, The Origin of Pagan Idolatry, Ascertained from Historical Testimony and Circumstantial Evidence, 3 vols. (London, 1816), i, 314-356. His view of the location of the garden of the Hesperides is typical of his method: "The Greeks in general placed this fabled garden close to Mount Atlas, and removed it far into the regions of the western Africa: but its true situation was in the north, on the summit or in the neighbourhood of the Armenian Ararat", i, 348-349. For commentary see Feldman and Richardson, 397-400.

allusion an Eastern source for the myth. This resolute vagueness and lack of elucidation shows contempt for the efforts of the Biblical historians to marshall evidence to prove a definitive source and thereby end further speculation.

The choice of Mount Atlas as the Witch's home can be construed therefore as Shelley's method of exposing the fact that these Establishment mythographers had shifted the grounds of the debate into the realms of supposition. Their speculations in effect legitimised his alternative, distinctly anti-Christian version of the originary past in visionary form. The prevailing climate of syncretism with its superimposition of one cultural practice onto another, its dogged and tedious parallels and proofs could thus be seized and inverted. Shelley himself owned or had access to Faber, Maurice and Moor who all used syncretist methods exhaustively to undermine and to deride oriental and other pagan, mythologies.[46] He exposes their bungling science to be as fictional as his own confessed fantasy.

One example of this conscious irony is in Shelley's echo or even possible parody of Faber. Faber sets out to show that all

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46 See Edward Moor, "Strictly speaking, the religion of the Hindus is monotheism", The Hindu Pantheon (London, 1810), 1. James Mill's contempt at least implicitly casts doubt on all religions; "The Hindu legends still present a maze of unnatural fictions, in which a series of real events can by no artifice be traced", History of British India, i, 98. See Thomas Maurice's attack on Volney's atheistical dismissal of all religions, The History of Hindostan, 2 vols. (London, 1795-1798), i, xxii.

non-biblical Gods are versions of an early religion based on the worship of Noah and that all female deities are versions of the Earth. These female deities are symbolised in myths by the moon or by ships, the ships being versions of Noah's ark.[47] The Witch's creation of the boat piloted by the Hermaphrodite recalls the inventive thirst for symbols in Faber, who defends his insight by arguing that many myths contain references to heroes being set afloat in ships.[48] The Witch's boat has a definitively Pagan ancestry, and has been passed around the deities associated with love[49]:

> 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 winged thought-
> In joyous expectation lay the Boat. (317-320)

Faber also extends his theories to readings of legends including the British Arthurian tales. The Lady of the Lake in Arthurian Romance is one version of the motif of the female deity presiding over the

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47 Faber, "All the goddesses of paganism will be found ultimately to melt together into a single person, who is at once acknowledged to be the great mother and the Earth: yet that person is also declared to have assumed the form of a ship when the mighty waters of the vast deep universally prevailed", i, 21.

48 Faber, i, 315-320.

49 See "The Witch of Atlas", 289-320.

sacred lake that he says is common to all pagan myths.[50] This is elaborated by Shelley in the Witch's "windless haven" (429) above the "Austral lake" (428) "Beyond the fabulous Thamondocana" (424), somewhere in the Southern hemisphere. Shelley's exaggerations of Faber's far-fetched logic suggest a conscious parody directed at the methods of those who sought so desperately to maintain the credibility of the Mosaic account.[51]

Shelley has mythological and historical reasons for his location of the poem which fuses the unknown Africa and the Orient. There is certainly an ancient precedent for associating Egypt with the beginnings of the world and particularly the Nile as the source of fertility for the human race.[52] The Witch's "contemplations calm,/ With open eyes, closed feet and folded palm" (271-272) and the many references to Fire and Sun evoke the symbols of Mithraism and Buddhism. Furthermore the associations of the Bacchic with the East, suggested in Prometheus Unbound are fused with the arguments of Dupuis and Knight in the opening of "The

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50 "We shall equally find in romance the sacred lake, the fairy or female divinity presiding over it, the wonderful cavern, the oracular tomb of imprisonment...", Faber, iii, 320. For discussion of other mysterious women and witches, see iii, 321-353. Faber connects the cavern, necromancy, boats, dreams, metamorphoses and these figures in such a way as to suggest the themes of "The Witch of Atlas".

51 See William Robertson, An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India, 2nd ed. (London, 1794), in which he mentions the mythical island of Taprobane which contains a lake, 96.

52 See Diodorus Siculus, "the first genesis of living things fittingly attaches to this country", Diodorus of Sicily, trans. C. H. Oldfather, 10 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1933), I.10.3., i, 37.

Witch", in a myth of origins based upon light, love and sexuality.

Shelley also undermines the conventional sanctity of caves and mountains in the work of Neoplatonist and Christian mythographers, by reference to the Orient. While the reference to Odysseus's experience in the cave of the Naiads may be appropriate, the contents of the Witch's cavern are distinct from Thomas Taylor's spiritualised account of the cave.[53] In Prometheus Unbound, the cave where Earth's "spirit/ Was panted forth in anguish" (III, iii, 124-125) is also the site of the Temple built by those who were maddened so destructively by Prometheus's pain that they "lured/ The erring nations round to mutual war/And faithless faith..." (III, iii, 128-130). The cave and the mountain suggest the East since Mount Meru is the place where the Macedonians discovered a cave, declaring it to be Prometheus's.[54] The cave to which Prometheus and Asia are to be conducted is "beyond the peak/ Of Bacchic Nysa, Maenad-haunted mountain,/ And beyond Indus and its tribute rivers" (III, iii, 153-155).[55] Prometheus's haunt is thereby moved

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53 See Taylor "Concerning the Cave of the Nymphs," in Thomas Taylor the Platonist: Selected Writings, ed. and introd. Kathleen Raine and George Mills Harper (London: RKP, 1969), 295-342, and Yeats, Essays and Introductions, 82-84.

54 Arrian, Anabasis Alexandri, Books v-vii and Indica, vol. 2 of Arrian, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983), 5.3.2, 9.

55 Mount Meru is particularly associated with the mythical invasion of India by Bacchus indeed according to Arrian it is the ivy and laurel on Mount Meru that drives the Macedonians into a Bacchic frenzy, such was their delight at testimony to an earlier Greek presence, Arrian, 5.1.1-5.3.4., 3-11. See Maurice, ii, 119-133; Maurice sees Bacchus as a version of many Eastern Gods including Osiris and the Indian Rama. For Shelley's reading of Arrian, see Journals, 18, 20-24 June 1817, i, 174-175, and L400, To TJH, 6 July 1817, Letters, i, 545-546.

eastwards from its Greek origins, as Arrian explains, since "the Macedonians in their account transferred Mount Caucasus from the Pontus to the eastern parts of the world...all for the glory of Alexander...".[56] The mythological ideas behind the cave in "The Witch" already have associations with Dionysian joy and possession introduced in Prometheus Unbound.

The cave also has further associations relevant both to Shelley's poetic interests and to his interest in the East. The cave on Mount Albordj is the place where Zoroaster retreats for seven years to learn Ormusd's law. According to Robertson the earliest devotees of Hinduism worshipped in subterraneous sanctuaries and caverns.[57] In Greek tradition a crucial link for Shelley is established between the oracular cavern, Apollo's function as the god of prophecy, and his role of God of light; Apollo is also the father of Shelley's witch. The method of attaining prophetic power at Delphi was for the devotee to be filled with God, and the experience of the Witch's mother when she gives birth in the cavern confirms this. The "scrolls of strange device,/The works of some Saturnian Archimage," (185-186), are associated with the oracular powers of the cavern itself. The magical, restorative properties that the Witch possesses, "Visions

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56 Arrian, 5.3.3, 10.

57 Robertson, Historical Disquisition, 260-261.

swift and sweet and quaint,/Each in its thin sheath like a chrysalis"(161-162) reinforce the benign state that Earth offers Prometheus and Asia as a place to retire, where the air:

> .....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. (III, iii, 144-147)

Shelley's choice of Mount Atlas possibly owes some polemical debt to Bailly's argument that the region of Atlantis, discussed by Plato in the Critias and Timaeus, was a historical fact provable through the scientific theories of the origins of the earth as developed by Buffon.[58] Bailly's Letters Upon the Atlantis of Plato are addressed to Voltaire who demanded proof that the Atlantides had preceded the Hindoos as the first race on Earth. This region of Atlantis is shifted from an island off the North-West coast of Africa to the central plains of Asia and the Atlantides (amongst

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58 For his comment on Plato see Jean-Sylvain Bailly, Letters Upon the Atlantis of Plato, and the Ancient History of Asia: intended as a continuation of Letters Upon the Origin of the Sciences addressed to M. de Voltaire, trans. James Jacque, 2 vols. (London, 1801), ii, 20-35. For the origin of the most ancient race at the 49th parallel, amongst those who worshipped the sun, see i, 197-227. For commentary see, E. B. Smith, "Jean-Sylvain Bailly. Astronomer, Mystic, Revolutionary 1736-1793" in Transactions of the American Philosophical Society n.s. 44 (1954), 427-538. For his influence on Shelley, see Raben, 103-105. Shelley refers to Bailly in Note to Queen Mab, vi 45-6, Hutchinson, 809.

them the Witch's mother) are supposed to have descended originally from Mount Caucasus.[59] When the boat piloted by the Hermaphrodite "Clove/ The fierce streams towards their upper springs" (407-408) there is a suggestion not only of the search for the source of the Nile but also the source on Mount Caucasus of all the major rivers of Asia, of great significance in Hindu myth. Furthermore if Bailly's suggestion was to be respected then the Atlantides are part of a group instrumental in introducing oriental mythology to the west since according to him and Faber the Atlantides brought with them to Europe the rudiments of European mythology.[60] Such a view reinforced the connections being made between Eastern and Western myth by Wilford whose "Essay on the Sacred Isles in the West" tried to show that the Hindu Paradise lay in the West and was possibly Britain.[61]

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59 Bailly conflates the Atlantides with the Titans; the Atlantides "appear to have descended from Caucasus, and who being the same with the Titans, included the descent of Niobe, Latona, and their children", ii, 98. There is also the suggestion, relevant to Shelley's "Witch," of the relation of the Amazons to the Atlantides, ii, 226-228.

60 See also John Frank Newton, a friend of Peacock, Letters to the Editor of The Monthly Magazine, The Monthly Magazine 33 (1 Feb. 1812), 18-22 and (1 Mar. 1812), 107-109 in which he comments on the Prometheus myth and Eleusinian mysteries and cites Bailly as an authority for regarding "the mystic theology of the Brahmins as the source of the Greek mythology", 19. He also cites Jones in the context of his view of "the Indian zodiac as the basis of all heathen mythology and poetry", 108-109.

61 Francis Wilford, "The British Isles were considered in the west as another world, perfect and complete in itself...these islands are obviously the sacred isles of Hesiod...from this most ancient and venerable bard I have borrowed the appellation of Sacred Isles, as they are represented as such by the followers of Brahma and Buddha, by the Chinese, and even by wild inhabitants of the Philippine Islands", "Essay on the Sacred Isles in the West", Asiatick Researches 11 (1810), 152.

In "The Witch" furthermore Shelley seems to have borrowed (perhaps via Peacock) the idea of co-related oppositional principles of active/passive, male/female, and light/darkness present in the work of Dupuis and Knight. The central mythical opposition in Knight's work is Bacchus/Ceres replicated as Osiris/Isis and Adonis/Venus in the Egyptian and Syrian traditions. The birth of the Witch from the interaction of male and female, symbolised by the contrast between Sun and Cave fulfils Knight's argument that this interaction of active and passive powers is generative of substance, and he illustrates this with an example from Egyptian myth.[62] This also seems to be the case in the creation of the Hermaphrodite fused out of seemingly incompatible elements, "Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow/ Together, tempering the repugnant mass/ With liquid love-" (321-323).[63] The sexuality of the Hermaphrodite is passive and benign:

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62 See Knight, "The sun was thought the instrumental cause, through which the powers of reproduction, implanted in matter, continued to exist: for, without a continued emanation from the active principle of generation, the passive, which was derived from it, would of itself become exhausted", An Inquiry into the Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology (London, 1818), 44.

63 See Knight, Inquiry, "The Egyptian Horus is said to have been the son of Osiris and Isis, and to have been born while both his parents were in the womb of their mother Rhea; a fable which means no more than that the active and passive powers of production joined in the general concretion of substance, and caused the separation or delivery of the elements from each other...", 66.

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; (329-332)

Yet the Hermaphrodite also possibly has a literary precedent in Southey's The Curse of Kehama since it is clear that the glendoveer,or spirit who represents love, fulfils a function similar to the Hermaphrodite who plays the role of a benign guide.[64] The mother-child relationship shadowed in the Witch's treatment of the creature has several pertinent analogies. It recalls Demeter's unsuccessful attempt to make Metaneira's son divine by holding him in fire, as well as the more commanding Venus scolding Cupid: the Hermaphrodite, like Cupid, has "rapid wings"(337).[65] The figure of Love in Shelley's verse is both metaphysical and clearly draws on Cupid, or his Hindu equivalent "the first-born Love out of his

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64 See L144, To Elizabeth Hitchener, 26 Nov. 1811, Letters, i, 195, "I almost wish that Southey had not made the glendoveer a male - these detestable distinctions will surely be abolished in a future state of being". The glendoveer is introduced in The Curse of Kehama (London, 1810), Canto VI, 47 and explained 285n. Canto X of Southey's poem is entitled "Mount Meru," the summit of Meru is like Shelley's description of Atlas, it has a "secret fountain" (45) and a "Lovely lake" (96) but is explicity allegorical of a Christian "Bower of Bliss" (98). Lorrinite, "The Enchantress" of Canto XI is the opposite of Shelley's witch, crude and evil.

65 Shelley might have gathered the elements of the myth of Demeter while translating the Homeric Hymns in the summer of 1820. For commentary on the relation of the "Hymn to Demeter" to the Eleusinian Mysteries, see The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, ed. N. J. Richardson (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1974), 12-30.

cradle leapt,/ And clove dun Chaos with his wings of Gold". The Hermaphrodite "With folded wings and unawakened eyes" (362) also recalls the Buddhist calm found in "the closed feet and folded palm" of the Witch and is a less ambivalent figure than critics have implied.[66]

The character and the conception of the Witch may also owe something to the increasing absorption of Eastern myths into literature, and perhaps particularly to Sir William Jones' "Hymns to Hindu Deities".[67] Jones' investment in India is clearly more than merely literary but his sympathy for oriental myth is important:

> We may be inclined, perhaps, to think, that the wild fables of Idolaters are not worth knowing, and that we may be satisfied mispending our time in learning the Pagan theology of old Greece and Rome; but we must consider, that the allegories contained in the Hymn to LACHSMI constitute at this moment the prevailing religion of a most extensive and celebrated empire, and are devoutly believed by many millions, whose industry adds to the revenue of Britain, and whose manners, which are interwoven with their religious opinions, nearly affect all Europeans who reside among them.[68]

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66 See, for example, Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, 194-200.

67 Sir William Jones, The Poetical Works of Sir William Jones. With the Life of the author, 2 vols. (London, 1810), ii, 55-145. For textual history, see G. Cannon, Oriental Jones: A Biography of Sir William Jones (1746-1794) (London: Asia Publishing House, 1964), 132-137. For comment on Jones' influence on Shelley, see R. M. Hewitt, "Harmonious Jones," ES 28 (1942), 42-59, especially 57-58. For the general background to the European interest in oriental myth and literature, see Raymond Schwab, The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680-1880, trans. G. Patterson-Black and V. Reinking, Foreword Edward W. Said (New York: Columbia UP, 1984).

68 Jones, Preface to the Hymn to Lachsmi, Poetical Works, ii, 104.

The Hymns are celebrations of the Natural world and as such Jones is keen to stress the compatibility of eighteenth-century English deism and the celebration of Nature amongst Eastern religions; "the gravest English writers, on the most serious subjects of Religion and Philosophy, speak of her operations as if she were actually an animated being." [69] They celebrate the Sun, the Ganges, the Himalayas, and are interspersed with the tales of petty jealousies and squabbles amongst the Gods and are presented as having parallels with the Hellenic Pantheon.[70] In their subject-matter they are clearly close to the issues which Shelley addresses; namely the physical world in its origins.

Shelley seizes the initiative from writers on Eastern mythology of the East such as Jones and Knight who point to the entirely innocent connotation of certain elements and animals in the Old Testament. In "On the Devil and Devils" Shelley had identified several symbols associated with evil in the Hebrew mythology as having positive meanings in other myths.[71] But also there is a

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69 Jones, Poetical Works, ii, 62

70 See Jones's essay, "On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India," The Works of Sir William Jones, ed. A. M. Jones, 6 vols. (London, 1799), i, 229-280.

71 Julian, vii, 103. See also Shelley's oriental idyll of republican nature-worship, "The Assassins" (1814), Julian, vi, 155-171 in which there is a benign serpent, 171 (for comment on "The Assassins" see Holmes, 243-247). See Knight, Inquiry, on the positive function of serpents in many mythologies, 16-19.

clear appeal to contemporary English sympathy for religion that requires only the belief in the spirit of order present in the natural world. This is evident in Jones' "Hymn to Narayana" and in Knight's comment, "the liberal and candid polytheist of ancient Greece and Rome thought, like the modern Hindoo, that all rites of worship and forms of devotion were directed to the same end."[72]

Jones's methods combine the syncretism practised in all polemical discussions of myth with a genuine interest in highlighting the benign aspects of eastern myth.[73] The goddess of Nature whose different aspects Jones addresses in "Two Hymns to Pracriti" and the "Hymn to Lachsmi", "the Ceres of India", has a particular bearing on the Witch and her conception.[74] For Jones is preoccupied uncannily with just that division between male and female which Knight and Dupuis discerned in the mythologies of Egypt and India:

> ISWARA or ISA, and ISANI or ISI, are unquestionably the OSIRIS and ISIS of Egypt;....The female divinity, in the mythological systems in the East, represents the active power of the male; and that ISI means active nature appears evidently from the word s'acta, which is derived from s'acti, or power, and applied to those Hindus, who direct their adoration

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72 Knight, Inquiry, 47-48.

73 See Jones, "On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus," Works, i, 445-462; "An Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations," Works, iv, 527-548; "Essay on the Arts, commonly called Imitative," Works, iv, 549-561.

74 Jones, Poetical Works, ii, 103.

principally to that goddess...[75]

The division of roles between male and female divinities in the Hindu religion rests on a similar basic opposition in Egyptian mythology. The Hymns divide into those devoted to male deities, Surya the Sun, Indra the Mountain, and the several goddesses of Nature who embody associations relevant to the Witch - Lachsmi "daughter of ocean and primeval night", abundance and prosperity; Bhavani - fecundity; Sereswaty - Imagination and Poetry. Jones succeeds in demonstrating that these pagan mythologies at least accord some significance to female deities, and it could be from such sources that Shelley creates his own Witch.

Several of Jones's Hymns concentrate on the celebration of the spirit of Love as instrumental in the origins of the world. In the final stanza of the "Hymn to Durga" in which the heroine and her lover the God Siva are finally united in a tale not dissimilar to the myth of Cupid and Psyche, the struggle between the forces of Good and Evil is portrayed on a grand scale as it is in the Zoroastrian struggle between Good and Evil outlined by Peacock in Ahrimanes.[76] As in Shelley's own poetry Love is to play a leading role in moral regeneration. Iswara, the omnipotent deity in the

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75 Jones, Poetical Works ii, 62.

76 "For, when the demon Vice thy realms defied,/ And arm'd with death each arched horn,/ Thy golden lance, O Goddess mountain-born!/ Touch'd but the pest - He roar'd and died", Poetical Works, ii, 77.

first poem is cerebral and imaginative by habit like the Witch, "fix'd in thought,/ Sat in a crystal cave new worlds designing."[77]

The "Hymn to Bhavani", more sensual in tone, features a deity surrounded like the Witch by a "mystic veil forever unremoved".[78] Jones clearly hints at the parallels between this deity and the Greek Venus.[79] This possibly underlies the homage paid to the Witch's beauty by the animal world. The definitively ante-diluvian setting is essential to Jones' message that the world is formed through physical forces which basically symbolise moral values. It is Love and Light that impregnate the forms of animated Nature at the opening of Jones' poem in a fashion not dissimilar to Shelley's opening stanzas:

> When time was drown'd in sacred sleep,
> And raven darkness brooded o'er the deep,-
> Reposing on primeval pillows
> Of tossing billows,
> The forms of animated nature lay;
> Till o'er the wide abyss, where love
> Sat like a nestling dove,
> From heav'n's dun concave shot a golden ray.[80]

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77 Jones, Poetical Works, ii, 69. He also has a similar habitation. Iswara's home makes him sublime and invisible but his superiority is also moral. Like the Witch's, his detachment is a source of hope and well-being.

78 Jones, Poetical Works, ii, 78.

79 Shelley's incomplete translation of the Homeric Hymn to Venus testifies to his fascination with this Hymn's treatment of the often comical powers of sexual attraction. See Timothy Webb, "Shelley's "Hymn to Venus"; A New Text," RES n.s. 21 (1970), 315-324.

80 Jones, Poetical Works, ii, 78.

Bhavani's birth takes place following the spontaneous interaction of physical elements and this is symbolised in the emergence of the lotos. Bhavani's power is similar to that of the Witch's beauty since it is also capable of taming the wildest beings of the natural world, "E'en orcs and river dragons felt/ Their iron bosoms melt/ With scorching heat; for love the mightiest quell'd".[81] In the "Hymn to Lachsmi", the goddess and her consort mingle with mortals rather as the witch does

> And oft as man's unnumber'd woes they mark,
> They spring to birth in some high-favor'd line,
> Half human, half divine,
> And tread life's maze transfigur'd, unimpair'd.[82]

Such parallels demonstrate the affinity of Shelley's witch to female deities in Eastern mythologies.

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81 Poetical Works, ii, 79. The spirit evoked is similar to that of the final act of Prometheus, an atmosphere of renewed and vigourous animation in the natural world: "Thus, in one vast eternal gyre,/ Compact or fluid shapes, instinct with fire,/ Lead, as they dance this gay creation", Poetical Works, ii, 80.

82 Jones, Poetical Works, ii, 108.

4.3 Ironies of origins: order and subversion in Shelley's "Witch of Atlas" and the mythological poetry of 1820

Shelley conspicuously avoids a golden age both through his ironic tone and his presentation of human kind in an essentially fallible state. Because he wishes to avoid the pernicious connotations of a fallen condition, he cautions against the dangers of projecting a defeatist attitude onto readings of history. "The Witch of Atlas" begins therefore not with God's creation of the world out of chaos but with the earliest period of recorded cosmogony, a time of oblivion according to Knight,

> ...the unmoved tranquillity prevailing through the infinite variety of unknown darkness, that preceded the Creation, or first emanation of light.[83]

The cohesion of the final part of the poem is achieved through the function of the boat as a narrative tool, employed like the chariot that offers a celestial perspective in Queen Mab.[84] The boat may also be a significant reference to the narrator's dispensing with the boat that offers him a global perspective in the Prologue to Peter Bell.[85]

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83 Knight, Inquiry, 64.

84 Queen Mab, Canto I, 58-66, Hutchinson, 763-764. See the boat in Southey, Thalaba Bk XI, ii, 287-288 and at the opening of The Curse of Kehama, X.

85 See Wordsworth, Prologue to Peter Bell: A Tale, 115, de Selincourt, ii, 335. Bloom comments, "Wordsworth puts away his little boat: Shelley's witch claims it, and her voyages therein are the substance of Shelley's poem", Shelley's Mythmaking, 174.

The interest in the antediluvian era of the world is evident in von Klinger's anonymously published fiction, Travels Before the Flood (1796), which Shelley, Mary, and Claire were reading in early 1820. In it, the protagonist reads from a manuscript in which is "exhibited a genuine picture of the earth and her inhabitants, at the period immediately preceding the Flood."[86] Von Klinger's comic novel can be placed within the tradition of satires on contemporary religion and government, particularly Volney's, with which Shelley was well-acquainted.[87] It takes the form of a dialogue, between the Caliph, an oriental despot and Ben Hafi, an itinerant sage, whose narrative is recounted to save himself from death. The antediluvian setting of the story of the travels of Noah's brother-in-law, Mahal, is intended to instruct Kings in all ages, and by implication, to serve as an ironical reminder of the backwardness of supposedly progressive, modern European society. Mahal, condemned to wander having questioned God's treatment of

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86 [Friedrich von Klinger], Travels Before the Flood; An Interesting Oriental Record of Men and Manners in the antidiluvian world, interpreted in Fourteen Evening Conversations between the Caliph of Baghdad and his Court, trans. from the Arabic [sic], 2 vols. (London, 1796), 18. "This wonderful manuscript has been dug out from the ground of the old mountain, deeply buried below a rock, by a sage of Hindostan, many centuries after the deluge", 11-12. Claire Clairmont writes, "Read Travels before the Flood which I like much", The Journals of Claire Clairmont, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking with the assistance of David Mackenzie Stocking (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1968), 122.

87 See comments of "the editor", [von Klinger], ii, iv-v.

humanity, would be an attractive hero to Shelley, combining the rebellious character of Byron's later Cain and inverting the typical hero of Southey's fictions whose mission is to protect Christianity. He also resembles Swift's Gulliver, a stranger in a fallen world, imprisoned, tortured, and ejected for protesting at the iniquities he finds in the countries he visits. Von Klinger's Travels exemplifies the use of oriental practices to serve as a critique of Christianity and as such, serves as a viable source for Shelley's method in "The Witch of Atlas". The book demonstrates that true innocence never existed, and that the myth of the prelapsarian state in the Bible is pernicious. This is illustrated when Mahal, discovering "an image, representing Love" which the pastoral folk worship, is shown the meaning of Love only to witness a jealous argument which erupts into a murderous fight.[88]

In his emphatically hypothetical golden era, Shelley posits a freedom from the constraints of time and geographical location and this gives the reader a sense of stasis. After her birth, the Witch moves through the poem confined to a stratospheric plane, making periodic interventions on earth. She remains consistent to her origins and as such the golden age in the poem is less an unattainable mythologised past than a realm that is permanently accessible through dreams. Shelley emphasises the potentialities of the human mind to free itself from constraints rather than the

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88 [von Klinger], 60; 52-67.

orthodox view of redemption through subscription to Christian doctrine of an afterlife. The inhabitants of ancient Egypt are shown to be liberated through the half-conscious and comical intimations of a transformed condition which she permits them.

The distinctive treatment of a generalised historical scheme in "The Witch" is important, since it differentiates the poem from the more conventional position of Prometheus. The aggression and pain in Prometheus is entirely removed from "The Witch" and Shelley noticeably excludes all reference to the violent internecine strife and chaos of the primal era which are so pronounced in Hesiod. The Witch, with her very limited powers of intervention, represents a symbolic alternative to most factious cosmogonies. The division of divine and mortal has already been anticipated a few stanzas previously when the Witch is forced to remove herself from direct contact with society because of the attention her beauty commands; "a subtle veil she wove-/ A shadow for the splendour of her love" (151-152). Passively, she has successfully converted and civilised the animal and primitive world to her creed of love, as the "Dedication" foretells:

> If you unveil my Witch, no Priest or Primate
> Can shrive you of that sin, if sin there be
> In love, when it becomes idolatry. (46-48)

Instead of Time, or Kronos, the jealous father, being "an envious shadow," (Prometheus Unbound II, iv, 34) time becomes rather the necessary experience of History. Instead of Prometheus' creation of a timeless realm as revenge on Zeus' abuse of power, it now becomes

possible to achieve that realm without such a retreat. The only moment of crisis in "The Witch" is in the Nymphs' realisation of their mortality. As the Witch points out, History has a path to follow and their era is over. They will literally become the paths of History, "the streams in which ye dwell/ Shall be my paths henceforth, and so farewell!" (239-240). The physical world over which the Nymphs preside must change and the Witch seems to invoke the Enlightenment science of Buffon to defend this acceptance of physical mutability:

> The boundless Ocean like a drop of dew
> Will be consumed - the stubborn centre must
> Be scattered like a cloud of summer dust - (230-232)

The recent events of 1819 and 1820 had possibly stimulated an awareness that the historical moment was there to be grasped rather than shunned. The "native vice" (189) that has to be expiated is not "original sin" but rather the socially imposed ills of "gold and blood" (191), common to all societies through time and most obviously recognisable in recent history through the National Debt, standing armies and war, all of which had been vividly experienced in Europe.[89] The Witch has the means to alter History precisely because she has in her possession historical documents which affirm alternative possibilities,

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89 Reiman describes "native vice" (189) as "original sin" in Norton, 354n.

> 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
> Too lightly lost...(185-189)

The golden age is attainable in the present through the interpretative and imaginative abilities of the Witch herself; it is not a repressive theory designed to reaffirm a concept of irredeemable moral transgression. She is not simply a magician but rather Shelley's ideal poet and an Enlightenment thinker who can teach,

> ...how all things that seem untameable,
> Not to be checked and not to be confined,
> Obey the spells of wisdom's wizard skill; (193-195)

Shelley's faith in restitution lies in his belief in the power of the human intellect both to direct History and to contain Nature,

> 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 prophane
> Tremble to ask what secrets they contain. (196-200)

Though described as available only to those few who understand their import, this ironic equivalent to the Eleusinian Mysteries differs in content from the obscure mystifying of the mysteries by those such as Taylor.[90] There is strong circumstantial evidence to

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90 See Thomas Taylor, "A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic

suggest that Shelley's immediate sympathies in 1820 were with Pagan religion. This is articulated most strongly in his letter to Southey of 17 August 1820, the day after the first draft of "The Witch" was completed, in which he rejects any desire that he should adopt the Christian faith and defends "the graceful religion of the Greeks" against the doctrinaire Christianity of Southey and Wordsworth:

> I confess your recommendation to adopt the system of ideas you call Christianity has little weight with me, whether you mean the popular superstition in all its articles, or some more refined theory with respect to those events and opinions which put an end to the graceful religion of the Greeks. To judge of the doctrines by their effects, one would think that this religion were called the religion of Christ and Charity, *ut lucus a non lucendo*, when I consider the manner in which they seem to have transformed the disposition and understanding of you and men of the most amiable manners and the highest accomplishments, so that even when recommending Christianity you cannot forbear breathing out defiance, against the express words of Christ.[91]

This view is endorsed by Mary in the draft of an essay inserted in her journal of the Italian period, entitled "The necessity of a Belief in the Heathen Mythology" which argues modestly that Heathen mythology is no less irrational than Christian belief.[92]

Mysteries," (Amsterdam, 1790). See chapter 3.2 above.

91 L 583, To Robert Southey, 17 August 1820, Letters, ii, 230.

92 Mary Shelley, "The necessity of a Belief in the Heathen Mythology...to a Christian," in Proserpine and Midas: Two Unpublished Mythological Dramas by Mary Shelley, ed. and introd. A. Koszul (London: OUP, 1922), xxiv-xxvi. See also Emily W. Sunstein, "Shelley's Answer to Leslie's Short and Easy Method with the Deists and Mary Shelley's Answer, "The Necessity of a Belief in the Heathen Mythology to a Christian," KSMB 32 (1981), 49-54. Mary's witty essay rebutts Leslie's proofs of the truths of Christianity. Sunstein argues that Byron gave Leslie's work to Shelley to refute

This sympathy with the religion of the Greeks relates directly to the preoccupations of Mary's recently published mythological dramas Proserpine and Midas into which Shelley had inserted his "Songs" of Apollo, Pan and Proserpina.[93] The significance of all these myths lies in their political import, since they are all preoccupied with confrontations between senior and less-respected members of the Greek Pantheon, Apollo and Pan, Apollo and Mercury, and Demeter and Zeus.[94] All these myths as well as Proserpine are variations on the theme of the destructive powers of sexual attraction but both Shelleys politicise them.[95] Homer's "Hymn to Mercury," like the myth of Midas, has comical elements which possibly account for Shelley's preferring it to the longer Homeric Hymn, "To Demeter" which has a more dramatic plot.[96] It is

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because he found it hard to do so. See Claud Brew, "A New Shelley text: Essay on Miracles and Christian doctrine," KSMB 28 (1977), 10-28, in which Shelley's fragment "On Miracles," Julian, vii, 147-148, is argued to be part of his reply to Leslie.

93 For comments on the genesis of this work, see Medwin, Life of Shelley, 252. See "Song of Proserpine," Hutchinson, 612, "Song of Apollo," Norton, 367-368, "Song of Pan", Norton, 368-369.

94 See also "Arethusa" (Hutchinson, 611-612), "Orpheus" (Hutchinson, 628-630), and the translation of Dante, "Matilda gathering flowers" (Hutchinson, 727-729), all of which are dated 1820. Arethusa also has a role in Mary's drama.

95 Bacchus has an important role to play in some of these myths especially Orpheus who is killed by women afflicted with Bacchic frenzy.

96 Shelley's translations of the Homeric Hymns were highly praised by contemporary reviewers, see [Lockhart], [attrib.] rev. of Faust by Goethe, and Posthumous Poems by Shelley, QR 34 (1826), 136-53. "Our literature can show few translations from the Greek poets more elegant than his of the Hymn to Mercury and Cyclops of Euripides...", 148. The characterisation of Mercury is similar to

interesting that elements of the "Hymn to Demeter" are dealt with in Mary's Proserpine and that others surface in the similarity in character of Demeter and the Witch.[97]

The conflict between these deities is delineated in a manner that shows these tales to continue the preoccupations with the Bacchic in the recent work of Shelley and his contemporaries for the Bacchic and Natural world is asserted in contrast to the civilised values that Apollo seems to proclaim.[98] After Shelley's "Song of Apollo" and "Song of Pan" at the opening of Mary's Midas, Tmolus proclaims Apollo victor,

> Phoebus, the palm is thine. The Fauns may dance
> To the blithe tune of ever merry Pan;
> But wisdom, beauty & the power divine
> Of highest poesy lives within thy strain.[99]

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the portrait of Love by Diotima in Shelley's translation of Plato's Symposium, Julian, vii, 198. For comment on these translations see Timothy Webb, The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1976), 90-141.

97 The Witch is capricious and vengeful and her divine status very much associated with the Eleusinian mysteries through her use of fire. The Homeric Hymn ends with the building of a temple to Demeter in which the mysteries of Eleusis are to be taught to the elect. The Witch ends by trying to impart her lore into the imagination of the sleeping dreamers. See Introduction, The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, ed. Richardson, 12-30.

98 For treatment of the Bacchic theme see chapter 3.2 and chapter 5.3.

99 Mary Shelley, Midas, ed. Koszul, 55. Apollo's vicious treatment of another contestant, Marsyas ,who tried to challenge his musical superiority, is represented in the statue in the Uffizi that Shelley noted, "And is it possible that there existed in the same imagination the idea of that tender and sublime and poetic and life-giving Apollo and of the author of this deed as the same person?", Julian, vi, 325.

However in Mary's version of the myth, although Midas aspires to the values of Apollo, he finds that they lead only to gold. In renouncing Apollo he turns to Nature and becomes a true adherent of Bacchus:

> Look at the grass, the sky, the trees, the flowers,
> These are Jove's treasures & they are not gold:-
> Now they are mine, I am no longer cursed.-[100]

Mary's drama, then, favours the natural world as promoted by Pan and Bacchus over the self-congratulatory values of Apollonian gold. Shelley's songs are subtle and important and, as has been suggested, Pan's more thoughtful and disquieting song is placed after Apollo's seamless self-assessment for a purpose.[101] Apollo proclaims a world of lucid moral clarity:

> 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. ("Song of Apollo," 13-18)

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100 Mary Shelley, Midas, ed. Koszul, 87.

101 See Reiman's note, Norton, 367.

This light illuminates the divinity of the universe, reflecting back onto the deity his own strength and importance; the narcissism is obvious; "I am the eye with which the Universe/ Beholds itself, and knows it is divine" (31-32). By contrast, Pan speaks of the spirit of the natural world as emanating from its inhabitants. As is suggested in his refrain "We come" (2), this is the corporate spirit of the animated world invoked at the end of Prometheus Unbound and at the beginning of "The Witch" when "...her low voice was heard like love, and drew/ All living things towards this wonder new" (87-88). The creatures that pay court to her are the inhabitants of the world of Pan and Silenus, "every Nymph of stream and spreading tree" (121) and even the ugly, deformed creatures, "Pigmies and Polyphemes, by many a name,/Centaurs and Satyrs, and such shapes as haunt/ Wet clefts..." (133-135).[102] The Witch is shown to have an intuitive accord with Pan:

> And Universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,
> And though none saw him...
> He past 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. (113-114; 117-120)

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102 The alternative manuscript version of stanza 11 in Bod. Ms. Shelley adds. e. 6, p. 66 [rev] which contains a specific reference to the Bacchic frenzies of certain of these nymphs:

{?} They, wild as Atys, the {lost ?} Corybant

Knew not that they were the same

They bore within to want

Which made to them {with ?}
As men with nympholepsy stricken

In his "Song", Pan's intention is to level the distinctions between divine and mortal as he does in his narration of his own tale of frustrated love.[103] The melancholy note on which the song ends strikes home at the fallibility of both humans and divinities to the pain of Love and as such challenges Apollo's magnanimity :

> Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!-
> It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed;
> They wept as, I think, both ye now would,
> If envy or age had not frozen your blood,
> At the sorrow of my sweet pipings. ("Song of Pan", 32-36)

Several Enlightenment historians, interested in the civilisations of the ancient and oriental world in themselves, rather than as evidence for the prevalence of an original, monotheistic Christianity, emphasised the sophistication of the knowledge of these cultures.[104] Von Mueller's Universal History shows respect and understanding for ancient, oriental religious practices as well as stressing the influence of civilisations such as the Egyptians on classical European societies such as the

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103 See the cancelled passage in Bod. Shelley Ms. adds. e. 6, p. 28, after line 29 in stanza 3; "And song of Syrinx the bright maiden/ Whom I once loved and love forever/ {Sing} Singing of Syrinx, how she became/ a reed,...".

104 Johann von Mueller, An Universal History: in twenty-four books, [trans. J. C. Prichard], 3 vols. (London, 1818). The history is undertaken from "a desire to turn the minds of men from a belief in a capricious and malignant fatality, to the useful contemplation of those influences which proceed from themselves, and which they have it in their power to modify..." i, 2.

Greeks.[105] Robertson's Historical Disquisition on the Knowledge the Ancients had of India, like Mueller, makes important claims for the commercial and scientific knowledge of the ancient Orient which could only serve to undermine the prejudice of theologians such as Faber.

The final stanzas of "The Witch" refer to the first documented civilisations in Herodotus's Histories. The obscurity of the chosen locale is significant. Egypt was the latest ancient civilisation to be investigated through exhaustive scholarship by, amongst others, Volney, and the many artifacts transported to Europe during and after Napoleon's campaign of 1798.[106] The African interior, where the Witch seems very much at home, was still virtually unknown and the source of the Nile a mystery. Shelley had in his possession the works of Park and Clarke, as well as being acquainted with the popular literature whose subject was the Near East.[107] His use of

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105 For von Mueller on the Orient, see Universal History, i, 18-32; on the founding of Athens by Cecrops, an Egyptian priest, see i, 34. See also the comment on symbols important in "The Witch": "Traditional knowledge, the germ of all humanity, wisdom, and learning, proceeds from the mountains of the primitive world", i, 6.

106 On the rediscovery of Egypt in Shelley's lifetime, see Peter A. Clayton, The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt: Artist and Travellers in the 19th Century (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 14-48. See Volney, Travels through Syria and Egypt in the Years 1783, 1784 and 1785, trans., 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1788).

107 For background to this subject see W. C. Brown, "The Popularity of English Travel Books about the Near East, 1775-1825," PQ 15 (1936), 70-80; "English Travel Books and Minor Poetry about the Near East, 1775-1825," PQ 16 (1937), 249-271; also of interest, "Byron and English interest in the Near East," SP 34 (1937), 55-64; "Robert Southey and English interest in the Near East," ELH 5 (1938), 218-224.

the notoriously unreliable Herodotus, and other historians whom he had been reading for some time along with other ancient Greek accounts of the East as sources serves both a mischievous and serious purpose for the earliest historian was highly speculative and gossipy in his account of the practices of Near Eastern and North African races.[108] As such he functions as a reminder of the prevalent contemporary ignorance of these nations and mirrors the hostility and marginalisation of these races in some quarters. Herodotus's generalised account also fulfils Shelley's own interest in the sequence of events that led to the establishment of civil society and its institutions including religion. Herodotus's sketch of social behaviour has a direct bearing on the present Christian nations of Europe and need not be confined simply to ancient Egypt.[109]

Shelley's Witch functions then as the embodiment of his claim that even visionary poetry can perform a critical function. The Witch is able to perceive the wider forces, the whole sweep of history despite the impulsiveness of her journeyings:

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108 See especially Book II of Herodotus, The Histories, trans. and introd. Aubrey de Selincourt (1954; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 102-173. See SC487, "P. B. Shelley (and William Godwin) Holograph Notes in a copy of Herodotus, ?July 16 - August 2, 1818," Circle, vi, 618-633.

109 For the classical background to the poem, see Frederic S. Colwell, "Shelley's "Witch of Atlas" and the mythic geography of the Nile," ELH 45 (1978), 69-92. See also K. Koller, "A Source for Portions of The Witch of Atlas," 52 (1937), 157-61.

> 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-
> &: she in the calm depths her way could take
> Where in bright bowers immortal forms abide
> Beneath the weltering of the restless tide. (546-552)

Shelley invests in the Witch his own beliefs in the power of the poet to effect a change in the consciousness of society by releasing their imagination, this being the burden of Prometheus. The sketch of Egyptian society is not much different from the contemporary ills that shackle the minds of all those oppressed by institutions. It is significant in the manuscript that it is only the Greek philosophers who remain immune from her pranks.[110] The vocabulary is similar to the more polemical and antagonistic content of Shelley's more obviously political verse. The living beings are haunted by, "Distortions foul of supernatural awe/ And pale imaginings of visioned wrong/ And all the codes of custom's lawless law..." (539-541). But the Witch is a non-intervening deity and Shelley conveniently uses the far-fetched fantasy realm as the means

110. Bod. Shelley Ms. adds. e. 6, p. 30 [rev]:

> {Grecian} sages of<fair> Greece spell
> The {Greek Philosophers} who came to {vow}
>
> lore of many a
> The {legends} {of} {the} written obelisk {s}
> {Wrote in sleep, on the tablets}
> in
> She moved not {from} their holy dreams - for well
> {world's}
> She knew that they, to the { Earths} <disk>
>
> in lampless
> Shining {and} {as} the light in Pharo's citadel
>
> a <dark> one
> To {wandering} ships - each {mind} a basilisk<and from>
>
> Whose look {kills} {kills tyr}
> would kill {fiend} tyranny
>
> Whose {sent}< beames>breathe
> {memory}

to offset a too urgent tone. After all, her practical jokes are a more effective means of exposing the serious deficiencies of human God-making than direct assault. The Witch subverts those authoritarian practices of Church and State that appeared to be collapsing around him and Mary in both Europe and England in the summer of 1820:

> 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. (625-632)

Although she can only engage in the specular realm of dreams and the imagination, such delusions are asserted to be the essence of those institutions anyway. In so doing Shelley expresses his own confidence that they will disappear, and also is consistent to his other mythological poetry of the summer of 1820 whose levity of tone conceals a serious attack on the claims to authority of all mythologies and histories.

4.4 Conclusion

"The Witch of Atlas" can be seen to develop the radical

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would kill {fiend} tyranny
Whose {sent} beames breathe
{memory}

mythologising of Prometheus Unbound in its incorporation of a feminine character, its comedy, and its final excursion into the unconscious. The literary models of Byron and eighteenth-century Italian poetry provide a formal model with which Shelley experiments confidently.

Whereas critics have either, like Hazlitt, seen Shelley's Witch as a contradiction of his professed hostility to divine mystery, or as the self-conscious projection of "the witch Poesy" ("Mont Blanc", 44), an allegorical tale of the poet's power, they have ignored the mythological contexts of the poem, except for its Neoplatonism. Shelley converts the arguments of theologians like Faber, who sought to absorb oriental myths into the Mosaic account, into the syncretism of secular scholars like Knight who used the common symbols of ancient religions in order to explain the origins of all religions in the pagan worship of the sun and sexual principles.

Like the myth of Prometheus, Shelley's own myth of "The Witch" introduces caves, mountains and rivers which all connote symbols of the origins of the human race and of the gods in pagan and Christian mythology. Shelley can allow his imagination a free rein because he is not positing a theory of origins, rather he is interrogating the theoretical realms of the suppositions of establishment syncretists like Faber, in a manner that bears comparison with other secular thinkers of the Enlightenment such as Bailly who transformed Plato's Atlantis into fact, or von Klinger whose invented antediluvian world is a method of satirising the claims of contemporary religion. The Witch is also associated with Pan, the God of the natural world with whom Mary Shelley, in her play Midas and Shelley in his "Song of

Pan", sympathise. Already the beginning of a critique of the more established and respected God of light and art, Apollo, associated with the pure ideal of Hellenism, can be perceived to be delineated.

The background of the Orient in the poem, serves then, through the work of Jones and others, as a means to criticise both the exclusion of Eastern civilisations which were increasingly respected as the forerunners of European classical societies, and the singular authority of Christianity. The Witch, as a humanised version of a deity, subverts, through her comic antics, the Christian, and indeed the Hellenic notion of a rational, male god. Her proximity to the female deities of Jones' "Hymns to Hindu Deities" and to the Bacchic world of Nature function as part of Shelley's critique of Western mythology.

CHAPTER 5

SHELLEY AND HELLENISM

5.0 Introduction: the problem of Romantic Hellenism

5.1 German Responses to the Greek Ideal: Winckelmann, Schiller, and A.W. Schlegel

5.2 Shelley's moral ideal of Greece: "A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks relative to the subject of Love"

5.3 The Hellenic versus the Bacchic: Letters to Peacock from Italy, "Notes on Sculptures" and A Defence of Poetry

5.4 The Hellenic Ideal as a political model: "Ode to Liberty", "Ode to Naples", and Hellas

5.5 Conclusion

5.0 Introduction: the problem of Romantic Hellenism

This chapter examines Shelley's interest in the Greek ideal which informs his view that the finest literature and thought herald liberty and progress. The example of Ancient Greece provides support for his belief in the essential role of poetry in the formation of republican societies in history. Shelley's claim for the secular role of the poet who, through his imagination, conceives of ideals which will alter the course of history, challenges the utilitarian dismissal of poetry in favour of the "calculating principle" mockingly undertaken by Peacock.[1] Wordsworth's claim for the poet as the representative of humanity is converted by Shelley into a more dynamic and ambitious role.[2] He is interested less in the poet describing social life and portraying the suffering of individuals than in initiating imaginative ideals and envisaging alternative possibilities to existing social and moral conditions. The Greek ideal plays an important function in this visionary theory of poetry as this chapter will show.

Shelley's interest in Ancient Greece has tended to be seen through two contexts, either his use of Greek mythology or his stated interest in the Preface to Hellas in the struggle of modern

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1 See Defence, Norton, 503, and Peacock, "The Four Ages of Poetry," rpt. in Shelley's Critical Prose, ed. B. R. McElderry, jr., Regents Critics (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1967), 158-172.

2 "...the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society", Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802), in Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (1963; London: Methuen, 1978), 259.

Greece for independence. While these aspects of his interest in Greece are evident in his work, they reflect a common and general perception of Romantic Hellenism which is more applicable to his contemporaries.[3] This perception sees the Romantic poets as either engaging in an uncritical immersion in the spirit of Greece, exemplified by Keats, or in an indulgence of their political radicalism epitomised in Byron's death at Missolonghi.[4] Shelley's interest differs from both these poets: he is more discerning than Keats' early unfocussed enthusiasm for the spirit of Greece, and, unlike Byron, takes an intellectual rather than a practical interest in the Greek struggle. In fact, as the "Notes on Sculptures" demonstrate, Shelley was interested in specific aspects of Greek mythology, in particular the figure of Bacchus. His interest in the events of 1820-21 is directed to more universalised imaginative and political issues than the "philhellenism" to which European radicals

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3 For background to and commentary on Romantic Hellenism, see John Buxton, The Grecian Taste: Literature in the Age of Neo-Classicism, 1740-1820 (London: MacMillan, 1978); Peter Gay, "The Rise of Modern Paganism," vol. 1 of The Enlightenment: An Interpretation (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967); Hugh Honour, Neo-Classicism, Style and Civilisation Series (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Terence Spencer, Fair Greece, Sad Relic: Literary Philhellenism from Shakespeare to Byron (1954; Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1974); Timothy Webb, Introduction, English Romantic Hellenism 1700-1824 (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982), 1-35.

4 "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell", Preface to Endymion: A Poetic Romance (1818) in The Poems of John Keats, ed. Miriam Allott (1970; London: Longman, 1980), 119.

subscribed.[5] The liberation of modern Greece is a poetic realisation of the inevitable and impending collapse of Restoration Europe. Ancient Greece symbolises a political and aesthetic ideal which accords with his theory of the visionary power of poetry.

"Romantic Hellenism" as a concept is often implicitly understood through the works of German Romantic writers who posit Ancient Greece as an imagined construct in their self-conscious engagement with the past. This model of Hellenic simplicity is later viewed by Arnold in contrast with Hebraic law; "The characteristic bent of Hellenism...is to find the intelligible law of things, to see them in their true nature and as they really are."[6] However, Arnold, although a qualified admirer of Hellenism, associates paganism with moral weakness. This Christian view of the pagan world is also present in German Idealist philosophers such as Schelling who saw polytheism as an inferior version of the monotheistic faith prior to the ultimate revelation of Christianity.[7] However for Shelley the irrational and celebratory

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5 For an account of philhellenism see, William St. Clair, That Greece Might Still be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence (London: OUP, 1972).

6 Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960-1977), v, 184.

7 Arnold sees Puritanism as a reaction against "the moral indifference and lax rule of conduct" epitomised by pagan elements in the Renaissance, v, 174. See Schelling, from Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, trans. the editors, rpt. in Feldman and Richardson, 322-327.

aspects of Ancient Greek culture constitute an important element of his version of the Greek ideal. This differentiates Shelley's Hellenism both from the standard concept of noble simplicity described by Arnold and from the endemic hostility of Christianity to paganism.

Shelley was probably familiar with the pantheons of Bell, Lempriere and Godwin, but more important in terms of his poetry was the creation of the Greek ideal which represented a unity of human ity with nature and fostered the spirit of liberty and creativity.[8] Despite a manifestly different emphasis, to be discussed below, this ideal bears comparison with the positive treatment of the Ancient Greeks in Winckelmann's Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks (1755) and Schiller's "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" (1795-96) and the Aesthetic Letters (1794-95). However, Schiller and A. W. Schlegel defend modern art as superior in aesthetic terms to the art of the ancients. For Schiller the aesthetic ideal is attained through transcending the opposition between the "naive" and untenable model of an idyllic past symbolised by Ancient Greece for which we are nostalgic, and the "sentimental" or modern consciousness. One consequence of his opposition between the naive and sentimental is that it is neither

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8 See Edward Baldwin, [William Godwin], The Pantheon: or Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome (London, 1806); John Bell, Bell's New Pantheon; or Historical Dictionary of the Gods, Demi-Gods, Heroes, etc., 2 vols. (London, 1790); Lempriere, Classical Dictionary. On the Romantic interest in Greek myth, see Alex Zwerdling, "The Mythographers and the Romantic Revival of Greek Myth," PMLA 79 (1964), 447-56.

desirable nor possible for the "naive" perfection of this classical past to be recovered intact since that very ideal is a product of our overt self-consciousness at having lost it.

Thus Schiller fuses the image of the classical past with the drive for transcendence, a recurrent theme of Shelley's poetry, to create a third, "higher" ideal which will, contrary to Rousseau's argument in the Discourses, be the better for our knowledge not the worse for it.[9] Shelley does not theorise his faith in the virtues of the classical past in quite this way, in part because the sources of the German response to Ancient Greece are rooted in cultural issues unique to Germany in this period. But he was sympathetic to the spirit of Greece as conveyed in Winckelmann's eulogistic and emotional prose. The aesthetic power of this image of Greece embodied moral and political freedom, as it did to Winckelmann and his successors, which appealed in Shelley to a sense of the responsibility of the artist. There is indeed a detectable shift in Shelley's Hellenism from the beginning of his residence in Italy in 1818, when he had a historical interest in Greek society, to a view of its classical civilisation as a symbol of the eternal value of political freedom and aesthetic beauty, a symbol which served to justify his defence of poetry.

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9 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, A Discourse on Inequality, 1755, trans. and introd. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); "A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences," in The Social Contract and Discourses, 1762 trans. and introd. G. D. H. Cole, rev. J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall, Everyman (1973; London: Dent, 1979), 1-26.

Section 5.1 analyses the moral and aesthetic perception of Ancient Greece in the work of Winckelmann, Schiller and A. W. Schlegel and in section 5.2 this perception is compared to Shelley's moral ideal of Periclean Athens described in his "A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks". Section 5.3 examines the concentrated study of pre-Christian art and culture during his tour of Italy, through the replicas of statuary he saw in Rome and Florence, and the cities and temples at Paestum and Pompeii which he visited. The antiquarian investigation of Southern Europe in this period, with which both Shelley and Byron were familiar, offers more insights than the moral and aesthetic version of the classical past conceived by the German Romantics, especially in Shelley's perceptible interest in the figure of Bacchus whose presence in his poetry has been discussed in chapters 3 and 4. Section 5.4 examines the politically optimistic poetry of 1820 and 1821 which arises out of his genuine faith that the Hellenic ideal which fused Nature, artistic expression and political freedom would triumph over the Ottoman Empire. Greece comes to represent in these poems a transcendent vision of hope which symbolises the renewed vigour of the republican tradition in its struggle against political and religious oppression.

5.1 German Responses to the Greek ideal: Winckelmann, Schiller and A. W. Schlegel

Much German Romantic thought sets out to supersede the respect

of Renaissance scholarship for the Classical past and instead to synthesise the positive aspects of both ancient and modern literature. Thus the distinctive features of the concept of "Romantic" art are defined in opposition to a convenient concept of the classical.[10] It is through this German definition of the superiority of modern poetry and religious faith over the paganism and epic writers of Greece and Rome, that Romantic Hellenism is frequently defined. Essentially the modern poet looks back to the ancient past only in order to transcend the limitations of Greek culture. Shelley's attitude towards Ancient Greece shows significant discrepancies from such a view. He has a fundamental sympathy with the pagan mythology based on the natural world espoused by the Greeks, and a particular respect for the Dionysian aspects of their culture which are ignored by most German Romantic writers of this period.[11]

Despite these literary reasons for wishing to dispense with the power of the classical model, there are cultural reasons for the Germans to preserve its exemplary force. Winckelmann and Herder apply a common Enlightenment historical method to the view that art

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10 For discussion of the first usage of the term "romantic" in England see, George Whalley, "England, Romantic, Romanticism," in "Romantic" and Its Cognates: The European History of a Word, ed. Hans Eichner (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972), 157-262.

11 Also "Hellenism very often has a colouring of Francophobia", David Constantine, Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 133.

and literature are the expression of the essence of a society.[12] This creates the means by which respect for the literature of Ancient Greece may be used to advance the nationalist claims for a specifically German literature embodying the values of the Romantic North as opposed to the Classical South. Shelley by contrast immerses himself in the Classical South precisely because it symbolises the ideal of the secular republican tradition set against Christianity.

The fervent religious tone of emotional intensity which is applied to Ancient Greece by German Romantics is frequently mediated through the language and forms of Christianity. Winckelmann is highly attracted to pagan art and its lack of restraint while Schlegel's introspective view of Greece is more recognisably pietist. This must necessarily be distinguished from Shelley's desire to experience and communicate the values of authentic pagan culture. In German Romantic thought, then, there is a notable development from an aesthetic criticism which values the finite creations of the Greek to one which embraces the infinite aspirations of the Christian. The mimetic and representative models of the finite and sensual which typify the rules of neoclassicist criticism, and come to symbolise the limitations of the Greek, are

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12 See J. G. Herder, "Extract from a Correspondence on Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples," (1773), trans. Joyce P. Crick, in German aesthetic and literary criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), ed. and introd. H. B. Nisbet, 154-161.

exchanged for the inward, expressive qualities of the spiritual and Christian desire for an unattainable ideal.

Winckelmann

More than any other figure of the eighteenth century, it is Winckelmann, who had never visited Greece and knew classical sculpture in Germany and Rome only in the form of replicas, who contributes to what can be best described as an aesthetic and moral myth of Greece.[13] Winckelmann's vision of Greece is informed by a mixture of aesthetic and erotic interests and his obsession with the perfect physical form of the Greeks becomes an important aspect of the Greek ideal for it symbolises the fusion of the natural and physical world with the moral ideal. In terms of aesthetic theory, he provides a new approach which emphasises the need for the artist and critic to immerse themselves sympathetically in the rules of the Greek artists and sculptors. In opposing these formal rules to the embellishment of the rococo and baroque, he also opposes an aesthetic concept of Pagan art characterised by simplicity to the

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13 For commentary on Winckelmann, see Constantine, 85-146; Henry Hatfield, Winckelmann and His German Critics 1755-1781. A Prelude to the Classical Age, Columbia University Germanic Studies 15 (New York: King's Crown P, 1943) and Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1964), 1-23 and the rest of this book; Honour, 57-62; David Irwin, Introduction, Winckelmann. Writings on Art, ed. David Irwin (London: Phaidon, 1972), 3-57; Nisbet, Introduction, in Nisbet, 3-7.

colour and detail of Christian Renaissance painting. The artistic technique of the ancients is praised in terms of contour and line rather than colour and mass; "the universal and predominant characteristic of the Greek masterpieces is a noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur".[14]

Winckelmann poses a problem for this very reason. His writings appeal to a respect for Pagan culture, common in secular Enlightenment thought.

On the one hand he echoes the sentiments of Rousseau in his desire to challenge the sophistication of modern civilisation. On the other, he advocates a respect for the Ancients' religious beliefs and for their artistic drive for an ideal which transcends the mortal. His aesthetic concept anticipates the standard view of the aims of Romantic poetry: "The Greeks created their Gods and men from such concepts, exalted far above the ordinary realm of material form."[15]

With Winckelmann begins the idea of an aesthetic which uses a classical model but will appeal to the later Romantic emphasis on a mental image of that ideal to which the modern artist can have recourse. Preoccupations of English Romantic poetry are

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14 "Thoughts on the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," trans. H. B. Nisbet, Nisbet, 42.

15 Winckelmann, "Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," Nisbet, 36.

foreshadowed in his idea of the Greeks' synthesis of art and nature, and of the artist's imagination as the workshop in which the best qualities of nature are fused and moulded into an ideal:

> they began to formulate certain general concepts of beauty, with reference both to individual parts of the body and to its overall proportions - concepts which sought to transcend nature itself. Their model in this case was an archetype of nature constructed solely in the mind.[16]

Winckelmann argues that the modern artist has access to the simplicity of Greek art by subjecting himself to its universalising strengths. From this emerges a concept of the aesthetic ideal of Greek art:

> The imitation of natural beauty is either based on a single object, or it collects observations from various distinct objects and unites them into a whole. The former we call copying or portraying a likeness; it is the method by which the Dutch artists create their forms and figures. The latter, however, is the way to universal beauty and its ideal images; it is the way of the Greeks.[17]

The Greek artist is favoured over the modern because he is better able to perceive the essence of the object he depicts. Winckelmann's portrayal of the Greeks offers an aesthetic which would appeal to Shelley because it is loyal to Nature but also

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16 Winckelmann, "Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," Nisbet, 36.

17 Winckelmann, "Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," Nisbet, 38.

appeals to a higher moral order:

> For on the one hand, their art embodies the essence of what is scattered throughout nature; and on the other, it shows us how far nature, at its most beautiful, can surpass itself in bold yet judicious compositions.[18]

This inward spirit offers the possibility of the Greek ideal being rediscovered by contemporary artists in Germany. He thus contributes, along with Herder, to the German rediscovery of Greece for nationalist ends; "The only way for us to become great, and indeed - if this is possible - inimitable, is by imitating the ancients."[19] The paradox of such "inimitable imitation" is to be found in the notion of the Hellenic ideal which guarantees a transhistorical aesthetic theory to which all cultures have access.

Winckelmann is the most potent and obvious source for Shelley's perception of Greek art although we have no record of his opinions, only the fact that he was reading him at all the most important stages of his travels.[20] Certainly, his "Notes on Sculptures" bear the hallmarks of Winckelmann's influence in their preoccupation with drapery and contour, and "noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur."

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18 Winckelmann, "Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," Nisbet, 38.

19 Winckelmann, "Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," Nisbet, 33.

20 For Shelley's reading of Winckelmann, see Journals, 24-31 Dec. 1818, i, 246; 2-3 Jan. 1819, i, 246-247; 14 Mar. 1819, i, 253.

There is also a suggestion of Winckelmann's association of sexual and aesthetic appreciation in the "Notes", although less obviously homoerotic. Like Shelley, his insight into Greek worship and institutions came through his knowledge of Magna Graecia, and his reaction to the temples of Paestum, like Shelley's, was passionate and enraptured.[21] Winckelmann provides the subject matter for later disquisitions on Greek art such as the Niobe and Laocoon groups which Shelley comments on at length in his exploration of the emotional intensity and noble detachment which is combined in Greek art.[22]

Above all, one aspect of Winckelmann's writing which is all too understandably dismissed amidst the excessive and effusive declamations of his prose, would clearly appeal to Shelley. Goethe describes "the pagan mentality which shines forth from Winckelmann's actions and writings" in terms that could equally apply to Shelley:

> That reliance of the ancients on the self, their concern with the present, their veneration of the gods as ancestors, their admiration for them, so to speak, only as works of art, their submission to an all-powerful fate, their high estimation of posthumous fame, which made even the future a function of this world - all of these factors are so essentially interrelated, form so indivisible a whole, and together constitute a human condition so clearly intended by nature itself, that we can detect, not only in the supreme moment of enjoyment but also in the darkest moment of self-sacrifice - or even distinction

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21 For the response of Winckelmann and Goethe to Paestum, see Constantine, 113-115.

22 For Note on Niobe, see Julian, vi, 330-332, on Laocoon, Julian, vi, 310-311.

an indestructible health.[23]

The sense of anti-clericalism, the political ideal of freedom and the influence of the climate of the Greeks on their culture are all evident in Shelley's letters, as in Winckelmann's prose. The discrepancy in their perceptions lies not in the emphatic wonder and power of the Hellenic ideal which reaches an absolute status as much in Shelley as it does in Winckelmann, but in the interest of Shelley and his circle in the dark underside of the Greek ideal, the irrational and even disordering influence of the Bacchic.

Schiller

Schiller's attitude towards such an idealised view is ultimately critical. His rationalisation of the modern attitude to Ancient Greece exposes some of the factors which have influenced the concept of Romantic Hellenism. For it is through the Romantic construction of an image of Greece that an association is made between art, politics, and nature which affirms the Romantic artist's perception of his role. The Enlightenment offered the pretext for an interest in the republican values of Athens, its natural religion and its artistic excellence. The Romantics convert this scholarly and often nostalgic interest into a means to

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23 J. W. von Goethe, "Winckelmann," trans. H. B. Nisbet, Nisbet, 239.

achieving their own idealism. In a sense Greece is no longer the object of their interests, it actually determines their idealism. It is invested with the freedom to which the Romantic artist aspires, yet it is presented as a determinate image. It functions as the outward boundary of Romantic idealism without which the drive to transcendence could not be achieved.

In some respects, Schiller's Greek ideal comes closest to that of Shelley since, like Shelley, he seeks to describe the Greeks in aesthetic, political and natural terms. Schiller's concept of Greece is also related to a theory of the wider value of aesthetics, as indeed it is for Shelley, both in "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" and the Aesthetic Letters. In the Sixth Letter, Schiller introduces the model of Greece as a contrast to his own age in much the same way as Shelley was to use Greece as the model of the achievement of enlightenment in literature and wisdom:

> The Greeks put us to shame not only by a simplicity to which our age is a stranger; they are at the same time our rivals, indeed often our models, in those very excellences with which we are wont to console ourselves for the unnaturalness of our manners. In fullness of form no less than of content, at once philosophic and creative, sensitive and energetic, the Greeks combined the first youth of imagination with the manhood of reason in a glorious manifestation of humanity.[24]

The ideal of Greece is thus fundamentally related to an image of Nature which suggests unity and wholeness to be subsequently

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24 Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (1967; Oxford: Clarendon P, 1985), 31. 1794-95

superseded by the divided modern consciousness:

> Why was the individual Greek qualified to be the representative of his age, and why can no single Modern venture as much? Because it was from all-unifying Nature that the former, and from the all-dividing Intellect that the latter received their respective forms.[25]

Whereas Schlegel was to emphasise the necessity of transcending this particular stage of history, Schiller wishes to incorporate its strengths into the modern in order to avoid the inevitable alienation from such a pure past which might result. Greece embodies this organic community which Shelley was to observe at Pompeii and elsewhere as a contrast to the fragmentary modern consciousness based upon the "calculating principle". Schiller qualifies his respect for the classical past by arguing that history could not have developed in any other way. The modern age is superior because it alone has knowledge of the value of the ancients:

> I readily concede that, little as individuals might benefit from this fragmentation of their being, there was no other way in which the species as a whole could have progressed. With the Greeks, humanity undoubtedly reached a maximum of excellence, which could neither be maintained at that level nor rise any higher.[26]

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25 Schiller, Aesthetic Letters, 33.

26 Schiller, Aesthetic Letters, 39.

Schiller argues, like Shelley, that the concrete image of Greece is sustained by our aspiration to be what the Greeks were; our need to attain the higher ideal which they failed to reach. For Shelley this ideal seems all the more accessible because it is evident in the archaeological rediscovery of the solid and literal remains of their civilisation. There is both identity and difference with regard to the ancient world.

It would be misleading to see the naive and sentimental as categories which denominate the ancient and modern respectively: Schiller's argument repeatedly undermines the distinction by using examples of naive modern poets and sentimental ancient ones, and by extending the scope of his argument to character and history as well as poetry. Schiller's definition of the Greek ideal in terms of the naive and sentimental is in fact self-consciously paradoxical. It relies on the notion of a determinate, concrete Ancient Greece which was in its own time limited precisely because it did not attain self-consciousness. It only attains the status of an ideal through the modern consciousness which is crucially differentiated from the classical past by being indeterminate and therefore free. For Schiller it is only through the modern representation of the ancient world and our consciousness of our division from it, that its full value can be realised. Schiller makes clear that it is the modern longing for perfection rather than the ancients' attainment of it that is the motivating force in the Hellenic ideal. To understand the Greeks fully, one must be modern.

This dichotomy is helpful in understanding the meaning of the concept of Romantic Hellenism. For to insist on the Greeks as a concrete image of human perfection, and to regard them as a finite and determinate phenomenon is a consequence of the need to find an embodiment of Romantic idealism. Without the determinate, the indeterminate cannot exist. There is then a kind of inversion of what are often assumed to be the causes of Hellenism. It is not that Hellenism is simply a dimension of Romantic idealism exemplified in a concern for modern Greece, but rather that Hellenism functions to enable Romantic idealism. It is thus a modern transference onto the ancient world of the Romantic investment in freedom and consciousness.[27]

The enabling power of Hellenism thus makes it crucial to the issue of political freedom not merely in the actuality of the Greek republics but in the recognition that artistic freedom was necessary to understand the historical past of Greece. It is possible to see how on this model Freedom and art become connected in what Schiller terms the ideal or aesthetic realm, since the very act of idealisation requires freedom *and artifice*. It is in some sense a solution to the oppositions between nature and art, and nature and freedom in Rousseau. In artistic terms which echo Shelley's objective of presenting the Hellenic ideal, the sentimental poet is to be able to achieve the lost ideal in the present reality with as

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27 See Charles Taylor, "The Claims of Speculative Reason," Part I of Hegel (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), 3-124.

much facility as the naive poet presented nature in an unmediated fashion.

Schiller's view of Ancient Greece is ultimately critical. For him it is not only impossible but undesirable to reproduce the actuality of the Hellenic ideal in the modern world. What was crucially absent from Greek society was any *moral* sense of the natural world, any concept of *freedom*. Where the distinguishing feature of modern civilisation is a humanity which, though agonised and divided in its consciousness, is essentially free because it is separated from Nature, the Greeks were subsumed within Nature, and thus made the mistake of attempting to make humanity a part of the inanimate world:

> Indeed, by hypostatising nature's individual phenomena, treating them as gods, and their effects as the acts of free beings, the Greek eliminates that calm necessity of nature precisely in virtue of which she is so attractive to us. His impatient fantasy leads him beyond nature to the drama of human life. Only the live and free, only characters, acts, destinies, and customs satisfy him, and if *we*, in certain moral moods of the mind, might wish to surrender the advantage of our freedom of will, which exposes us to so much conflict within ourselves, to so much unrest and errant bypaths, to the choiceless but calm necessity of the non-rational, the fantasy of the Greek, in direct opposition to this, is engaged in rooting human nature in the inanimate world and assigning influence to the will where blind necessity reigns.[28]

Schiller here sets himself up in opposition to the irrational,

purely natural joys which Shelley found so much a part of the spirit

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28 Schiller, "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry," 1795-96 trans. J. A. Elias (slightly modified), Nisbet, 189.

of Greece. Schiller's condemnation of the Greeks for their lack of moral and rational knowledge is necessary to his justification of the relationship between freedom and artistic expression:

> At one with himself and happy in the sense of his humanity he was obliged to remain with it as his maximum and assimilate all else to it; whereas *we*, not at one with ourselves and unhappy in our experience of mankind, possess no more urgent interest than to escape from it and cast from our view so unsuccessful a form.[29]

The ambivalence of this passage arises from the fact that it appears to be nostalgic for the non-rational aspects of Greek culture. But ultimately for Schiller consciousness and art constitute a greater index of freedom. For Shelley the case is different. The non-rational and celebratory aspects of Greek mythology provide an index of a particular kind of aesthetic and political freedom necessary to criticise the modern political order.

A. W. Schlegel

A. W. Schlegel develops the implicit critique of classicism in Schiller into a fully-fledged justification of the superiority of the modern, Christian artist. In his Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, delivered in Vienna in 1808, Schlegel proposed the "universality of true criticism" in preference to the narrow

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29 Schiller, "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry," Nisbet, 190.

neoclassicist critical precepts dominant in the period.[30] Schlegel demanded a criticism which would extol the merits of the Ancients without excluding the virtues of Dante, Shakespeare and other "modern" writers who infused their classical models with their own originality and genius.

Such diversity and energy in art, which Schlegel calls "romantic", even if producing only fragmentary results, contrast favourably with the homogeneity and solidity of the Greeks:

> modern cultivation is the fruit of the union of the peculiarities of the northern nations with the fragments of antiquity. Hence the cultivation of the ancients was much more of a piece than ours.[31]

Schlegel also puts forward a critique of the limitations of Greek society and culture in which the qualitative distinction between the finite and self-contained character of Greece and the more enduring aspirations of modern Europe are pronounced; "The formation of the Greeks was a natural education in its utmost perfection...[they] performed all of which our circumscribed nature is capable."[32] Schlegel's judgement of Greek mythology and literature is seen

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30 A. W. Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans. John Black, 2 vols. (London, 1815), i, 4.

31 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 8.

32 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 11-12.

primarily in relation to its religion: "But however far the Greeks may have carried beauty, and even morality, we cannot allow any higher character to their formation than that of a refined and ennobled sensuality."[33] It becomes clear that the aesthetic and literary claims for the modern are advanced largely in terms of the greater depth of Christianity. The Greeks were essentially superstitious, even though this superstition liberated the spirit of their art:

> Their religion was the deification of the powers of nature and of the earthly life...this worship...assumed, among the Greeks, a mild, a grand, and a dignified form. Superstition, too often the tyrant of the human faculties, seemed to have contributed to their freest development.[34]

For Schlegel it is Christianity, "this sublime and beneficent religion" which "has regenerated the ancient world from its state of exhaustion and debasement".[35] For Schlegel, as for Schiller, the Greeks who "aspired at no higher perfection than that which they could actually attain by the exercise of their own faculties," are inferior to the inward drive of the moderns.[36]

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33 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 12.

34 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 12.

35 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 13.

36 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 15.

While Shelley's aesthetic theories may bear comparison to the transcendent drive of the infinite, Schlegel clearly arrives at his definition of the Romantic through a specifically pietist route:

> The religion of the senses had only in view the possession of outward and perishable blessings; and immortality, in so far as it was believed, appeared in an obscure distance like a shadow, a faint dream of this bright and vivid futurity. The very reverse of all this is the case with the Christian: every thing finite and mortal is lost in the contemplation of infinity...[37]

In Greek art and poetry there is "an original and unconscious unity of form and subject; in the modern,... a keen struggle to unite the two..."[38] But this rupture between form and content is preferable since it drives the poet into self-conscious recognition of the duties of his art:

> The Grecian idea of humanity consisted in a perfect concord and proportion between all the powers, - a natural harmony. The moderns again have arrived at the consciousness of the internal discord which renders such an idea impossible...[39]

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37 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 15.

38 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 17.

39 Schlegel, Lectures, i, 16.

This deep self-consciousness that characterises Schlegel's theories of the modern is a theoretical construct by which the Greek aesthetic can be seen to be transcended. It plays no further part in the writings of the modern poet.

Shelley sent Schlegel's Lectures to Gisbo in May 1818 and in the Preface to Prometheus Unbound can be seen to be influenced in a very broad sense by Schlegel's recommendation that the modern poet should not follow the outward letter but the inward spirit of classical myth and also that ancient Greek myth can be used without neoclassical loyalties.[40] Christianity is a spiritual religion which embodies freedom, where the Pagan superstition of the Greeks is associated with Necessity. But Shelley uses such ideas in opposition to Schlegel in order to use it to criticise Christianity in Prometheus Unbound. To Schlegel, unlike Shelley, Christ is therefore a more powerful mythical embodiment than Prometheus.

5.2 Shelley's moral ideal of Greece: "A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks relative to the subject of Love."

In choosing The Symposium as the text which revealed the

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40 L467, To JG, [11-31] May 1818, Letters, ii, 17. For commentary on Schlegel and myth see Feldman and Richardson, 342.

essence of Greek society, Shelley's view of Greek culture as a pure expression of moral ideals can be seen to be closer to Winckelmann's Hellenic ideal than the critiques of classicism in Schlegel and Schiller. His correspondence during the summer of 1818, suggests that the "Discourse" emerged directly out of the need he felt in the process of translation to present the differences between ancient and modern morals in a historical context:

> - I am employed just now, having little better to do, in translating into my fainting & inefficient periods the divine eloquence of Plato's Symposium - only as an exercise or perhaps to give Mary some idea of the manners & feelings of the Athenians - so different on many subjects from that of any subject that ever existed.-[41]

Clearly the first part of The Symposium offered Shelley the means to portray Athenian conduct sympathetically; "The whole of this introduction affords the most lively conception of refined Athenian manners." [42] Recent critics have tended to locate the sole interest of the introductory "Discourse" in the circumspect treatment of the delicate matter of Greek homosexual love, which occupies a minimal part of the surviving manuscript, but prevented the publication of the complete essay until 1931.[43] The

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41 L470, To MG and JG, 10 July 1818, Letters, ii, 20. See also L472, To TLP, 25 July 1818, Letters, ii, 26 and Journals, 7th - 17th July 1818, i, 217-219.

42 "On The Symposium, or Preface to the Banquet of Plato," [A Fragment] Julian, vii, 162.

43 See Nathaniel Brown, Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979), 5-23; Paul Foot, Red Shelley, 112. For background to translation, see Notopoulos, 381-390.

"Discourse" is not, as is argued by these critics, a statement of Shelley's personal views on this matter, since he distinguishes explicitly between the purpose of historical relativism behind the treatise and his personal horror of the treatment of women and the practice of pederasty.[44] Shelley's translation, to be examined in Chapter 6, provides the pretext for an introduction to a general consideration of the quality of life in Ancient Greece, as he suggests to Godwin:

> The Symposium of Plato seems to me, one of the most valuable pieces of all antiquity whether we consider the intrinsic merit of the composition or the light which it throws on the inmost state of manners & opinions among the antient Greeks. I have occupied myself in translating this, & it has excited me to attempt an Essay upon the cause of some differences in sentiment between the antients and moderns with respect to the subject of the dialogue.[45]

The "Discourse" begins with the question of how the political democracy of Periclean Athens is related to the artistic products of the period. At this stage in Shelley's argument, "showing the Greeks precisely as they were" involves illustrating the effect of society on the flourishing of art, rather than, as in the later work

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44 "This slight sketch was undertaken to induce the reader to cast off the cloak of his self-flattering prejudices and forbid the distinction of manners, which he has endeavored to preserve in the translation of the ensuing piece, interfere with his delight or his instruction", Notopoulos, 413.

45 L471, To WG, 25 July 1818, Letters, ii, 22.

of 1820-21, arguing that art actually influences political change.[46] Shelley's sense of the wholeness of Greek art actually disables the modern artist, since it is a kind of "inimitable imitation":

> ...Their sculptures are such as we, in our presumption, assume to be the models of ideal truth and beauty, and to which no artist of modern times can produce forms in any degree comparable.[47]

These "models of ideal truth and beauty" reflect the essence of Greek society:

> ...how superior was the spirit and system of their poetry to that of any other period! So that, had any genius...arisen in that age, he would have been superior to all, from this circumstance alone - that his conceptions would have assumed a more harmonious and perfect form.[48]

It is also important to recognise a further distinction in his evaluation of Renaissance scholarship summarily dismissed by Schlegel. Indeed Shelley foresees a situation in which modern society will read the Ancients with the urgency of the Middle Ages.

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46 Notopoulos, 407.

47 Notopoulos, 404.

48 Notopoulos, 405.

Ancient Greece is regarded as a repository of scientific and philosophical knowledge and he looks forward to an era of intellectual respect for the Classical world such as occurred in the Renaissance.

In the conclusion to the first part of the essay, Shelley proposes a broad effort at portraying the morals and feelings of Athens in the period between "the birth of Pericles and the death of Aristotle"[49]:

> ...There is no book which shows the Greeks precisely as they were; they seem all written for children, with the caution that no practice or sentiment, highly inconsistent with our present manners, should be mentioned, lest those manners should receive outrage and violation.[50]

One of Shelley's aims in his proposed investigation of Ancient Greece reflects a wish to use translation and commentary for those who would otherwise be denied the enlightenment which classical texts afforded about Greek life. Such an enterprise would yield an awareness not simply of Greece in terms of historical fact but as a model cultural form; not as an ideal but as a reality.[51] These

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49 Notopoulos, 404.

50 Notopoulos, 407.

51 This method is close to that of Robert Lowth in his understanding of the cultural context of the Bible, "...we must even investigate their inmost sentiments, the manner and connexion of their thoughts; in one word, we must see things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinions: we must endeavour as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it", Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, trans. G. Gregory, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London, 1787), i, 113. Edward Gibbon also argues for a similar method with regard to classical poetry, "But we, who are placed in another clime, and born in another age, are necessarily at a loss to see those beauties, for want of being able to place ourselves in the

aims differentiate Shelley from both the antiquarian interest in artifacts, which influenced design and artistic form but did not convey a sense of the living forces of Greek society, and from the German Romantics for whom the Hellenic Ideal was a theoretical concept that brought into play and was indispensable to the idea of the modern. This revivified history would communicate an understanding of the best model for artistic and political conduct to the present:

> But there are many to whom the Greek language is inaccessible, who ought not to be excluded by this prudery to possess an exact and comprehensive conception of the history of man; for there is no knowledge concerning what man has been and may be, from partaking of which a person can depart, without becoming in some degree more philosophical, tolerant, and just.[52]

Periclean Athens embodies the fusion of artistic expression and republican freedom. The written documentation left to us - the philosophical, political, and poetical works - constitute for Shelley the essential identity of Greek culture and it is through

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same point of view with the Greeks and Romans. A circumstantial knowledge of their situation and manners can only enable us to do this", An Essay on the Study of Literature, trans. from the French by the author (London, 1764), 25. It is worth noting that Lowth values Hebrew over Greek poetry, "And it is worthy observation, that as some of these writings exceed in antiquity the fabulous ages of Greece, in sublimity they are superior to the most finished productions of that polished people", Lectures, i, 37.

52 Notopoulos, 407.

literature in this broad sense that historical access is afforded. For this peculiarly literalistic reason, the defence of poetry, for Shelley is expressed frequently in conjunction with a sympathy for the early Greek poets. Indeed in the Defence, Shelley argues that a comprehensive account of Greek life is best expressed in the poetry:

> 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...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 enquiry 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 coexist with whatever other arts contribute to the happiness and perfection of man.[53]

The significant issue is that Shelley uses the notion of Greece to defend his ideal of poetry. Ancient Greek culture suggests a direct and fully realisable source of influence which Shelley later incorporates into his poetic formulation of Greece as a dynamic and inspirational force of freedom:

> The study of modern history is the study of kings, financiers, statesmen, and priests. The history of antient Greece is the study of legislators, philosophers, and poets; it is the history of men, compared with the history of titles. What the

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53 Defence, Norton, 488.

> Greeks were, was a reality, not a promise. And what we are and hope to be, is derived, as it were, from the influence and inspiration of these glorious generations.[54]

Shelley's interest in Ancient Greece is also historically specific. The desire to emulate the Greeks is qualified by a recognition of their possible failings but is enhanced by the knowledge that their achievement could equally be realised in the modern world:

> Let us see their errors, their weaknesses, their daily actions, their familiar conversation, and catch the tone of their society. When we discover how far the most admirable community ever formed, was removed from that perfection to which human society is impelled by some active power within each bosom, to aspire, how great ought to be our hopes, how resolute our struggles![55]

Shelley, like Schiller, in Aesthetic Letters, sees Ancient Greece as a moral ideal which contrasts with the modern world. To Gisborne he writes of the difference to the modern world, had Christianity never arisen, and had the Greek civilisation prevailed:

> Were not the Greeks a glorious people?...Who knows whether under the steady progress which philosophy & social institutions would have made, (for in the age to which I refer their progress was both rapid & secure,) among a people of the most perfect physical organisation, whether the Christian

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54 Notopoulos, 406-407.

55 Notopoulos, 407.

> Religion would have arisen, or the barbarians have overwhelmed the wrecks of a civilisation which had survived the conquests & tyranny of the Romans. - What then should we have been?[56]

This lament for the values of Greece at the height of the political crisis in the autumn of 1819 shows that it represented more than merely ennobled sensuality. In this early period of classical study and translation Ancient Greece is conceived as an actuality to which Shelley's ideals aspire. Whereas for Schlegel the opposition between classical and modern is crude and external, for Shelley, like Schiller, it is internalised emotionally, but unlike Schiller, it symbolises for him a desirable political reality.

5.3 The Hellenic versus the Bacchic: Letters to Peacock from Italy, "Notes on Sculptures in Florence and Rome," and A Defence of Poetry

There are four interrelated issues in this section which demonstrate the development of Shelley's conception of Ancient Greece. His experiences of visiting Pompeii, Paestum and witnessing the ruins within their physical environment increased his sympathy with the pagan worship of the natural world. His preference for this "natural" religion over the forms of Christianity is evident in the contrast between ancient and modern, Christian and pagan which

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56 L532, To JG, 16 Nov 1819, Letters, ii, 156.

he beholds at Rome. In his tour of the Uffizi the spirit of Bacchus, and the free expression of sensuality with which he is associated is seen as a vital force which Shelley views as beyond the spirit of Christianity to convey. Michelangelo's sculpture represents a travesty of the essence of Bacchus which Shelley saw as projecting both political freedom and collective joy.

For Shelley the image of the civilisation of the ancients is associated with the climate and physical environment in which they lived. Such a method of historical understanding is also advanced by Enlightenment historians who see artistic products in relation to climate and locality. Shelley's perceptions also owe something to the empirical attempt to understand the literature of the ancient world through its environment inaugurated by Robert Wood. Wood defended the writings of Homer as being true to Nature: thus the climate and locality of the Iliad and Odyssey are relevant and necessary to understanding Homer's poetry.[57] Wood's Essay was influential because his was the first on-site inspection to prove what theorists had alleged, that Greek literature and mythology reflected its environment. Through his unassuming approach he offers the means to an aesthetic which does not simply offer contextual support for the greatest classical poet but also provides the means to defend other kinds of primitive writing in terms of their freedom from the constraints of neoclassicist rules. Wood's

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57 Robert Wood, An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer: With a Comparative View of the Ancient and Present State of the Troade (London, 1775).

work can thus be seen in the context of the work of Lowth which evaluates the poetry of the Bible in its physical and cultural context.[58] This is the very sense in which Shelley seems to approach his tour of Italy and the sites of Magna Graecia. It is the immediacy, the almost physical immersion in the world of the Greeks, which marks his critical appreciation.

Shelley's visits to Paestum and Pompeii confirmed his interest in the way Greek society functioned both in terms of art, civic values and the interaction with the natural world in pagan religion. Shelley's insistence to Peacock that Pompeii "was a Greek city" is important since he obviously intended to use his visits to establish how the Greeks lived. In the remains of Pompeii, civic values are still evident. He describes how the single-storey houses afforded views of the public buildings thereby demonstrating the genuine strength of the roots of the republican tradition:

> This was the excellence of the antients. Their private expenses were comparatively moderate; ...But their public buildings are everywhere marked by the bold & grand designs of an unsparing magnificence.[59]

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58 See especially Isaiah A New Translation: with a preliminary dissertation, and Notes, Critical, Philological and Explanatory (London, 1778), for example the detailed notes on Isaiah i, 6 and iii, 16 on the art of medicine in the East and on cosmetics, Notes, 7-8; 32-34.

59 L491, To TLP, [23-24 Jan. 1819], Letters, ii, 72.

Another major attraction of such life is the way that the mythological figures are part of domestic life;

> They are Egyptian subjects executed by a Greek artist who has harmonised all the *un*natural extravagance of their original conception into the *super*natural loveliness of his country's genius.[60]

The natural world is a necessary part of the Hellenic ideal since it relates the sublime power of Nature to the values of the polis and the cultural unity which art and mythology provide. Nature fulfils the aspirations which are present in the political and poetic ideals of the Greeks:

> If such is Pompeii, what was Athens?...I now understand why the Greeks were such great Poets, & above all I can account, it seems to me, for the harmony the unity the perfection the uniform excellence of all their works of art. They lived in a perpetual commerce with external nature and nourished themselves upon the spirit of its forms. Their theatres were all open to the mountains & the sky. Their columns that ideal type of a sacred forest with its roof of interwoven tracery admitted the light & wind, the odour & the freshness of the country penetrated the cities. Their temples were mostly upaithric, & the flying clouds the stars or the deep sky were seen above. O, but for that series of wretched wars which terminated in the Roman conquest of the world, but for the Christian religion which put a finishing stroke to the antient system; but for those changes which conducted Athens to its ruin, to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived![61]

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60 L491, To TLP, [23-24 Jan. 1819], Letters, ii, 73. See also his comments on the temple of Isis in Pompeii and the fountain with the Egyptian obelisk in the Piazza Navona (L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 88).

61 L491, To TLP, [23-24 Jan. 1819], Letters, ii, 73-74.

Nature could also function, as it had done in "Mont Blanc", as a function of the power of historical change. His remarks on the visit to Vesuvius on 16th December, which was "in a slight state of eruption" as they climbed it, make this parallel explicit:

> Vesuvius is, after the glaciers the most impressive expression of the energies of nature I ever saw. It has not the immeasurable greatness the overpowering magnificence, nor above all the radiant beauty of the glaciers, but it has all their character of tremendous & irresistible strength.[62]

Shelley's description of their trip is hair-raising but his account of the volcano possibly inspires images of the fires of destruction which serve as political metaphors in his poetry,

> We were as it were surrounded by streams & cataracts of a red & radiant fire, & in the midst from the column of bituminous smoke shot up into the sky, fell the vast masses of rock white with the light of their intense heat, leaving behind them thro the dark vapour, trains of splendour.[63]

The vocabulary of his visionary and political poetry is constructed out of the experiences of these sights. Paestum is also perceived by Shelley in terms of a coincidence of the power of the

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62 L488, To TLP, [17 or 18 Dec. 1818], Letters, ii, 62.

63 L488, To TLP, [17 or 18 Dec. 1818], Letters, ii, 63.

natural environment and an architectural grandeur, "The effect of the jagged outline of mountains through groupes of enormous columns on one side, & on the other the level horizon of the sea is inexpressibly grand."[64] The temples are stunning in their state of preservation, and Shelley's description certainly aspires to grant them some absolute status,

> ...though perhaps we ought to say not that this symmetry diminishes your apprehension of their magnitude, but that it overpowers the idea of relative greatness, by establishing within itself a system of relations, destructive of your idea of its relation with other objects, on which our ideas of size depend.[65]

Shelley's view of the power of the natural world and its influence are also apparent in the contrast between Christian and pagan evident in the ruins of Rome. St Peter's is dismissed by comparison with the Pantheon, a symbol of the vital contact with the natural world which is so strong an element of classical religion and mythology:

> ...it is as it were the visible image of the universe; in the perfection of its proportions, as when you regard the unmeasured dome of Heaven, the idea of magnitude is swallowed up & lost. It is open to the sky, & its wide dome is lighted by the ever changing illumination of the air. The clouds of noon fly over it and at night the keen stars are seen thro the

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64 L492, To TLP, 25 Feb. 1818 [for 1819], Letters, ii, 79.

65 L492, To TLP, 25 Feb. 1818 [for 1819], Letters, ii, 80.

azure darkness hanging immoveably...[66]

It is in Winckelmann's terms that he admires the "magnificent simplicity of its form."[67] Classical architecture is a self-contained unity, a form of artistic self-sufficiency which celebrates a pure and unmediated union with Nature. The antitheses between ancient and modern, pagan and Christian, are suggested repeatedly to Shelley:[68]

> After all, Rome is eternal & were all that *is* extinguished, that which *has been*, the ruins & the sculptures would remain, & Raphael & Guido be alone regretted of all that Xtianity had suffered to spring forth from its dark & pernicious Chaos.[69]

The image of fettered criminals in St Peters Square hoeing out the weeds between paving stones supplies a typically Shelleyan metaphor of pathos and righteous indignation directed against the modern travesty of ancient values:

> The iron discord of those innumerable chains clanks up into

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66 L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 87-88.

67 L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 88.

68 "If I am too subtly jealous of the honour of the Greeks our masters & creators, the Gods whom we should worship - pardon me," L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 89.

69 L498, To TLP, 6 April 1819, Letters, ii, 93.

> the sonorous air, and produces, contrasted with the musical dashing of the fountains, & the deep azure beauty of the sky & the magnif[ic]ence of the architecture around a conflict of sensations allied to madness. It is the emblem of Italy: moral degradation contrasted with the glory of nature & the arts.[70]

Rome was thus a source of melancholy to Shelley because it had been subjected to Christianity, yet it was also, on his first visit, a source of excitement because it once represented the paragon of republican values and achievement; "Behold me in this capital of the vanished world", "The impression of it exceeds any thing I have ever experienced in my travels." [71] He is overcome by the power of the ruins to evoke the inimitable grandeur of the ancient world,

> Behold the wrecks of what a great nation once dedicated to the abstractions of the mind. Rome is a city as it were of the dead, or rather of those who cannot die, & who survive the puny generations which inhabit & pass over the spot which they have made sacred to eternity.[72]

For Shelley the symbolic force of the architecture transmits a tangible energy, "if I speak first of the inanimate ruins...will you not believe me insensible to the vital, the almost breathing

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70 L498, To TLP, 6 April 1819, Letters, ii, 93-94.

71 L487, To TLP, [20] Nov. 1818, Letters, ii, 54; L488, To TLP, [17 or 18] Dec. 1818, Letters, ii, 58.

72 L488, To TLP, [17 or 18] Dec. 1818, Letters, ii,59.

creations of genius yet subsisting in their perfection?".[73] He writes that "These things are best spoken of when the mind has drunk in the spirit of their forms", which is so sublime as to be beyond expression, "Come to Rome. It is a scene by which expression is overpowered: which words cannot convey." [74]

The contrast between pagan and Christian is apparent especially in the Forum. He fulminates against the despoiling of the Arch of Titus, "this stupid and wicked monster Constantine,...one of whose chief merits consisted in establishing a religion [which had destroyed altered to] the destroyer of those arts...".[75] The most dramatic of the arches in the forum is that dedicated to Titus, which depicts the sacking of Jerusalem. It summarised for Shelley the vanity of all imperial and religious ambition, "The power, of whose possession it was once the type, and of whose departure it is now the emblem, is become a dream and a memory. Rome is no more than Jerusalem."[76]

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73 L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 84.

74 L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 84; 85.

75 L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 86. See also "Near it is the arch of Constantine or rather the arch of Trajan [Titus?], for the servile & avaricious senate of degraded Rome ordered that the monument of his predecessor should be demolished in order to dedicate one to this Christian Reptile who had crept among the blood of his own murdered family to the supreme power", L488, To TLP, [17 or 18] Dec. 1818, Letters, ii, 59.

76 "Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence," Julian, vi, 309. More or less the same description is found in L495, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters ii, 89 - 90. The reliefs of the winged figures of victory suggest the Spirit of the Hour and the Spirit of the Earth in Prometheus Unbound, see Donald H. Reiman, "Roman Scenes in Prometheus Unbound III iv," PQ 46 (1967), 69-78. In his halting awareness of the imperial ends commemorated, "Never were monuments so completely fitted to the purpose for which they were designed of

Shelley's interest in the statues in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence can be seen largely as a confirmation of the impulse towards the Bacchic and Maenadic aspects of release which challenged the ordered dimension of Hellenism.[77] Shelley undertook a systematic investigation of the Uffizi for his own purposes from which his "Notes on Sculptures" emerged, and clearly the impetus was to continue his investigation into art as the reflection of the morals of the society.[78]

The nature of the attraction of the Marlow circle to the cult of Dionysus has been discussed in chapter 3. In the publication of archaeological discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum, the supposedly rational society of the Greeks was revealed to practise

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expressing that mixture of energy & error which is called a Triumph.-", he anticipates the ironic title and substance of the train in "The Triumph of Life", L495, To TLP, 23 Mar. 1819, Letters, ii, 86.

77 See the following notes on statues: 3, 5, 29, 34, 53, 57, 36, 39, all on the Bacchic theme, Julian, vi, 309-379.

78 See L518, To MG, 13 or 14 Oct. 1819, Letters, ii, 126 and Journals, 11 Oct. 1819, i, 298; 20 Oct. 1819, i, 299; 31 Dec. 1819, i, 302 and 22 Jan. 1820, i, 306. For important textual history, see E. B. Murray, "Shelley's Notes on Sculptures: The Provenance and Authority of the Text, " KSJ 32 (1983), 150-171. See also Frederic S. Colwell, "Shelley on Sculpture: The Uffizi Notes," KSJ 28 (1979), 59-77. For further evidence of interest in sculpture see Journals, "Spend the morning at the British Museum - {se} looking at the Elgin Marbles," Feb. 13 1818, i, 193; "Go to the exhibition [at the Royal Academy] (Canova's sculptures - Turner's landscape...)", 24 May 1817, i, 170.

fertility rites which were related to both agricultural and human reproduction.[79] In his essay prefaced to Knight's Discourse, Hamilton describes the Priapic fete of the saints Cosmo and Domiano "as it actually was celebrated at ISERNIA, in the confines of ABRUZZO in the Kingdom of NAPLES, so late as in the year of our Lord 1780".[80] Hamilton's detailed account of such Bacchanalian festivals in the Naples area draws attention to contemporary evidence, for example of the amulets evidently related to the cult of Priapus worn by women and children "of the lower class".[81] His tone is a mixture of chauvinism and antiquarian delight, the ceremonies to Priapus offer "fresh proof of the similitude of the Popish and Pagan religion".[82] Hamilton published illustrations on both Etruscan and Greek vases, of sexual rites and observances.[83]

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79 See Sir William Hamilton, Account of the Discoveries at Pompeii (London, 1777).

80 Sir William Hamilton, "An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus, Lately Existing at Isernia in the Kingdom of Naples," (London, 1786), 8.

81 Hamilton, "Account," 4.

82 Hamilton, "Account," 4.

83 See Sir William Hamilton, Collections of Engravings from Ancient Vases Mostly of pure Greek workmanship discovered in sepulchres in the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, 2 vols. (Naples, 1791), and Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of the Honourable W. Hamilton, Preface Hancarville [P. F. Hugues], 4 vols. (Naples, 1766).

Shelley stresses the ideal and sublime character of the sculptures of Bacchus usually reserved for the Apollonian or established deities in the Greek Pantheon. Thus his comment on the statue in the Museum in Naples "a Bacchus more sublime than any living being," and his view of the figures of Bacchus and Ampelus, "less beautiful than that in the royal collection of Naples and yet infinitely lovely":[84]

> The countenance of Bacchus is sublimely sweet and lovely, taking a shade of gentle and playful tenderness from the arch looks of Ampelus, whose cheerful face turned towards him, expresses the suggestions of some droll and merry device. It has a divine and supernatural beauty, as one who walks through the world untouched by its corruptions, its corrupting cares; it looks like one who unconsciously yet with delight confers pleasure and peace.[85]

Clearly the emphasis of his appreciation is on an expression of innocent friendship, a reasoned rather than irrational jollity. The artistic harmony of the statue is attuned to the emotional mutuality it depicts:

> Like some fine strain of harmony which flows round the soul and enfolds it, and leaves it in the soft astonishment of a satisfaction, like the pleasure of love with one whom we most love, which having taken away desire, leaves pleasure, sweet

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84 L488, To TLP, [17 or 18 Dec. 1818, Letters, ii, 63, Journals, 19 Dec. 1818, i, 245, Julian, vi, 319.

85 Julian, vi, 319.

pleasure.[86]

This view contrasts fundamentally with that perceived in the inferior Bacchus by Michaelangelo which fails because it depicts the Bacchic through the eyes of the Christian; "It is altogether without unity, as was the idea of the Deity of Bacchus in the conception of a Catholic".[87] In both artistic and moral terms it is merely a piece of workmanship:

> The countenance of this figure is the most revolting mistake of the spirit and meaning of Bacchus. It looks drunken, brutal, and narrow-minded, and has an expression of dissoluteness the most revolting:...It wants as a work of art unity and simplicity; as a representation of the Greek Deity of Bacchus it wants every thing.[88]

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86 Julian, vi, 319-320.

87 Julian, vi, 329.

88 Julian, vi, 329. See his comments on Michelangelo, "I cannot but think the genius of this artist highly overrated", L492, To TLP, 25 Feb. 1818 [for 1819], Letters, ii, 80; "He seems to me to have no sense of moral dignity & loveliness; & the energy for which he has been so much praised appears to me to be a certain rude, external, mechanical, quality in comparison with any thing possessed by Raphael.- or even much inferior artists. His famous painting in the Sixtine Chapel seems to me deficient in beauty and majesty both in conception & the execution; it might have combined all the forms of terror & delight- & it is a dull & wicked emblem of a dull & wicked thing. Jesus Christ is like an angry pot-boy & God like an old alehouse-keeper looking out of window", L510, To LH, [20 Aug. 1819], Letters, ii, 112. See Frederic S. Colwell, "Shelley and Italian Painting," KSJ 29 (1980), 43-66, particularly on contemporary views of Michaelangelo, 45-48.

The need to assert in aesthetic terms that the Bacchic does not overstep the bounds of Nature or art is important; indeed the representation of the irrational is what makes it sane and ordered, as the description of an altar engraved with the reliefs of four maenads (one of whom he notes appears to be Euripides' Agave, with the head of Pentheus) depicts:

> Nothing can be imagined more wild and terrible than their gestures, touching as they do upon the verge of distortion, in which their fine limbs and lovely forms are thrown. There is nothing however that exceeds the possibility of Nature, although it borders on its utmost line.[89]

In this ambivalence, it is possible to detect a latent attraction to the freedom associated with the Maenads, that Shelley describes uncritically in his review of Peacock's Rhododaphne:

> There is here, as in the songs of ancient times, music and dancing and the luxury of voluptuous delight. The Bacchanalians toss on high their leaf - inwoven hair, and the tumult and fervour of the chase is depicted.[90]

The Romans were unable to sustain the moral and artistic benefits of

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89 Julian, vi, 323.

90 Julian, vi, 273-274.

such idealisation. Shelley is prepared to justify the excess of the spirit of the Bacchic:

> This was indeed a monstrous superstition only capable of existing in Greece because there alone capable of combining ideal beauty and poetical and abstract enthusiasm with the wild errors from which it sprung. In Rome it had a more familiar, wicked and dry appearance - it was not suited to the severe and exact apprehensions of the Romans, and their strict morals once violated by it, sustained a deep injury little analogous to its effects upon the Greeks who turned all things, superstition, prejudice, murder, madness - to Beauty.[91]

The scene depicted on the pedestal, is clearly fused in Shelley's mind with Euripides' Bacchae, "The tremendous spirit of superstition aided by drunkenness and producing something beyond insanity, seems to have caught them in its whirlwinds...".[92]

Shelley's notion of the sensuality of certain Greek deities is important to the concept of release expressed in the Bacchic myths. Venus represents "an ideal shape of the most winning loveliness", and his most detailed note describes Venus Anadyomene who was born, like Asia, out of the waves.[93] Shelley domesticates her delightfully, "she seems to have just issued from the bath"; "Her

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91 Julian, vi, 323.

92 Julian, vi, 323.

93 L468, To TLP, [17 or 18] Dec. 1818, Letters, ii, 63.

face expresses a breathless yet passive and innocent voluptuousness without affectation, without doubt; it is at once desire and enjoyment and the pleasure arising from both." His description clearly expresses enjoyment at the sculpture:

> This perhaps is the finest personification of Venus, the Deity of superficial desire, in all antique statuary. Her pointed and pear-like bosom ever virgin - the virgin Mary might have this beauty, but alas![94]

Certainly the other Venuses (numbered in the "Notes", 19, 24, 25 and 28) either misrepresent the quality of this desire, or attribute a sense of vulgarity.

The relationship of such sensitivity to sensual themes in classical writing is clearly of some importance to Shelley in his understanding of Greece. In A Defence an extended passage is devoted to an analysis of the "extinction or suspension of the creative faculty in Greece" which is seen largely in terms of the decline into a weaker sense of the erotic in these later writers.[95] Shelley is explicit about the relationship of the arts to sensuality. Thus the strength of the oldest Greek poets compared to the inferior writers of pastoral idyll such as Theocritus, Boschus and Bion is founded on their greater sensitivity to the wider

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94 Julian, vi, 320-321.

95 Defence, Norton, 492.

meaning of physical feeling:

> 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 an harmony of the union of all.[96]

Yet interestingly Shelley has a historical explanation for the reason behind this decline in the appreciation of the sensual, since it symbolises the last stage before the total corruption of the values of Ancient Greece. All forms of political corruption begin with the mind and work through to the body:

> 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 sense hardly 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, departing from the world.[97]

Shelley looks to Ancient Greece both for republican political values and the spirit of joy epitomised in Bacchus. He develops a finely tuned sense for the power of the natural world in which the Greeks lived and celebrated their religion. His perception of

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96 Defence, Norton, 492.

97 Defence, Norton, 493.

Ancient Greece can be seen as both practically informed but also as resistant in some respects to the notion of the rational, classical culture associated with Romantic Hellenism.

5.4 The Hellenic ideal as a political model: "Ode to Liberty"; "Ode to Naples" and Hellas

The image of Athens conforms in Shelley's mind to that sense of the fusion of Nature's beauty and civilised values found in the visits to Rome, Pompeii and Paestum. The power of poetry for Shelley in the mainly optimistic poems of 1820-21 can be seen in the context of the specific environment of Ancient Greece. Thus in the "Ode to Liberty", the personification of Freedom is seen to inhabit and gain sustenance from Greece.[98] Athens becomes an emblem of visionary permanence which for Shelley is clearly akin to the process of poetic creation:

> Athens arose: a city such as vision
> Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
> Of battlemented cloud, as in derision
> Of kingliest masonry: the ocean-floors
> Pave it; the evening sky pavilions it;
> Its portals are inhabited
> By thunder-zoned winds, each head
> Within its cloudy wings with sunfire garlanded,-
> A divine work!... (61-69)

The imagery deliberately undercuts a sense of regal magnificence with the airy divinity which is the prerogative of the poet's vision of Nature. The permanent value of the visionary is argued to be more durable than the empires and palaces of monarchs. Athens, "the latest oracle" (75), reflects the origins of literate and artistic skill which is commensurate with the liberty to which the

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98 See also the fragment, "The Coliseum," Julian, vi, 299-306.

ode is addressed:

> Art's deathless dreams lay veiled by many a vein
> Of Parian stone; and, yet a speechless child,
> Verse murmured, and Philosophy did strain
> Her lidless eyes for thee;...(57-60)

Similarly the "Ode to Naples" represents the overpowering sense of the historical value of Pompeii and its civilisation. Naples is represented by Shelley through the image of Minerva, in mythological tradition born from Jupiter's brain, goddess of wisdom, war and the liberal arts:

> Thou youngest giant birth
> Which from the groaning earth
> Leap'st, clothed in armour of impenetrable scale!
> Last of the Intercessors!
> Who 'gainst the Crowned Transgressors
> Pleadest before God's love! Arrayed in Wisdom's mail,
> Wave thy lightning lance in mirth
> Nor let thy high heart fail,... (66-73 in Hutchinson, 616-620)

In Hellas, instead of celebrating the power of Greece, as Aeschylus had done, Shelley emphasises the fragility of the values which are embodied in the Greek ideal. The pathos of the drama works to concentrate the emotions on a sense of imminent destruction. Shelley is not simply making a propaganda point in order to alert people to the vulnerability of Greece. He actually creates a sense in which the values of Greece are associated with the visionary power of poetry to evoke a timeless realm of hope. The very form of the poem contributes to its celebratory quality, "The subject in its present state, is insusceptible of being treated otherwise than lyrically."[99] Yet in the fragility of the Greek ideal we begin to

behold the sense of the necessity of an ideal realm in order to counter the horror of the historical situation which Shelley witnessed in Europe after the optimism of 1820.[100]

> 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 civilization and social improvement.[101]

The brief impulsive composition which makes the poem "a mere improvise" is attributed to "the intense sympathy which the Author feels with the cause he would celebrate".[102] The politically-aware members of Shelley's immediate circle at Pisa including Mavrocordatos, the friend of Mary to whom the poem is dedicated, clearly saw that to ignore the cause of modern Greece was to repudiate the sources of Western culture itself:

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99 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 408.

100 See Mary Shelley's "Note on Hellas"; "Almost against reason, as it appeared to him, he resolved to believe that Greece would prove triumphant; and in this spirit, auguring ultimate good, yet grieving over the vicissitudes to be endured in the interval, he composed his drama", Hutchinson, 481.

101 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 408.

102 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 407-408.

> We are all Greeks - our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece. But for Greece, Rome, the instructor, 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 instituti on as China and Japan possess.[103]

The literal rationale for such optimism is less important than the messianic historicism which amounts to a Hellenic version of the Second Coming. Shelley has paradoxically to insist on the "inimitable imitation" which is so relevant to the German Romantic concept of Ancient Greece; "The modern Greek is the descendant of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our Kind."[104] This unbreachable difference between ancient and modern is necessary to Shelley's sublime sense of the Greek, but has the advantage of being combined with what he anticipated to be a historically inevitable goal. He can use the political situation to argue that the interests of the establishment are ill-served by "the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilization".

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103 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 409.

104 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 409.

For poetic purposes, Shelley's drama is merely an aspect of the drama of the age. The political consequences of ignoring "the great drama of the revival of liberty" are that a numerical advantage will be established: "a new race has arisen throughout Europe, nursed in the abhorrence of the opinions which are its chains, and she will continue to produce fresh generations to accomplish that destiny which tyrants foresee and dread".[105] These sentiments clearly echo that sense of optimism in the summer of 1820 which Shelley mythologises in terms of contemporary European history,

> ...Well do the 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.-[106]

The Prologue to Shelley's Hellas, represents the more poetical dimension of Shelley's intention in the drama.[107] He conflates the figure of Christ with the Greek ideal in order to achieve a vision

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105 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 410.

106 Preface to Hellas, Norton, 410.

107 Hutchinson, 448-452.

of the Hellenic spirit shorn of those dimensions of Hebraic vindictiveness.[108] Christ articulates the revival of Greece in terms of Christian love and unity, "The spirit of Thy love which paves for them/ Their path o'er the abyss, till every sphere/ Shall be one living Spirit,- so shall Greece" (117-119). Satan sees the situation entirely cynically as merely part of the cycle of wars and imperial struggle:

> Go, thou Viceregent of my will, no less
> Than of the Father's; but lest thou shouldst faint,
> The winged hounds, Famine and Pestilence,
> Shall wait on thee, the hundred-forked snake
> Insatiate Superstition still shall...("Prologue," 142-146)

It is precisely this negative vision that appals Christ. Shelley in allowing Satan to be refuted also denies his own previous cyclical view of history, in his anxious quest for a firm source of hope in an ideal:

> ....Obdurate spirit!
> Thou seest but the Past in the To-come.
> Pride is thy error and thy punishment.
> Boast not thine empire, dream not that thy worlds
> Are more than furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops
> Before the Power that wields and kindles them. ("Prologue," 160-165)

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108 See Shelley's note: "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", Hutchinson, 478.

Christ's visionary view of history, then, transcends the immediate moment and seeks for a notion of historical truth in the mind:

> True greatness asks not space, true excellence
> Lives in the Spirit of all things that live,
> Which lends it to the worlds thou callest thine. ("Prologue," 166-168)

The Prologue foreshadows a tripartite dramatic division. Satan's obsession with mortal weakness and imperialist ambition in which the historical future is foreseen to be destructive is set against Mahomet's misplaced confidence in the ideal unity of religious conviction and imperialist ambition. On the third, highest level is Christ's denial of mortal weakness and his faith both in the transcendent image of Greece as an ideal which extends beyond the phenomenal world.

In the first scene, Hassan describes to Mahmud the battles fought between Greeks and the Turks of the Ottoman Empire; the "gloomy vision" which haunts the tyrant is to be answered by Ahasuerus who is presented from the beginning as the externalised source of historical knowledge. As Hassan describes him:

> ...from his eyes looks forth
> A life of unconsumed thought which pierces
> The present, and the past, and the to-come
> .....others dream
> ...He was preadamite and has survived
> Cycles of generation and of ruin...
> ...[he] May have attained to sovreignty and science
> Over those strong and secret things and thoughts
> Which others fear and know not.(146-148; 152-154; 159-161)

Ahasuerus, like Demogorgon, is no crude foreteller of the future, but merely a result and embodiment of profound reflection, "Thou art as God whom thou contemplatest" (761);

> 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 slave of this low sphere,
> And all its narrow circles - it is much -...(745-750)

The exchange mirrors that in the prologue between Christ, Mahomet and Satan. Here Ahasuerus acts as the Christ figure arguing for faith in the transcendent world, the noumenal realm of unity in which "Nought is but that which feels itself to be" (785). Ahasuerus's speech fills Mahmud with "Doubt, insecurity, astonishment" (791) since all externalised reference is abandoned; "what has thought/ To do with time or place or circumstance?" (801-802). Ahasuerus merely realises the insecurities already present in Mahmud's mind rather than introducing any further of his own. Even the invocation of the spirit of Mahomet the Second is seen in terms of a communing with "That portion of thyself which was ere thou/ Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death..." (855-856). It is therefore close to Prometheus's summoning of his curse. Counterpointed against the imminent fall of Islam predicted by Mahomet, is the victory of the Turkish army which thereby confronts all possible confidence with the reality of death, as Mahmud acknowledges; "I must rebuke/ This drunkenness of triumph ere it die/ And dying, bring despair..." (928-930). The victorious final stanzas show the final triumph of Greece:

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. (1002-1007)

Shelley's vision of Ancient Greece is given a divine status which reflects his desperate need to assert the timeless values it embodied. Hellas, written two years after the visit to the Uffizi and four years after the Marlow summer, seems to reflect a changing emphasis in his attitude to Greece. He moves closer to a pure and absolute image of Greece which is intellectual and poetic whereas his earlier perception was made through practical experience. In the Odes and Hellas, which all use Ancient Greece as a model for political freedom, the Hellenic ideal is evoked as an absolute and powerful image of the past which could paradoxically represent the best interests of Christianity.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined Shelley's attitude towards Ancient Greece with the purpose of revaluating his position in relation to the concept of Romantic Hellenism. It has established that Shelley's view of the classical world was primarily formed during his direct experiences of visiting the ruins at Rome, Paestum, Pompeii. In beholding the natural environment of classical civilisation, he understood the deification of the natural world by primitive cultures. Bacchus represents the freedom of Nature both

in the physical world and in human feeling but also symbolises the antithesis to the Hellenic concept of reason and authority.

Shelley's view of Ancient Greece as a living force is encapsulated in his view that "What the Greeks were was a reality not a promise". In relation to the instability in southern Europe in 1819-20, this reality seemed about to reassert itself, as poems such as the "Ode to Liberty" proclaim. Yet his final major work associated with Greece, Hellas, seems at once more abstract and idealised. Greece is invoked as an imagined construct symbolising the values of freedom and wisdom absent from contemporary Europe which Shelley saw as the domain of the poet to treasure and express.

Although there is a clear interest in Ancient Greece amongst many European Romantics in this period, Shelley's view can be contrasted to that of Schiller and A. W. Schlegel who viewed the literature and culture of the Ancients as inferior to the modern consciousness and spirituality. Shelley does not reflect these German Romantics' critical view of the perfect cultural and artistic form of the Greeks as a limitation. For Shelley, in fact, the modern poet's desire for transcendence is not an expression of his superiority to the Greeks but rather a necessary urge to achieve that form of political freedom by which the Greeks were governed. Shelley's interest in Greek society is therefore primarily historical, and artistic products are seen to reflect the political freedom of the society. He regards the democracy of the polis as an urgently relevant historical model, which had once been realised, of how society should be governed. To that extent, his Hellenic ideal was based on actual experience. However, as the political situation

in Europe at the end of 1821 became less hopeful, his image of Ancient Greece became more idealised and abstract. In Hellas, Ancient Greece is a repository in which to invest the essentialist and idealist claims of visionary poetry which is obliged to transcend a historical situation that seemed at the least doubtful, and possibly catastrophic, to the cause which Shelley proclaimed.

CHAPTER 6

SHELLEY'S THEORY OF POETRY

6.0 Introduction: Shelley's poetics; idealism and relativism

6.1 Shelley's theory of universal imagination: philosophy, language and morality: "On Life"; "Speculations on Metaphysics"; "Speculations on Morals"

6.2 Shelley's theory of Love and the idealist tradition: "On Love", The Symposium

6.3 Poetry as philosophical history: "Ode to Liberty", A Philosophical View of Reform; A Defence of Poetry

6.4 Conclusion

6.0 Introduction: Shelley's poetics; idealism and relativism

This chapter argues that Shelley's definition of poetry can be seen to revise the view of literature as purely an adjunct to civilisation, consonant with the values of an educated society, as propounded by the "philosophical" or "conjectural" historians such as Gibbon and Robertson. Instead, the poet is argued by Shelley to be instrumental to the moral and political development of civil society. The ideal realm of poetry, like Schiller's aesthetic realm, is synonymous with the controlling force of moral good through which history is judged but also in A Philosophical View of Reform and A Defence, poetry can be seen to have played an instrumental role in the history of political freedom. These claims are made within the context of his attitude to contemporary historical events, and when the events become a source of doubt and despair, as often in the period 1820-22, Shelley reaches for the absolute ideal of poetry with urgency. Thus his theory of history combines Enlightenment relativism with an absolute faith in the idealism of poetry. The "myth" of the origins and role of poetry in history in A Defence are evidence of how Shelley's perception of poetry, like his use of mythology, was determined by the historical moment in which he wrote.

Shelley's theory of history owes much to the Enlightenment interest in secular, republican societies most influentially described in the work of Gibbon. Shelley had absorbed this tradition of Enlightenment history-writing through his evident interest in the historical past, and in particular his detailed

analysis of Greek republican society. His theory of the development of poetry, however, relates to the universal fictions of origins which form an essential aspect of poems like "The Witch" and determine his ideal image of Ancient Greece. Although his philosophical bearings were formulated in the scepticist tradition of the eighteenth century, the idealist claims for poetry in A Defence appear to draw on the opposite philosophical tradition deriving from Plato and many critics see this idealist allegiance as exclusive of any historical evaluation of poetry.[1] The following analysis, however, shows that literary history and the history of poetry in relation to society co-exist for Shelley with his political claims for freedom. Recent formalist studies of his theory of poetry in the context of language theory understate the absolute claims for poetic form and content which are made in A Defence.[2] Even the deconstructionist position attempts to deny the stated claims for a "transcendental signified" which Shelley makes through the term "poetry".[3] However, Shelley's unease about words

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1 For Platonist interpretations of A Defence see M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic theory and the Critical Tradition, (Oxford: OUP, 1953), 126-131 and Tracy Ware, "Shelley's Platonism in A Defence of Poetry," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900 (Rice University) 23 (1983), 549-566. For post-Kantian interpretations of the idealism of A Defence see Wasserman, Critical Reading, 204-220.

2 See earlier discussion in Chapter 1. For useful readings of A Defence in terms of contemporary language theory, see Keach, 1-41, and Cronin Shelley's Poetic Thoughts, 1-38.

3 For the view that Shelley is writing self-consciously about the destabilising of linguistic meaning in a fashion which anticipates Derrida, see Jerrold Hogle, "Shelley's Poetics: The Power as Metaphor," KSJ 31 (1982), 159-197.

having fixed meanings should be seen more as an anxiety which results from his idealism rather than as a celebration of the provisionality of meaning which characterises Nietzschean deconstruction.

Angela Leighton uses a philosophical model to explain Shelley's poetic theory. She traces a particular dimension of the transition in the history of philosophy in the eighteenth century from preoccupations with the representation of the world through sense-perception, to a more inward interest in the sublime, which to philosophers such as Burke and Kant is a measure of the failure of reason to explain the workings of the mind in its most excited state. Her account of his idealism is courageous in its attempt to argue that a faith in poetry functions as a displacement of the religious faith he eschewed, and provides a context in which to set up the apparent contradictions in his writing:

> The real debate in these [early] letters is not so much between atheism and Christianity, but between the two kinds of discourse they presume. The problem which confronts Shelley at this stage, and which he will confront again in Peacock's "The Four Ages of Poetry," is that the language of reason is progressive, while the language of poetry is reactionary.[4]

In other words, Shelley is already implicated in an aesthetic and political paradox by the very fact that he has chosen the philosophy of sense-perception to refute Christianity. This, somewhat

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4 Leighton, 32-33.

ironically, forces him into an aesthetic tradition which seeks to explain art through an appeal to the sublime workings of a Creator, either the divinity of revealed religion, or, more preferably for Shelley, the figure of the poet. Yet this explanation of the process of artistic composition and mediation is only one aspect of Shelley's defence of poetry, and both within A Defence and elsewhere, a defence of poetry in terms of history and morality is argued. Shelley's theory of the imagination not only refers to theories of language and the mind, but relates to historical consciousness and a theory of social development.

While he borrows his political ideas from the native republican tradition, his brand of philosophical history bears comparison with the continental theories of the development of society. The late eighteenth-century view of historical development as the expression of the aesthetic, cultural and philosophical character of a society in the work of Herder and Hegel, and the relationship between the aesthetic realm and historical consciousness in Schiller's Aesthetic Letters are both ideas recognisable in Shelley's various writings on poetry.[5] In the "Ode to Liberty" and A Philosophical View of Reform he presents a spirit of history of which poetry is both the initiator and the expression, the cause and the effect. In his

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5 See J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture, ed., introd., and trans., F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: CUP, 1969) and G. W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History, trans. H. B. Nisbet, introd. Duncan Forbes (Cambridge: CUP, 1975).

reply to Peacock's satirical attack on its barbarism in the modern age, "poetry" is seen as the essence and expression of a culture, in a similar way to the definition of the "spirit" of a culture or age in the work of Herder and Hegel. It is within such a definition that Shelley's phrase, "the true Poetry of Rome lived in its institutions" can be understood.[6].

The method by which Shelley justifies his vocation in Adonais and A Defence is through demanding self-denial: poets are martyrs to the future, and necessarily misunderstood in their own age, their true value and insights being realised at a future date. Shelley invents a tradition whose members are destroyed only to be recovered later when it becomes clear to such a poet as himself, that they have actively contributed towards that tradition and related to other poets within it. The sense of poetry as co-terminous with historical consciousness is also crucial to the assertion of artistic freedom, and, as was argued in Chapter 5, to the creation of ideals which are both political and aesthetic. This is stated in his poetry as well as prose. In formal structure and in tone, Adonais incorporates classical culture in the image of Rome (424-468) within the definition of an idealised and eternal role for the poet. The realm of poetry is neither obscured by nostalgia, since it is always developing even when the poet is dead, nor is it detached from the continuity of a political tradition. Such

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6 Defence, Norton, 494

idealised claims for a poetical tradition develop in the work of Arnold and Eliot into fully-fledged defences of a different definition of culture to that of the classical republican values which Shelley idealised.

The following interpretation of Shelley's later view of poetry argues that it is not the subliminal return of displaced religious ideas which haunts his sympathies with the analytical tradition, but rather an attempt to conjoin an absolute idealism and a historical relativism. There is a development away from an individualistic and personal theory of the imagination, a pure idealism of the kind advanced in the summer of 1818, towards a more historicist vision of the role of the imagination which is most lucidly articulated in A Defence. The essentialist justification of poetry influences Shelley's view of history. As the historical events of 1820-21 around him become less easy to interpret optimistically so the idealist claims become more exaggerated. The strain of this conflict is best expressed in "The Triumph of Life".

In section 6.1 I consider Shelley's theory of the imagination within the context of eighteenth-century definitions of the term, and argue that the distinguishing characteristic of his theory of language, of mind and of morals is a quest for the universality of different kinds of idealism. The power of the imagination is particularly important in the English and Scottish tradition of philosophical history and theories of the development of civil society. In section 6.2. I relate the definition of poetry to Shelley's view of Love as explored in his translation of Plato's Symposium. In section 6.3, I show how Shelley seems on the one

hand, worried by the consequences of an over-refined analytic philosophy of the imagination and, on the other, dissatisfied with an interest in the past for its own sake. To explain the mind is to explain future possibility. To look back to historical examples or patterns is to be conscious of the value of introducing an essentially idealistic or epochal sense of movement, rather than noting isolated particularities. The role of the poet and the definition of poetry in A Defence is moral and even legislative as well as aesthetic.

6.1 Shelley's theory of universal imagination: philosophy, language, and morality: "On Life," "Speculations on Metaphysics," and "Speculations on Morals."

Three theoretical topics illuminate the theory of imagination which Shelley develops after 1818: the mind, language, and morality. The imagination is given an absolute authority in all three areas in A Defence which is then applied to Shelley's concept of the influence of poetry on history. His theories of mind, language and morality are defined through the concept of "poetry" which arises out of these claims for the imagination. The ideal character of the term "poetry" takes several forms. First, it is related to "the intellectual philosophy" which Shelley increasingly interprets in terms of a liberation from the mind's restrictive ties to the external world of sense-impressions in empirical philosophy. This idealism is also necessary in order to overcome his disappointment with contemporary historical events and to restore the faith

necessary to effect political change. Second, his idealist theory of the poetry of all languages in their origins, and the access of the poet to the pure expression of truth in primitive language, effectively permits him to argue that the poet has unique access to an authentic and primal understanding of language through which consciousness can be changed. Finally, the imagination represents the best aspects of human morality and can be seen as performing a guiding role in the history of civil society.

Shelley's theory of the imagination and of the role of the poet develops in part through his understanding of the operations of the mind. "On Life" provides the standard account of Shelley's philosophical allegiances which move from a crude materialism to "the intellectual philosophy" which he had encountered with admiration in Drummond's Academical Questions, discussed above in Chapter 2.[7] Shelley's attraction to the "intellectual system" is greater than his stated claim that it establishes that nothing exists except as it is perceived; it grants a degree of autonomy to the mind provided that perception plays the crucial role in that autonomy. Most important, it permits a degree of initiative to the human mind as offered in "Mont Blanc" which is neither a simple faith in God nor in the arbitrary power of matter.

In "On Life" he recounts his disillusion with "the popular philosophy of mind and matter" which had "fatal consequences in

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7 "the intellectual philosophy," is described in "On Life," Norton, 477. See Chapter 2.1. See Frederick L. Jones, "Shelley's "On Life," PMLA 62 (1947), 774-83. The date of the manuscript is much debated, but P. M. S. Dawson states 1819.

morals" because of its "violent dogmatism".[8] This "common-sense" view which separates the mind from the world outside, implies that an independent Creator is responsible for the universe.[9] Like the materialist philosophy which he consequently abandons, this presents a view of history as beyond human understanding, an argument which Shelley found frustrating as his desperate search for faith in "Mont Blanc" showed. His interest in a science of the mind, however, has an empirical basis perhaps because he sought tangible results from it in the historical domain.[10] But fundamentally for Shelley the imagination was an irrefutable aspect of human experience which philosophy had to account for;

> ...man is a being of high aspirations "looking both before and after," whose "thoughts that wander through eternity" disclaim alliance with transience and decay, incapable of imagining to himself annihilation, existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be.[11]

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8 "On Life," Norton, 476.

9 For scepticism about knowing causes, see "On Life," Norton, 478, and "Speculations on Metaphysics," Julian, vii, 59, "beyond the limits of perception and of thought nothing can exist."

10 See "Speculations on Metaphysics," "Let us contemplate facts. Let me repeat that in the great study of ourselves we ought resolutely to compel the mind to a rigid examination of itself. Let us in the science which regards those laws by which the mind acts, as well as in those which regards the laws by which it is acted upon, severely collect those facts", Julian, vii, 62-63.

11 On Life, Norton, 476.

This is essentially the predicament of the poet figure in Alastor who has no control over his destiny. Yet it also serves as an apt description of the way Shelley justified his recourse to the ideal as a consequence of the discomfort of the poet with the real world.

Shelley is, however, sufficiently persuaded by the empiricist tradition to maintain a belief expressed in both "On Life" and "Speculations on Metaphysics" that the mind "cannot create, it can only perceive".[12] The empiricist view was essential to deny the existence of God to his father in 1810, but some degree of autonomy for the mind was necessary to support his faith in the connection between the political world and his visionary poetical faith. However, his idealism is to be distinguished from the available models in eighteenth-century philosophy, and especially what has been termed misleadingly an "atheistic rendering of Berkeley".[13] Clearly Berkeley's basic defence of idealism in terms of God is not only incompatible with Shelley's atheism, but also with his need for an idealism which permits the possibility of change.

In A Defence he throws off the shackles of empiricism completely by using the stress on perception in eighteenth-century

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12 "On Life," Norton, 478. See "Speculations on Metaphysics," "we can think of nothing which we have not perceived," Julian, vii, 59.

13 Wasserman, Critical Reading, 136.

philosophy to justify, not to undermine, a free rein for the imagination; "All things exist as they are perceived: 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.""[14] Ultimately philosophy plays a secondary role to the primary purpose of elaborating the consequences of the freedom suggested by such a definition of the powers of the imagination. The "intellectual system" is largely seen in negative terms; it merely establishes the limitations of the mind.[15] The mistakes which philosophy explodes are important, but its claims for arriving at truths are provisional only:

> ...it destroys error, and the roots of error. It leaves, what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy. It reduces the mind to that freedom in which it would have acted, but for the misuse of words and signs, the instruments of its own creation.[16]

The idealist emphasis of Shelley's later philosophical views is explicit in the opening distinction in A Defence between the synthesising and universalising powers of the imagination on the one

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14 Milton, Paradise Lost, I, 254-255, Defence, Norton, 505.

15 "On Life," Norton, 476.

16 "On Life," Norton, 477. See also "Speculations on Morals," "metaphysical science will be treated merely so far as a source of negative truth", Julian, vii, 71.

hand, and the analytical and particularising force of reason on the other.[17] Similarly "Life" in the earlier essay, signals a protest against the idea that we are tied to sense impressions in a purely passive way which eventually makes all sensation familiar and ultimately deadening; in other words, it confirms his unease with a purely empiricist explanation of our minds.[18] Rather "Life" is an inner power of mind which can alter and heighten our perception. In A Defence it is poetry which performs this liberating role: "But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions".[19]

Shelley's philosophical background taught him to explain the

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17 Defence, Norton, 480. Compare Coleridge's definition of the synthesising qualities of the primary and secondary imagination, Biographia Literaria with Aesthetical Essays, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (London: OUP, 1907), i, 202; and Wordsworth's rejection of purely mechanical understanding, "Imagination, in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following Poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws", Preface to Poems (1815), . Owen and Smyser, iii, 30-31.

18 "The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life, which though startling to the apprehension is in fact that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us", "On Life," Norton, 476.

19 Defence, Norton, 505. The idea of the poet as capable of defamiliarising is present in Wordsworth, "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present", Preface to Lyrical Ballads, ed. Brett and Jones, 255-256, and in Shelley, Defence, Norton, 505-506.

world through an empiricism with which he was always uncomfortable. As the imagery of veils and masks in his poetry constantly suggests, the antithesis to the world of experience is a realm of constant values impermeable to history yet sensed by us in dreams or moments of acute joy or pain. Shelley later locates this ideal world beyond actuality, in a transcendent realm, "what has thought/ To do with time or place or circumstance?".[20] This unattainable ideal performs a crucial function in visionary political poems such as Hellas, yet there is also a more personal sense in which Shelley is uncomfortable with the empiricist explanation of the mind even if in rational terms he understood it. Writing to Peacock after arriving in Italy, he views memory as binding the self to the past in an imprisoning way:

> 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 the earth, & when, persuaded by some necessity you think to leave it, you leave it not,- it clings to you & 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 has been, seems yet to be, but barren & stript of life. See, I have sent you a study for Night Mare Abbey.[21]

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20 Hellas (801-802). See also "The words, *I*, *you*, *they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind", "On Life," Norton, 477-478.

21 L462, To TLP, 20 April 1818, Letters, ii, 6.

Although he can invent an imaginative realm which is invulnerable to actuality, he recognises that human memory is invariably a source of doubt rather than optimism. Memory in some sense is the negation of "life", as defined in "On Life". The skeletal forms in "The Triumph of Life" are lifeless because the poet recognises that human identity is subject to erosion. The urgent task for the imagination is to have access to a realm of ideal thought which will offset its despair at the personal and historical reality to which it is subject.

Shelley's theory of the crucial role which poetry performs in the development of language, contributes to a wider myth of origins similar to the preoccupations of poems such as "The Witch of Atlas". The history of language, like mythology, was notoriously used by theologians, to disprove the force of polytheism and to argue that the only pure language was that of the Bible. Shelley creates a myth of primitive language which gives it the status of poetry, and this creative force initiates development through creating new forms of thought. In the origins of the world, all primitive language <u>is</u> poetry, since it is constantly creating new expressions for ideas:

> 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.[22]

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22 <u>Defence</u>, <u>Norton</u>, 482. Compare Rousseau, "Essay on the Origins of Languages," in <u>On the Origin of Language</u>, trans., with afterwords,

This secular argument which connects the form of the poetry of the ancient world with a sublime content is used by Lowth in his appreciation of the divine poetry of the Hebrews.[23] Shelley goes further in his claim that language, like the poet, retains the essential value of the thought which it expresses at the same time as providing the ideas through which society may develop. Language is presented as an ideal and invulnerable realm which is essentially poetic but sadly has been corrupted by later concepts of its meaning and form. Just as poetry is placed in opposition to the mechanical understanding, so it is opposed to grammar:

> 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 are the works of a later age, and are merely the catalogue and the form of the creations of Poetry.[24]

John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, introd. Alexander Gode (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), Rousseau comments, "Figurative language was the first to be born...At first only poetry was spoken; there was no hint of reasoning until much later", 12. Coleridge is sceptical about the claims for a pure original language: "Anterior to cultivation, the lingua communis of every country, as Dante has well observed, exists every where in parts, and no where as a whole", Biographia, ed. Shawcross ii, 42.

23 See Lowth, Lectures, "The origin and first use of poetical language are undoubtedly to be traced into the vehement affections of the mind", i, 79.

24 Defence, Norton, 482.

Shelley sees poetic language as instrumental in permitting the advance of intellectual thought. The poet is conscious of the ideal origins of language which makes his own usage "vitally metaphorical".[25] Poetic language is therefore linked with an authentic and lasting meaning:

> · 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;...[26]

The poet in A Defence is, then, both creator and perceiver, a somewhat distinct emphasis from "On Life" where "mind cannot create; it can only perceive." In A Defence the emphasis is on the need for the poet to revitalise language, and for poetry to be seen as expressive of ideas which are living rather than a dead arrangement of words abused of their meaning by custom. This evolutionary theory of poetry is present in later theories of literary history, such as that of the Russian Formalist Tynjanov who argues that poetry develops through a continual revolution of form.[27] The

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25 Defence, Norton, 482.

26 Defence, Norton, 482.

27 See Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1971), 66-78.

criterion for the definition of poetry is not that it is different from prose; "the distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error."[28]

Shelley also viewed the imagination as a moral agency, a role which it had been accorded by Scottish eighteenth-century philosophers and moral theorists.[29] The following passage in A Defence reflects this tradition but can be seen to revise the emphasis:

> 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.[30]

The imagination performs a necessary function both in the life of the individual and society, but in Shelley's argument that the

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28 Defence, Norton, 484. Shelley once again is closer to Wordsworth in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, ed. Brett and Jones, 253, than to Coleridge's strictures which attack explicitly the idea that "a composition may be poetical without the composition as a whole being a poem" (Defence, Norton, 485), Biographia Literaria, ed. Shawcross, ii, 41.

29 See Roy R. Male, jr., "Shelley and the Doctrine of Sympathy," University of Texas Studies in English 29 (1950), 183-203, on the influence of the Scottish philosophers' definition of sympathy and its influence on Shelley's theory of the imagination.

30 Defence, Norton, 487-488.

source of virtue is partly innate can be detected an aspect of his idealist anxiety.[31] As humanity becomes more knowledgeable and therefore more civilised, its powers of imagination and therefore its benevolence increase;

> the inhabitant of a highly civilised community will more acutely sympathise with the sufferings and enjoyments of others, than the inhabitant of a society of a less degree of civilisation.[32]

But this view is combined with the Scottish philosophers' beliefs that the development of the human instinct to be benevolent is related to the civilisation of his society.[33]. Civilisation is

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31 The idea that benevolent propensities are inherent in the human mind permits Shelley to believe that firm, scientific conclusions can be made about morality. Metaphysical theories of the mind are altogether less certain and interesting, "metaphysical science will be treated merely so far as a source of negative truth; whilst morality will be considered as a science, respecting which we can arrive at positive conclusions", "Speculations on Morals", Julian, vii, 71. He also emphasises that virtue originates in the mind, as opposed to arising uniquely from the social relations of civil society, see Julian, vii, 74. Compare Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" "the public use of one's reason must always be free and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men", German aesthetic and literary criticism, ed. Simpson, 31.

32 "Speculations on Morals," Julian, vii, 75.

33 For influence of Hutcheson and Hume on Smith's theory of sympathy see Introduction to Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. McFie, Vol. 1 of The Glasgow edition of the works and correspondence of Adam Smith (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1976), 10-15.

presented by these philosophers as dependent upon the moral role which the imagination and the associated concept of sympathy play. Shelley therefore endorsed the view of an established philosophical tradition which saw the imagination as essential to moral virtue:

> the only distinction between the selfish man, and the virtuous man is that the imagination of the former is confined within a narrow limit whilst that of the latter embraces a comprehensive circumference...Virtue is thus entirely a refinement of civilised life; a creation of the human mind or rather a combination which it has made, according to elementary rules contained within itself, of the feelings suggested by the relations established between man and man.[34]

Shelley's theory of the imagination as advanced in A Defence is therefore related to some of the premises of the eighteenth-century philosophical historians whose theories of society developed in conjunction with the contemporary view of the integral role of the imagination and sympathy in social development.[35] In this tradition, the development of society depends upon the role of civic responsibility and virtue. The primitive era, when the mind mirrors the natural environment in its credulity, shows no evidence of the imagination performing a moral or civic function. But Shelley ensures that his idealist faith in the absolute powers of the mind

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34 "Speculations on Morals," Julian, vii, 75-76.

35 See Duncan Forbes, "Scientific Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar," Cambridge Journal 7 (1954), 643-670; Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 58 (1967), 1635-1658.

is also a pre-condition of such development. For Shelley, unlike the philosophers and historians of the eighteenth century for whom civil society is the key to progress, imagination is already latent in the origins of the world awaiting manifestation in the later historical development of society. Origins for Shelley are, as the analysis of "The Witch of Atlas" has demonstrated, related to the assertion of ideal values which replace the limitations of history. Formulations of the past develop out of such myths, of which his theory of poetry is one:

> The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develope 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.[36]

The imagination is an eternal and active principle which provides the initiative for society to exist. Shelley argues that the imagination has performed a historical role in contributing to the progress of society recounted by the Enlightenment. The term "poetry" is thus associated with the origins of humanity and performs an instrumental role in its civilisation. Even in "the youth of the world", a sense of artistic value exists, and poets "in

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36 Defence, Norton, 481.

the most universal sense of the word" are those best able to approximate to the beautiful ideals of the mind:[37]

> ...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.[38]

Through asserting the primary role of poetry in the development of language and civil society, Shelley can make claims which are both idealist and historical.

6.2 Shelley's theory of love and the idealist tradition: "On Love", The Symposium.

The development of the concept of the imagination in A Defence to include moral and civic values is established also through Shelley's definition of love which develops in his translation of The Symposium in the summer of 1818. Love is argued to have similar capacities to the imagination; it is the mind's ability to create ideal forms which answer to its emotional needs. In A Defence the emphasis is different. The poet's imagination, as has been shown,

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37 Defence, Norton, 481, 482.

38 Defence, Norton, 482.

is called upon to perform a moral role in the formation of society and love is equivalent to this moral responsibility without which society falls prey to the purely utilitarian view of the "calculating principle".[39]

The fragment entitled "On Love" reflects an early stage in the affinity which Shelley posits between love and the imagination. Although its tone resembles that of Alastor and the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", in which human love is impossible or painful in life and can be fulfilled only through dream or death, textual critics argue that its date is co-temporaneous with his translation of The Symposium.[40] In "On Love", the quest for the answering image of "the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man" which Shelley argues exists in "our intellectual nature," is a source of agony rather than hope because it accentuates the division

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39 Reiman argues that the primary source of "On Love" is the definition of sympathy in Hume's Treatise and Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, based on Male's argument in "Shelley and the doctrine of Sympathy," that Shelley reads Plato's Symposium in the summer of 1818 with Smith in mind, extending Smith's idea of the imagination as an essentially moral agency to the Platonic explanation of the highest form of love, the recognition of the beautiful (ie. the good) in another person, see SC488, Circle, vi, 633-647.

40 See Reiman, SC488, Circle, vi, 633-647. Reiman argues that "On Love" is probably a false start to the Preface to the Symposium which was abandoned and subsituted by "A Discourse", and it therefore dates from the Bagni di Lucca period of summer 1818. It is relevant that the Ms. is in Mary's hand since it accords uncannily with her journal entry of 25 Feb. 1822, Journals, i, 399-400.

between the actual and ideal self.[41] This essence of the self, "a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap," contains not only its best qualities but the seeds of the difficulty in finding an answering image:[42]

> The discovery of its antitype...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 or respite to the heart over which it rules.[43]

This is the language of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" in which the union of ideal spirit and searching mind is impossible just as the quest of the soul in Alastor is curtailed by lack of any reciprocating love.

The disjunction between the ideal and real worlds, between life and death is overcome by the insight afforded to Shelley through Plato's definition of love in 1818 which could be converted and applied to poetry in 1821. In translating The Symposium Shelley extends the definition of love provided by Diotima into a defence of

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41 "On Love," Norton, 473-474.

42 "On Love," Norton, 474.

43 "On Love," Norton, 474.

art and poetry. It remains somewhat baffling that while writing A Defence and Adonais he was able to ignore the repeated references to the dangers of artistic freedom in Ion and The Republic which he was reading and translating at the time.[44] Diotima offers a solution to this dilemma by directing love towards social and civic ends and thereby providing a concrete solution to "the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends". In A Defence poetry is described in similar terms, as an internal resource; "it equally creates for us a being within our being."[45] In introducing The Symposium Shelley saw how Plato provides a model in which the frustration of desire can be turned away from the self and towards the public and historical sphere.

"A Discourse" explains the the role of love and its relation to tolerance in classical republican society. Shelley uses the classical model implicitly to criticise the modern Christian hostility to sexuality which he satirised in such poems as Peter Bell the Third. "A Discourse" defines love as a concept which is more universal and impersonal and more certain of the role of love in the formation of civil society:

> Man is in his wildest state a social being: a certain degree of civilisation and refinement ever produces the want of

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44 For reading and translation of Republic see dates in Notopoulos, 619, and for Ion, see dates in Notopoulos, 621.

45 Defence, Norton, 505.

> sympathies still more intimate and complete; and the gratification of the senses is no longer all that is sought in sexual connexion. It soon becomes a very small part of that profound and complicated sentiment, which we call Love, which is rather the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive; and which, when individualised, becomes an imperious necessity, only to be satisfied by the complete or partial, actual or supposed, fulfilment of its claims.[46]

Shelley begins to define desire in the terms in which imagination is defined later in A Defence. He associates love, like imagination, with the civilisation of society, "The want grows more powerful in proportion to the developement which our nature receives from civilisation; for man never ceases to be a social being."[47]

Plato's quite public definition of love as a form of social duty is consolidated by Shelley's explanation of love as a consequence of the laws of the mind. Love, like imagination, signals a freedom from formal constraints; its ideal propensities can be understood through many forms, as Diotima stresses,

> and if he ought to pursue that which is beautiful in form, it would be absurd to imagine that beauty is not one and the same thing in all forms, and would therefore remit much of his ardent preference towards one, through his perception of the multitude of claims upon his love.[48]

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46 Notopoulos, 408.

47 Notopoulos, 408.

48 The Symposium, Julian, vii, 205.

Plato directs the mind towards higher forms of good which become more morally useful as they become more abstract and idealised. Shelley's emphasis on the unattainable nature of love, the impossible quest to fulfil desire both on an individual and a social level are answered in Plato's philosophy. However Shelley tries to move further to a stage at which the realisation of ideals may be achieved.

Shelley's claim that Plato was "eminently the greatest among the Greek philosophers" constituted a contentious defence of a philosopher who was regarded dimly in this period.[49] Plato had received poor treatment through Thomas Taylor's translation with which Shelley was familiar.[50] It might be in reference to Taylor that Shelley comments on the misinterpretation of Plato, "those emanations of moral and metaphysical knowledge on which a long series and an incalculable variety of popular superstitions have sheltered their absurdities from the slow contempt of mankind".[51]

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49 "On The Symposium or Preface to the Banquet of Plato, A Fragment," Julian, vii, 161. See M. L. Clarke, Greek Studies in England, 1700-1830 (Cambridge: CUP, 1945), 112-122.

50 Coleridge described Taylor's translation as "incomprehensible English" (cited in Notopoulos, 33), and the Edinburgh Review remarked, "He has not translated Plato; he has travestied him, in the most cruel and abominable manner. He has not elucidated him but covered him over with impenetrable darkness", ER 14 (April 1809), 190.

51 "On The Symposium or Preface to the Banquet of Plato, A Fragment," Julian, vii, 161.

As has been argued in Chapter 3 above, the work of the Marlow group in 1817 embraces the themes of sexuality and love in order to refute the moral assumptions of Taylor's Neoplatonism. Furthermore the idea expressed in The Symposium by Phaedrus and Aristophanes that Love was a mythical force in the creation of the universe, and that humans were originally androgynous, incorporated into "The Witch of Atlas", reflect an opposite tendency to the religious blandishings of the erotic which Taylor exercised.

The Symposium offers the possibility that Love can attain the divine realm as the image of the Heraclean stone in Ion equivocally states with regard to art.[52] The relationship of love to divinity and, by his own translation, to poetry itself, is thus crucial. Shelley turns inwards to the emotions of the self in order to later redefine love in terms of thought. The excitement which he experienced in translating Plato's Symposium can thus be attributed to the possibilities suggested by Diotima's proposal of an interchange between human and divine. Diotima's claims for the semi-divine status of love echo Shelley's view of the imagination as a divine source of energy in A Defence: Love is "A great Daemon, Socrates; and every thing daemoniacal holds an intermediate place between what is divine and what is mortal."[53] Indeed Poetry in the

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52 See "Ion, or, of the Iliad," in Plato: Symposium and other Dialogues, introd. J. Warrington, trans. M. Oakley (1952; London: Dent, 1964), 67-69.

53 "The Banquet" Translated from Plato, Julian, vii, 199. A comparison with a modern translation emphasises Shelley's unique emphasis, "A great spirit, Socrates: for the whole of the spiritual is between divine and mortal", The Symposium in Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1975), 179.

Defence assumes a similar mythical status, that of a demiurge, to that of Love in The Symposium. Diotima's definition of love expresses the unity of human desire and divine wholeness which is realised both in the "intense inane" (III, iv, 204) in the final act of Prometheus, and in the definition of the poet in A Defence;

> He interprets and makes a communication between divine and human things...He fills up that intermediate space between these two classes of beings, so as to bind together, by his own power, the whole universe of things. Through him subsists all divination, and the science of sacred things as it relates to sacrifices, and expiations, and disenchantments, and prophecy, and magic. The divine nature cannot immediately communicate with what is human, but all that intercourse and converse which is conceded by the Gods to men, both whilst they sleep and when they wake, subsists through the intervention of Love; and he who is wise in the science of this intercourse is supremely happy, and participates in the daemonical nature; whilst he who is wise in any other science or art, remains a mere ordinary slave.[54]

Shelley's translation of Diotima's speech with regard to love foreshadows his claims for the poet as the intermediary between the earthly and the divine, a prophet figure granted unique access to the future, in A Defence. Shelley adapts Plato's definition of love to his own wish to promote philosophy and poetry as expressive of a desire for beauty and truth.[55] For Shelley as for Plato, the moral

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54 Julian, vii, 197-198. The Loeb translation of the second sentence cited above gives an even greater sense of the dialectical bind between human and divine: "being midway between, it [Love] makes each to supplement the other, so that the whole is combined in one", 179.

55 This is emphasized by setting Shelley's translation against a modern version, "Love is that which thirsts for the beautiful, so that Love is of necessity a philosopher, philosophy being an intermediate state between ignorance and wisdom", Julian, vii, 199. "So that Love must needs be a friend of wisdom, and, as such, must be between wise and ignorant", Loeb, 183.

dimension to the love of the beautiful is a property of those with philosophical insight, whom Shelley defines as poets. Plato provides a pretext for this in The Symposium, as Shelley's translation shows, "Poetry; which is a general name signifying every cause whereby anything proceeds from that which is not, into that which is...".[56] The second influence of this theory of love on the definition of poetry relates to its powers of generation. For Plato these are defined in abstract terms. For Shelley, this abstract discussion can be used to reflect on the imaginative propensities of the poet in his role as prophet. The ideal imagination of the poet is the form in which the consequences of love is expressed, and this is made fully compatible with the republican values suggested by Plato:

> What is suitable to the soul? Intelligence, and every other power and excellence of the mind; of which all poets, and all other artists who are creative and inventive, are the authors. The greatest and most admirable wisdom is that which regulates the government of families and states, and which is called moderation and justice.[57]

In this sense the myth of the power of Love is developed into a

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56 Julian, vii, 200.

57 Julian, vii, 204. Compare Loeb translation, "Prudence, and virtue in general; and of these the begetters are all the poets and those craftsmen who are styled inventors. Now by far the highest and fairest part of prudence is that which concerns the regulation of cities and habitations; it is called sobriety and justice", 199.

means by which the responsibility to the future, a crucial element of Shelley's theory of poetry, is guaranteed as the most valid feature of the poet's imagination. Creativity is both literal and imaginative:

> Love is the desire of generation in the beautiful, both in relation to the body and the soul...The bodies and the souls of all human beings are alike pregnant with their future progeny, and when we arrive at a certain age, our nature impels us to bring forth and propagate...The intercourse of the male and female in generation, a divine work, through pregnancy and production, is, as it were, something immortal in mortality.[58]

Generation is the desire to overcome death, or in terms of Shelley's definition of the imagination, to offset the sense of the fragmentary, and inadequate, isolated self.[59]

Plato's definition of love realises Shelley's desire that his poetical yearnings for the ideal realm could be matched by a tangible realisation in the present. Love is to be worshipped according to Diotima as a force which can transcend the present moment and fuse with Nature and classical history. In the republics of Greece and Rome by whose history Shelley was fascinated, there is a political manifestation of the values associated with the imagination. His translation of The Symposium demonstrates how

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58 Julian, vii, 201.

59 See Defence, Poetry "is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own", Norton, 504.

close the concept of love could come to his idea of the social and moral power of poetry in its historical role as prophecy.

6.3 Poetry as Philosophical History: "Ode to Liberty," A Philosophical View of Reform and A Defence of Poetry

Shelley's theory of the imagination then combines elements of a philosophy which believes in the powers of experience and sensations, but also in the possibility of converting those passive experiential sensations into an advocation of the power of mind with explicit reference to history;

> A catalogue of all the thoughts of the mind, and of all their possible modifications, is a cyclopedic history of the universe.[60]

To develop the science of the mind will permit the recovery of the experience of the world. It is memory in a fundamental sense which constitutes the basis of history, "we are ourselves then depositories of the evidence of the subject which we consider."[61]

The relationship of memory to the growth of the self is also the theme of the most celebrated Romantic poem, The Prelude, yet unlike Shelley, Wordsworth's poetry and his identity are rooted

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60 "Speculations on Metaphysics," Julian, vii, 59.

61 "Speculations on Metaphysics," Julian, vii, 63. The problem which Shelley confronts is similar to that articulated by Kant in Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (1929; London: Macmillan, 1985) that to be able to describe the workings of our mind we have to be detached from it: "If it were possible to be where we have been vitally, and indeed - if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience, - if the passage from sensation to reflection - from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation, were not so dizzying and so tumultuous, this attempt would be less difficult", Julian, vii, 64.

outside any wider context than the self. The mind grows through its interchange with the natural world, and this development is distracted by Wordsworth's youthful sympathies with the political events he witnessed in France. The Excursion, as was argued in Chapter 2, reinforces the exclusion of the political order by reference to mind and nature in an even more extreme way. The internal debate of Prometheus Unbound revises the view that sublime poetry arises out of an exclusive communion of the mind with nature since Shelley confronts the pains of historical memory and gives poetry a privileged position in the visionary future outlined by Prometheus (III, iv, 49-56). Just as Wordsworth conceives of The Excursion as an intermediary stage towards the greater goal of writing The Recluse, so Shelley in his Preface to Prometheus concedes an ambition to write a universal history of society which he presumably thinks will be of greater practical relevance than his visionary poem:

> Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society; let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Aeschylus rather than Plato as my model.[62]

Shelley is determined that the ideal forms of Plato, rather than the actual suffering of the defeated Titan should serve as a model for

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62 Preface to Prometheus Unbound, Norton, 135.

historical understanding not simply visionary poetry. In an earlier letter to Peacock, written just after he had completed the first act of Prometheus, he implies that the moral and metaphysical speculations discussed above were the essence of such historical understanding.[63] His poetry is merely subsidiary to the greater challenge of synthesising all human knowledge and history into what he terms "moral and political science",

> I consider Poetry very subordinate to moral & political science, & if I were well, certainly I should aspire to the latter; for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discovery of all ages, & harmonising the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt...[64]

Three years later, when he writes A Defence, there is no longer a conflict between moral or political science and poetry. Poetry is a guiding moral force and the initiator of historical change, and it is a necessary counterweight to the unfeeling aspects of science. By 1821 it is therefore no longer a question of poetry being subordinate to the moral and political issues central to history but rather that it now includes, indeed is the best representation of,

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63 Other authorities for Shelley's view of the superiority of poetry to history are Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry," in Classical Literary Criticism, trans. and introd. T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 43-45 and Sidney, A Defence of Poetry, ed. and introd. J. van Dorsten (Oxford: OUP, 1966), 30-31.

64 L491, To TLP, [23-24 Jan. 1819], Letters, ii, 71.

those issues. There is a parallel here with Coleridge's disappointed response to The Excursion which did not, for him, measure up to his interpretation of Wordsworth's wider plan, The Recluse:

> Whatever in Lucretius is Poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not Poetry: and in the very Pride of confident Hope I looked forward to the Recluse, as the first and only true Phil. Poem in existence.[65]

Although arguing from within a different tradition to Coleridge, it is with the same sense of the need for a philosophical theme that Shelley defends poetry.

A significant source of the method and argument of both A Philosophical View of Reform and the "Ode to Liberty" is that of "philosophical" history.[66] Shelley's use of the term "philosophical" in his treatise on reform shows a debt to Gibbon, Robertson and the debate about historical method in the eighteenth-century.[67] Gibbon's theory and practice of

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65 L969, To William Wordsworth, 30 May 1815, The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs, (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956-71), iv, 574. L 6 vols.

66 For general discussion of philosophical history, see Frank E. Manuel, Shapes of Philosophical History (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 70-114, which examines Kant and Condorcet especially; Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Historical Philosophy of the Enlightenment," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 27 (1963), 1667-1687.

67 For discussion about the conflicting views of historical method of antiquarians and philosophical historians, see Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 13 (1950), 285-315, rpt. in Studies in Historiography (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 1-39.

philosophical history, the study of impersonal forces as opposed to that of facts and heroes, is established both in Memoirs of My Life and Essay on the Study of Literature.[68] The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire fascinated Shelley because it explained both the collapse of classical republican civilisation and the rise of Christianity, but Gibbon argues, instructively to Shelley, that the "awful revolution" of the triumph of barbarism and religion "may be usefully applied to the instruction of the present age."[69] For Gibbon, such a history is particularly suited to the climate of the Enlightenment, "I had likewise flattered myself that an age of light and liberty would receive without scandal an enquiry into the human causes of the progress and establishment of Christianity."[70] In addition Gibbon's historical method was attractive to Shelley, because although clearly sophisticated, it appealed to simple insights; "A philosophical genius consists in the capacity of

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68 For important discussions of philosophical history with regard to Gibbon's Essay, see Arnaldo Momigliano, "Gibbon's contribution to Historical Method," Historia 2 (1954), 450-463, rpt. in Studies in Historiography, 40-55; Frank E. Manuel, "Edward Gibbon: Historien-Philosophe," in G. W. Bowersock, J. Clive, and S. R. Graubard, eds., Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1977), 167-181. For a reading of Gibbon's philosophical history within the tradition of Machiavelli, see J. G. A. Pocock, "Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian," in Bowersock et al., 103-119.

69 See "General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West," Decline and Fall, iv, 103-112.

70 Gibbon, Memoirs of My Life, 1796, ed. and introd. B. Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 159.

recurring to the most simple ideas; in discovering and combining the first principles of things."[71] Gibbon's humanism, which he argues is requisite for the historian, is a version of Shelley's theory of the poet's particular suitability to the role of historical conscience:

> Surrounded with imperfect fragments, always concise, often obscure, and sometimes contradictory, he is reduced to collect, to compare, and to conjecture: and though he ought never to place his conjectures in the rank of facts, yet the knowledge of human nature, and of the sure operation of its fierce and unrestrained passions, might, on some occasions, supply the want of historical materials."[72]

Shelley puts forward poetry to answer the problem of the paradox which confronted secular historians of progress like Gibbon. Gibbon was aware that the forces making for refinement in society were also those which induced corruption, yet was also conscious that primitivism was not an acceptable refuge from such a realisation because in prehistory man has no reflective capacity.[73] For Gibbon, and for other Enlightenment historians, savagery accompanies freedom and corruption results from over-refinement:

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71 Gibbon, An Essay on the Study of Literature, trans. from the French by the author (London, 1764), 89-90.

72 Gibbon, Decline and Fall, i, 231.

73 See Pocock, "In so paradoxical a vision of history, there were no golden ages, but only golden moments at which the creative had not yet begun to destroy", Bowersock et al., 105.

> The rise of a city, which swelled into an empire, may deserve, as a singular prodigy, the reflection of a philosophic mind. But the decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight.[74]

Such a historical theory, caught in a paradox in which development leads to corruption, and primitivism is merely barbaric, relies upon a definition of cultural progress outside the commercial sphere; "...the use of letters is the principal circumstance that distinguishes a civilised people from a herd of savages incapable of knowledge or reflection."[75]

Such a view can be distinguished from Robertson's faith in the value of commerce to civilisation in the History of the Reign of Charles V; "Commerce tends to wear off those prejudices which maintain distinction and animosity between nations. It softens and polishes the manners of men."[76] This secular validation of the

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74 Gibbon, Decline and Fall, iv, 104-105.

75 Gibbon, Decline and Fall, i, 212-213.

76 William Robertson, The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V. With a View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the subversion of the Roman Empire, to the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, 3 vols. (London, 1769), i, 81. See also the role of commerce in the rise of Italian city states, i, 32-40.

commercial spirit emerges in a different form in the work of Malthus and the utilitarians in Shelley's own time. Whereas the relationship of commerce to civilised values is regarded as the crucial factor for Robertson, Shelley emphasises poetry as contributing to both the moral and civic fabric of civil society. In his investment in poetry he attempts to overcome the paradox of civilisation leading to corruption noted by Gibbon; poetry will be the true guide to progress, where commerce has failed. The "Ode to Liberty" and the A Philosophical View of Reform stress the interconnection of poetry and liberty in republican history but the idealism in both works shows that Shelley is equally inclined to a view of the spirit of history as an absolute guiding force.

Shelley defined poetry not simply as instrumental in history but also as prophetic. Poetry is a source of permanent truths which can be referred to in order for progress to take place. The poet expresses his ideal vision and futurity will eventually prove his imaginings to come true. He does not see poetry as the equivalent of a Platonic realm of which we remain ignorant because of our mortality. Instead he defers the manifestation of the powers of this realm until a future date. The idea of an immanent model such as the Platonic unchanging form, is balanced by the way that such perfect models are invoked by the poet according to the needs of the historical moment. Shelley's claims are both idealist and relativist; poetry is the essence of all that is perfect and good, yet it is accessible to human society through the realisation of this essence by the morally responsible poet. Although their intellectual sympathies were entirely different, there is an

interesting parallel between the expressionist history of Coleridge's The Statesman's Manual, discussed in chapter 2, and Shelley's attempt to prove poetry to be the source of all historical change. Coleridge's distinction between Hume's history and the poetry of the Bible is founded on the same principle by which Shelley distinguishes a story from a poem:

> 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.[77]

Whereas Coleridge argues for the divinity of history based upon his orthodox Christianity, Shelley founds his theory of the universal power of poetry in the laws of the human mind to which the poet has unique access. Poetry is related to the universal characteristics of human nature and therefore maintains its relevance over time in a way that prose fiction cannot:

> The one [story] is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other [poetry] is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature.[78]

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77 Defence, Norton, 485.

78 Defence, Norton, 485.

Such claims for the pre-eminence of poetry are based on its formal properties but they are applied for historical purposes. If the beautiful and ideal cannot be apprehended in the world then poetry can invent them. An alternative to the actuality of historical circumstance, which for Shelley in 1821 was necessary, can be created by arguing that present sources of despair are merely distortions of the truth: "The 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."[79]

If poetry is given a role which is superior to history, because history is merely a dimension of it, it is also shown to be the best dimension of metaphysical philosophy. Poetry is a vitalised version of the science of the mind in which Shelley had been interested earlier in his life; "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."[80] It is seen as "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own" precisely because it has affinities with the unconscious:

> Poetry, as has been said, in this respect differs from logic, that it is not subject to the controul of the active powers of

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79 Defence, Norton, 485.

80 Defence, Norton, 504.

> the mind, and that its birth and recurrence has 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 insusceptible of being referred to them.[81]

As such, poetry is in fact more true to the spirit of philosophy than philosophy itself; the universal laws which the poet understands are the laws of mind, in their application to history: "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."[82] The poet's claims for universal knowledge are then necessary to historical foresight in which the present can be overruled by the more important claims for the future, "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."[83]

The underlying sense of the justification of this theory of poetry is through the definition of philosophical history advanced in the eighteenth century. The poet is seen to contribute to the spirit of history as expressed in A Philosophical View of Reform,

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81 Defence, Norton, 506.

82 Defence, Norton, 482-483.

83 Defence, Norton, 483.

> For the most unfailing herald, or companion, or follower, of an universal employment of the sentiments of a nation to the production of beneficial change is poetry, meaning by poetry an intense and impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions respecting man and nature.[94]

Poetry is both the cause and effect of social change; the poets can either be the agents of such change through the spirit of the age or by obeying their own spirit, a form of collective unconscious: "they are compelled to serve that which is seated on the throne of their own soul".[95] This emphasis on the prerogative of the poet's unconscious is part of the defence of his earlier claim that "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence"; in the inferior moments of literary history, consciously propagandist art has prevailed, therefore the "poet would do ill to embody his own conception of what is right and wrong."[96]

An important aspect of the universal claims for poetry is its association with the idealised origins of the world. There is also an attempt to match the timeless and ahistorical claims of

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84 Julian, vii, 19.

85 A Philosophical View of Reform, Julian, vii, 20. "The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning", Preface to Prometheus Unbound, l.134. Norton,

86 Defence, Norton, 488. See his comments on Restoration literature, 491.

philosophy since both Plato and Bacon are seen as poets and Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante as "philosophers of the very loftiest power":[87]

> 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.[88]

Poetry as well as poetic language has become a metaphysical and transcendent category which is universalised, yet is also seen in terms of origins. All poems are "episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world."[89] There is an equivalence between poetic originality, the freedom of the poet to create ideas through language, and the origins of society.

A Defence was originally intended as a two-part essay, only the first of which was published. The first part of the essay is seen largely in terms of the universal relevance and application of poetry:

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87 Defence, Norton, 485.

88 Defence, Norton, 485.

89 Defence, Norton, 493.

> 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 an universal sense.[90]

The projected second part appears to be both a defence of form and an extension of some of the ideas included in the imagination, such as love and morality. It is essentially the manifesto of a political argument for the kind of idealist poetry which Shelley had written:

> The second part will have for its object an application of 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.[91]

This may be compared with Schiller's aim at the beginning of the Aesthetic Letters to concern aesthetics and the construction of true political freedom;

> the spirit of philosophical enquiry is being expressly

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90 Defence, Norton, 507.

91 Defence, Norton, 507-508. The last sentence of this passage can be found in a similar context in A Philosophical View of Reform, Julian, vii, 19.

> challenged by present circumstances to concern itself with the most perfect of all the works to be achieved by the art of man: the construction of true political freedom[?][92]

The most important argument is the defence of the imagination against reason, a conflict which attains the status of a crisis at the end of Shelley's career, especially in The Triumph of Life. Reason comes to denote not simply the worst excesses of the analytic tradition but also the utilitarian thinkers of his own day. His attitude towards the philosophy of the eighteenth century, both of the conventional "common sense" school and the radical materialists whose views he had once espoused, is hostile. His attack on the analytical tradition is made explicitly at the beginning of A Defence and in A Philosophical View of Reform. But there seems to be a moral parallel being drawn between the analytical tradition and the utilitarian thinkers of his own day "The poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes."[93]

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92 Schiller, Aesthetic Letters, 7. But Schiller, unlike Shelley, argues that the flourishing of literature is often incommensurate with political freedom; "It is almost superfluous to recall the example of modern nations whose refinement increased as their independence declined. Wherever we turn our eyes in past history we find taste and freedom shunning each other, and beauty founding her sway solely upon the decline and fall of heroic virtues", Aesthetic Letters, 69.

93 Defence, Norton, 502.

The centrepiece of the Defence is the attack on utilitarian values of the kind propounded by Malthus and James Mill. For both Schiller and Shelley, Utility is set in opposition to Poetry. However Shelley does not deny the importance of secular and republican Enlightenment values of the kind advanced by Peacock, "Undoubtedly the promoters of utility in this limited sense, have their appointed office in society." In fact he insists that such Enlightenment values are beholden to the poets, "They follow the footsteps of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life."[94] Utility is seen as the extension of the valuable moral, political and philosophical science of the previous century with which Shelley was largely in sympathy. Yet the dangers of science and reason and the encroachment upon the proper sphere of the artist are acutely observed by Schiller:

> Utility is the great idol of our age to which all powers are in thrall and to which all talent must pay homage. Weighed in this crude balance, the insubstantial merits of art scarce tip the scale, and, bereft of all encouragement, she shuns the noisy market-place of our century.[95]

For Shelley, as for Schiller, writing during the Terror, nearly

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94 Defence, Norton, 501.

95 Schiller, Aesthetic Letters, 7.

thirty years earlier, the issue is the same. Shelley sees class division and its concomitants as endangering the political fabric of the nation, "anarchy and despotism...are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty."[96] Schiller and Shelley see the erosion of poetry and the advance of science in precisely the same terms. For Shelley, "the poetry in these systems of thought [moral, political and historical science] is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes."[97] For Schiller, "The spirit of philosophical inquiry itself is wresting from the imagination one province after another, and the frontiers of art contract the more the boundaries of science expand."[98] Similarly Shelley sees the struggle between the internal and external man, the rise of science and the vulnerability of the individual as creating a form of alienation:

> 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...[99]

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96 Defence, Norton, 501.

97 Defence, Norton, 502.

98 Schiller, Aesthetic Letters, 7.

99 Defence, Norton, 502-503.

A large proportion of A Defence is taken up with the issue of literary history, even though at one point he denies that this is his aim.[100] Ostensibly the pattern of social and historical development and the rise of poetry is given a similar trajectory to that of A Philosophical View of Reform. However, although the same overall pattern is recounted there are notable changes in the Defence. It is no longer simply a question of republican values producing poetry of merit; the expression "the poetry of Rome lived in its institutions" means that it could not live any where else, and that it did not embody freedom as it did in Greece, "...poetry in Rome, seemed to follow rather than accompany the perfection of political and domestic society."[101]

The theory of the imagination unites both the essentialist and idealist claims for the a priori powers of the mind, and the more conventional claims that poetry and the development of the imagination are the signs of civilised society, "Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the Imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man."[102]

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100 "...let us not be betrayed from a defence into a critical history of Poetry and its influence on Society", Defence, Norton, 500.

101 Defence, Norton, 494.

102 Defence, Norton, 480.

Neither of these views is original but their combination shows Shelley to be quite capable for polemical purposes of borrowing ideas from distinct traditions to advance a unique argument.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of idealism and historical relativism in Shelley's theory of poetry. Shelley moves towards idealism from a number of different positions: his philosophical views, his theory of morality and his theory of love. From the summer of 1818 the imagination is argued to exercise a crucial role in the context of philosophy, morality and love. His espousal of the "intellectual philosophy" of Drummond permits him to be liberated from the shackles of empiricism, his association of the morality of the Greeks with their imaginative abilities, and finally his translation of The Symposium in which love is argued to possess the same moral and imaginative capacities as poetry, are all different aspects of this tendency towards idealism.

It is most important to emphasise, however, that the onset of idealism is not accompanied by a rejection of the experience of the mind of the individual, or of history. In fact, Shelley's interest in translating Plato is initiated by his fascination with the republican values of the classical world rather than an interest in idealism. The morality of the Greeks is reflected in their society and presents a timeless model of historical perfection, as was shown in the last chapter. This ideal historical model becomes all the more urgent to uphold because of the historical events of the period 1820-21.

Shelley's claims for poetry in A Defence are unequivocally idealist, and poetry is seen to play a significant role in upholding permanent moral values. But the most significant claims developed in A Defence, are found in Shelley's adoption of the historical scheme

of the secular historians of republican history such as Gibbon and Robertson. Yet instead of arguing that commerce is the most significant expression of freedom against the constraining authority of religion or despotism, Shelley gives poetry this role. Poetry therefore performs a function in the history of the freedom of thought and republican government which makes it invaluable to the future of liberty in civil society.

Poetry is thus given a crucial part to play in Shelley's view of history, indeed it is given the authority of a form of mythology. For it performs the role of harmony and synthesis which it was previously the duty of myth to perform, and the idealism which he claims for it, is so dependent upon a rhetorical argument in itself amounting to a form of mythmaking, that it will eventually come under strain in his final work, "The Triumph of Life".

CHAPTER 7

"THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE": SHELLEY AND HISTORY

7.0 Introduction: Shelley's view of the Enlightenment in 1822

7.1 The Masque: "Charles the First" and the disguise of revolution

7.2 History and the Self: an ironic counter-myth of origins

7.3 Conclusion

7.0 Introduction: Shelley's view of the Enlightenment in 1822

"The Triumph of Life" has suffered from being cast as both the final statement of Shelley's literary output and, because of its final unanswered question, "then what is life?", as the archetypal Romantic fragment. Its special status derives also from the silent inclusion in many readings of the death of its author which provides a pretext for critics to complete, or more often uncritically to re-enact, the difficulties of its unfinished condition. This has not inhibited the ease with which the poem has been construed as a usually negative moral vision.[1] Nor has it deterred one kind of quasi-historical reading, that of speculative biography, which takes its cue from the numerous personal histories recounted in the poem itself. As a biographical statement, the poem stands as either a straightforward renunciation of the political values associated with Shelley's earlier verse or a necessarily hypothesised re-affirmation of his optimism.[2] In short, criticism has demanded conclusive evidence of the meaning of the apocalyptic vision in the poem, while failing to attend to its more explicit claims of examining the role of the intellectual in history. The poem questions Shelley's own theories of history and his idea that the enlightened thought of the

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1 See A. C. Bradley, "Notes on Shelley's "Triumph of Life"," MLR 9 (1914), 441-456; F. M. Stawell, "Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"," ES5 (1914), 104-131.

2 For a useful criticism of the poem see G. M. Matthews, "On Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"," SN 34 (1962), 104-134.

poet could effect historical change. In particular it examines the increasing alienation of those of the earlier generation of the Enlightenment thinkers from their ideological intentions.

The dominant reading of the poem emphasises the religious resonances of its transitions from a transcendental to a finite realm, and this sense of inadequacy with the here and now has made the poem attractive to those, including Eliot, who abhorred the rest of Shelley's output.[3] Such a reading suggests a conflation of Shelley and the figure of Rousseau who in life dismissed the hypocrisy of the salons for solitary communion with Nature. Indeed the late Victorian interpretation of the poem saw Rousseau's failure in purely biographical terms as an inability to repudiate his own sensual excesses; according to this view, Shelley likewise is judged in the poem, and the Maenadic dance of the crowd in front of the chariot is taken as a warning of the dangers of sexual freedom which Shelley licensed elsewhere in his verse.[4] This sense of an allegory of religious salvation is also present in comparisons made with the sense of loss in Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality". This plainly negative impression is re-stated in Bloom's influential reading in which loss is a necessary process of the defeat of the artist's visionary intentions; for desire to be

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3 See Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, Selected Prose, ed. Kermode, 82.

4 See John Todhunter, "Notes on Shelley's Unfinished Poem, "The Triumph of Life"," (London: [privately printed], 1887), especially 15-19.

shattered by the horror of experience is merely a confirmation of human psychology.[5] Bloom argues in effect that the poem commemorates Shelley's acknowledgement of the triumph of everything against which his poetry struggled. Bloom's combination of psychology and Old Testament rhetoric leave the poem humbly acquiescent to the irony of its title. While the sense of conflict between the possibility of personal realisation and the terror of actuality are present in the poem, it is not clear that either an optimistic or defeatist conclusion define its unresolved elements.

In a more rewarding reading of the poem, de Man successfully demonstrates its susceptibility to such inexplicit strategies, emphasizing its defiance of the methods of re-construction and recuperation to which criticism is so evidently prone. It is precisely with literary critical questions of meaning, origin and coherence that the text is riddled, and as such its movement is anti-linear, one of infinite regress in which questions are repeated, suppressed or deferred creating the overall pattern of "a question whose meaning, as question, is effaced from the moment it is asked".[6] For de Man the poem is a primer for deconstructive, as opposed to historicist, criticism since it gives the reader the task of maintaining its fragmented and inconclusive state; "Reading as

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5 Bloom, "The final aspect of Shelley's mythopoeia is that the myth, and the myth's maker, are fully conscious of the myth's necessary defeat", Shelley's Mythmaking, 275.

6 de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," Rhetoric of Romanticism, 98.

disfiguration, to the very extent that it resists historicism, turns out to be historically more reliable than the products of historical archaeology."[7] Since his starting-point is the arbitrary nature of linguistic meaning in the poem, so he also sees it as essentially hostile to historical meaning:

> The Triumph of Life warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence.[8]

At this point de Man's concern with the exemplary possibilities of the text militates against other issues in the poem. For even while accepting it as an interrogation of "Good and the means of good" (231), it is reified to the status of a paradigm that cannot be explicit at any level, since it is preoccupied only with exposing the limitations of any kind of analysis. It does seem that the poem is actually attempting to answer this question of "good and the means of good" and to overcome the narrator's grief at how "power and will/ In opposition rule our mortal day-" (228-229). While these questions implicate the difficulties of historical meaning, they are not only questions of figuration since the poem brings into

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7 de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," Rhetoric of Romanticism, 123.

8 de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," Rhetoric of Romanticism, 122.

play both recent history as it was formulated by Shelley and his circle in this period, and also his own theoretical approaches to history. The fact that these questions remain unresolved or substituted by others, and that the impression of history is of treachery and failure, nevertheless does not necessarily mean that Shelley wished to exclude or suppress it.

The poem can be read, I think, as the enactment of contrary elements in Shelley's own philosophy of history.[9] On the one hand, his confidence in historical progress which required the ideal of an atemporal realm beyond the deficiencies of the present historical condition and removed from the exigencies of mortal life, in which the values of Freedom and Thought are the controlling influences. On the other, and this is the most dominant impression of the poem, there is the failure in recent history of the individual thinker or political leader to seize historical opportunity. The central focus is Shelley's attitude towards the Enlightenment, as conveyed through Rousseau and other Enlightenment figures, and in particular their failure to effect the change they forecasted. In one compelling moment the narrator betrays his own sense of the comparative weakness of Restoration Europe, haunted by Napoleon's ghost,

> .....I felt my cheek
> Alter to see the great form pass away
> Whose grasp had left the giant world so weak

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9 For a summary, see William Royce Campbell, "Shelley's Philosophy of History: A Reconsideration," KSJ 21 (1972), 43-63.

That every pigmy kicked it as it lay- (224-227)

Shelley's own horror at the "fierce spirit" (34) who "rolled/ In terror, and blood, and gold,/ A torrent of ruin to death from his birth," (34-35) is recorded in Shelley's poem, "Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon" (1821). Yet the sense of historical loss, the passing away of the last vestiges of revolutionary possibility in Europe is the greater impression in "The Triumph",

"The Child of a fierce hour; he sought to win

"The world, and lost all 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... (217-222)

These lines reflect Shelley's acute sense of history as opportunity, the opportunity to be seized and converted into lasting change. It is this legacy of Enlightenment historicism as well as the defeats of recent insurrections in Europe that haunt the poem.

Three particular aspects of the treatment of history in the poem seem relevant. First, the blindness of the pageant which "past/ With solemn speed majestically on..." (105-106) and the dominant sense of disjunction between valid thought and political action,

...little profit brings

> Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
> Nor then avail the beams that quench the Sun
> Or that these banded eyes could pierce the sphere
>
> Of all that is, has been, or will be done.- (100-104)

The poem's structure centres on the dissonance between personal history and the actions or deeds which have taken place outside, and in defiance of, the knowledge conveyed by these thinkers. History is only the total of the composite lives of its actors and cannot be seen as a coherent movement transcending these individual personalities. Second, the poem offers two perspectives, the narrator's and Rousseau's, which function as a paradigm of the ahistorical sphere which Shelley uses as a vantage point in his earlier theories of history. Third, the consequence of the failure of Rousseau who succumbs to solipsism despite his intentions, ""And so my words were seeds of misery-/ Even as the deeds of others"" (280-281). If this challenges the basis of Shelley's historical theory in which the thinker or poet is the forerunner of social change, the narrative structure also ensures some detachment from Rousseau's despair. The narrator points out that his words are not as destructive as the despots and priests who have "spread the plague of blood and gold abroad" (287). It is therefore a twofold struggle, for the Roman Emperors and the figureheads of the Church are those who have generated the historical condition against which the Enlightenment is aligned, while the thinker has lost any historical perspective beyond a personal one, indeed he now merely replicates the suffering against which he fought:

......"Their power was given
But to destroy," replied the leader - "I
Am one of those who have created, even

"If it be but a world of agony." (292-295)

Rousseau's position is often taken as in some sense exemplary, not least negatively because his feeling, which Enlightenment reason notoriously neglected, is shown to fail him, "I/ Have suffered what I wrote, or viler pain" (278-279). His scorn of those Enlightenment thinkers who possess only the "Signs of thought's empire over thought..." (211) is often implicitly taken as Shelley's own reading of the Enlightenment, one that is consonant with a nineteenth- and twentieth-century hostility to the inadequacies of French Enlightenment theories of history, in particular the concepts of Progress through Reason and perfectibility by which Shelley was greatly influenced, through Godwin.[10]

The reasons for his failure to continue with an essentially sanguine historical vision, which "Charles the First" promised to be, can be partly attributed to contemporary events in Europe. In

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10 See Duffy's conflation of Shelley and Rousseau with regard to this passage:- "Like Rousseau, but with much more trust and youthful good will, Shelley had himself tried to be a worthy son of the Enlightenment, only to discover a mutiny within, which he shared with Rousseau and for the handling of which the career of the latter might well serve as guide, example, and warning", Edward Duffy, Rousseau in England: The Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979), 111.

the letter most frequently cited in conjunction with "The Triumph of Life" there is an air of desperation about the crisis in Western civilisation:

> 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 religions no less than political systems for restraining & guiding mankind.[11]

The urgency of this language reflects his own loss of faith in the political situation in Europe two years after his hopes had been aroused in the summer of 1820 by a series of insurrections in southern Europe including the Kingdoms of Sicily, Naples, Piedmont and Spain which seemed to promise the downfall of the major Restoration monarchies.[12] To compound this situation, in the Greek War of Independence, the Allies, including Britain had agreed on a policy of non-intervention. Yet beyond the political background, there is also a sense of the conflict of his own historical theory.

From his earliest work Shelley displays an interest in and debt to different facets of the Enlightenment approach to history which included both an interest in the origins of religion and mythology and the foundations of human society, and the development of civil institutions. Three major theories are scrutinised in "The Triumph",

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11 L719, To Horace Smith [hereafter abbreviated to HS], 29 June 1822, Letters, ii, 442.

12 See Hobsbawm, Age of Revolution, 144-146.

the first preoccupied with the origins of human society, the subject of Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality, the second with "philosophical history" which sought to extrapolate the underlying motivating forces in the past and delineate a pattern of progress, and the third a more provisional account of the endless hostility between opposing forces of good and evil that made for merely cyclical change.

7.1 The Masque: "Charles the First" and the disguise of revolution

If, as is suggested by textual historians, the poem was composed between the end of May and the end of June 1822, it is significant that Shelley was so reticent about it.[13] It is never mentioned in his correspondence, in notable contrast to the now virtually forgotten fragment "Charles the First", a project which he intended to complete in the spring of 1822 and which he hoped would be a major historical drama developing on the relative success of "The Cenci".[14] Shelley's inability to continue with this work was a source of discomfort and symptomatic of a greater disillusion with regard to the contemporary political situation,

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13 On date of composition, see Reiman, Norton, 453n.

14 See L578, To Thomas Medwin, 20 July 1820, Letters, ii, 219-220.

> I do not go on with "Charles the First". I feel too little certainty of the future, and too little satisfaction with regard to the past, to undertake any subject seriously and deeply.[15]

This remark is treated conventionally as a personal confidence but it is also possible to interpret it as a loss of faith in the kind of historical scenario he was trying to sketch. The setting of "Charles the First" in the decade before the outbreak of the English civil war reflects the relative confidence of Shelley's attitudes to the contemporary political situation in Europe and England when he began researching for the drama in the early months of 1820.[16] At that point it was possible to interpret events such as Peterloo, though negative in themselves, as heralding a positive future. The tyrannical behaviour of the King and his Archbishop in the drama could thus be dramatised in the knowledge that practical reform was safely assured. Shelley had the simple advantage of hindsight that justified a sense of historical inevitability being on his side. It was not simply, as with the final act of Prometheus, that a revolutionary future had to be deferred to a visionary realm beyond

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15 L715, To JG, 18 June 1822, Letters, ii, 436.

16 The idea of the English civil war as a subject for historical drama was originally suggested by Godwin in the summer of 1818 as a subject for Mary to write on. See R. B. Woodings, " "A Devil of a Nut to Crack": Shelley's Charles the First," SN 40 (1968), 216-237, especially 227-228.

the tyranny of the present. However, Shelley's enthusiasm for the work declined rapidly after the main effort at writing in January 1822.

The dream of the "triumphal pageant" suggests at the least a revision of the notion of historical progress. The idea of a grotesque carnival of death and destruction, a masque of triumph which reveals only defeat, is a device used to expose the hypocrisy of the Establishment in "The Mask of Anarchy". The masque embodies, or realises, the contradictions which it is meant only to play out. Thus the Roman Empire, once the model of republican civilisation, celebrates the enslavement of nations in the name of liberty as Shelley had witnessed in the reliefs on the Arches of Titus and Constantine in the Roman Forum,

> As when to greet some conqueror's advance
> Imperial Rome poured forth her living sea
> From senate house and prison and theatre
> When Freedom left those who upon the free
>
> Had bound a yoke which soon they stooped to bear (112-116)[17]

It is just this gross parody of freedom and willing submission of the population that Shelley analysed in June 1822 as the root of the loss of historical momentum and the crisis of contemporary society,

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17 See Chapter 5.3

> But all, more or less, subdue themselves to the element that surrounds them, & contribute to the evils they lament by the hypocrisy that springs from them. - England appears to be in a desperate condition, Ireland still worse, & no class of those who subsist on the public labour will be persuaded that their claims on it must be diminished.... - I once thought to study these affairs & write or act in them - I am glad that my good genius said *refrain.* I see little public virtue, & I foresee that the contest will be one of blood & gold...[18]

This disillusion and lack of interest in political theorising contrasts with the wish expressed in the Preface to Prometheus, at the high point of his faith in historical progress, that he should "produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society".[19]

The opening scene of "Charles the First" introduces several issues prominent in "The Triumph". The subversive masque performed before the King functions both as entertainment and as a vivid exposition of social divisiveness. Shelley's historical source suggests the political ambiguity of the conjunction of the masque proper and a side-show or anti-masque that Shelley places after the main procession. The dialogue of two members of the audience, the older Citizen and the Youth, foreshadows that between Rousseau and the dreamer in "The Triumph". Just as Rousseau seeks to understand

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18 L719, To HS, 29 June 1822, Letters, ii, 442.

19 Preface to Prometheus Unbound, Norton, 135.

himself by reference to the narrator,

> ...and from spectator turn
> Actor or victim in this wretchedness,
>
> "And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn
> From thee". (305-308)

so the Citizen in "Charles the First" insists that attention to reality is preferable to theatre: "Canst thou discern/ The signs of seasons, yet perceive no hint/ Of change in that stage-scene in which thou art/ Not a spectator but an actor" (i, 32-36).[20] There is no representation or narrative that does not already implicate the observer, no vantage point from which the anatomy of society can be conducted. Shelley uses the pageant in both works to undermine any sense of the possibility of an aesthetic of history.[21] The Youth subscribes to the simple sense of optimism evinced by Shelley in the autumn of 1819: for him there is no contradiction in the masque of the lawyers pursued by the anti-masque of beggars and cripples, "Who would love May flowers/ If they succeeded not to Winter's flaw;/ Or day unchanged by night; or joy itself/ Without the touch of sorrow?" (i, 176-179). For the Citizen, however, the masque is a straightforward representation of

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20 All references to "Charles the First" are from Hutchinson.

21 For comment on Shelley's use of masque, see David Norbrook, "The reformation of the masque," in The Court Masque, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), 94-110, especially 94-96.

the real contradictions in society, an enactment of injustice and division:

> .....Here is health
> Followed by grim disease, glory by shame,
> Waste by lame famine, wealth by squalid want,
> And England's sin by England's punishment.
> And, as the effect pursues the cause foregone,
> Lo, giving substance to my words, behold
> At once the sign and the thing signified -
> A troop of cripples, beggars, and lean outcasts. (i, 162-169)

The fatal bond of sign and signified, cause and effect is precisely the condition of mutual destruction noted by Rousseau in his description of the advanced stages of civil society, in his Discourse on Inequality portrayed notably in terms of a fatal interaction of master and slave:

> It was necessary in one's own interest to seem to be other than one was in reality. Being and appearance became two entirely different things, and from this distinction arose insolent ostentation, deceitful cunning and all the vices that follow in their train. From another point of view, behold man, who was formerly free and independent, diminished as a consequence of a multitude of new wants into subjection, one might say, to the whole of nature and especially to his fellow men, men of whom he has become the slave, in a sense, even in becoming their master...[22]

While Shelley's historical drama envisages a state beyond the slavery of the present moment in which freedom shall be realised,

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22 Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, 119.

the crowd in "The Triumph" recalls the reasons for the failure of the French Revolution as expounded in the Preface to The Revolt of Islam, and its effect on contemporary thought,

> 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 tranquility of freemen so soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened.[23]

In "The Triumph", Shelley's evident inability to take any comfort from the crisis which he diagnosed is nevertheless mitigated by a glimpse of the comic perversions to which the actors in the spectacle before him succumb. If the condition of most of these figures in history is the mere pursuit of appearances or shadows "Some flying from the thing they feared and some/ Seeking the object of another's fear" (54-55), there is also the paradoxical possibility of a comedy of inverted roles, a social disordering akin to that effected at the end of "The Witch of Atlas",

> And others sate chattering like restless apes
> On vulgar paws and voluble like fire.
> Some made a cradle of the ermined capes
>
> Of kingly mantles, some upon the tiar
> Of pontiffs sate like vultures, others played
> Within the crown which girt with empire
>
> A baby's or an idiot's brow, and made
> Their nests in it;... (493-500)

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23 Hutchinson, 33.

Rousseau's account of the pageant thus shows a greater awareness of the subversive possibilities of the masque than the narrator. The transition from one interpretation of the crowd which is essentially tragic, to the possibilities of comedy, invites a reassessment of the dominant sense of loss which Rousseau describes as when he too succumbed to the crowd,

> .....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 actions and the shape without the grace (516-522)

Repeatedly the poem gestures towards an originary state when it reaches such moments of crisis. It begins and returns to an originary ideal, firstly when the dreamer awakens in the dawn of the natural world only to fall into a trance, and again when Rousseau returns to the natural idyll in his idealised autobiography. The ideal realm of Nature in both cases is presented as a pre-social state without history, in which all human emotions and susceptibilities are forgotten. The poem begins in a blaze of heat and vitality in which the order of the universe is independent from either God or Man, a secular realm in which Nature alone celebrates the sunrise. The importance of solar mythology and the worship of physical needs through the symbol of the Sun had been recently

investigated by mythographers in Southern Europe and the East. The idea that all religions including Christianity could be reduced to the worship of the Sun was, as this thesis has suggested, an important strand of Enlightenment thought, for not only did it undermine revealed religion and the idea of a prelapsarian condition, but it also gave credit to the imagination and rationale of the mythologies of pagan cultures. It was also an issue of Enlightenment history, since those who wanted to stress the progress of reason emphasized the primitive and barbaric state of the early inhabitants of the world. Gibbon and Rousseau represent the opposing sides of this argument. For Gibbon, the possibility that European civilisation is actually threatened by the barbaric East informs his tropological treatment of history as decline and fall; for Rousseau man in his natural state without the trappings of artifice is fatally endowed with reason or a capacity of self-improvement which will eventually destroy him. Rousseau's first social contract as expounded in the Discourse on Inequality is merely a sordid affair by which the rich perpetuate their rule over the poor. Shelley's narrator therefore awakes not simply in a primal, transcendental realm before consciousness, but in the origins of the world, a condition without history and therefore without memory, a state in which man cannot even remain conscious, which is also the locus of Enlightenment speculation on history itself. Rousseau's recollection of his own life thus mirrors the paradigm of originary bliss to which both his Discourses allude. His personal history and the history of the world are conveniently fused. In describing his past to the narrator, he locates himself

in an "unknown time" (312), a kind of atemporal or ahistorical standpoint that prevents all efforts to figure his own past,

> Whether my 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. (332-335)

7.2 History and the Self: an ironic counter-myth of origins

Rousseau's narrative begins in the "April prime" (308), a world in which all sentient and moral experience is forgotten. This sense of oblivion foreshadows the arrival of the "shape all light" (352) whose feet,

> .....blot
> The thoughts of him who gazed on them, and soon
>
> "All that was seemed as if it had been not,
> As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath
> Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought,
>
> Trampled its fires into the dust of death, (383-388)

The shape's draught of Nepenthe (359) is supposed to answer those questions of origins and destiny with which the poem abounds, but it in fact initiates the horrors of the pageant. Rousseau's artistic contrivance portrays a state which is both a suppression, since it is a forgetting, but also a reminder of a condition outside history. From such a perspective the historical preoccupations of these actors, including the narrator, and implicitly Shelley, are of no importance; "Thou wouldst forget thus vainly to deplore/ Ills, which

if ills, can find no cure from thee..." (327-328). We are reminded that the pageant itself is a dream, a certain kind of illusion. In this condition, morality be it domestic or political, does not exist,

> A sleeping mother then would dream not of
>
> "The only child who died upon her breast
> At eventide, a king would mourn no more
> The crown of which his brow was dispossest...(321-324)

The "shape all light"(352) out of which emerges the crucial disjunction between the ideal vision and history itself, represents the moment of the insufficiency of nature, of pure existence without reflection or reason. It is the point at which Shelley clearly finds Rousseau's account of the innate virtue of a state of ignorance inadequate despite the pain which consequently haunts the poem,

> A light from Heaven whose half-extinguished beam
>
> "Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
> Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost. -
> So did that Shape its obscure tenor keep
>
> "Beside my path, as silent as a ghost;...(429-433)

These paradigms of originary bliss thus enact the possibility of an ahistorical realm towards which the poem seems to move at other points. The figure of Ahasuerus in Hellas provides an insight into this movement in "The Triumph" towards a transcendental realm of pure thought in which action and experience are dismissed,

> .....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 - and 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. (Hellas, 776-785)

Ahasuerus presents this vision to the tyrant of the Ottoman Empire to signify the imminent demise of his and all tyrannies, this a necessary tool in a drama that ends with the defeat of the Greeks. Shelley in Hellas appears to revert to his earlier model of cyclical change and to accept the fundamentally arbitrary nature of history as the most viable theory by which to challenge the seemingly impervious institutions which he wished to see dislodged. Yet he also retains the hope that there might be some absolute jurisdiction in the historical scheme that would compensate for the tide of inevitability swinging the wrong way.

It is this sense of a need for some ultimate recourse to an order outside history, suggested in the "Ode to Liberty" and in his own versions of philosophical history, which is present in the idealised states in "The Triumph". Yet whereas the dramatic devices of Hellas permit such hope to be invoked through the chorus, in "The Triumph" there is a sense that any such order is now inaccessible and furthermore that it is problematical; it can only be invoked at the cost of personal and therefore historical paralysis. The cycle of effort and disappointment remains part of the historical condition that the narrator tries to reject,

..... - "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 how you may;
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,

"Our shadows on it ere it past away. (243-251)

Rousseau argues that effort and disappointment are inevitable and this leaves the world and its history as "the false and fragile glass", something essentially treacherous.[24] One view of the poem implies that Rousseau's attitude to the Enlightenment and history represents Shelley's own reading.[25] Such a reading of the poem accepts Rousseau as a valid guide while ignoring his evident shortcomings. He is after all "one of that deluded crew" (184): instead of succumbing to the outward show of knowledge the "signs of thoughts empire over thought" (211), which are merely versions of

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24 Rousseau, like Christ, is to Shelley the model of an egalitarian philosopher; "The dogma of the equality of mankind has been advocated with various success in different ages of the world...Rousseau has vindicated this opinion with all the eloquence of sincere and earnest faith, and is perhaps the philosopher among the moderns who in the structure of his feelings and understanding resembles the most nearly the mysterious sage of Judaea", "Essay on Christianity," Julian, vi, 247.

25 See Duffy, "...Rousseau epitomised for Shelley a rather personal anxiety - the plight of the imaginative man in an unimaginative age", Rousseau in England, 116.

the political religious and military imposture against which the philosophes struggled, Rousseau has succumbed to "the mutiny within" (213). Like the charioteer, he is himself blind (187-188) and cynical about the possibilities of knowledge, "If thirst of knowledge doth not thus abate,/ Follow it thou even to the night, but I/ Am weary" (194-196).

That Shelley was ambivalent about the Enlightenment is evident from an earlier cancelled passage in which the narrator tries to dismiss

> the doubtful progeny
> Of the new birth of this new tide of time
> In which our fathers lived & we shall die[26]

In his assessment of the Enlightenment in A Philosophical View of Reform he indeed doubts the optimism of the *philosophes*, and his critique seems to borrow from the language and themes of Rousseau,

> The capabilities of happiness were increased, and applied to the augmentation of misery. Modern society is thus a[n] engine assumed to be for useful purposes, whose force is by a system of subtle mechanism augmented to the highest pitch, but which, instead of grinding corn or raising water acts against itself and is perpetually wearing away or breaking to pieces the wheels of which it is composed.[27]

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26 Donald H. Reiman, Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study, Based on a Text newly edited from the Bodleian Manuscripts, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 55 (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1965), 241.

27 Julian, vii, 10.

Yet in Godwinian terms he is also keen to stress the effect of enlightened opinion both in the eighteenth century and earlier, and he emphasises the correlation between knowledge or opinion and practical action, as when he remarks that "the just and successful Revolt of America corresponded with a state of public opinion in Europe of which it was the first result".[28] Rousseau's assessment of Voltaire and himself in the cancelled passage emphasises that his own failure to reach the position of truly great thinkers such as Plato and Bacon is a consequence of the historical burden which they felt forced to bear,

> I know the place assigned
> To such as sweep the threshold of the fane
> Where truth & its inventors sit enshrined.-
>
> "And if I sought those joys which now are pain,
> If he is captive to the car of life,
> *'Twas that we feared our labour would be vain* [29]

7.3 Conclusion

Yet Shelley did not accept that such a failure of nerve was the legacy to which his generation had to submit itself, even in the

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28 Julian, vii, 10.

29 Reiman, The Triumph of Life: A Critical Study, 241.

final year of his life. His sense of the need for a greater resistance to such resignation is expressed in his appreciation of Byron's Cain: A Mystery (1821):

> What think you of Lord Byrons last Volume? In my opinion it contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since the publication of Paradise Regained. - Cain is apocalyptic - it is a revelation not before communicated to man.[30]

Whatever private regrets he may have felt at his own comparative lack of success, Shelley could admire Cain for developing his own preoccupations, the vengeful aspects of the Christian religion, the problem of the "Gordian knot of the origin of evil" and the question of how man could alter his condition through reason.[31] Cain's joy at beholding the bright realms of future worlds is mitigated by his experience of Hades where Lucifer remarks on the miserable future of human history, "...innumerable/ Yet unborn myriads of unconscious atoms,/ All to be animated for this only!"[32] Lucifer remarks that though Cain is dissatisfied with the knowledge he has been granted, he nevertheless has gained self-knowledge; "Didst thou not require/ Knowledge? And have I not, in what I show'd,/ Taught thee to know

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30 L683, To JG, 26 Jan. 1822, Letters, ii, 388.

31 Hellas, Notes, Hutchinson, 478.

32 Byron, Cain: A Mystery, in Byron: Poetical Works, ed. Frederick Page, 3rd ed., corrected John Jump, Oxford Standard Authors (1970; Oxford: OUP, 1979) II, ii, 41-43.

thyself/", (II, ii, 418-420). This is the very injunction that Rousseau uses in condemning the failure of the Enlightenment thinkers, who forget "the mutiny within".[33] Lucifer merely informs him that history is governed by the two great opposing principles of Good and Evil. The conclusion is thus that the acquirement of knowledge has only negative consequences.[34] Shelley, however, sought to extract an element of hope from Byron's despair,

> Perhaps all discontent with the *less* (to use a Platonic sophism) supposes the sense of a just claim to the *greater*, & that we admirers of Faust are in the right road to Paradise. - Such a supposition is not more absurd, and is certainly less demoniacal than that of Wordsworth - where he says -
>
> This earth,
> which is the world of all of us, & where
> *We find our happiness or not at all*
>
> As if after sixty years of suffering here, we were to be roasted alive for sixty million more in Hell, or charitably annihilated by a coup de grace of the bungler, who brought us into existence at first.[35]

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33 "...their lore/ Taught them not this - to know themselves..." (211-212).

34 See also Shelley's comment, "I differ with Moore in thinking Xtianity useful to the world: no man of sense can think it true; and the alliance of the monstrous superstitions of the popular worship with the pure doctrines of the Theism of such men as Moore, turns to the profit of the former, & makes the latter the fountain of its own pollution.- I agree with him that the doctrines of the French & material philosophy are as false as they are pernicious; but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism - for this reason, - that the former is for a season & that the latter is eternal", L699, To HS, 11 April 1822, Letters, ii, 412.

35 L697, To JG, 10 April 1822, Letters, ii, 406-407.

The "right road to Paradise" is then the refusal to surrender to actuality, even if it be to engage in such an impossible exercise as Faust's. In his way, Shelley therefore defies and revises Byron's assessment of the Enlightenment:

> 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: & if such should be the case, delusions, especially the gross & 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.[36]

The difficulty for Shelley, with his belief in resistance as the "right road" to his own secular paradise, is the knowledge that literary and philosophical thinking had failed, a vision that haunts Rousseau's memory,

> See the great bards of old who inly 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...(274-278)

Rousseau's own failings highlight the vulnerability to the age which Shelley sensed in contemporary poets and "The Triumph of Life" is

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36 L719, To HS, 29 June 1822, Letters, ii, 442.

sceptical of the mechanisms he had used in his previous historical theories to extract consolation from the contemporary gloom. It could be argued though, that for a poem so conscious of its own strategies, Shelley might have envisaged a different fate from Rousseau's had the poem continued, a movement beyond the self, outside the horror of this particular dream-vision towards a clarification of the ideal ahistorical realm with which the poem is haunted.

Shelley's use of mythology and his perception of history can be seen to converge towards the end of his life in the theory of the poet as the most suitable figure to understand the origins of humanity and to engage in prophecies of the future. This idealisation functions as an act of faith, a resort to mythology which is in fact quite distinct from his earlier usages.

His early interest in the mythologies of ancient and non-Christian cultures develops out of his philosophical rejection of Christianity but does not amount to adopting one form of religious belief in preference to another. "Mont Blanc" represents only a partially successful attempt to show how the primitives' terror of the natural world could easily become the worship of a power which could never be known or understood. That Shelley could explain the origins of mythology in such primitive fears is an acknowledgement of the influence of eighteenth-century theorists like Hume who sought to explain religious belief in terms of psychology. The poet attempts to project historical faith but finds that the resources of such faith, like fear itself, are in the mind.

Shelley's use of the Prometheus myth is also sceptical since he uses Aeschylus's drama in order to defy its conclusion. The incorporation of other, more direct mythological interests, from Peacock's scholarly fascination with Zoroastrianism, to Smith's and Hunt's interest in the pastoral and Bacchic dimension of Greek mythology, is oblique but evident. The divergence from Aeschylus makes Prometheus Unbound resistant to the usual respect for the authority of myth, and Shelley's syncretism of elements of different

faiths is used less to present an ideal religion than to permit his own visionary prophecy, and to transform the past into a negative myth, a bad dream.

Mythology thus comes to function as the most viable means to overcome the despair at historical events in Europe which followed the failure of the French Revolution. Shelley resorts to myth not to escape from history but in order to expose the dangers of imposing a Christian morality to produce a regressive view of historical destiny, as Wordsworth does. The interpretation of mythology signals the freedom of the artist from such moral and aesthetic constraints. "The Witch of Atlas" is ironical, not simply whimsical, because it asserts itself as a confessedly fictional fantasy where Christian, and even secular, defences of different theories of origins present themselves as serious fact.

Prometheus Unbound and "The Witch of Atlas" also introduce another aspect of Enlightenment mythography; respect and understanding for the civilisations of the East. The role of Bacchus, whose journey from the East is supposed to have threatened Hellenic reason and social order, is important, but more compelling is the location of both poems outside the conventional classical setting, and in the case of Prometheus Unbound, where most defences of Christianity begin. Such a location helps to define in these poems an ironically speculative theory of origins and an alternative, visionary future.

Shelley's interest in ancient mythologies is, in the case of Ancient Greece, accompanied by an interest in its political culture, not simply an aesthetic appreciation of the kind advanced by

Winckelmann. To separate the aesthetic realm from the political, as the category of Romantic Hellenism does, ignores Shelley's criticisms of aspects of Greek culture. To see Shelley as a Hellenist solely is to deny the values of Apollonian light and reason which he sought to undermine through his introduction of Bacchic disorder and joy.

Mythology ultimately functions as a means to reflect on the role of the poet in historical destiny. Shelley's historical theory alters to incorporate a sense of hope in the summer of 1820 when Southern Europe appeared to provide evidence for the collapse of Restoration monarchies. In his earlier historical visions, either Necessity, in Queen Mab, or the cyclical principles of good and evil in The Revolt of Islam, operate. This admission of the arbitrary nature of historical destiny means that there is no progress but merely a succession of inconclusive triumphs. Shelley, in the atmosphere of renewed hope in 1820, adopts a faith in the progress of civil society based on the values of enlightened belief in the arts as expressed by Gibbon, and develops his own theory of philosophical history. A Philosophical View of Reform and the "Ode to Liberty" typify this confidence in which Freedom is personified as a supra-historical concept, working beyond events themselves as the philosophical historians did, and thereby defying aberrant moments in the historical scheme. Shelley's use of mythology thus extends beyond an interest in myth, towards a personal formulation of mythologised history based upon his view that the poets had played a significant role in the achievements of republican freedom as delineated by the secular historians of the eighteenth century.

Shelley's use of mythology increasingly reflects his validation of the poet's vocation. Instead of theorising about the origins of the world, as in his earlier work, after 1820 Shelley uses political freedom as a symbol of the permanent and uncorruptible power of the poet's conscience which will ultimately triumph in futurity, after his death. Mythology, then, does not imply a golden age without history never to return, but a future vision which the poet creates but which, given historical conditions, remains unrealised. The criticism of the Enlightenment in "The Triumph of Life" represents the equivocal victory of the myth of the suffering poet over the wreckage of the myth of reason which he beholds.

Bibliography

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III **OTHER PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES**

(1) Primary material

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Note on Bibliography

[ ] indicates anonymous authorship.

Name followed by [ ] indicates pseudonymous authorship; pseudonym followed by real name in square brackets.

[attrib.] indicates attributed authorship.

[?] [attrib.] indicates doubtfully attributed authorship.

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Bod. Ms. Shelley d. 1, ff. 15[r] - 16[r], 17[r] - 32[v].

---. ["The Triumph of Life"]
Bod. Ms. Shelley adds. c. 4, ff. 19[r] - 34[v], 37[r] - 53[r] [lines 1-391, 406-end]

Bod. Ms. Shelley adds. c. 4, ff. 54[r] - 58[v] [Discarded openings of "The Triumph of Life"]

---. ["Ode to the West Wind"]

Bod. Ms. Shelley adds e. 6, pp. 138 [rev]. - 137 [rev]. [stanza IV and last 5 lines of stanza V]

Glossary

ff.: folios
pp.: pages
[r]: recto
[v]: verso
[rev].: reverso

In this thesis I have used the following conventions for Mss.: cancelled words or phrases are surrounded by pointed brackets { }, undecipherable words by angle brackets < >. Insertions in the text for the purposes of clarification are denoted by square brackets, [ ].

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