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'The Life We Image': Chaos and Control in the Poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats

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'The Life We Image'
Chaos and Control in the Poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats

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Declaration

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University. The work is solely that of the author, Madeleine Callaghan, under the supervision of Professor Michael O'Neill. An excerpt from chapter six, in an earlier form, has been published as "This soul out of my soul: The Trial of the Hero in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*," *Grasmere 2008: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference*, compiled by Richard Gravil (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009): 146-54.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The tension between experiential chaos and artistic control is a constant if varying presence, and acts as a fertile, dangerous, but ultimately enriching principle, in the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats. Each poet is highly self-conscious about this tension, a self-consciousness traceable to their Romantic and post-Romantic understanding of the nature of poetry. Situating itself in the present post-McGannian critical landscape, my thesis looks at poetry through the lens of a new formalism. The thesis valorises aesthetic subtleties and lays emphasis on poetry's performative intelligence.

The Introduction describes in detail the approach, method, and contents of the thesis. Section one examines the poetics of Byron, Shelley and Yeats, focusing on how each poet figures his attempted control of the potentially chaotic text. The first chapter, on Byron's poetics, centres on *Don Juan*, *Beppo* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and argues for the presence of a coherent poetics in his oeuvre. Chapter two, on Shelley's poetics, examines *A Defence of Poetry* and its relationship with Shelley's poetry, giving particular attention to *Alastor* and "Mont Blanc." Chapter three examines the self-consciousness of Yeats's poetics, and explores the way in which he makes poetry express his effort towards mastery while retaining the chaos that permits creative freedom in *The Wanderings of Oisin*, the Byzantium poems, and "Easter 1916."

The struggle to assert poetic control is a form of heroism, and the second section examines the concept of the hero in works by each of the poets. I illustrate how traditional critical accounts of the poets underestimate the complexity that governs their versions of heroism. Chapter four, on *Cain* and *The Giaour*, and chapter five, on *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, trace Byron's evolving challenge to any straightforward notion of heroism. Chapter six views Shelley's *Epipsychidion* as a climactic exploration of the poet-as-hero, while chapter seven explores *Adonais*'s radical refiguring of the heroic and the elegiac. Chapters eight and nine focus on "The Tower," on Yeats's creation of a uniquely personal, yet carefully impersonal, poetic monument to the poet-hero.

The chaos of the actual, from which Byron, Shelley, and Yeats create their poetry, wars constantly with, but also paradoxically enables, the control they attempt to establish. It is their staging of the quarrel between chaos and control that not only provides them with the material out of which they make poetry but also means that their practice foreshadows and at times outflanks our critical constructions.

Note on Texts

Lord George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London: Murray, 1973-1996). Abbreviated hereafter as *BLJ*.
All quotations from Byron's letters (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991). Hereafter *Byron's Prose*.
All quotations from Byron's prose (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

Lord George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed., introd. and notes by Jerome McGann, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). Hereafter *McGann*.
All quotations from Byron's poetry (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F. L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon P, 1964). Hereafter *Shelley's Letters*.
All quotations from Shelley's letters (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed., introd. and notes Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). Hereafter *Leader and O'Neill*.
All quotations from the poetry and prose of Shelley (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey, 4 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986-2007). Hereafter *Yeats's Letters*.
All quotations from Yeats's letters (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

W. B. Yeats, *W. B. Yeats: The Major Works*, ed. with introd. Edward Larrissy, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001). Hereafter *Larrissy*.
All quotations from Yeats's poetry (unless specified otherwise) will be taken from this edition.

The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version, (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1957).
All quotations from the Bible will be from this edition.

Introduction: "Between contraries man runs his course"

I.

The movement between chaos and artistic control dominates the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats. "Control," according to this thesis, has largely positive but occasionally negative associations: positive when it informs the poet's ability to express his individual poetic "rage for order,"[1] negative when it suggests too facile or authoritarian a formal conquest of experience. "Chaos" suggests the following entwined notions: that "reality" is more various than we think it is, to adapt Louis MacNeice's words from "Snow," and yet that it is the material from which the poet forms his experience.[2] As Coleridge puts it in his sonnet to Bowles, chaos is that over which the creative Logos sweeps, as "the great Spirit erst with plastic sweep / Moved on the darkness of the unformed deep" (13-14).[3] This sense of chaos as vital, as both necessary and living, sparks the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats into abundant life. Chaos in this light makes the achievements of artistic control more impressive and substantial. Embodied in the words of a poem, chaos is itself paradoxically creative, and bears witness to Yeats's conviction that "the desire that is satisfied is not a great desire, nor has the shoulder used all its might that an unbreakable gate has never strained."[4] Chaos is both all that threatens artistic control and all that licenses it to manifest itself with the greatest power. This potent paradox creates the dramatic effect of the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats, as each writer combines force with fluidity to animate "the life we image."

The close of *Prometheus Unbound* illustrates the understanding of the interplay between chaos and control that runs through the thesis. Here Demogorgon offers the following advice:

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[1] Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* ([1954] New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 130.
[2] Louis MacNeice, "Snow," *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter McDonald (London: Faber, 2007), 24.
[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "To the Rev. W. L. Bowles," [Revised Version] *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin, 1997), 73.
[4] W. B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis," *Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 500.

> These are the spells by which to re-assume
>
> An empire o'er the disentangled Doom.
>
>
> To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
>
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
>
>   To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
>
> To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
>
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
>
>   Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent…

<div align="right">(Prometheus Unbound 4: 568-75)</div>

This passage unites all three poets in the way that in it a belief in the power of utterance shines through lines that promise assertion, but remain shot through with doubt. Despite the poem's asserted victory over tyranny, Shelley's clear-sighted artistry recognises that chaos always potentially beckons beyond speech that would fortify the will. Far from being simply melioristic, the passage shows the complexity of Shelley's dual commitment to thought-controlled "beautiful idealisms" (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, 232) and chaotic mutability.[5] Suffering, forgiveness, and defiance, taken to the extreme edge of the possible, are the "spells" that can offer an unfettered future. The pain-fraught challenges will seem "infinite" and "omnipotent," but Shelley makes a point of using the words "seem" and "think." He works to alter perception, and acknowledges the almost unthinkably difficult nature of the task. Control is central to the passage; man's ability to command his own thought will be his saviour, but the chaotic element that threatens this faculty exists alongside it, as Shelley refuses definitively to separate chaos from control.

The use of the word "spells" in the first line of the quotation recalls its employment by Shelley in the earlier "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty:"

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[5] Jerrold Hogle's book focuses particularly on this slant of Shelley's thinking, focusing on Shelley's interest in what he terms "transference:" "I will offer a reading of his poetry and prose that reveals the fundamental logic of a mobile process – what I will call "transference," a ceaseless transition between elements of thought – which has been suppressed in the most accepted understandings of the Shelley canon." See Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York, NY; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), vii.

> Frail spells — whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
>
> > From all we hear and all we see
> >
> > Doubt, chance and mutability.

<div align="right">("Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," 29-31)</div>

Shelley questions the value of the human-created names that become "frail spells" which "might not" (29) remove the stain of "doubt, chance and mutability" (31). He refuses to say "cannot" instead of "might not," as an absolute statement would prevent opening and renewing possibility moving through the poem.[6] Both poems give evidence of Shelley's movement away from an over-determining and prescriptive authorial technique, underscoring the ambiguity that he deliberately writes into his work. *Prometheus Unbound*, even as it delivers the "beautiful idealisms" (232) Shelley hoped to create, also shows a strong grasp on the chaotic possibilities that continue to lurk.[7] Assertions never exist without Shelley writing into the lines a fissure, where the possibility could be denied, or pass into something else.[8] Demogorgon's audience acknowledges this, even before his speech: "Speak: thy strong words may never pass away." (4: 553)[9] The importance of the conditional tense denotes the multiplicity of possibilities that play through Shelley's poetry, yet Shelley maintains a strong authorial presence. He continues to control, to harness, to hypothesise, whilst all the while accepting and encouraging the various types of chaos that exist in his work. The tension that he generates through his sophisticated and complex artistry gives his poetry its creative force.

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[6] As Forest Pyle observes, "But this critique is not so straightforward as it first appears, for Shelley qualifies his refusal of the power of these 'frail spells': their 'uttered charm *might not* avail to sever' 'doubt, chance, and mutability' from our worldly perception.' See Forest Pyle, "'Frail Spells': Shelley and the Ironies of Exile," *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed., Norton Critical Edition (New York, NY; London: Norton, 2002), 664.

[7] While I see the chaos of the real as never far from *Prometheus Unbound*, Earl R. Wasserman argues that Shelley writes *Julian and Maddolo* as a realistic poem to counter the idealism of the lyrical drama: "Shelley interrupted the composition of *Prometheus Unbound* to grapple with reality and earn for himself – at the price of much self-searching and many concessions – a hard-won and insecurely held footing in the actual human condition on which to sustain the idealisms of which he had been writing in his lyric drama." Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore, MD; London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1971), 74.

[8] As Carlos Baker perceptively writes about *Prometheus Unbound*, "Behind the insistent hopefulness of Shelley's drama, the conditional *IF* bulks large as life." Carlos Baker, *The Echoing Green: Romanticism, Modernism, and the Phenomena of Transference in Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984), 107.

[9] Michael O'Neill in *The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) argues that "*Prometheus Unbound* is memorable precisely because the fear that its words may 'pass away' has, throughout, prompted the inventiveness of its language," 125.

This observation is relevant to Byron and Yeats. Their distinctive poetic practices show the fascinatingly disparate ways in which they express their relationships with chaos and control. Shelley, even at his most idealistic in act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*, never loses his grasp on the darker possibilities of his vision:

> …to hope till Hope creates
>
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
>
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent…

> (4: 573-75)

These lines, the final line in particular, might be set alongside Byron's line in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (known hereafter as *CHP*), "There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here" (*CHP* IV. 105: 945). Shelley's line increases the subtlety of the series of negatives. Byron arrests hope after hope, but Shelley, who seems to affirm the primacy of hope, deliberately, delicately, and darkly half-undercuts his own lines. The negatives undo some of what the line seems to be doing, but they do not remove the sense.[10] They throw a series of shadows against the light of the assertion. In moments of tension, Byron and Shelley often use negatives to introduce darker notes, or disrupt any certain thrust. Similarly, Yeats uses negatives to draw attention to some of his most fraught moments and to underscore the inescapably double nature of poetic utterance:

> Nor may I less be counted one
>
> With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
>
> Because, to him who ponders well,
>
> My rhymes more than their rhyming tell

> ("To Ireland in the Coming Times," 17-20)

While seeming to assert, these lines point up an underlying fracture and fear. Yeats's fears about his status in Irish poetry remain, despite the boldness of his claim for his central place. Like Shelley, Yeats appeals to a "fit audience" ("Preface to *Epipsychidion*," 513) to distinguish the underlying thrust of his poetry, insinuating the deeper nationalist bent given to his writing by its exploration of the occult. He seeks to control the perception of his poetry by deliberately naming himself among Ireland's most famous

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[10] Timothy Webb persuasively shows the subtlety of Shelley's use of negatives. See "The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1983), 37-62.

nationalist poets. The chaotic element stems from Yeats's awareness that he may not be counted among these predecessors by his readers, who may judge him in a very different manner.

II.

The tension between chaos and control acts as a fertile, dangerous, but ultimately enriching principle in the poetry of Byron, Shelley and Yeats. Each poet is highly self-conscious about this tension, a self-consciousness traceable to their Romantic and post-Romantic understanding of the nature of poetry. In the present post-McGannian critical landscape, my thesis looks at poetry through the lens of a new formalism in the wake of studies such as Susan Wolfson's *Formal Charges*,[11] Jane Stabler's *Byron, Poetics, and History*,[12] and Michael O'Neill's *The All-Sustaining Air*.[13] The exploration of chaos and control in the thesis foregrounds the poetry's performative intelligence. While a negotiation between the poles of chaos and control can be discovered in every poet, the poetry of the three poets discussed in this thesis converges by overtly being a theatre of conflict. Despite different aesthetic sensibilities and poetic preoccupations, Byron, Shelley, and Yeats stage the struggle between chaos and control in their work. Their poetry grapples with the "reality" that the poet encounters or creates, and the resulting orchestrated conflict becomes a creative principle central to their poetry.

The concordance to the poetry of Byron notes twenty-two uses of the word "chaos;"[14] the concordance to Shelley's poetry shows thirty. Incidences of the word "chaos" denote a sense of the precariousness of poetic creation, and point towards an inventive energy which seems to possess a life separate from, yet is entirely part of, the poetry. Byron almost exclusively uses the word in the context of his "serious" poems, and his most

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[11] Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997).

[12] Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 52 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

[13] Michael O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American and Irish Poetry Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

[14] *A Concordance to the Poetry of Byron*, ed. Ione Dodson Young, vol. 1 (Austin, TX: Best Printing Company, 1975), 236.

characteristic terms of discussion centre on the inevitability of chaos. He writes in *Childe Harold* IV of "The particle of those sublimities / Which have relapsed to chaos" (*CHP* IV. 54: 482-83). This meditation indicates Byron's sense that chaos can never be banished.[15] It remains, lurking behind and ever present in even the most controlled appearances of form, civilisation, and ideals. His poetry seems to skate dangerously on the edge of an almost desired chaotic abyss:

> Chaos of ruins! who shall trace the void,
>
> O'er the dim fragments cast a lunar light,
>
> And say, 'here was, or is', where all is doubly night?

> (*CHP* IV. 80: 718-20)

The challenge in these lines reflects the sheer magnitude of the chaos, a chaos that demands an ordering principle, where a person must describe, enumerate, and elegise that which was before. Implicit in these lines is the idea that Byron himself must perform this role, heroically exploring the void. This stubborn urge to control even in the face of an overwhelming chaos is central to Byron's poetics. Order as well as chaos is omnipresent; if not overtly displayed, it can manifest itself as desired or hidden. As Andrew Rutherford notes about the poet's apparently disorganised epic, "Yet in its own peculiar way *Don Juan* is an order, not a chaos."[16] Byron's authorial presence dominates the poetry, but he never loses sight of perspectives that threaten to overwhelm his almost all-encompassing vision. Order, like chaos, is omnipresent in Byron's work; despite any appearance of "pure" order or chaos, the poet must always juggle the two principles. Couched in these terms, this thesis will argue that the true Byronic hero is the poet.

Unfettered control offers a sterile and uncreative ideal, and precludes poetic creation. Byron uses the word "control" twenty-eight times, and in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, Byron isolates his ambivalent attitude to control. His address to the Ocean (discussed in chapter one) foregrounds the uncontrollable as positive; man's control is limited, and dubious in its destructive purpose: "Man marks the earth with ruin — his control / Stops with the shore" (*CHP* IV. 179: 1605-06). Yet Byron's artistry is nowhere more apparent

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[15] Tom Paulin discussed Byron and chaos in his lecture, "Byron, Chaos and Rhyme," The Byron Foundation Lectures, The Centre for Study of Byron and Romanticism, Nottingham University, UK. 2000.

[16] Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh; London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), 141.

than in these closing stanzas to the poem; he utilises the Spenserian stanza to effect a mastery over his poetry and audience in a manner that emphatically dramatises his ordering and perceptive role as poet. Byron's poetry does not work to exclude the chaotic principle; rather, he works with the chaos, battling to channel, express, and glory in the uncontrollable elements of world. The energy of the movement between chaos and control propels some of the poetry's most dramatic and characteristic moments.

For Shelley, the words "chaos" and "control" pose challenges to the poet that must be faced as he seeks to hold the ground as "unacknowledged legislator" without veering into dangerously tyrannical positions. He uses the word "chaos" thirty times, and 'control' only eight times.[17] "Control," according to the lexical concordance, generally denotes "restraint, check," implying authoritarian overtones in his use, yet Shelley places the word under intense scrutiny, shifting the implications of the word within his fluid imaginative vision. As Hugh Roberts and Michael O'Neill show in their essays on Shelley's writing in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, Shelley creates an open-ended mode that encompasses his imaginative vision while acknowledging and encouraging alternatives to his authorial perspective.[18] Both chaos and control become potentially tyrannical and dangerous, but they also contain within their meaning potential for growth and change; Shelley weaves his way between each extreme.

Chaos can be a deeply disturbing element in Shelley's poetry; Ellis's definition of the word as meaning "confused, unformed matter" in his Concordance fails to do full justice to the disorienting, intoxicating, and potentially destructive power, in Shelley's poetry, of chaos. Chaos threatens to swallow up the hopeful "frail spells" ("Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," 29) of an ordering poetic principle, as metaphor comes to appear as a "firmament pavilioned upon chaos" (*Hellas*, 772). Equally, part of the disturbing nature of chaos in Shelley's poetry is its hypnotic quality, as the void beckons toward the poet

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[17] *A Lexical Concordance to the Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, compiled and arranged F. S. Ellis (London: Bernard Quadrich, 1892; rpt. Johnson Reprint Company 1967), 97, 98 and 123

[18] Hugh Roberts emphasises Shelley's startling open-enededness in his preface writing, while Michael O'Neill draws attention to Shelley's subtle forcefulness and assurance. See Hugh Roberts, "Noises On: The Communicative Strategies of Shelley's Prefaces" (183-98) and Michael O'Neill "Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet" (239-55), both in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb, The Nineteenth Century Series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

with dangerously attractive power. *Epipsychidion* (discussed in chapter six) contains one of Shelley's most compelling uses of the word "chaos":

> But neither prayer nor verse could dissipate
> The night which closed on her; nor uncreate
> That world within this Chaos, mine and me,
> Of which she was the veiled Divinity…

> (*Epipsychidion*, 240-43)

Shelley preserves the poet's envisioned world, where his "veiled Divinity" (243) is not subject to destruction by "this Chaos" (242). He refers to the everyday world of self as "this Chaos," (242) while his imaginative picture of the powerful and mysterious female figures belongs to "that world," (242) the world of the imaginative poet. Both chaos and the ordering principle belong in the mind, and it seems that Shelley's "epipsyche," confined within the mind, could more properly be referred to as "That world within this Chaos" (242).

Shelley's treatment of the word "control" lends intensity to his poetry; examples in *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound* show Shelley moving from a tyrannical definition of control in the former that betrays his innate revulsion from compelling or being compelled by external influence, and in the latter, displaying "control" as a fundamental principle for self-governance:

> O Slavery! thou frost of the world's prime
>   Killing its flowers and leaving its thorns bare!
> Thy touch has stamped these limbs with crime,
>   These brows thy branding garner bear,
>   But the free heart, the impassive soul,
> Scorn thy control!

> (*Hellas*, 676-81)

 The placement of "control" at the end of the Chorus' speech deliberately stresses the word; the words leading up to the final exclamation build to a characteristically Shelleyan crescendo. Bursting through to the final line, Shelley describes slavery as frost, and then considers it as branding limbs and brows, possibly recalling the mark of Cain. At line

680, Shelley shifts from a description of the wrongs of slavery to a defiant gesture that underlines that humanity, possessing or potentially possessing "the free heart, the impassive soul" can "Scorn thy control!" (680-81) Here Shelley, while showing the force and gravity of controlling slavery, propels the poetry into an electrifying affirmation of humankind's ability to resist tyranny. While "control" figures in the final quoted line of *Hellas* as an intensely negative force, Shelley shows it to be vital to humanity's freedom in *Prometheus Unbound*:

> Man, oh, not men! a chain of linkèd thought,
> Of love and might to be divided not,
> Compelling the elements with adamantine stress;
> As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,
> The unquiet republic of the maze
> Of planets, struggling fierce towards heaven's free wilderness.
>
> (4: 394-99)

Shelley emphasises the central importance of the relationship between "love" and "might," highlighting the necessity of firm resolve to retain humanity's freedom. "Man" must be capable of "Compelling the elements with adamantine stress;" Shelley's emphasis on this unyielding firmness, as in *Hellas*, implies the danger surrounding humanity. The final two lines in the stanza show Shelley's primary preoccupation — the idea of the "unquiet republic…struggling fierce" (4: 398-99) energises his poetry, as "heaven's free wilderness" (4: 399) can only be bought at the expense of continual effort. After emphasising struggle as an essential element to gaining control over oneself, Shelley imaginatively depicts a fluid harmony in which "Labour, and pain, and grief" (4: 404) are converted into gentleness:

> Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
> Whose nature is its own divine control,
> Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea;
> Familiar acts are beautiful through love;
> Labour, and pain, and grief, in life's green grove
> Sport like tame beasts, none knew how gentle they could be!
>
> (4: 400-05)

Shelley creates a utopian image of man whose nature controls itself; Man can say with Prometheus, "Yet am I king over myself" (1. 492). Yet here, there is no use, ironical or otherwise, of authoritarian types of control. The control is "divine," (4: 401) stripped of any negative connotations; Shelley renews the meaning of the word "control" by his determination to give the word here, partly through its mutually supportive rhyme with "soul," an unambiguously positive definition. Shelley exploits the nuances of chaos and control to create for his poetry a multi-shaded portrait of power; his yielding supple poetic vision interacts with his confident and assertive poetic individuality.

The Yeats concordance has no references to the word "chaos," nor does the word "control" feature as a central site of poetic crisis or questioning.[19] Yet Yeats's poetry moves between powerlessness and command.[20] Central to the construction of the Yeatsian self is his continued concern with the authority available to the poet. "The Magi," included in *Responsibilities*, illustrates Yeats's dense, paradoxical, and highly wrought presentation of chaos and control. Yeats rarely explores a single imaginative position; he engages in a struggle between several different perspectives, where his artistic vision remains always alert to other possibilities. Shimmering beneath even Yeats's most assertive statements lurks a troubling counter-truth, which refuses the poetic death of a final definitive position:

> Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,
>
> In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
>
> Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
>
> With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
>
> And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
>
> And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
>
> Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
>
> The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

("The Magi," 1-8)

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[19] See *A Concordance to the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Stephen Maxfield Parrish; programmed James Allan Painter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1963).

[20] Seamus Heaney defines Yeats's poetry through this lens: "'Command' had indeed characterised the Yeatsian style." Seamus Heaney, "Introduction," *W. B. Yeats: Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber, 2000), xii.

"The Magi" begins in a manner analogous to the opening line of "The Fisherman:" Yeats's "Although I can see him still" (1) insists on the primacy of the poet's vision. Unlike "The Fisherman," however, the poem provides the reader with no indication of the significance of its imaginative vision; it is not apparent exactly what Yeats hopes his reader to discern. The poem's eight lines offer a sparse vision of Yeats's imagined Magi that emphasises their almost unearthly nature. The "stiff, painted clothes" (2) seem strangely two-dimensional, as if Yeats were describing a painting, rather than an imaginative picture of living, breathing men. Described as "pale unsatisfied ones," (2) with "ancient faces like rain-beaten stones," Yeats creates a curiously detached mental image of an impersonal personal vision. He underscores their haunting quality with his "Now *as at all times* I can see in the mind's eye," [emphasis added] suggesting the omnipresence of the enigmatic image in Yeats's theatre of the mind. The restraint of the Magi, manifested as a controlled and undemonstrative presence, is striking; yet the writing also captures a deep restlessness.

The final three lines hold in suspension a straining, almost active hope alongside passive waiting, where the ancient men long for "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor." (8). Turbulence, here implying a minor violence, cannot fulfil the desire for chaotic wildness. "Mystery," suggesting a holy sanctity, sits uneasily beside "uncontrollable," as the "bestial floor" seems to drag the reader back to "the foul rag and bone shop" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," 40) where all, including religious "heart-mysteries," ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," 27) begins. This troubling mingling of the Magi's desire for chaos and their restrained self-possession is mirrored by the way in which seemingly formal and controlled lines pulse with an almost unearthly energy. This performance characterises Yeats's poetic mode.

Romantic poetry, a period in which the foregrounding of the self became the dominant poetic mode, seems the ideal ground for a study that seeks to examine the poetic performance of chaos and control, and the formation of the poet as hero. As Harold Bloom writes:

> In the context of post-Enlightenment poetry, a breath is at once a *word*, and a
> *stance* for uttering that word, a word and a stance *of one's own*. In this context,
> a weaving or a fabrication is what we call a poem, and its function is to
> represent, to bring back into being again, an individual stance and word.[21]

The choice of Byron and Shelley, as opposed, for example, to Wordsworth and
Coleridge, derives from the younger Romantics' engagement with, yet departure from,
the poetic explorations of their poetic predecessors. Coleridge, though vitally significant
to the poetic development of both Byron and Shelley, does not embrace the centrality of
the poetic performance that the two younger poets both relish. As Jerome J. McGann
shows:

> All of Coleridge's work reveals that, despite his insistence upon preserving
> the importance of multiplicity, his passion was toward unity and reconciliation,
> not only "the One Life within us and abroad," but the unifying principle of life
> in everything that is.[22]

This drive "toward unity" seems opposite to Byron's and Shelley's instinct to complicate
and threaten their poetic structures. Coleridge could, for both Byron and Shelley, feature
in a work such as *Kubla Khan* as a bard-like figure, who encapsulated an almost pure
kind of poetry, and his conversation poems offer models for both younger poets.[23] Yet
neither Shelley nor Byron seems influenced by his inspired Bard-like questioning; each
draws on different models, and centres the individual self in his work. Yeats employs
more closely Coleridge's bardic style, but with such intense self-scrutiny that even as he
makes use of the power available to him by such an idea, he constantly interrogates and
calls into question this elevated poetic status. Coleridge almost seamlessly weaves
tension into his work; his anxieties bubble under the surface or cloak his poetry;
Coleridge creates a poetry of blurred boundaries, where art and life become not two

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[21] Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Shelley* (New Haven, CT; London:
Yale UP, 1976), 1.
[22] Jerome J. McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P; London: John Murray, 1976),
108.
[23] William Brewer offers an overview of how both poets were inspired by Coleridge's poetry, and the texts
with which they were engaged. See William D. Brewer, *The Shelley-Byron Conversation* (Gainesville, FL:
UP of Florida, 1994), 26-27.

separate things, but amorphous and entwined.[24] Byron and Shelley refuse this conciliatory principle, forcing the poetic self and the reader into the centre of a conflict between chaos and control.

My decision not to include Wordsworth as a major component of the thesis revolves around his central poetic mode of affirmation. As Geoffrey Hartman writes, "Wordsworth's recovery is therefore a rediscovery of inner continuities;"[25] this observation, while offering a valuable insight into Wordsworth's poetic practice, affirms the central reason for Wordsworth's exclusion from this study. "Inner continuities" are precisely what Byron and Shelley carefully explore, challenge, and destroy in their poetry. Wordsworth creates for Byron and Shelley the authority to centre the self; their poetry would scarcely be possible without the influence of Wordsworth, Harold Bloom's "covering cherub."[26] Yet Wordsworth's poetic method differs from Byron's and Shelley's even where it seems most similar, for their treatment of the self, heroism, and poetic creation operates with a striking difference of emphasis. Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, in his treatment of the "Growth of a Poet's Mind" emphatically declares the poet to be hero, and the central theme is the self:

> I have been speaking, for my theme has been
>
> What passed within me. Not of outward things
>
> Done visibly for other minds — words, signs,
>
> Symbols or actions — but of my own heart
>
> Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.
>
> O heavens, how awful is the might of souls,
>
> And what they do within themselves while yet

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[24] Kathleen M. Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan' and the Art of Thingifying," *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 132. As Seamus Perry shows, Coleridge's "impulse for unity" grew throughout his career alongside his fascination with Reason: "Coleridge's enthusiasm for the supersensuous merges with his impulse for unity." See Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1999), 63.

[25] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, foreword Donald G. Marshall, Theory and History 34 (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 1987), 6.

[26] Bloom discusses the covering cherub of poetic influence in *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 38.

>   The yoke of earth is new to them, the world

>   Nothing but a wild field where they were sown. [27] (*Prelude* (1805) III: 173-81)

The inwardness of the poem becomes its virtue; its originality is guaranteed by its exploration of the individual poetic soul. This quotation illustrates the force of M. H. Abrams' observation about Romanticism: "As a result the audience gradually receded into the background, giving place to the poet himself, and his own mental powers and emotional needs, as the predominant cause and even the end and test of art."[28] Yet, while Abrams shows the prominence of the individual speaker, the audience, rather than having "receded into the background," remains vitally important to the passage. Wordsworth's commitment to communicate as "a man speaking to men"[29] remains greatly significant; paradoxically, he requires the audience to assent to the independence of his individual poetic voice. Despite his assertion of the self, Wordsworth blends this with, in Hazlitt's phrase, his "levelling" muse.[30] As Hazlitt writes of his poetry, "It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard;" Wordsworth continually uses his poetic power to unite, to overcome boundaries, to solve and satisfy. The self, which Wordsworth explores with wonder and awe, uniting poet with man in an opening affirmative gesture, seems antithetical to the poetry of the self developed by Byron and Shelley. For these younger poets, self-exploration could not offer unfettered optimism. In a way that recalls Blake, without adopting that poet's full-blown division of the self into separate faculties or "Zoas", their poetry reveals fracture and torment; in their poetics and their poetry, Byron and Shelley present the poet-hero and their investigations of the self in a poetry that ranges across a spectrum of shifts, ruptures, and

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[27] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* [1805] III: 173-81, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York, NY; London: Norton, 1979), 100.

[28] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1953), 21.

[29] William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* [1800]," *Lyrical Ballads: The text of the 1798 edition with the additional 1800 poems and the Prefaces*, ed. with introd, notes and appendices R. L. Brett and A. R Jones, 2nd ed. (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 250. All quotations from the Prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads* will be from this edition.

[30] William Hazlitt, *Mr Wordsworth*, *Liber Amoris; The Spirit of the Age, The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, vol. 7 (London; Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 161.

crises. Yeats, inspired by Blake as he was, is more, as Bloom argues, in the line of Shelley: a poet whose theme was less his vision than his attitude to his vision.[31]

III.

Harold Bloom's critical formulations represent, in his terms, a strong precursor from whom I have diverged and to whom I am indebted as I have sought to arrive at fresh interpretations of the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats. His *Anxiety of Influence*,[32] *Poetry and Repression*,[33] and *Shelley's Mythmaking* have been particularly influential for this study.[34] *Shelley's Mythmaking* was a formative study that bravely and profoundly renewed awareness of the value of Shelley's poetry. Despite many critical innovations since his book, his insightful commentary has provided critics with a defence of Shelley's poetry that endures. My thesis particularly makes use of his chapter on *Epipsychidion*, developing his thought to suggest deeper and more troubling constructions of the poet-hero. Unlike Bloom, however, I view Shelley's mingling of the private and public sphere as a considered poetic technique employed to question and challenge the concept of the poet-hero.[35] I foreground Shelley's finely wrought performance in the poem, one which moves continually between the impression of control and of yielding.[36] Bloom's central conception of the relationship between the poet and the poem has helped me formulate and sharpen my interest in the poet's battle for control over the potentially chaotic text: "The poet's conception of himself necessarily is his poem's conception of itself, in my reading, and central to this conception is the matter of the sources of the powers of

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[31] See Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1970), 105 and 393.

[32] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.

[33] Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*.

[34] Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, Yale Studies in English: Volume 141 (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1959).

[35] "Shelley did not succeed completely in cutting the poem's genetic hawsers; the poem is to a certain extent a private and not a public performance. To that extent it is mostly very bad; Shelley's overt parallel of his poem to Dante's *Vita Nuova* is hardly justified." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 208.

[36] Like Michael O'Neill, I sense that Shelley would resist the heroics of power forwarded by some of Byron's figures, "Shelley is likely to have been able to raise at best only two cheers for such a concept of heroism. His own Prometheus needs to endure, yes, but also to love, to move beyond his sense of suffering." See Michael O'Neill, "The Fixed and the Fluid: Identity in Byron and Shelley," *The Byron Journal* 36 (2008): 110.

poetry."[37] Yet Bloom's studies occasionally overlook the teasing, pleasurable and aesthetic potentials of poetry,[38] and when he writes of his "lack of interest in most aspects of what is called 'form in poetry',"[39] he sets out a combative position from which the present thesis departs. Finally, Bloom provides the Shelleyan critic with a remarkable but disputable description of his poetic practice:

> His poetry is autonomous, finely wrought, in the highest degree imaginative, and has the spiritual form of vision, stripped of all veils and ideological coverings, the vision many readers justly seek in poetry, despite the admonitions of a multitude of churchwardenly critics.[40]

My own sense is rather that Shelley's poetry, far from being "autonomous," both strives for and suspects, attempts and yet affectingly fails to achieve autonomy throughout his most powerful work.[41]

My thesis has, in part, grown out of a critique of Jerome J. McGann's argument in *The Romantic Ideology*, which asserts that the poetic productions of the Romantic period are products of the age: "This work assumes that poems are social and historical products and that the critical study of such products must be grounded in a socio-historical analytic."[42] As Richard Cronin notes, McGann's view of Romanticism is far more mixed than this polemical statement implies: "Although McGann is severe on 'confusion of thought', 'the mortal sin of every form of criticism', it is a sin from which *The Romantic Ideology* does not seem exempt."[43] While highly mindful of the power and heroism of the poetry,

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[37] Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom et al (New York, NY: Seabury P, 1979), 3.

[38] Bloom's sense of the "melancholy identity" of poets and poetry is deeply sensitive, but needs the counterbalancing sense of joy so often displayed by the poets in this thesis. Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, 27.

[39] Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," 2.

[40] Harold Bloom, "The Unpastured Sea: An Introduction to Shelley" *Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (Chicago, IL; London: U of Chicago P, 1971), 87.

[41] As argued by Michael O'Neill – "Lyric autonomy, the sense that the poet's words have shaped themselves into a self-sufficient discourse, is only ever momentary in Shelley, an impression, a 'sense'; hence its pathos and unstable value." See "'And all things seem only one': the Shelleyan Lyric," *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays,* ed. Kelvin Everest, Essays and Studies 45 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, for the English Association, 1992), 119.

[42] McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, 3.

[43] Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 5.

McGann ultimately views it as an idealistic and ideological illusion.[44] Yet this formulation deliberately overlooks the imaginative individuality of these poets in favour of the "radical Marxist project" which seeks to undermine the "vatic" projection of Romanticism.[45] Like Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler, I differ strongly from McGann on this point, as this study shows Byron, Shelley and Yeats to be of central interest to the Romantic period and beyond owing to their enactment of the poet's attempt to fashion the self, imposing order on and insinuating a personal presence into the text. The struggle between being a product of history and being a discrete individual is often at the forefront of their work; history, biography, and the world are never merely outside of the text. These forces are always present, and always grappled with by the strength of the poet's imagination. The imaginative and technical spheres represent arenas in which the poet can exercise his "blessed rage for order,"[46] and seek to style the universe according to imaginative structures. My thesis explores the way in which chaos and linguistic order co-exist in the poetry of Byron, Shelley and Yeats, as each simultaneously acknowledges the outside, while continuing their attempts to impose onto their texts a succession of verbal universes capable of reflecting, countering, and challenging the external world. There is no "uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" present in the work of any of the three poets.[47]

My thesis also opposes Jeffrey Robinson's criticism that the imagination "prefers a poetry of closed forms;"[48] this makes a critical assumption that Byron, Shelley, and Yeats would reject. This study contends that each of the three poets can lay claim to the title of imaginative poet for reasons opposite to Robinson's formulation. While it is admired, the synthesising principle that is the Imagination also comes under suspicion in the poetry of

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[44] My thesis benefits greatly from McGann's criticism, particularly the following studies: *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1968); *Don Juan in Context*; *Byron and Romanticism*, ed. James Soderholm (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

[45] Terms used in the introduction to Hopps' and Stabler's *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace* which strongly argues against Jerome McGann's thesis in *The Romantic Ideology.* See "Introduction," *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, ed. Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler, The Nineteenth Century Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

[46] Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," 130.

[47] McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, 1.

[48] Jeffrey C. Robinson, *Unfettering Poetry: Fancy in British Romanticism* (New York, NY; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4.

Byron, Shelley and Yeats. This unifying and creative principle, which Shelley defines as the key to poetic creation,[49] has the possibility to discover endlessly new combinations, which throw into question the preceding figurations dreamt of by the poet. So, the discussion of "Mont Blanc" in chapter one focuses on Shelley's interest in creating and dissolving different interpretations of the mountain which finally transforms fixity into possibility. Robinson's study also re-labels Byron as a "poet of Fancy,"[50] which supposes that Byron would accept that he deals solely in "fixities and definites," a view that wilfully excludes much of the poet's synthesising capacity, and reduces his world-view to playing with counters that,[51] as a poet of mobility,[52] he would not accept as either fixed or definite. While Byron may play with the notion that his poetry, particularly *Don Juan*, receives "all its materials ready made from the law of association,"[53] his breathtaking range evidences, and even underlines, his imaginative faculty. He offers the reader a this-worldly poetry in *Don Juan*, but allows eternity, religion, and the other-worldly their place: all belong to his earth-bound world. With this in mind, chapter two offers a discussion of Byron's poetics that seeks to establish Byron's poetics as evidencing a subtlety consistent with serious poetic preoccupations. For Yeats, writing in the aftermath of Romanticism, the imagination offers a power that can transform and alter perception, and the controlling poet can create patterns, images and ideas that can influence the outside universe. Yet, like his Romantic predecessors, Yeats continually questions the efficacy of his poetry; his poetry rehearses and performs the struggle of constructing a self with the power to effect these changes. The three poets offer the reader a poetry that consistently challenges the borders of self and world, control and chaos. Between these contraries, their poetry runs its course.

My own critical position is that the poetry of Byron, Shelley and Yeats demands, above all, a form of close reading that is alive to the interplay between poetic individuality and

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[49] "Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination': and poetry is connate with the origin of man." *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

[50] Robinson, *Unfettering Poetry*, 203.

[51] S.T. Coleridge, Chapter XIII, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. with introd. George Watson [1965] (London: Dent, 1977), 167.

[52] See McGann, "Byron, Mobility, and the Poetics of Historical Ventriloquism," *Byron and Romanticism*, 36-52.

[53] *Biographia Literaria*, 167.

external considerations. Byron's, Shelley's, and Yeats's engagement with these issues makes their poetry self-reflexive and capable of creating, uncreating, and recreating verbal universes. I am in sympathy with Michael O'Neill's belief in the value of poetry as a "mode of knowing,"[54] and, applying this idea to Byron's, Shelley's, and Yeats's poetry, I explore their work as creating self-aware poetry that openly performs its relationship with chaos and control.

IV.

This study is not framed as an influence study. Though Byron, Shelley and Yeats are bound together in subtle and intricate ways, this study does not seek to demonstrate the poetic capital made from the friendship between Byron and Shelley, nor their influence on Yeats's poetry. While Bloom's ideal that "criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem,"[55] is immensely useful for the critic, there have been excellent studies on influence, by Bloom himself, and by other critics who have shown the various relationships between Byron, Shelley and Yeats, and I see no reason to retrace well-worn routes.[56] Ultimately, my focus lies on the individuality of the three poets, who, though sharing preoccupations, create their own intensely individual responses to the problem of chaos and control.

I have chosen to work on these three poets as their uniqueness resides in their overt struggle to become an individual in the world. In Shelley and Byron, owing to their

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[54] "Unlike Bloom, then, for whom all readings are misreading, I would reassert the value of poetry as a mode of knowing when the object of knowledge is literature itself." Michael O'Neill, "Poetry as Literary Criticism," *The Arts and Sciences of Criticism*, ed. David Fuller and Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 123.

[55] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 96.

[56] For examples of studies that focus on the relationship between Yeats, Shelley and Blake, see George Bornstein, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1976); George Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley* (Chicago, IL; London: U of Chicago P, 1970). For studies on the relationship between Shelley and Byron, see Brewer, *The Shelley-Byron Conversation*; Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976). For studies that see Yeats through the wider frame of Romanticism, see O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air*; Baker, *The Echoing Green*.

working in the aftermath of the French Revolution,[57] the sense of being belated pervades their work. Unable to access the unfettered poetic optimism open to the first-generation, they struggled throughout their careers to create imaginative space, finding ways to engage with the world that would allow for their individual vision. While McGann's summary of the first-generation Romantics is undeniably reductive, it would strike a note of resonance for Shelley and Byron, and, beyond them, for Yeats: "Blake fell silent, Wordsworth fell asleep, and Coleridge fell into his late Christian *contemptus*. The second generation Romantics, however, fashioned from these evil times a new set of poetic opportunities."[58] Shelley and Byron insist on "poetic opportunities" and their interest in self-mastery is strikingly central to the poetry. For Yeats, the problem of the self in an unfriendly universe becomes still more pressing, as he works to define himself in relation to and often separation from his contemporaries, his society, and the political conditions of his day.[59] This self-mastery is not an egotistical auxiliary to their art; as Paul Stanfield writes of Yeats, and is apparent in each of the poets, "he also believed poetry made things happen."[60]

This thesis is structured in two parts. The first part contains three chapters on the poetics, respectively, of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats. I focus on their individual interest in the relationship between chaos and control in poetry, and how each poet formulates and expresses his control (or attempted control) of the potentially chaotic text. The thesis is ordered chronologically, focusing on each poet in turn. Each chapter is divided into five sections to indicate thematic concerns. The first chapter, on Byron's poetics, centres on *Don Juan*, *Beppo*, and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and argues for the presence of a coherent poetics in his oeuvre. By contrasting Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" with sections from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, I show Byron's mocking laughter to be "doubly serious" (*Beppo* 79: 632) with reference to his poetic battle with his

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[57] "The Romantic Movement found itself in a revolutionary age, of which the French Revolution was the central symbol." Northrop Frye, "Foreword," *Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, Ed. with foreword Northrop Frye (New York, NY; London: Columbia UP, 1963), vi.

[58] McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, 116.

[59] For a balanced study of Yeats's response to Ireland through politics, see Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

[60] Paul Scott Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, Macmillan Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 7.

contemporaries. Chapter two, on Shelley's poetics, examines *A Defence of Poetry* and its relationship with Shelley's poetry, giving particular attention to *Alastor* and "Mont Blanc." Shelley's refusal to end-stop his poetry reflects the open and fluid intellectual patterning of *A Defence*. He moves between "force and assurance,"[61] in his confident avowals of belief, and "transference,"[62] where he "he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth."[63] The interplay between faith and doubt, control and chaos, is central to Shelley's poetics. Chapter three examines the self-consciousness of Yeats's poetics, and concentrates on *The Wanderings of Oisin*, the Byzantium poems, and "Easter 1916" in order to explore Yeats's career-long interest in the vacillation between chaos and control.[64]

To contend with or master chaos is to have commerce with the heroic, and the second section is divided into six chapters addressing the concept of the hero in the poetry of Byron, Shelley and Yeats. Each of the poets has two chapters as the thesis builds on the groundwork laid down in the first section to explore more fully the nature of the poetic achievement of each writer. Byron, Shelley and Yeats explore the hero-type in individual and characteristic terms that follow on from their respective poetics. They each focus particularly for their most intense explorations of the nature of the hero on the poet-hero, who attempts to impose order and structure on to the world of chaos. Chapters four and five examine Byron's concept of the hero. Byron's heroic figures are considered as explorations of his interest in perception and language, the product of his desire "to create, and in creating live / A being more intense" (*CHP* III. 6: 46-47). Chapter four focuses specifically on *Cain* and *The Giaour*. It traces Byron's evolving sense of the importance of interpretation to ideas of heroism in poems whose speakers draw attention to the fragmentary nature of perspective. The effect is to show the difficulty of any straightforward notion of heroism. Following this theme, chapter five discusses the

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[61] See Michael O'Neill "Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet," *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, 239.

[62] Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, vii.

[63] Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. and expanded R. W. Maslen, 3rd ed. (Manchester; New York, NY: Manchester UP, 2002), 103.

[64] "I am always, in all I do, driven to a moment which is the realisation of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the surrender to God of all that I am" W. B. Yeats, "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty," *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 305.

relationship between the hero and the narrator in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*, as Byron decentres the active hero of the narrative in favour of the lyrical self that narrates the poem. By closely scrutinizing Byron's poetic method in his construction of the hero, the reader can trace the evolution of his style, and recognise the artistry of his creations. Perspective, struggle, and self-mastery come to be the governing principles in Byron's construction of heroism.

Shelley's heroes emerge as subtly projected figures who embody and dramatise the poet's ambitions and desires. *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais* offer a peculiar brand of heroism which complements and develops Shelley's earlier preoccupations. Written in close proximity, these poems focus on poet-heroes who create and order verbal universes from and in the face of the chaos of the historical-objective world.[65] Chapter six views Shelley's *Epipsychidion* as a climactic exploration of the poet-as-hero who grows in importance and scope in this poet's work, sometimes tragically or near-tragically as in the Poet of *Alastor* or Rousseau in *The Triumph of Life*, sometimes more optimistically as in Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound*, who is or becomes, as Daniel Hughes has argued, a figure of the "capable poet."[66] The chapter examines the means by which Shelley constructs in *Epipsychidion* a heroic project of subtle complexity, the poet-hero's verbal universe veering between yielding fluidity and sinuous violence. Chapter seven explores *Adonais*'s radical refiguring of the elegy as it creates a hero-figure who is double in construction, at once the elegising Shelley and the elegised Keats. *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais* unite through their manifest poetic risk-taking. Both poems risk total destruction: *Epipsychidion* at the hands of language when its foreshadowed breakdown witnesses the apparent implosion (yet also implicit validation) of the idea of the poet as hero, and Shelley's prophetic rhetoric in *Adonais* invoking a breathtaking death-drive which seems to force him along almost against his will. Shelley's conception of the hero conjures his own verbal universe, weaving strands of literature, biography, and influence as he

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[65] I follow Carlos Baker's belief that Shelley was primarily interested in the hero as poet: "Had he anticipated Carlyle in writing a book on heroes, hero worship, and the heroic in history, he would have emphasized the hero as poet, whom he felt to be the strongest force for mental rehabilitation that human history knows." Baker, *The Echoing Green,* 111.

[66]This phrase is taken from the title of Daniel Hughes' study of *Prometheus Unbound*. See Daniel Hughes, "Prometheus Made Capable Poet in Act One of *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in Romanticism* 17.1 (1978): 3-11.

undulates between action and passivity. Shelley's hyperbolic poetry performs the heights and depths of heroism.[67] Shelley experiments with tropes, heroism, and the genre of elegy as he discovers the limits of language, and so the limits of human desire and possibility. Heroism in Shelley involves a continual critique of power; the poetry moves between a yielding suppleness of tone, open to the embrace of chaos, and the assertive force of the controlling poet's vision.

In the exploration of Yeats's concept of the hero, the discussion in both chapters eight and nine centres on and circles round "The Tower," a poem which is among Yeats's most sustained explorations of the poetic self in pursuit of hard-won, heroic status. Yeats, the self-mythologiser, transforms self into hero; the doubts, ironies, and shifting tones become his Dantescan purgatory, where the self is hardened into "something intended, complete."[68] Chapter eight focuses on "The Tower," tracing Yeats's masterful use of tone, form and his predecessors to create a uniquely personal, yet carefully impersonal, poetic monument to the poet-hero. Poetic art both creates and conceals the self, as Yeats draws upon the opposing poles of personality and art to form a poet-hero who is Yeats, but never simply so. Chapter nine considers the enriching ways in which "Adam's Curse," "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz," and "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" interact with the final section of "The Tower." Through readings of these poems, I explore Yeats's evolving ability to place at the centre of his work the poet-hero; his belief in self-fashioning required the creation of figures who would question, undermine, and finally support the self. Yeats's poetic victory is his role as the main actor in his own drama, the Prospero commanding the Ariels and Calibans of his poetry. Between the chaotic pressures of the world in "Theatre business, management of men," ("The Fascination of What's Difficult, 11) and the controlled solitary image of the "cold snows of a dream" ("The Road at my Door," 15), the poet energises his poetry; the ultimate quest of Yeats's masterful poetry is to form a poet-hero who can perform the

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[67] Like Harold Bloom, I assume hyperbole to be the most important of tropes, and follow his interpretation: "Hyperbole, the trope of excess or of the over-throw, like repression finds its images in height and depth, in the Sublime and the Grotesque." Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 2nd ed. [1975] (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 100.
[68] W. B. Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 509.

difficult and creative negotiation between his assembled company and his "ghostly solitude" ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," 40).

V.

The prominence of chaos and control in the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats insistently returns us to power relationships, relationships that develop as the poet performs them before his reader. All the contradictions of the dialectic are worn on their collective sleeve, as the reader enters into an arena in which becoming, not being, enacts itself. The three poets stand at the centre of their work, and this is the reason for their grouping in this study. Yeats determinedly situates himself as a contemporary who engages in dialogues with his predecessors, and can stand aloof from them as he wills himself into individuality. He turns his lateness into an advantage; he is belated, but glories in the opportunities offered to him by his status as "last romantic" ("Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," 41). He stands apart from what he considers to be erroneous aspects in Shelley and his contemporaries,[69] and the "filthy modern tide" ("The Statues," 29) of contemporary Ireland. It is his ability to hold himself equal to Shelley and Byron while occupying similar territory that fits him for this discussion.

Could anyone but Yeats, possessing a similar level of engagement with Romantic poetry (particularly Shelley), have been able to assert such strong self-autonomy in his work? Poets working immediately after Shelley and Byron deliberately avoid writing poetry in the same manner. While something comparable to the preoccupation with chaos and control occurs in the poetry of Tennyson, Arnold, and Browning, they touch on these poles, but do not form their poetry from them. They mask the performed lyric self and present, often through dramatic monologues, personae that veil, repress, and sublimate the tensions which burst from the work of Byron, Shelley and Yeats. Matthew Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" encapsulates the difficult sense of belatedness that

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[69] Yeats often criticised Shelley and Byron's poetry, but he is never more excoriating than when he discusses his belief that Shelley lacked a Vision of Evil: "Why is Shelley terrified of the Last Day like a Victorian child?" Yeats, "Prometheus Unbound," *Essays and Introductions*, 420. O'Neill's defence of Shelley's vision of evil shows Yeats's reading to be a misreading. See O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air*, 113-14.

often pervades his work when he reflects on the poetry of Byron and Shelley.[70] He figures himself and his contemporaries as "Inheritors of thy distress" (143). His emphasis on the over-weaning influence of Shelley and Byron fetters his poetry; he retreats from the Romantic self since he cannot afford to challenge the predecessors that dominate his work:

> But we — we learnt your lore too well!
>
> Years hence, perhaps, may dawn an age,
> More fortunate, alas! than we,
> Which without hardness will be sage,
> And gay without frivolity.
> Sons of the world, oh, speed those years;
> But, while we wait, allow our tears!
>
> (156-62)

Arnold is left unable to participate in the poetic freedom he admires so strongly in Byron and Shelley. Arnold is abandoned in the wake of his predecessors, and cannot access his dreamed-of future. Any study of his work in the context of these two predecessors would inescapably create a study of poetic influence, not a study of poetic independence.

This study focuses on Yeats as he pushes the performance of the lyric self to the forefront of his poetry in a way unprecedented since his Romantic precursors. Harold Bloom rightly draws attention to the seemingly inescapable belatedness that pervades Browning's and Yeats's poetry,[71] but unlike Bloom, I hold that Yeats's interest in self-fashioning bespeaks his strikingly individual perspective, which is reminiscent, yet never merely derivative, of Shelley and Byron.[72] The self-fashioning drive creates the preoccupation with heroism on which the second section of the thesis focuses. The prominence of chaos and control in the three poets is always filtered through the self;

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[70] Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott; 2nd ed. ed. Miriam Allott, Longman Annotated English Poets (London: Longman, 1979), 309.
[71] See Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, 174 and 178.
[72] Yet Bloom does show that Yeats managed the unlikely stroke of becoming his own influence: The dominant influences upon him were the antithetical fourfold: Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Pater, to whom as an *antithetical* theorist he added himself as a fifth." *Poetry and Repression*, 206.

Yeats's distance affords him the space he requires to create the poetry of the lyric self without being dangerously forced into a supplicant position to his powerful forebears.

Despite Yeats's often quoted assertion from "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," there is, finally, no last romantic. As Jerome McGann writes, "The Romantic Age is so called not because all its works are Romantic, but rather because the ideologies of Romanticism exerted an increasingly dominant influence during that time."[73] In the same way, Yeats could still access the ideologies of Romanticism, and partially create his potent myth of the self from the preoccupations of his forebears. His individuality as a poet consists of his ability to access the same modes of self-fashioning that Byron and Shelley perform throughout their poetry. Modernist models infuse Yeats's poetry with contemporary poetic trends, yet his unique mixture of Modernism with Romanticism guarantees a powerfully unique voice.[74] Byron and Shelley's poetry are models for his own work, to be utilized and engaged with, yet their poetry does not force his soul to "fret in the shadow of [their] language."[75] Yeats denies the boundary that separates him from the Romantics, and, in an act of will, creates his own pantheon of great poets whom he can converse with, appropriate, and challenge (see chapters eight and nine for a longer discussion). The chaos of the actual, from which Byron, Shelley, and Yeats create their poetry, wars constantly with but also paradoxically enables the control they attempt to establish. It is their staging of the quarrel between chaos and control that not only provides them with the material out of which they make poetry but also means that their practice foreshadows and at times outflanks our critical constructions.

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[73] McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, 19.

[74] Daniel Albright carefully shows Yeats's ambivalent stance towards contemporary poetic trends, demonstrating his consistent engagement with Modernism: "If Yeats became the ghost that haunted Modernism, Modernism was also a ghost that haunted Yeats." See Daniel Albright, "Yeats and Modernism," *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, ed. Marjorie Howes and John Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 63.

[75] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Seamus Deane (London: Penguin, 1992), 205.

CHAPTER ONE

"Doubly Serious": Byron's Ambivalent Poetics

"This conundrum of a dish"

To search for a poetic ideology in Byron's poetry and prose may seem somewhat perverse. [1] Byron has provided the critic with no equivalent to Wordsworth's "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" or Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*,[2] but we should not infer from this that he lacked a coherent poetics of his own. Byron's letter on the Bowles/Pope controversy sets out his stall on his departure from the Lake school of thought.[3] More generally, however, Byron did not feel it necessary to formulate any formal poetic manifesto owing to his conviction that his beliefs were shared by the majority of his contemporaries.[4] This sense of sharing or debating beliefs with his readership is strong in a poet who always writes with his audience in mind,[5] leading Matthew Bevis to observe: "Byron's work is the most sustained poetic engagement with oratorical culture in the period."[6]

I.

Wordsworth and the Lake school came to represent for Byron the apotheosis of a new school that seemed to discard traditional poetic principles in favour of a new system of philosophy unpalatable to the aristocratic poet. From his antipathy to these values, Byron developed a confrontational style designed to counter the poetic group he saw as

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[1] "He stands apart from all the other great Romantic poets in never having written a piece of expository critical prose that has seemed important to later investigators of Romantic aesthetics." McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, 159.

[2] William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* [1800]," 250. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, *Leader and O'Neill*, 674-701.

[3] Lord Byron, "The Bowles/Pope Controversy 1821: Letter to John Murray Esq." *Byron's Prose*, 120-60.

[4] Byron consistently refers to others that share his opinion on matters, for example he refers to the stanzas on Pope in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* as "our [his and Hobhouse's] mutual opinion." "The Bowles/Pope Controversy 1821: Letter to John Murray Esq.," 123. He also retains the confidence that "all the rest of the Blank pretenders may do their best and worst - -they will never wrench Pope from the hands of a single reader of sense and feeling. - - - - -," 158.

[5] "Byron might proclaim a lordly indifference, but he remained uncommonly attuned to the expectations of his readers." Peter J. Manning, "*Don Juan* and the Revisionary Self," *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 211.

[6] Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 32.

despoiling contemporary literature. He is an antagonist of poetic systems and creeds; even at his most conventional, Byron remains, as he hints to Lord Holland, "*half a framebreaker myself.*"[7] No other poet is as vitriolic in his avowed disdain for the poet and poetry, even as his poetry evinces enjoyment for the possibilities that language allows.[8] This combination of disdain and vigour is apparent throughout Byron's oeuvre.

Contraries provide the tinder spark that sets Byron's poetry alight and in motion. His poetics demands a fitting tribute to "our mix'd essence,"[9] and this gives rise to poetry that actively seeks to reflect life in all its variety:

> Why I thank God for that is no great matter;
>   I have my reasons, you no doubt suppose,
> And as, perhaps, they would not highly flatter,
>   I'll keep them for my life (to come) in prose;
> I fear I have a little turn for satire,
>   And yet methinks the older that one grows
> Inclines us more to laugh than scold, though laughter
> Leaves us so doubly serious shortly after.

(*Beppo* 79: 625-32)

Byron appears to be playing a game in this stanza: a game with the narrator, the poet-self, the personal self and his friends.[10] The mixture of the public-private voice is, as Robert Gleckner shows, a hallmark of Byron's poetic voice which, despite "its very publicness [is] capable of a peculiar kind of intimate revelation."[11] While Gleckner convincingly argues for the public-private Byronic voice, the level of calculation at work in the poetry makes the "intimate revelation" seem particularly "peculiar." Having teasingly alluded to

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[7] *BLJ* 2: 166.

[8] Often affecting to deplore his own and the work of contemporary authors, Byron could seem to "play" at poetry, lacking respect or love for his work: "With regard to poetry in general I am convinced that [Moore] and *all* of us—Scott—Southey—Wordsworth—Moore—Campbell—I—are all in the wrong—one as much as another—that we are all upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system—or systems—not worth a damn in itself—& from which none but Rogers and [George] Crabbe are free—and that the present & next generations will finally be of this opinion." *BLJ* 5: 265

[9] *Manfred* I. ii. 41

[10] See Jerome McGann, "Byron and "The Truth in Masquerade," in *Romantic Revisions*, 191-209 for a discussion of the manipulative games played by Byron in "When We Two Parted."

[11] Robert F. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1967), xvii

Lady Byron in the previous couple of stanzas, Byron moves on to more cunning self-exposure. By leavening his serious poetic thought with the circumstances of his famously debauched life, Byron can detach himself from the caricature of Sotheby, the archetypal author in "foolscap uniform[s]" (*Beppo* 75: 594). When Byron writes in stanza 75 that "One hates an author that's *all author*," (*Beppo* 75: 593) he uses the following four stanzas to add to his worldly credentials. His repeated allusions to Lady Byron, and their acrimonious separation, guarantee for himself the reputation that he half courts and half satirises, that of the scandalous man of the world who toys with poetry. Words perform as things in the sense that they assume the status of a deed: they have the power to alter perception, create a counter-truth, and forge a lasting testimonial of the poet's making. The deliberateness of his manipulation shows Byron shaping words in order to master his self-presentation. Words can thus influence world, as the poet, however self-mockingly, turns legislator, assigning value and meaning in his poetic space.

But this power is transitory. Words perform their own meanings, and remain outside of the poet's total control. If words are things, they are things that will not long disappear from the verse. Against Byron's "laughter" at poetry's expense, we must place his "doubly serious" (*Beppo* 79: 632) attitude towards language and expression. Language's role in Byron's sustained poetic attempt to provide "what will suffice" is more than that of a vehicle;[12] it is a force in its own right. It wrestles with the poet who wrestles with it. Here, Byron seems to anticipate the ontological formulation of language offered by twentieth-century deconstructive theory:

> And the deconstructive insight is that language does not simply fail to refer to objects, or fail to refer to them "adequately." Language does not fail to produce communication. Instead, it creates a communion that is always inadequate because the language that would be its mere medium has its own ontological status.[13]

But Byron will not allow this inadequacy to defeat his urge to express; his will-driven poetry enters a conflict with language. Byron must acknowledge the chaos of language in

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[12] Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry," 239.
[13] Frances Ferguson, "Romantic Studies," *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York, NY: MLA, 1992), 117.

order to control it, and engage in a pitched battle to "own" his words rather than accepting their limitations. The pressure placed on language by this conflict-ridden concept of language is immense, but Byron turns this strain into a celebration of language, which for all his attempts to control and order, remains its own agent. In his poetry, words are not ciphers that in a particular order can perfectly convey the message their creator intends. Byron allows words autonomy; the ambiguity and shades of meaning innate to words withhold complete power from the aspiring arbiter. Words have an intense power that comes from their palpable organic presence:

> For true *words* are *things*,
>
> And dying men's are things which long outlive,
>
> And oftentimes avenge them; bury mine,
>
> (*Marino Faliero*, 5.1: 289-91)[14]

This thought repeats itself through Byron's poetry and prose; it was not only a device suitable for the rhythm of this particular stanza. In Byron's journal entry for November 16, 1813 he alludes again to this preoccupation: "Did not Tully tell Brutus it was a pity to have spared Antony? and did he not speak the Philippics? and are not "*words things*?" and such "*words*" very pestilent "*things*" too."[15] Byron, the frustrated man of action, seeks to make poetry an active thing; like Thomas Carlyle, he sees the poet-as-hero as also the hero-as-poet,[16] possessing the power to inform his words with his own heroic presence. [17]

This link between word, deed, and character creates a sense of uneasiness in later responses to Byron's brand of active poetry. Lord Byron's strength, for poets such as W. H. Auden, and thinkers such as Bertrand Russell, contains an underlying ideological danger. Auden's lines in his *Letter to Lord Byron* suggest the deep ambivalence of

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[14] As *McGann* does not contain this drama, the edition used is: Lord George Gordon Byron, *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, Byron: Poetical Works*, ed. Frederick Page; rev. John Jump (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), 446

[15] *BLJ* 3: 207

[16] Thomas Carlyle, "Lecture III: The Hero as Poet. Dante; Shakspeare," *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, notes and introd. Michael K. Goldberg; text established Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin, and Mark Engel, *The Norman and Charlotte Strouse Edition of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: U of California P, 1993), 67-97.

[17] "The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he were at least a Heroic warrior too." Carlyle, 67-68.

response to Byron, as Byronic heroism borders on the proto-fascist in Auden's verse explorations:

> Suggestions have been made that the Teutonic
> > Führer-Prinzip would have appealed to you
> As being the true heir to the Byronic —
> > In keeping with your social status too
> > (It has its English converts, fit and few),
> That you would, hearing honest Oswald's call,
> Be gleichgeschaltet in the Albert Hall.

(*Letter to Lord Byron* 2: 470-76)[18]

These arch lines, suspended between admiration and accusation, present a provocative and nuanced view of Byron's heroic method. By insinuating Byron's implicit fellowship with the rising spectre of German nationalism without direct accusation, Auden retains a sly distance from Byron's accusers and Byron himself. The line "true heir of the Byronic" suggests Byron's often overt interest in his aristocratic status, while "fit and few" seems to draw smartly on Milton's "fit audience find, though few" (*PL* VII. 31),[19] referencing Byron's hope to be Milton's poetic heir. The proto-fascism becomes a theme, as, in Bertrand Russell's view, it becomes the most prominent form of philosophical influence that Byron exerted. Russell finds in Byron "Titanic cosmic self-assertion" combined with Satanism, which he explicitly links with Napoleon and Hitler, overtly gesturing to his sense of Byron's proto-fascism.[20] Byron, as the only poet featured in Russell's volume, combined with the volume's appearance immediately after the Second World War, renders him a prominent and sinister figure in Russell's evaluation of his philosophical importance, particularly as Satanic heroism becomes the Byronic hallmark in Russell's perception.

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[18] W. H. Auden, *Letter to Lord Byron, The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1977), 180.

[19] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* VII: 31, *John Milton: The Complete Poems*, ed. with preface and notes John Leonard (London: Penguin, 1998), 269.

[20] Bertrand Russell, "Byron," *History of Western Philosophy* [1946] (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 717.

Yet Byron also takes a less heroic, even anti-heroic view of words as things, as when in *Don Juan* (known hereafter as *DJ*), he addresses the enduring life of words beyond the natural life of their "creators":

> But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
>
>   Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
>
> That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think;
>
>   'Tis strange, the shortest letter which man uses
>
> Instead of speech, may form a lasting link
>
>   Of ages; to what straits old Time reduces
>
> Frail man, when paper – even a rag like this,
>
> Survives himself, his tomb, and all that's his.

<div align="right">(DJ III. 88: 793-800)</div>

This stanza reflects Byron's ability to foray through several emotional inflections within a single unit of verse. In "But words are things" (III. 88: 793) the drawn-out vowels make the reader read at a slower pace. The first six lines (up to the semi-colon after "Of ages") ponder the "thingness" of words, and the powerful presence that they have despite their unphysical nature. The oddness of this thought causes Byron's reflection to assume a more brooding, even Hamlet-like inflection, as he expands his assertion from thousands to millions. By denigrating his verse as "even a rag like this," (III. 88: 799) Byron is not simply diminishing his achievement, as Richard Cronin argues with reference to *Don Juan*.[21] Rather, Byron's frustration arises from his contrast between the immortality of words and the fading away of the memory of the actual life. Possession, actions, and even the body itself, may define the content of a life, but when that life is extinguished, words are all that remain. Byron was a poet preoccupied with affording language a lasting potency,[22] but the idea that poetry could supplant the primacy of action is threatening for his poetics of presence. Byron's response to the substance of words is to marry the

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[21] "In effect, he was agreeing that *Don Juan* should be published not as poetry but as verse. If one school of poets appealed to future generations by writing 'claptrap', Byron, it might seem, was content to appeal to what interested the present age, to write what the poem calls 'tittle tattle' (XII, 43)." See Richard Cronin, "Words and the Word: The Diction of *Don Juan*," *Romanticism and Religion*, 149.

[22] Byron consistently deprecated authors who seemed unworldly in his opinion, and *Beppo* contains a characteristic complaint against those whose work can neither mirror the world nor affect it in any way: "One hates an author that's *all author* - fellows / In foolscap uniforms turned up with ink" (*Beppo* 75: 593) and he praises those poets who are "Men of the world, who know the world like men" (*Beppo* 76: 602).

laughter and tears of this mixed condition. Tragedy and comedy are thrown together in the same stanza, and a dizzying array of postures and emotions are forced to coexist.

II.

That one must be wary of over-valuing any one of Byron's assertions is evident, and stanza 88 cannot be viewed as an island isolated from the mood of the previous and following poetry. Stanza 88 is surrounded by mockery, irony, and exasperation. Prior to this meditation, Byron sketches a savage and humorous portrait of "their poet, a sad trimmer" (*DJ* III. 82: 649). Jerome McGann argues persuasively that the portrayal involves a conflation of Southey and Byron,[23] and this remark suggests the guilt, complicity, and contempt implicit in the grimly humorous passage. The confessional quality of the poet is undercut by the trimmer's chameleon-like ability to adapt to the situation without any compunction:

> Thus, usually, when he was ask'd to sing
>
>   He gave the different nations something national;
>
> 'Twas all the same to him — 'God save the king,'
>
>   Or '*Ça ira',* according to the fashion all;
>
> His muse made increment of any thing,

<div align="right">(DJ III. 85: 673-77)</div>

The slyness of this passage, as it seems to display the poet-trimmer as a disingenuous character, shapes multiple levels of suggestion. One is momentarily to denigrate the apparently confessional quality detectable in *Don Juan* and his other poetry. As Paul West rightly points out, "It is Byron and Byron's idea of himself which hold his work together."[24] This phrase helpfully suggests the proto-Yeatsian nature of a poetry in which the poet has been "reborn as an idea, something, intended, complete;"[25] yet Byron's use of this "idea" is to show the limits of intentionality and the impossibility of completion.

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[23] "But the portrait is contemporary, and is modelled partly on Southey and partly on Byron himself." *McGann*, 1048-49. For a longer discussion of the conflation of Byron and Southey in this figure, see McGann, "Private poetry, public deception" *Byron and Romanticism*, 113-40.

[24] Paul West, "Introduction," *Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Paul West, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 2.

[25] Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 509.

Byron projects himself,[26] and allows into his work as much of the self that would vivify the composition without becoming descriptive or simplistically self-revelatory in any degree. This portrait of a poet, identifiable with both Byron and Southey, his poetic enemy, deflates the notion that readers have gained or can gain privileged access to Byron's mind. Byron's choice of words has made it difficult to differentiate between two wildly different poets, and demonstrated that the poet portrayed is compliant with any pose that it becomes expedient to take. Further still, Byron alludes to Shakespeare's Sonnet 111 in stanza 87, immediately before the assertion that "words are things" (*DJ* III. 88: 793). In the stanza, Byron explicitly describes poets as liars, and the reference to the Shakespearean sonnet is particularly barbed:

> …And feeling, in a poet, is the source
>
> Of others' feeling; but they are such liars,
>
> And take all colours — like the hands of dyers

<div align="right">(DJ III. 87: 790-92)</div>

The Shakespearian sonnet describes the condition of the poet, forced to move in reputation-damaging circles and his subsequent notoriety.[27] The allusion helps to catalyse the aristocratic hauteur that Byron mimics,[28] and the reference compounds the distance between the poet and his audience by subtly indicating his higher status than that of the masses. An educated audience would note the Shakespearian allusion, and understand from it that the poem is a public performance that degrades the poet. In an anticipatory rebuttal of John Stuart Mill's later dictum on the difference between poetry and rhetoric ("eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard"), Byron demonstrates that the poem is not an entity necessarily removed from dramatic eloquence.[29] Language is always public,

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[26] As M. K. Joseph argues, the hallmark of Byron's mature style is his ability to project himself into the poetry; it is a willed and never accidental performance: "[In *Beppo*] The tone of voice is that of Byron in the letters, and the character of the narrator is not exactly Byron himself, but Byron as he now chooses to project himself into the poem." M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964), 136.

[27] William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 603.

[28] J. Michael Robertson suggests Byron's poetry can be usefully, though not comprehensively viewed through the lenses of his aristocratic background, see J. Michael Robertson, "Aristocratic Individualism in Byron's Don Juan", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 17 (1977): 639-55. *JSTOR*. 30 Sep. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[29] John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume 1 - Autobiography and Literary Essays*, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, introd. Lord Robbins, vol.1 (Toronto: U of Toronto P; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 348.

always engaged in power struggle, and always a force in its own right. Being a poet is, for Byron, being strong enough to grapple with language's otherness.

III.

Comparison between Wordsworth and Byron, those "corporeal enemies,"[30] illuminates the nature of Byron's poetics. Emphasis on the spontaneity, even the apparent carelessness of Byron's poetry, while providing intermittent insights into its compositional processes,[31] has tended to downplay both his poetic art and his development of an implicit poetics. The polarization of Wordsworth and Byron is evident from their mutual loathing (despite Byron's momentary conversion in the summer of 1816 when Shelley "used to dose me with Wordsworth physic even to nausea"),[32] and issues, in large part, from their antagonistic theories of poetry. Even when they seem to occupy similar ground, they conflict strongly. When Wordsworth refers darkly to Byron "poaching on my Manor" in a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson,[33] Byron's approach to Nature in Canto III is probably in his mind. Moore recalls Wordsworth speaking of "the feeling of natural objects which is there expressed, not caught by B[yron] from nature herself, but from him [Wordsworth] and spoiled in the transmission."[34] A comparison of Byron's address to the Ocean in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto IV with Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (hereafter "Tintern Abbey") reveals their different approaches to Nature:

> Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean — roll!
>
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
>
> Man marks the earth with ruin — his control
>
> Stops with the shore; — upon the watery plain

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[30] McGann refers to Byron and Wordsworth in this way. *Byron and Romanticism*, 8.

[31] See Lord Byron, *Don Juan: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, Vol. 1. (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1957), 180 for an excellent discussion of Byron's composition and revisionary methods.

[32] Thomas Medwin, *Conversations of Lord Byron: Revised with a New Preface*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. [1824] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1966), 194.

[33] Letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, June 24 1817, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Arranged and ed. Ernest de Selincourt, Vol. 3, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970), 394.

[34] Medwin, 194.

> The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
>
> A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
>
> When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
>
> He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
>
> Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.

<div align="right">(CHP IV. 179: 1603-11)</div>

Byron's stanza retains a tone of mastery, one at odds with the apparent contrast between the power of the ocean and human powerlessness. The drama of Byron's poetic personality takes centre-stage in the stanza, the final couplet displaying his dramatic use of negatives, reminiscent of his exclamation from canto IV: "There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here" (*CHP* IV. 105: 945). The speaker twice commands the ocean to roll, and his admiration for the control that the ocean possesses mirrors his control of the rhyme. Sublimity is recovered by the poet for his own art. The ocean is almost personified, as the shipwrecks are "all thy deed," (*CHP* IV. 179:1607) and the apostrophe seems to view ocean as less an element, than a responsive being, or perhaps the poet is more element than man at this climactic moment. There is no crossing of boundaries,[35] nor mingling of man and nature. The narrator speaks, but neither attempts nor manages any communion with ocean; they remain separate and powerful in their own roles. Unlike abstract "man" and the civilisations that Byron shows to be variously crushed by the ocean, the speaker's position is somewhere beyond time-bound humanity. Like the ocean, which Byron reminds us is "Unchangeable save to thy wild waves' play — / Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow —" (*CHP* IV. 182: 1636-37), his narrator writes himself into a perpetual present tense by his insistence on the physicality of the event:

> For I was as it were a child of thee,
>
> And trusted to thy billows far and near,
>
> And laid my hand upon thy mane — as I do here

<div align="right">(CHP IV. 184: 1654-56)</div>

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[35] Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey's edited collection of essays focuses on this tendency in Byron's work: "Byron too, pilgrim of eternity, seeks out and relishes, far more than his Romantic contemporaries, the limits inherent in writing whilst using them to dramatize the clash between limitless energies and bounded existences." "Preface" *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1988), viii.

The reader's imagination enacts the movement of laying his hand upon the ocean's mane; that is, the line not only describes Byron's activity in the poem; it also describes how the reader repeats that activity in the process of imaginative response. The present-tense immediacy of the passage renders the poem an act that takes place each time it is read. Byron's narrator dramatically retains control of the poem by continually drawing the reader's eye to the individual character of the narrator as the strong elemental opposition of man and Nature creates the existential drama.

Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" operates in a fundamentally different way. Whereas Byron's strong presentation of man and nature focuses on the otherness of the two, Wordsworth, as Beth Lau points out,[36] witnesses and effects a blurring between the individual and Nature, and the endless cycle of "loss" and "recompense" involved in such blurring. The essence of the narrator's youth centres on his evolvingly complex identification with Nature:

> …For nature then …
>
> To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
>
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
>
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
>
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
>
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
>
> An appetite: a feeling and a love,
>
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
>
> By thought supplied, or any interest
>
> Unborrowed from the eye. —

<p align="right">(74; 76-84)[37]</p>

Nature and the self are or were one; "To me was all in all," (76); the past state that Wordsworth laments is separate from thought. Instinctive "feeling and a love" (81) offer

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[36] "He recognizes that, with the loss of the immediacy of his youthful impressions or the fading and blurring of his recollections of that vivid state, he has gained a greater ability to abstract and generalize from his experience." Beth Lau, "Wordsworth and Current Memory Research," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 42 (2002): 683, *JSTOR*. 30 Sep. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[37] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill, The Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 133. All quotations from Wordsworth's poetry will be from this edition, unless indicated otherwise.

a naturalness free of the intellectual self. His separation from Nature after this "thoughtless youth" (91) accompanies a deeper, more morally aware engagement with the solace offered by memory that, in affectingly evoked ways, awakens the poet's consciousness of the human condition, allowing him in lines of the most exquisitely attuned sympathy to hear "The still, sad music of humanity" (92). The poet continues to defend his current state, while lamenting the passing of his youth in nature:

> …Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.
>
> (103-12)

Nature now seems to have become part of the speaker, separate from the self, but inextricably part of the speaker's identity. Nature is the guide of the speaker's moral being, and this transition, while perhaps less intense, creates a different kind of pleasure for the narrator. The blurring between the self and Nature has moved from being an unconscious merging of the two to Nature's being an internalised moral presence.

The different forms of relationship chosen by Byron and Wordsworth indicate their divergence. Byron demonstrates mastery by his choice of rhyme. He wields the Spenserian stanza in two ways: one, to indicate his immersion in tradition and his natural place in the canon; the other, to demonstrate his singularity by twisting the traditional pilgrimage ideal, alterations explored by Brian Nellist.[38] His presentation of the

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[38] "[Byron's poetry is]…constantly inventing itself, bringing into being the point of view from which it *might* be conceived but never from which it *must* be conceived. It lives continuously in its own presentness and each Spenserian stanza becomes the realization of the moments that constitute that present." Brian Nellist, "Lyric Presence in Byron from the *Tales* to *Don Juan*," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, 41.

speaker's relationship with Nature is to present two equal entities engaged in a dramatic encounter. Each shares an absolute otherness: any similarities are used to indicate the power both hold, though over disparate elements. The narrator controls the verse, and the reader's perception of the scene. Byron never forgets that he has an audience, nor lets his reader forget the nature of the relationship, where he shapes their perceptions. Nature, signified by the ocean in this particular representation, holds a strong power, and the elemental potency of the ocean mirrors the strength of the poet.

By contrast, Wordsworth individuates his exploration of the relationship between man and Nature by his early ability to become a part of Nature, not by the will-driven power of his poetic self.[39] The subtlety of Wordsworth's avowal, "To me was all in all" (76) illustrates the depth of his engagement with Nature; the bareness of the diction does not overpower the reader. Instead, the simplicity of the lines creates a sense of melancholic authenticity, where the reader communes with Wordsworth's solitary meditation. After Wordsworth recounts the "din" (26) of urban life, he evokes through his elongating rhythmic patterns that "gently lead us on" a "blessed mood" in which a potent blend of memory and imagination restores the communion between man and nature.

> … Nor less, I trust,
>
> To them I may have owed another gift,
>
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
>
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
>
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
>
> Of all this unintelligible world
>
> Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
>
> In which the affections gently lead us on, …
>
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
>
> In body, and become a living soul:

---

[39] Michael Cooke goes as far to say that Byron's contribution to poetry is his emphasis on the will: "Byron goes beyond Coleridge and Wordsworth in recognizing the will, the individual's conscious deeds, as thwarting the potential reconciliation between man and nature, man and his existence in altering time. This recognition constitutes a special contribution to the philosophy of the romantic lyric, or indeed to romantic philosophy." M. G. Cooke, *The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969), 21.

> While with an eye made quiet by the power
>
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
>
> We see into the life of things.

<div align="right">(36-43 & 46-50)</div>

Stripped from the constraints of the body, and yet still allowing for its visitations to be experienced corporeally, Nature allows attuned humanity "almost" to transcend the physical, and, through Nature's harmony and joy, to "see into the life of things" (50). That formulation bears witness to Wordsworth's vision of Nature; one in which an active perceiver who can "see" needs also to see with "an eye made quiet" (48) and has as a reward a vision, not simply "of things," but of their "life" (50). Byron's vision of Nature is altogether more "random and contingent" in contrast to Wordsworth's hard-won affirmative understanding.[40]

Wordsworth's transition from "I" to "we" reveals the generosity of his poetic practice; the "I" owes gratitude to the "forms of beauty" (24), yet the movement to the "we" emphasises the possibility of his tranquil mood being extended to the whole spectrum of humanity. These lines move from the "din" and the burdensome nature of the mundane to an affirmation of the transforming power of "that serene and blessed mood" (42). The "we" promises a certain parity amongst people; unlike Byron's Carlylean emphasis on the poet as Great Man,[41] Wordsworth offers a more democratic vision of the relationship between man and nature, where access will be granted to those who are sensitive and yielding to Nature's beauty. Byron also uses "we," but his movement between the first person singular and the plural is markedly different in its formulation:

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
>
> A being more intense, that we endow
>
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
>
> The life we image, even as I do now.
>
> What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
>
> Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,

---

[40] Cooke, 48.

[41] Carlyle, 67-68.

> Invisible but gazing, as I glow
>
> Mix'd with the spirit, blended with thy birth,
>
> And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth.[42]

> (*CHP* III. 6: 46-54)

The role of the poet in this stanza emphasises the poet's ability to create poetry, an ability which magnifies and intensifies the poet's identity. The relationship between creator and creation is complex in its symbiotic nature; the poet is both creator of his creation and created by it, "gaining as we give / The life we image." (*CHP* III. 6: 48-49) Byron amplifies the intensity of this concept by his emphasis on the poem's use of the present tense; "even as I do now" (*CHP* III. 6: 49) wrenches the act of creation into performance with every reading of the poem. The subsequent question lends urgency to the stanza; the poet is half-created by the creation he has wrought, and the poet must question what he becomes by the act of creation; he is no longer a discrete individual. He directly links the role of the poet with both self-mastery and the birth of a new self through poetry. Intensity of feeling and a powerful and almost incommunicable violence are found within the self as Byron compares his thought to lightning that cannot be expressed and must be sheathed as a sword (*CHP* III. 97: 905-13). Intensity and self-mastery define the poet; Byron's vision of the violence and energy of language subtilises poetic creation as elemental, and beyond the twin poles of good and evil. As Jerome Christensen succinctly puts it, Byron's poetry exists in the present tense: his is an "action poetry: ink drops, link forms."[43]

Where Wordsworth moves from "I" to "we," finishing his stanza on the plural democratic note, Byron's stanza performs precisely the opposite movement as it pivots from an inclusive to an individuated view of the poet. The poet performs before his reader, not as

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[42] I take this stanza from Lord George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980) rather than *McGann*, as *McGann* has "the life we imagine" (49) rather than "the life we image." McGann offers no explanation in either edition for his different choice. The substitution of "imagine" for "image" seems both to disrupt the rhythm of the line with an extra clunky syllable, and to semantically impoverish the stanza, and the canto as a whole. Susan Wolfson and Peter J. Manning also use "the life we image" in their *Selected Poems* (see *Lord Byron: Selected Poems*, ed. with introd. Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2005), 416).

[43] Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore, MD; London: The John Hopkins UP, 1993), 224.

a representative of mankind, but as separate from it. The line "What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou" (*CHP* III. 6: 50) does not immediately seem to address the poet's creation; instead, Byron seems to accuse the reader, separating the creative poet-hero from the reader-turned-onlooker in Byron's dazzling display. After the initial "we" where the poet and reader seem to unite to create the poetic creation, it becomes increasingly clear that Byron's status as poet-hero renders him incomparable to the now-passive reader. It is Byron who traverses earth, and glows with the fire of his creative mind. The poet, turned hero, turns spectacle before the reader, as Byron seems to ascend beyond his audience. Wordsworth's "still, sad music of humanity" (92) both harmonises and seems discordant with Byron's high and separate poetry of individual power.

IV.

Despite their many antagonisms, Wordsworth and Byron were united by their preoccupation with what it is to write poetry, and the distinguishing characteristics of the poet. Byron is often dismissed as lacking due seriousness with regard to his art; Paul West condemns him as lacking any apparent virtue as a poet, claiming "Byron had no philosophy, was no great social wit, and was not even essentially a writer."[44] But the Bowles/Pope controversy letter illustrates the scale of Byron's expectation of poetry as he praises poetry above all for its ethical ability. He writes "In my mind the highest object of all poetry is Ethical poetry — as the highest of all earthly objects must be moral truth."[45] This ethical dimension echoes Wordsworth's approach to the role of the poet in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, yet the difference in emphasis displays the intense dissimilarity of Byron and Wordsworth. Wordsworth's "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" (1802) tackles the subject of the role of the poet. Having posed the question "What is a Poet," he moves to a definition of the poet that describes the poet's attributes entirely outside of language, defining the poet in terms of his higher degree of sensitivity manifested by intensity of thought and feeling:

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[44] Paul West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 12.
[45] Lord Byron, "The Bowles/Pope Controversy 1821: Letter to John Murray Esq." 143.

> He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively
> sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of
> human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common
> among mankind;[46]

The democratic element of the famous passage begins and ends in the sentence that defines the poet as a man amongst men.[47] Yet Wordsworth imbues his poet with a heightened sensitivity not dissimilar from Byron's poetic claim for essentially the same removal of the poet from the standard class of humanity. Wordsworth's urge to educate the public and enlarge the mind's capacity by his poetic practice is to don a teaching mantle and thereby position himself as a fit moral instructor:

> For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross
> and violent stimulants…It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to
> produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any
> period, a Writer can be engaged.[48]

He is a self-styled inheritor of Sidney's *Defence*, where the poet has a responsibility to teach, delight, and move.[49] Byron's sentiments seem wildly divergent; language expresses thought and action, and should express the whole of life as it is, not as it ought to be.[50] As W. W. Robson writes, Byron often presents himself as "a fellow sinner,"[51] and despised the finger-wagging moralism he perceived in the poetry of the Lakers:

> All are not moralists, like Southey, when
>
>   He prated to the world of 'Pantisocracy';
>
> Or Wordsworth unexcised, unhired, who then
>
>   Season'd his pedlar poems with democracy;

---

[46] "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* [1802]," 255.

[47] Elizabeth Fay shows Wordsworth using chivalry to promote the poet's higher status and thereby educate the reader "to produce an obligation on the reader's part that raises him to a higher level of civic duty than the private act of reading and its associated detachment in the social contract normally convey," See "Wordsworth, Bostonian Chivalry and the Uses of Art," *Wordsworth in American Literary Culture*, ed. Joel Pace and Matthew Scott; foreword Stephen Gill (Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 178.

[48] "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* [1800]," 248 and 249.

[49] Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*.

[50] Byron's rebuke to Pope's avowal that he "*stooped* to Truth" [Byron's emphasis], indicates Byron's protective interest in objective reality. He writes writing "He should have written "rose to truth." See "The Bowles/Pope Controversy 1821: Letter to John Murray Esq.," 143.

[51] W. W. Robson, "Byron as Improviser," *Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 93.

> Or Coleridge, long before his flighty pen
>
>   Lent to the Morning Post its aristocracy;
>
> When he and Southey, following the same path,
>
> Espoused two partners (milliners of Bath.)

<div align="right">(DJ III. 93: 833-40)</div>

This excoriating stanza develops motifs in the "Dedication" to *Don Juan* which insists on Byron's absolute difference from his Lakist contemporaries. Byron picks up his original complaint about the Lakers, which was, in his eyes, their hypocritical turn from their original politics. The third line "Or Wordsworth unexcised, unhired, *who then*" [emphasis added] (*DJ* III. 93: 835) carefully brings out the past tense nature of Wordsworth's democratic ideals. Byron does not attack Wordsworth for moralising on behalf of democracy; rather, he draws attention to the change in Wordsworth's politics.[52] For Byron, this lack of consistency removes from Wordsworth's poetry the necessary ground on which to argue for anything at all. Owing to Wordsworth's shifted allegiances, Byron implies that Wordsworth can no longer moralise, and his earlier poetically expressed democratic principles may be derided, not for their content, but for their lack of authenticity. Yet Byron moralises in this stanza and elsewhere, and he bases his right to do so on his claim to hold unwavering political principles;[53] by placing himself in the Augustan tradition, Byron affords himself the protection of tradition as well as his self-avowedly unshakeable political principles. Moralising, for Byron, appears to be an earned poetic style. Poetry and politics entwine in this stanza; the rhyming words "Pantisocracy," "democracy," and "aristocracy" poetically enact the increasing conservatism of their ideas. Declining from the intensely idealistic "government for all" into a traditional aristocratic structure, Byron uses his form to mirror his content.

In the loaded description of the "aristocracy" of Coleridge's "flighty pen," Byron deliberately shows Coleridge's aristocratic pose to be only pose, even as he concedes the distinction of Coleridge's writing. This double use of the word reflects the sense of waste

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[52] This tactic in *Don Juan* reflects Byron's condemnation of Southey's changeable politics as opposed to his own principles, in "The Bowles/Pope Controversy 1821: Letter to John Murray Esq.," 148.

[53] As Byron writes, "I never was consistent in any thing but my politics— & as my redemption depends on that solitary virtue — it is murder to carry away my last anchor.—" *BLJ* 3: 204.

that Byron attaches to Coleridge and Wordsworth; their association with Southey seems
to evidence their degeneration. Byron mourns Wordsworth's decline; he might be thought
as lamenting, as Shelley does in his sonnet "To Wordsworth," "Thus having been, that
thou shouldst cease to be" (14). Byron never associates Wordsworth or Coleridge with
"vulgarity" in his letter on the Bowles/Pope controversy, yet their association with what
Byron considers debased poetic principles, and the "cockney school" call into question
their claim to be great poets.[54] Accordingly, Byron uses every weapon in his poetic
artillery to derail their influence, on both himself and the age. The final lines, "When he
and Southey, following the same path, / Espoused two partners (milliners of Bath.)" (*DJ*
III. 93: 839-40) are brilliantly economic in their cruelty; the brackets neatly contain a
only description, but one so tartly delivered in the final couplet, that the reader cannot
help but be aware of it as a punch line. As a Lord and a poet, Byron draws attention to his
appropriate social place to mete out this particular sneer. Byron wished to undercut the
Lake poets where possible; that they married women of humble social origins was
material that Byron could not resist. Byron's ruthless mode of attack is nowhere more
apparent than this stanza;[55] Byron's ambivalent response to the Lake school threw him
uncomfortably back onto his greatest foible — his respect for rank over poetry.[56]

The notion that the Lake School are the superiors of the common man is difficult for
Byron to stomach, but more importantly, Byron, as a matter of self-preservation, attempts
to stamp on a burgeoning new school spreading "a new orthodoxy."[57] His attack on the
Lake School amounts to Byron appointing himself the defender of tradition against

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[54] Byron seems most excoriating not of the Lakers, but of "*their under-Sect*," and mocks the Lakers'
attempt to deny their acolytes: "It is to be observed that the rustical founders are rather anxious to disclaim
any connection with their metropolitan followers." "The Bowles/Pope Controversy 1821: Letter to John
Murray Esq.," 156.

[55] This was noted by Francis Jeffrey as particularly "outrageous": "we do not mean to deny that Lord B.
had a right to name Mr. Southey - but he had no right to say any thing of Mr. Southey's wife; and the
mention of her, and of many other people, is cruel, coarse, and unhandsome, " From an unsigned review of
Sardanapalus, *The Two Foscari*, and *Cain*, in the *Edinburgh Review* for February 1822, XXXVI, 446-52,
quoted from *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul;
New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 205.

[56] Lady Blessington records her astonishment at Byron's preferment for aristocracy over merit: "We were
not prepared for this; we expected to meet a man more disposed to respect the nobility of genius than that
of rank; but we have found the reverse." *Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. with introd.
and notes Ernest J. Lovell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969), 64.

[57] Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism
(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 44.

Wordsworth's "sect" (*DJ* III. 95: 852), and his tongue-in-cheek parody of the Ten Commandments "Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope; / Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;" (*DJ* I. 205: 1633-34) strikes the obvious note of comedic disdain, but also indicates a subtext. That subtext contains a more embattled defence of a tradition of which he needs to believe himself the inheritor. It is reminiscent of Byron's earlier, and more serious plea for posterity:

> …I twine
>
> My hopes of being remembered in my line
>
> With my land's language:

<div align="right">(CHP IV. 9: 76-78)</div>

As Jerome Christensen comments, Byron's relationship with his poetic lineage is directly related to his aristocratic ancestry: "Committing his memory to his "line," Lord Byron now acknowledges that he has a line, rather than just a given name — a poetic profession with a line of work and a line of products."[58] Byron's aristocracy becomes a feature of his poetics as he twines his high birth with his poetic achievement.

V.

When Byron punctures what is perceived to be the "ideal" in *Don Juan* and *Beppo*, it is not because "Byron's only universal attitude was contempt;"[59] but there is an important part of his ontological poetics which denies that morality, beauty and emotion should be abstracted from the conditions of human society.[60] Like Keats, Byron sought to understand the relationship between the ideal and the real, and where Keats expressed his fundamental ambivalence between actual and ideal beauty in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Byron demonstrates his commitment to human beauty in *Beppo*.[61] The ideal is not separate from humanity in Byron's world view, but absorbed into the human condition. Byron subtly sketches a celebration of ideals in *Beppo*, and forces the reader to re-

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[58] Christensen, 211.

[59] West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art*, 23.

[60] As G. Wilson Knight perceptively argues, "Byron likes, as a poet, what is already warm with human contact." G. Wilson Knight, "The Two Eternities" Don Juan," *Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 25.

[61] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1988), 344-46.

examine the idea that he lacks any form of belief system. The ideal in *Beppo* is the highest and best that humanity can image and become, not despite, but because of our fallen existence. The narrator's praise of Giorgione's paintings amounts to a celebration of their humanity, which for Byron, show "truth and beauty at their best." Byron situates human love higher than any ideal rendering, and stanza fourteen is a poignant stanza of love and beauty lost:

> One of those forms which flit by us, when we
>   Are young, and fix our eyes on every face;
> And, oh! the loveliness at times we see
>   In the momentary gliding, the soft grace,
> The youth, the bloom, the beauty which agree,
>   In many a nameless being we retrace,
> Whose course and home we knew not, nor shall know,
> Like the lost Pleiad seen no more below.

<div align="right">(Beppo 14: 105-12)</div>

Byron's caressing use of "f" sounds in the first two lines emphasise the iambic pentameter, lending an arresting pathos to the lines. The slowness of the diction conveys the wistfulness of the stanza, as the reader lingers over the lulling slow syllables of "in the momentary gliding, the soft grace" (*Beppo* 14:108). The link between loss and beauty is prominent, and the elegiac sweep of the stanza celebrates this mixture, refusing to separate either sensation. The sadness inherent in the lines adds to their dignified beauty, and Byron refuses to describe a purity of emotion that he does not believe to exist; humanity's irrevocably "mix'd essence" (*Manfred* I. ii. 41) defines the poem.

Byron's poetics in *Don Juan* follow *Beppo*'s emphasis on mankind's mixed condition. When Andrew Rutherford suggests that *Don Juan* lacks coherence and evidences "a blurring of the satiric focus,"[62] this seems to be the deliberately rendered crux of the poem. *Don Juan* is exceedingly difficult to classify owing to its purposeful yoking

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[62] Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study*, 216.

together of several different modes of discourse.[63] Byron refuses to operate with only one mode; *ottava rima* provides him with the structure that he requires in order to harness his ever-changing theme, and though Anne K. Mellor somewhat erroneously argues that Byron refuses to end-stop his stanzas, her sense that Byron allows his themes to mingle, cross and entwine, remains.[64] The argument that *Don Juan* is satire ignores the presence of deeply pathetic incidents that combine with the comedic and satiric elements to produce the "radically, aggressively episodic and meandering" poem that insists on the chaos of life,[65] and the "drunkenness of things being various."[66] The Juan and Haidée episode demonstrates Byron's ability to run pathos through the poem like a steel thread:

> Their faces were not made for wrinkles, their
>
>> Pure blood to stagnate, their great hearts to fail;
>
> The blank grey was not made to blast their hair,
>
>> But like the climes that know nor snow nor hail
>
> They were all summer: lightning might assail
>
>> And shiver them to ashes, but to trail
>
> A long and snake-like life of dull decay
>
> Was not for them — they had too little clay.

(*DJ* IV. 9: 65-72)

This stanza manages to convey the deep pathos of Haidée's (and by implication, Juan's) death while defiantly celebrating their fortune in avoiding the inevitable fall from grace that would come with age and separation. Their time together, described by the narrator as "another Eden," (*DJ* IV. 10: 74) expresses the paradisal and unsustainable nature of their happiness. Byron's use of negatives in the stanza enacts the tightrope walk of defiance and elegy he maintains through the entire episode. The use of three examples (faces, blood, and hearts) within the first part of the sentence demonstrates Byron's handling of rhetoric in even the most dramatic parts of *Don Juan*. The fourth line introduces the reason why Haidée and Juan could not live long, and his metaphor "they

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[63] McGann describes the plurality of terms applied to *Don Juan*: "Its names are legion: modern epic, epic satire, negative epic, mock epic, romance epic, epic novel, novel in verse, realistic epic – and many others." McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, 3.

[64] "Byron's vision and stanzas are never end-stopped." Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 1980), 62.

[65] McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, 3.

[66] MacNeice, "Snow," *Collected Poems*, 24.

were all summer," which, perhaps owing to its arresting brevity, outwits sentimentality.[67]
The final couplet's rhyme of "decay" and "clay" clearly indicates the narrator's bias
towards the doomed couple, and prematurely shortened lives. This metaphor seems both
indebted to, and challenging of, Wordsworth's pronouncement in *The Excursion* (I. 500-
02).[68]

> …the good die first,
>
> And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust
>
> Burn to the socket.

Shelley appends the quotation as an epigraph to *Alastor*, a poem which Byron had
previously used for poetic inspiration.[69] In this case, Byron moves beyond the
comparison between those "whose hearts are dry as summer dust;" Haidée and Juan are
summer embodied. This intelligent use of his contemporaries indicates the level of
artistry involved in the passage, and the intricacy of Byron's vision.

His artistic control over his subject immerses the reader in his description of Haidée's and
Juan's doomed love affair, and then her decline and eventual death. Byron presents the
narrator as moved by the tale, which corresponds to the anticipated reader response that
Byron projects. Twice the narrator asserts his authority over the tale; "Here I must leave
him, for I grow pathetic, / Moved by the Chinese nymph of tears, green tea!" (*DJ* IV. 52:
409-10) Byron suggests that the narrator's choice of beverage led him to relate the tale in
such a way, and the second, more brusque demonstration of the narrator's power over the
direction of the story jars the sense after the pathetic description which immediately
preceded.

> But let me change this theme, which grows too sad,
>
> > And lay this sheet of sorrows on the shelf; …
>
> Besides I've no more on this head to add;
>
> > And as my Muse is a capricious elf,

---

[67] Byron is ruthless towards sentiment throughout the entire poem, and the pathos here is separate from
sentimentality: "The object of the satire is sentiment rather than passion; or rather, passion itself is
recognised as a major part of human nature, but becomes an object of satire when it is confused with
principle and becomes autonomous." Joseph, 277.
[68] William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. with notes E. de
Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1949), 25.
[69] See Brewer, 25, for an example of Byron's use of *Alastor* in "The Dream."

> We'll put about, and try another tack

<div align="right">(DJ IV. 74: 585 & 586 and 589-91)</div>

This change of "tack" is deliberately abrasive; Byron makes the power of the narrator abundantly clear by foregrounding the narrator's control over the chaos of the multiple tales to be told. We, the readers, are brusquely snapped out of any tragic musings by the narrator's clear-eyed weighing of his options. Byron refuses to allow the reader to settle into any single emotion; his restless mobility refuses the audience the opportunity to passively absorb the poem. Byron's poetics of the wholeness of life, of laughter and tears provokes the reader into response.

The cannibalism episode in is an example of how close to the wind Byron sailed on some occasions as he sought to provoke his readers and critics into response.[70] In this episode, Byron moves between mischievous, satiric, and dangerously blasphemous in his humorous mode, and also offers the reader a historical sketch from actual shipwrecks.[71] While Byron deliberately provokes his audience, this is only part of Byron's scheme; the passage has a serious intent and closely relates to his poetics, where the relationship between chaos and control underpins the poetry.[72] He renders Pedrillo's death in a peculiarly mixed manner; Pedrillo's gentle self-sacrifice, framed by Byron in Christological terms, appears violently opposed to the intended cannibalism which is the cause of his death. Before condemning the passage as a grotesque parody of Christ's, and linking it to Byron's well-documented detestation of sacrifice,[73] a close examination of the passage does not indicate that Byron dismisses sacrifice entirely.[74] The failure of Pedrillo's sacrifice, where all the people who ate his flesh died, is obvious, but Byron

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[70] As McGann points out, "the lines, as well as the whole notorious passage they locate, might fairly be called "offensive," "shocking," "debased," even "immoral" - I think they've been so characterized from the beginning." *Byron and Romanticism*, 292.

[71] "That [there] was not a *single circumstance* of [Juan's shipwreck] - *not* taken from *fact* - not indeed from any *single* shipwreck - but all from *actual* facts of different wrecks." *BLJ* 8: 186.

[72] A point also made by Carl Thompson in *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 249.

[73] "The Son of God the pure, the immaculate, the innocent, is sacrificed for the guilty. This proves his heroism, but no more does away with man's sin than a school boy's volunteering to be flogged for another would exculpate a dunce from negligence, or preserve him from the rod." *BLJ* 2: 97.

[74] Though Peter Cochran disagrees in his essay on sacrifice: "Byron's poetry stays loyal to his rejection, not only of Christ's sacrifice, but of dramatic sacrifices in general, throughout his writing career." Peter Cochran, "'Sacrifice and Offering Thou Didst Not Desire': Byron and Atonement," *Romanticism and Religion,* 94.

does not scorn the act of sacrifice, nor the quiet dignity of Pedrillo's acceptance of his fate:

> He but requested to be bled to death:
>   The surgeon had his instruments, and bled
> Pedrillo, and so gently ebb'd his breath,
>   You hardly could perceive when he was dead.
> He died as born, a Catholic in faith,
>   Like most in the belief in which they're bred,
> And first a little crucifix he kiss'd,
> And then held out his jugular and wrist.

<div align="right">(DJ II. 76: 601-08)</div>

There is heroism, if of a passive variety, in Pedrillo's acceptance of his fate. Christensen's remark, that "*there is nothing but context* for his choice,"[75] seems accurate, but he argues that Pedrillo fails to understand this. Rather, Pedrillo speaks the language of sacrifice; he imports on to a murderous scenario the trappings of his religion, and the passivity of his messiah. The slow syllables of the stanza gently ebb as Pedrillo's action momentarily takes charge of the narrator's voice. While disagreeing with the sacrificial element of Christian doctrine, Byron permits a strange dignity to take centre stage. The description lacks any sneering edge; Byron individuates Pedrillo in earlier stanzas, and then allows him to melt into the universal image of Christ in his final moments.

When searching for a definitive poetics in Byron's oeuvre, what is immediately striking is the range of poetic and dramatic styles Byron attempts. The poet attempts to arbitrate, order, and shape his poetry, while the materials strain away from the anchoring imposition of direction as chaos and control become the definitive poles of the Byronic poem. Form becomes "this firmament pavilioned upon chaos" (Shelley, *Hellas*, 772), but Byron celebrates chaos, fashioning his mature poetry from a surging sea of ideas, facts, and anecdotes. Byron hones his artistic control; to be arbiter over chaos is to choose a deliberately dangerous territory. Form, "the literary system of Byronism,"[76] and his sharp

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[75] Christensen, 246.
[76] Christensen, xvi.

consciousness of his audience allow him to retain the reigns of power even as he seems to ride the slipstream of his consciousness. The search for the ideal way in which to express life's wholeness, from the ridiculous to the sublime and back again, is the centre of Byron's poetic strategy. Christensen states that "the Romantic poet is after virtue, not after truth;"[77] and this statement helps to illuminate Byron's departure from the norms of his contemporaries, as his insistence on experience and world drives him into a confrontational mode of poetics. Potentiality and the power of words fire his imagination; his magisterial command of words combines paradoxically with his ability to display their independent potential. From the interplay between linguistic power and shows of powerlessness, Byron shapes what is most distinctive about his poetry.

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[77] Christensen, xix.

CHAPTER TWO

Veiled Meaning: Shelley's Poetics

"Veil after veil may be undrawn and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed."

 I.

To create a theory of poetry is a difficult task for any poet, but particularly for one so alive to nuance as Shelley. *A Defence of Poetry* is the seminal document in which to trace the development of his poetics, but ultimately, it contains some of Shelley's most ambiguous prose. His literary versatility, breadth of learning and his awareness of his audience combine in *A Defence* to render it a complex performance that defies any single interpretation; it suggests "the heresy of paraphrase" by its almost poetic performance.[1] Stephen Behrendt considers the use of the multistable image, which "conveys multiple messages simultaneously so that the artist or author who employs the device communicates at once on more than one level,"[2] to be the hallmark of Shelley's art. Nowhere is the use of a multistable text more apparent than in *A Defence*.[3] The effect of a poetic created out of an active weaving of many perspectives and potentials allows Shelley's poetry to enjoy a large range of parameters sanctioned by his theory of poetry. This is not to suggest that Shelley was engaged in some kind of constant "play": on the contrary, Shelley was deadly serious. *A Defence* insists on a multilayered and shifting expression that does not seek to definitively house poetry but offer metaphors for its fullest contemplation. Shelley's poetics are not only contained in their fullest in the essay, but *A Defence* provides the frame of reference through which all of his work can be read.

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[1] Taken from a chapter title in Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947), 192.
[2] Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE; London: U of Nebraska P, 1989), 2.
[3] As Simon Haines suggests when he writes that Shelley "was not what we would nowadays call a 'theorist' of poetry, or of language more generally." See Simon Haines, *Shelley's Poetry: The Divided Self* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 56.

A Defence of Poetry is a high-wire performance;[4] written as a reply to Peacock's utilitarian downgrading of poetry, Shelley makes remarkable claims for the role of the poet and the effect of poetry, arguing that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World." (701). Poetry is central, argued to be "the expression of the Imagination," (675) which is in turn a far superior faculty than reason in Shelley's theory of imaginative poetics. He states that "to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful;" (676-77) this idealistic claim for the role of the poet suggests that the poet ought not only to apprehend, but express "the true and the beautiful" (677) to the reading public. Shelley takes this statesman-like ability to its logical conclusion:

> [Poets] …are not only the authors of language… they are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society and the inventors of the arts of life and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. (677)

This assertion is a brave attempt to encroach on to sacred territory; his insistence on the poet's importance indicates a certain faith in language and the poet's authority, or more accurately, a faith in the importance of such faith. When Shelley makes the poet a participant "in the eternal, the infinite and the one" (677) to the exclusion of place and time, he guarantees the poet a place in a pantheon that is not subject to the temporal rules governing society. The forceful quality of Shelley's prose is highly apparent at this juncture; he asserts and affirms the centrality of the poet.[5]

This guarantee for the importance of the poet, being rooted in the eternal as opposed to the society in which the poet operates, seems to add weight to Shelley's claim for the law-making and quasi-religious capability of the poet. However, Shelley's argument for eternity throws up questions of his ability to deliberately confuse the question of what

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[4] The performative element can be extrapolated from P. M. S. Dawson's article that shows Sgricci's influence on Shelley's *Defence*: "[Sgricci] he also influenced, if only by timely reinforcement, the way in which Shelley conceived of the process of poetic creation, at the time when Shelley was preparing to write *A Defence of Poetry*." P. M. S. Dawson, "Shelley and the *Improvvisatore* Sgricci: An Unpublished Review," *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 32 (1981): 20.

[5] As Michael O'Neill writes of *A Defence*: "I wish, without disagreeing with his [Hogle's] analysis, to give greater stress than he does to the force and assurance of the writing." See "Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet," *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, 239.

ought to be with the actual marginalisation of poets by thinkers such as Thomas Love Peacock, to whose *Four Ages of Poetry* he responds.[6] *A Defence* becomes more defensive, as Shelley seeks to carve for poets a prominence denied to him by his circumstances.[7] While poets such as Byron enjoyed a hitherto unprecedented level of fame, Shelley found himself struggling to find an audience for his poetry. The avowal of the eternal in which the poet participates becomes a comforting belief that rescues Shelley from a crippling lack of recognition by his contemporaries:

> Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fullness of his fame; the jury which sits in judgement upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers: it must be impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations. A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why. (680)

This excerpt is a complex performance; Shelley performs the difficult task of positing a pantheon, and hence a society for the poet, but it is situated outside of contemporary society and away from "the gross opinions of the vulgar" (678). There is a strong impulse toward solitude in this section that seems to counter, and even deny, the importance of the society, a society in which Shelley claims the poet is at the heart. Yet Shelley accepts the presence of unseen auditors; poets are a part of society. *A Defence* argues for the symbiotic relationship between poet and society, Athenian society displaying the high point for both. As M. H. Abrams writes, Shelley and the Romantics were not in search of a fantasy world; "to a degree without parallel…obsessed with the realities of their era."[8]

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[6] As Michael Chappell points out, "both Milton and Shelley use prose to justify their existence as poets," despite their fears for the role of the poet who seems marginalised from society. See Michael Chappell, "Chapter Six: De-fencing the poet: the political dilemma of the poet and the people in Milton's *Second Defense* and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*," *Milton, the Metaphysicals and Romanticism*, ed. Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 136.

[7] *A Defence*, though written in 1821, remained unpublished until Mary Shelley's 1840 edition of the prose, despite various attempts to have it published: see *The "Defence of Poetry" Fair Copies*, ed. Michael O'Neill (New York, NY: Garland, 1994), vol. XX of the Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts, 4-7.

[8] M. H. Abrams, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Norton, 1970), 93.

Far from advocating a separation between the poet and his society, Shelley was clear-eyed in his pursuit of an audience whom he could influence.[9]

The dual impulses within the *Defence* are to flee to the comfort of the eternal pantheon, or write for a contemporary audience who may resist or ignore the poet's artistry. But Shelley resists these extremes; instead he acknowledges that a marriage of the two is inevitable for the creation of poetry:

> Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit &c. be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears. (681)

The assertion inevitably provokes questions: how many contemporary norms should be incorporated? How can we know the difference between universal principles and time-bound structures? The fluidity of the statement leaves these points deliberately open to interpretation by the poet. This complex alloy of the eternal with the temporal creates poetry, and Shelley does not tone down the uneasy alliance of the two.

Fluidity of meaning occurs throughout the *Defence*, and Shelley's use of word "veil" to different effect throughout the essay reflects in miniature his complex refiguring of language. Poetry's ability to defamiliarise and reveal the world through language is emphasised throughout the essay, and veiling is the central metaphor for this extraordinary capacity. For Shelley, language at once "lifts the veil" (681) and is the veil itself (698), and these different uses can seem confused and confusing.[10] Tracing the different uses of this term illustrates the intensity that Shelley invests in this single term, and the various ways in which veiling becomes the central metaphor for poetry. The first use of the word "veil" insists on the revelation that poetry can effect: "It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world; and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (681). Poetry subordinates the

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[9] See Behrendt, 1.
[10] See Earl J. Schulze, *Shelley's Theory of Poetry: A Reappraisal* (The Hague; Paris: Mouton, 1966), 12.

mind to its revelatory powers; it enlarges the mind's capacities by visiting its imaginative perceptions on to the mind as "receptacle". What Shelley omits here is as relevant as what he states; the poet writes the poetry which makes the reader's mind the receptacle, and he controls the reader by rendering the mind passive. While Shelley denies the primacy of the poet's will elsewhere, it is unmistakable that the poet's power resides in his ability to unleash his words. Shelley strongly asserts the elemental force of poetry as he describes the force of Dante's poetry:

> His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of
> inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth,
> and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high poetry
> is infinite; it is as the first acorn which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after
> veil may be undrawn and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed.
> (693)

The power of Dante, and by extension, Shelley, lies in the living force of poetry. While poetry is a revelatory force, it also withholds some of its power. The power possessed by poetry lies in its potentiality, and its dual capacity to reveal and conceal. Here, the metaphor of veiling shows the tantalising nature of poetry; almost erotically, the poetry temptingly refuses to reveal its naked beauty to its audience. The life of poetry exists separately to the poet, but the poet still makes the words "his." Troublingly, the words cannot always discharge their lightening, which requires a conductor. This implies the vital role of the reader, whose interpretation can transform the ashes into living flame. The statement of the occluding capacities of poetry communicates a pride; the reader cannot divine every element. The words contain a living spark and the reader, though vital to the performance as a conductor, remains passive by comparison, continually frustrated by the fluid and teasing nature of language.

The ineffable of nature of language is integral to poetry, and the metaphor of veiling centralises this vital element: "And whether it spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being" (698). Poetry can perform in two different ways; it can create its own autonomous world, or it can reveal truths about the world in which we live, the essential

difference between poems such as *The Witch of Atlas* and *Prometheus Unbound*. The veil metaphor is used to illustrate the dual creative faculty of poetry; its fanciful and its imaginative ability. One is not indicated to be higher than the other; both have their place in the creative scheme. When Shelley writes of poetry "veiling them [vanishing apparitions] in language or in form," (698) this does not indicate either language or form to dilute or occlude the apparitions. Rather it shows the accoutrements of vision to be necessary for their dissemination. Words are vital to reveal and conceal vision, as pure vision cannot exist alone. The shifting metaphors of veiling expose subtly the "electric life" (701) that burns within the words. Veiling, with its revelatory and concealing implications, ideally illustrates the fluidity of poetry's essential being.

II.

A Defence of Poetry does not lend itself to paraphrase; the text depends upon its cumulative effect which Schulze regards as problematic.[11] However, Shelley is not writing as a philosopher attempting to build a definitive system. He writes as a poet, responding to a utilitarian critique of poetry.[12] The process of each element reacting to one another within the text creates meaning, and these myriad perspectives and internal tensions do not demonstrate an inherent weakness in Shelley's poetry, but rather the premise of the *Defence*. The poet and the reader become an equal part of the process of creation of the work. Unlike James Rieger, who considers the complexity of the essay as indicating that Shelley "has set out to puzzle him [the reader],"[13] it seems Shelley demanded a great deal of his reader, and could say with Milton "fit audience [let me] find, though few!"[14]

The demands made on the audience rest on the other-worldly element of poetry; Shelley describes the act of writing poetry as an inspired act, not will-based activity: "Poetry is

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[11] Schulze, 35.

[12] "…he writes not primarily as a linguistic philosopher but as a poet," William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (New York, NY; London: Methuen, 1984), 3.

[13] James Rieger, *The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York, NY: George Brazillier, 1967), 16.

[14] Milton, *Paradise Lost* VII: 31, *John Milton: The Complete Poems*, 269.

not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.'" (696) Poetry does not stem from ambition, propaganda, or pecuniary interest; Shelley firmly places poetry as something that comes from without and is revealed to the poet, who then attempts to communicate his vision to his audience:

> ...the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and grace, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results: but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. (696-97)

This passage could be taken as a lament for the failure of language, and the impossibility of communicating the exact nature of the vision. Its presence in *A Defence* suggests a latent fear of the inefficacy of poetry,[15] and leads Tilottama Rajan to comment that: "The darker elements in Romantic works are not a part of their organic unity, but rather threaten to collapse this unity."[16] Yet Shelley's doubt is on open display, and the way he communicates this doubt actually serves to spotlight the beauty of language, and the possibilities of poetry. Shelley uses three different metaphors for the fading of inspiration: the fading coal, the inconstant wind, and the fading flower. All three conjure images in the mind, conversely proving the magical ability of language to paint images in the mind of the reader. When Shelley argues that the greatest poetry is "probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet," (697) he reaches back to an earlier statement in which he argues that the limiting factors of the original vision's transmission are the very elements that render it possible to communicate:

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[15] Keach regards the darker elements of the essay to reveal themselves through their latent presence, see Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 3.

[16] Tilottama Rajan, *The Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980), 19.

> Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their
> conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful whether the
> alloy of costume, habit &c. be not necessary to temper this planetary music for
> mortal ears. (681)

Shelley writes as a poet adoring and deploring the tools of his trade. He acknowledges the double-edged nature of language through the play of despair and ecstasy mingled in the argument. The pressure placed on language witnesses the intensity of Shelley's poetic questionings; Shelley's trust in language is a fragile though complex necessity for the poet's autonomy and belief in the value of poetry. As Michael O'Neill argues, "The 'belief' and 'autonomy'…are the reverse of untried; nor are they indicative of facile anti-rationalism or narrowly formalist self-delight."[17] The despair and ecstasy emanate from the same fundamental cause: the expressive yet obscuring relationship of thought to language. The relationship of vision to language is an interplay between revealing and concealing movements that reflect the visitant nature of inspiration and the complexity of the language wielded by the poet.

The poet's role in this difficult interplay between the revealing and concealing elements of language, combined with the external, and non-will based nature of poetic inspiration, is a complex vocation. Like Wordsworth, Shelley isolates the poet from other men on the basis of his increased sensitivity to external factors.[18] Following the older poet, Shelley shows the poet to be separated from his fellow man by virtue of his heightened sensitivity as opposed to his ability as a craftsman. His more delicate sensibilities make him peculiarly disposed to inspiration, which relies on the precarious and unpredictable visitations of an external force. When Earl J. Schulze argues for a "this-worldly bias"[19] in Shelley's poetry, he overlooks the eternal nature of Shelley's conception of poetry, which clearly states that "poetry is indeed something divine." (696). The poet almost becomes a vehicle for a divine power that delivers a higher kind of knowledge; poetry is the earthly

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[17] Michael O'Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997), 119.

[18] He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind;" William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* [1802]," 255.

[19] Schulze, 13.

expression of the eternal world. [20] The role of poet is to be reformer, and "unacknowledged legislator[s] of the world," (701) and, paradoxically, poetry's otherworldly status supports the great importance of the poet to society. Poetry's effects are bound up with the world, though generated by another:

> In spite of the low-thoughted envy which would undervalue contemporary merit, our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty. (700)

Shelley's affirmation that contemporary poets would ascend even beyond the heights already reached by his predecessors subtly indicates the scale of his ambition. Shelley hopes to be counted among these all surpassing poets, also indicated by his self-styled role as a poet preoccupied with promoting liberty and social change. As he does in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* (135), Shelley gestures toward the pantheon by whose achievements he wishes to be judged; he tacitly implies his membership of the elite group of contemporary poets who challenge the laurels of previous authorities. [21] Even as Shelley attempts to place himself within this potential group of surpassing authors, he continues to question the role of the poet. He continually qualifies the role of the poet by questioning the autonomy of the poet, and presenting the poet as a medium for poetry, and not the originary force. Poets remain speakers of "words which express what they understand not," (701) and never author-gods that gain inspiration from this world, and create new forms in poetry. The force of the eternal and transcendent other in the everyday fallen society remains the source of the poet's power and central importance in the world, yet the poet never possesses that force. Poets inhabit a hinterland between the chaos of the earthly and the divine order of poetry.

III.

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[20] While not wishing to depreciate Shelley's interest in language, Richard Cronin's formulation is of interest in this context: "Poetry exists in the mind of the poet and of his reader, but only potentially in the poem. The poem is simply (Shelley's spectral metaphors make the word particularly appropriate) the medium." Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (London; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), 28.

[21] See Stephen C. Behrendt, [in the Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*] ...he introduces the predecessors by whose standard he wishes to be evaluated and in whose company he wants the reader to number him." Behrendt, 22.

Shelley's poetry and prose negotiate a path between the chaos and control of the earthly and eternal elements of poetic expression. *A Defence* is a prose demonstration of the subtleties and flux to which poetry is subject, and the poetry represents, through many different lenses, the same preoccupation with creating poetic order out of chaos; as Shelley writes in his *Defence*, "But mark how beautiful an order has sprung from the dust and blood of this fierce chaos!" (689) Despite the fluidity and nuances of *A Defence*, a long-running contention of Shelley studies is that Shelley's prose undermines the poetry, leading to repressed subtexts and self-avoiding textual strategies. [22] Rather, the complexities of *A Defence* reflect those within Shelley's poetry; both are openly inscribed in the text, as Shelley complicates and questions the vision that he produces. *Alastor* is often interpreted as the ultimate example of Shelley's divided texts, with the "theory of art," represented by the preface and "the poetry of experience" by *Alastor* itself; these apparently separate approaches to the hero seem contradictory to some critics.[23] No more than is the case in *A Defence*, the approaches of the preface and the poem do not represent a confusion of thought in Shelley's mind. Nor is it true that Shelley's scepticism is confined to his prose works (such as the preface) rather than his poetry.[24] Scepticism does not seem quite the right word for Shelley's poetry and prose; Terence Hoagwood's definition of scepticism describes it as "a dialogical disrupter of philosophical system-building,"[25] and Shelley's project does not resist transcendence, another hallmark of the sceptical project. Rather, Shelley takes into account the different perspectives of each participant in the *Alastor* project: the reader, narrator, hero, and author of the preface. These different elements combine to offer the reader a nuanced work capable of incorporating several different readings into its text.

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[22] "The unresolved contradiction between the theory of art and the poetry of experience leads to the presence, in the earlier poems, of repressed subtexts which challenge and interrupt the logic of the text, even as they contain in embryo the knowledge that will be made explicit in *The Triumph of Life*." Rajan, *The Dark Interpreter*, 72.

[23] See Raymond D. Havens, "Shelley's 'Alastor'," *PMLA* 45 (1930): 1098-1115, *JSTOR*. 21 June 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[24] Milton Wilson, *Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1959), 219.

[25] Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1993; London; Toronto: Associated UP, 1993), 15.

The preface is a difficult text; it both repudiates and defends the position of the Poet in *Alastor*. Its simultaneous movement, on the one hand, to offer an allegorical text that is not "barren of instruction for actual men" (92) and on the other, to vindicate its hero, creates a thread of ambivalence that runs throughout the poem and preface. When R. D. Havens argues that Shelley ruins the allegory suggested in the preface by his performance in the poem,[26] he neglects to consider that for Shelley, the notion of providing a straightforward and prosaic story bears no resemblance to his conception of what poetry ought to be. As Shelley states later in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence" (232); the preface is not intended to "explain" the poem, for "Poetry is a sword of lightning ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it" (685). Shelley appends the preface to the poem as a note to address the reader, and manipulate the audience's prejudgement of the text, but the poem stands apart as an expression of other-worldly inspiration. The writer of the preface seems like a bad reader, who moralises where inappropriate, and offers to the reader a key with which to read this "allegory." As Hugh Roberts observes: "To my mind, though, what is striking about the preface is not its obtuseness but its lack of reticence, the detached matter-of-factness with which it offers analysis and evaluation."[27] The incongruence of the preface to the poem opens out the poem; the reader, puzzled by the disjuncture between poem and preface gains the imaginative space to perform his/her own interpretation.

A close examination of Shelley's treatment of the hero in *Alastor* and its preface indicates that Shelley does not forget his theme, nor is his writing "confused," and confusing for the reader.[28] The treatment of the Poet by the writer of the preface deliberately affects a distance from the text, purporting to analyse it from a vantage point beyond the poem. The writer of the preface positions himself as reader, critic, or creator of the poem; by claiming no particular affiliation, the reader is thrown upon her or his own resources. Shelley frames the poem through a variety of techniques; firstly offering it to the public as notable for its allegorical character, and then relating the plot to the reader. The matter of fact description offers a psychological explanation of "the veilèd maid" (151):

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[26] Havens, 1103, n. 5.
[27] Roberts, 193.
[28] Havens, 1106. 1108.

His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture. (92)

This description of the plot deliberately provides a dry sketch of the events of the poem as it detaches itself from *Alastor*. The description glibly notes the Poet's wasting away through desire in the final line of the plot summary: "Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave" (92). Yet this detachment becomes a fiction, as the writer launches into a diatribe against those who would judge the Poet, but he expresses his ambivalence toward the hero by seeming to locate his "speedy ruin" in his "self-centred seclusion:" (92)

The Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin. But that Power which strikes the luminaries of the world with sudden darkness and extinction, by awakening them to too exquisite a perception of its influences, dooms to a slow and poisonous decay those meaner spirits that dare to abjure its dominion.

The Poet is a heightened image of an ideal type of man; Shelley draws out his distinction between his self-destructive heroic Poet and the reader by clearly separating "actual men" (92) from the Poet of *Alastor*. The difference between the pure-hearted type of person, exemplified by the Poet, and the "selfish… multitudes" (93) that abjure human company is brought out in motive and degree of sensitivity:

Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt. All else, selfish, blind, and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world. Those who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave. (93)

While the end result for both types is "a miserable grave," those "deluded by no generous error" are worthy of contempt, while the "tender-hearted" deserve compassion and understanding. *Alastor* does not deal in conventional reality; the poem records the quest of a visionary character outside the realms of mundane experience. Shared sympathetic communion is the primary urge of the preface. Like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, the poem is of a visionary state suspended outside of reality. It neither sits in judgement, nor is it appropriate to import into the poem a code of morality deliberately removed from the compass of the poem.[29] But this should not suggest a vagueness of tone, or an attempt to escape from reality. The stridency of tone in the preface is noted by Stephen Behrendt;[30] his understanding of the poem as a formulation of Shelley's declaration of independence from Wordsworth's influence adds a steely layer to the traditional figuring of *Alastor* as a prime example of the poetics of desire.[31] The densely textured ambivalence that characterises Shelley's poetry mirrors his poetics.

The site of the strongest ambivalence in the poem is the encounter of the poet with the veilèd maid. The deep desire of the Poet for the supernatural realm culminates in his encounter with an image of the ideal, presented as a woman. The highly eroticised figure overpowers the Poet as vacancy and sexual ecstasy combine to create a powerfully charged description of being overcome:

> His strong heart sunk and sickened with excess
>
> Of love. He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
>
> His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
>
> Her panting bosom:… she drew back a while,
>
> Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
>
> With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
>
> Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.
>
> Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night
>
> Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep,

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[29] This seems similar to *Prometheus Unbound*, as Bloom asserts the extraneous nature of morality to the Shelleyan vision in the dramatic poem: "This then [description in lines 191-209] is to be taken only as a vision of the way things are; moral meaning is extraneous to it." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 104.

[30] Behrendt, 104.

[31] Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley*, 29.

> Like a dark flood suspended in its course,
>
> Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain.
>
> (181-91)

The "excess of love" sickens the heart of the Poet, and the psychosexual unity between the pair is described by Shelley in terms that hint towards the danger attendant on this tireless pursuit and final unity with the ideal. The assonance of the "s" sounds in the first line slows the rhythm, and lulls the reader into a comparable trance to the Poet. The lines intimate a dizzying lack of control on the part of the Poet; the female figure chooses to withdraw, and then enfolds him in her arms, and Shelley's syntax does not clarify whether it is her own "irresistible joy" or the Poet's joy to which she yields. The female figure is ambiguous; despite the Poet's longing, he is consumed by her presence, suggesting a danger inherent in the intensity of his desire. Shelley hints that she may be a projection of the Poet's mind:

> A vision on his sleep
>
> There came, a dream of hopes that never yet
>
> Had flushed his cheek. He dreamed a veilèd maid
>
> Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.
>
> Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
>
> Heard in the calm of thought;
>
> (149-54)

The poet is asleep, just as in *Queen Mab* where Ianthe experiences her visionary journey as she sleeps. However, the soul of Ianthe is awakened in *Queen Mab* (*Queen Mab*, 128-32), but in *Alastor* Shelley does not clearly indicate the nature of the Poet's vision, rendering it painfully ambiguous. The experience could be suggestive of a self-generated, and therefore deceiving vision, or the other alternative, a visitation from an ethereal plane. Either of these interpretations could find support from the text; the maid's "dissolving arms" do not suggest a corporeal presence but do not deny or avow that she exists independently of the Poet's mind. She could be an example of Shelley creating a double of the Poet; the maid is a poet herself, and deeply preoccupied with the same ideals as him:

> Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,

> And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
>
> Thoughts the most dear to him, and poesy,
>
> Herself a poet.
>
> (158-61)

Where William Ulmer considers doubles to be a negative element in Shelley's poetry,[32] the use of doubles in *Alastor* seems more helpfully glossed by his essay *On Love*, written in 1818. There, Shelley describes love as finding within oneself a purer self:

> We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. (632)

Alastor walks the tightrope between presenting the veilèd maid as this "ideal prototype" and as a dangerous force, either internally generated or externally present, that overcomes the Poet. Shelley carefully presents these dangers and desires to the reader, while the narrator explicitly highlights the danger undertaken by the Poet:

> He overleaps the bounds. Alas! alas!
>
> Were limbs, and breath, and being intertwined
>
> Thus treacherously?
>
> (207-09)

This episode within the poem is comparable to *The Triumph of Life* with Rousseau's encounter with the mysterious female shape. Rousseau begs the lady to remain: "Pass not away upon the passing stream" (399) in a similar image to the dark flood that swept away the Poet's vision of the ideal woman. As happens to the mind of *Alastor*'s Poet, Rousseau's mind is reduced to a vacant space by his unity with a similar female figure, symbolised by his drinking from the cup offered by her.

> 'I rose; and, bending at her sweet command,
>
>   Touched with faint lips the cup raised,
>
> And suddenly my brain became as sand.

---

[32] "Doubles are always the progeny of repression, projections outside the self of inadmissible impulses and secret guilt." William Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990), 9.

(403-05)

The play of possibilities that shimmers across the presentation of the Shape all Light in *The Triumph of Life* dominates the description of the veilèd maid in *Alastor*. The multiple interpretations of the Shape show that Shelley deliberately makes the ideal an ambiguous entity that may be incompatible with human existence, and therefore elevate or destroy the elect that come into contact with its force.[33] Rajan's reading of *The Triumph of Life* as a revision of *Alastor* instead of a reversal is accurate in this thematic sense.[34] The central points of both poems are a visionary confrontation with a female principle that overcomes the male and human protagonist. Shelley's questioning and exploration of the nature of the power of the ideal and the myriad of interpretative opportunities available to each experience unites the poetry throughout his oeuvre.

IV.

This essential ambivalence towards all elements of the text allows the poetry simultaneously to veil and present a meaning that is never circumscribed and final. Vacillation in *Alastor* is a poetic expression of Shelley's poetics as delineated in *A Defence of Poetry* and "Mont Blanc" is a very different example of Shelley's radically explorative poetics. *A Defence of Poetry*, as I have shown, is an essay that seeks to express the dialectic of the earthly chaos and eternal order of poetry, allowing for the fluidity of poetic language in an attempt to defy any final interpretive position. "Mont Blanc" explores the relationship between inner and outer as Shelley presents an encounter between humanity and nature that witnesses the blurring of the two through man's interpretative drive. As Jerrold E. Hogle writes, "The individual psyche in "Mont Blanc" arises out of, and is a differentiation within, an earlier, larger, centerless, and essentially linguistic play of differences ands similarities."[35] Hogle's interest in Shelley's poetics of process and transference has particular resonance in this poem as Shelley writes into the

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[33] See Rajan, "The extremes of interpretation include Allott's view of the Shape as the Wordsworthian visionary gleam, and Bloom's view of it as fundamentally deceptive and evil." Rajan, *The Dark Interpreter*, 72.

[34] "*The Triumph of Life* is a revision rather than a reversal of *Alastor*." Rajan, *The Dark Interpreter*, 83.

[35] Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, 75.

poem a complex fusion of doubt and faith, assertion and questioning, as he seeks the essence of the relationship between the observer and the observed.

Stuart Curran's observation about Shelley's English period deserves consideration in the light of "Mont Blanc" as Shelley carefully presents the reader with a denial of any definitive view of the mountain: "Yet as a whole the poems of Shelley's English period undermine certainty, achieving unity only in their quest for it. Individually, they reflect the very fragmentation, the inadequacy of any single solution, that Shelley sought to escape."[36] By revealing the multiple possibilities and the many metaphors open to poetry, Shelley refuses to simplify his poem; his poetry never eludes his creative control. Its status as a poetic performance of free play of the imagination unites and orders the text; the imagination is an ordering principle, but the chaos of the natural world means that creative honesty resides in expressing the plurality of the ordering systems at the expense of a single unifying system.[37] The poetic control that Shelley subtly embeds in the poetry has much to do with the present-tense nature of its vision. The reader proceeds through the poem following Shelley's gaze, and the play of his imagination.

The poetic self that mediates between chaos and control is all-important to "Mont Blanc," and a comparison of the poem to Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni" illustrates Shelley's independent poetics combined with his responsive reading of Coleridge.[38] Bloom decides that there is no significance in their shared subject, "We have no reason to believe that Shelley had Coleridge's poem in mind, either then or when he composed his "Mont Blanc," for there are no verbal echoes of the earlier "Hymn" in the later work."[39] Bloom is wrong; as Michael O'Neill, among others, shows,[40] Shelley carefully echoes and disrupts Coleridge's earlier poem, weaving his

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[36] Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975), 34.

[37] See Hogle, *Shelley's Process* for a discussion of Shelley's use of mythographs.

[38] Christopher Hitt advocates *Mont Blanc* being considered in the light of Coleridge's "Hymn," highlighting the variety of sources available. Christopher Hitt, "Shelley's Unwriting of "Mont Blanc"" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47 (2005): 139-166 [144 and notes 12 and 13]

[39] Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 11.

[40] Michael O'Neill, "The Gleam of Those Words: Coleridge and Shelley," *Keats-Shelley Review* 19 (2005)*: 76-96.*

unique poem from strands of his own and Coleridge's thought. The importance of Coleridge's influence on Shelley should not be underestimated; Shelley writes of his engagement with Coleridge's poetry, asking Peacock in July 1816 about: "Of England's literature, of which when I speak Coleridge is in my thoughts."[41] Though Shelley may not have read the prefatory note to Coleridge's poem when it was published in the *Morning Post*, it is exhilarating for the reader to imagine the challenge for Shelley to respond to Coleridge's exclamation, "Who *would* be, who *could* be, an Atheist, in this valley of wonders!"[42] While Bloom drily points out, "The extenuation is that 1802 is rather a late and difficult time for a poet to be uttering a psalm of praise to Jehovah,"[43] it seems that Shelley challenges and disrupts, yet finally responds to Coleridge's affirmative optimism.[44] Shelley does not offer the reader a fully formed myth to replace Coleridge's orthodox prayer. Neither does he, as Bloom believes, prepare the ground for a new myth and system to be embraced by later poems. The comparison between Coleridge's "Hymn" and "Mont Blanc" illustrates the major development offered by Shelley's fluid poetics in comparison to Coleridge's troubled and hysterical orthodox single vision.[45]

"Mont Blanc" is a highly structured unit of 144 lines in five sections written in irregularly rhyming iambic pentameters, but the power of its organisation has drawn critical disdain. F. R. Leavis detects a thoughtless quality which he claims is the hallmark of a typically Shelleyan poem.[46] The sense that Shelley's work is somehow off the cuff is refuted powerfully by Keach's close reading of the form and structure of "Mont Blanc":

> Rhyme in *Mont Blanc* is not, then, as 'wildly irregular' as it has been thought
> to be. It is sufficiently irregular to help evoke the 'untameable wildness' Shelley
> spoke of: some of the most interesting rhymes in the poem are so distant and so

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[41] *Shelley's Letters* 1: 490.

[42] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Prefatory Note to 'Hymn before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouny,'" *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works; Poems (Variorum Text) Part 2*, vol. 16, ed. J. C. C. Mays, Bollingen Series LXXV (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), 925. All quotations from the poem will be from this edition.

[43] Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 12.

[44] "Shelley pointedly rejects Coleridge's theistic solutions, but he shares his desire to affirm." O'Neill, "The Gleam of Those Words," 95.

[45] Angela Esterhammer, "Coleridge's 'Hymn before Sun-rise' and the Voice Not Heard," *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 226.

[46] "[Shelley's poetry has] little to do with thinking" in F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition & Development in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 173.

muted by distended syntax that the reader may find them as 'remote' and 'inaccessible' as Mont Blanc itself.[47]

Shelley's structural subtlety belies any reading of the poetry as an emotionally raw and technically poor creation.[48] His artistry evokes the flux of perception and the untameable power of nature, but on closer examination, Shelley's control over the poem is remarkable. Section one immediately situates Mont Blanc as an entity that is defined by its perception by the onlooker. It does not stress the static form of the mountain, concentrating instead on the fluid nature of perception:

> The everlasting universe of things
>
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
>
> Now dark — now glittering — now reflecting gloom —

(1-3)

Passivity of the mind is suggested by the flow of things through it, and the process seems alogical as sense impressions are recorded. Shelley develops in the first half of the section an illusion of unfiltered vision, but this is partially shattered by Shelley's philosophic addition into the description of the scene: "The source of human thought its tribute brings / Of waters, — *with a sound but half its own*," (emphasis added). This reference to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" indicates at this early stage the theme that the poem continues to develop,[49] that of the strength and creative power of the human mind. It also affirms the power of the first-generation Romantic poets in Shelley's fertile imaginative scheme. The human mind can develop its own defining sense of the mountain, but Shelley will not offer the reader a static illustration. In contrast, Coleridge allows that the Arve and Arveiron "rave ceaselessly" but the mountain is an "awful Form" (5), beggaring description in the first stanza. The repeated adjective "silent" (6, 7, 13), generates a sense of being overcome which seems to prevent Coleridge describing the peak; the sublime renders the poet speechless. By the end of the stanza, description is past, as Coleridge decides to meditate on the spiritual sense that he arrives at inspired by Mont Blanc:

> Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,

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[47] Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 199.

[48] "The 'poetical faculty', we are left no room for doubting, can, of its very nature, have nothing to do with any discipline, and can be associated with conscious effort only mechanically and externally," Leavis, 175.

[49] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," 106-08: "the mighty world / Of ear and eye, both what they half-create/ And what perceive." *William Wordsworth*, 134.

Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer

I worshipped the Invisible alone.

(14-16)

The sublime stops the mouth of the would-be bard, as nature in its material form is ejected from the poem almost immediately by Coleridge as something awesome and outside of language. Coleridge's attempt to commune with nature fails as nature is by definition outside of language; in order to cope with his mental struggle with silence and awe, Coleridge transposes the divine onto nature. This imaginative leap provides Coleridge with the basis with which to impose an orthodox framework of Christianity onto the landscape, but a troubled anxiety remains in the poetry. In *Mont Blanc*, Shelley insists on the non-dogmatic nature of the poem; the poem cannot be viewed through the lens of orthodox Christianity as the multiplicity of possibilities precludes the imposition of any single frame of reference. The poem is created out of external impressions on his individual mind, which overflows with different connections and ways of conceptualising the mountain. As Earl Wasserman comments, the poem communicates "the active and irresolvable mental tension between the two [subjective impression and external thing] that is embodied in the word 'Seeking.'"[50] Shelley refuses to impose one kind of controlling mould on to the chaos of the natural world; instead he relishes the plurality of interpretations possible by exposure to external stimuli.

Like Coleridge's rendering of Mont Blanc, Shelley's section two of "Mont Blanc" also refers to the scene as "awful" (15), and the poet glories in the dynamic possibility of the "many-coloured, many-voicèd vale" (13) landscape. He does not project his imaginings as the sole truth of the mountain, reminding the reader of the "ceaseless motion" (32) of the scene. Shelley shows a heightened awareness of the subjectivity of his imaginings in the second part of the second stanza:

Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee

I seem as in a trance sublime and strange

To muse on my own separate fantasy,

My own, my human mind, which passively,

---

[50] Wasserman, 227.

> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
>
> Holding an unremitting interchange
>
> With the clear universe of things around;
>
> (34-40)

The word "passively" can seem difficult in the context of Shelley's more melioristic ideals, which often emphasised the need to actively respond to the world: as Mary Shelley writes, "Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none."[51] In the context of this line, Kapstein argues that the reader can decide between reading "passively" as the poet being momentarily overcome by the scene, or as the mind being constantly passive in the face of external stimuli.[52] The latter conclusion for Kapstein is an admission of the weakness of the imagination, and he argues that Shelley's statement in "On Life" ("Mind, as far we have any experience of its properties, and beyond that experience how vain is argument, cannot create, it can only perceive," 636), accepts and laments this frailty. But previously in the same essay, Shelley asserts that "Nothing exists but as it is perceived;" (635) perception is a human act of ordering the profusion and potentiality provided by nature. The "unremitting interchange" (39) in which the poet and the universe engage defines the discerning act of the human mind. The trance "sublime and strange" (35) describes the suspension of the will, a suspension which in the *Defence* provides the conditions for creating poetry: "Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will" (696). The word "passively" (37) draws attention to the necessary withdrawal of critical faculties and egotistical "self"-driven thought in favour of a state in which self blurs with world.[53] The poet operates in a state between chaos and control; rather than being a controlling arbiter over the scene, assigning a willed meaning to the chaotic world, Shelley interacts with it. He displays a fluid sensitivity to the world which he saw as integral to the poet figure: "… he is more delicately organized than other men, and sensible to pain and pleasure both his own and that of others in a degree unknown to

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[51] Mary Shelley, "Note on *Prometheus Unbound,*" *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1934), 271.

[52] I. J. Kapstein, "The Meaning of Shelley's "Mont Blanc"" *PMLA* 62 (1947): 1050, *JSTOR*. 4 Feb. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[53] Shelley often lamented the egotism he thought damaging to his poetry and his selfhood: "*Self*, that burr that will stick to one," he complained to Hunt in 1819. "I can't pull it off—yet." *Shelley's Letters* 1: 108-9.

them" (699-700). The passivity of the poet-figure in this context, where the principle of Self is dulled in favour of a harmonious interchange, does not display weakness. It manifests sensitivity to the delicacy of the balance between chaos and control, nature and man, which the poet must be attuned to in order to write poetry.

"In the still cave of the witch Poesy" (44) displays a similar kind of interest in the mediation between self and world, though here, the mediation is between the self and the philosophical concepts of others. By deliberately planting an echo of Plato's famous cave, Shelley seems to direct the reader towards other authorities to explain his thinking. This has led to a plethora of early criticism which emphasised Shelley's Platonic influence.[54] This has been refuted emphatically by critics such as Wasserman and Bloom,[55] but to deny the Platonism latent in the lines is to misread a poet as learned as Shelley.[56] But Shelley's is a "separate fantasy" that can reference Plato's cave without committing to its theory. Jerrold E. Hogle views "Mont Blanc" as enacting a refutation and refiguration of Wordsworth and Coleridge's thought;[57] yet Shelley moves beyond simply refiguring his older contemporaries into a display of intellectual independence that can reference authorities such as Plato while remaining aloof from any full commitment to their thought. Shelley meditates on the scene and discovers "One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings / Now float above thy darkness…" (41-42). Shelley glories in the chaos and possibility latent in the scene, retaining his intellectual independence by acting as a poetic conduit to the scene rather than attempting to order and control the scene as Coleridge does in his orthodox hymn. The variety and number of these thoughts that are present in the cave represent all the possibilities open to the poet, and to the human mind.

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[54] See James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1949) or Ross G. Woodman, "Shelley's Changing Attitude to Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 497-510. *JSTOR*. 12 June 2008. <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[55] Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 29; Wasserman, 215, n. 18.

[56] Yeats writes: "So good a Platonist as Shelley could hardly have thought of any cave as a symbol, without thinking of Plato's cave that was the world;" Yeats, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" *Essays and Introductions*, 81-82.

[57] Jerrold E. Hogle, "Shelley as Revisionist: Power and Belief in *Mont Blanc*," *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. G. Kim Blanc (London: Macmillan, 1991), 108.

Coleridge's verses two and three also discuss the blending of man with the scene, but for Coleridge, he is not communing with what he perceives, but with the Christian framework he has imposed. Where silence ruled the first stanza, Coleridge cries to his soul to "awake" in the third stanza, as if to whip himself into an artificial frenzy as he imagines nature joining him in a hymn to the Lord. The constant use of rhetorical questions in verse four until the end of the poem are reminiscent of Blake's technique in "The Tyger,"[58] but they are without the same degree of moral intensity, as Coleridge never strays from orthodox praise. The questions remain as purely rhetorical figures. Coleridge seems tormented by his inability to figure the ineffable as the rhetorical questions rise up to transform into questions requiring answers, answers the poet cannot quite insist on with the requisite degree of authority:

> Who sank thy sunless pillars deep in Earth?
> Who filled thy countenance with rosy light?
> Who made thee parent of perpetual streams?

(36-38)

While Shelley's poem moves at a slow pace with protracted pauses and solemn diction, Coleridge's "Hymn" seems to sprint towards the finish; there is no sense of a meditation on the figure of the mountain. Coleridge seems overpowered by the Lord in his imagination, and the gushing nature of the poem shows little imaginative strength or vigour. [59] The final verse, in which he writes of his subjugation before God most completely expresses his suppliant position: "That as I raise my head, awhile bowed low / In adoration," (75-76). "Mont Blanc" is an imaginative rebuttal of the earlier poem's attitude of powerlessness and the drive towards a single conclusion.

Stanza three of "Mont Blanc" begins cautiously, recounting the belief of an unspecified group, and asks, "Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled / The veil of life and death? or do I lie" (53-54). This potential pun on "lie" throws the question into doubt, and flags

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[58] William Blake, "The Tyger," *Blake's Poetry and Designs: Illuminated Works, Other Writings, Criticism,* selected and edited Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, 2nd ed. (New York, NY; London: Norton, 2008), 38.

[59] "Coleridge is plainly imitating the poet of Job, but much of the fine force gained by that imitation is dissipated by Coleridge's typical softening of the harsh strident original." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking,* 17.

up the poet as capable of misleading the reader. By casting doubt on the veracity of the enquiry, Shelley invites the reader to examine the question themselves, and become their own authority, divesting the poet of more of his controlling power:

> …Is this the scene
>
> Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
>
> Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
>
> Of fire envelop once this silent snow?

(71-74)

Like the "Hymn", the silence of the scene tempts the poet into constructing a mythology or a voice for the scene, but unlike Coleridge, Shelley will not allow this one strand of thought to dominate nature's infinite possibilities. Shelley bleakly records the silence of the mountain and will not impose an absolute meaning on to the scene.[60] But the poet will not say that the mountain is bare of meaning; he senses an incommunicable idea:

> 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;"

(76-79)

This is a particularly difficult passage to interpret in any one way.[61] O'Neill, in his gloss on the poem, points out that version B has "In such a faith" in place of "But for such faith", and it seems sensible to read the lines in this way.[62] But for Shelley to have introduced such "purposeful obscurity" suggests that he wanted the reader to have difficulty with the lines,[63] and here Shelley seems to question mild faith, and prefer awful doubt. The final lines of the stanza reflect Shelley's continued interest in revealing the "Large codes of fraud and woe" (81), and he concedes that the message is esoteric, but claims to believe that "the wise, and great, and good / Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel" (82-83). This strikes a hopeful, if somewhat unconvincing note. Shelley cannot decipher the message of the mountain, and still less impart to the reader any didactic

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[60]Hogle "Shelley as Revisionist: Power and Belief in *Mont Blanc*," 108.

[61] I agree with Robert Brinkley who argues at this juncture for "The force of Shelley's indecision." "Spaces Between Words: Writing *Mont Blanc*," *Romantic Revisions*, 262.

[62] Note to page 122, line 79, Leader and O'Neill, 722

[63] Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking,* 23.

meaning. In this way, stanza four seems to correct Shelley's over-optimistic assertion. After a naturalistic description, Shelley acknowledges that "Power dwells apart in its tranquillity / Remote, serene and inaccessible" (96-97). As Bloom suggests,[64] this suggests that the Power behind nature is an indifferent entity rather than a benign force working to secure mankind's favourable destiny. The preoccupation of lines 84-97 is to remove any anthropocentric bias, as the scene of Mont Blanc shows otherness to be a powerful force equal, if a stranger to mankind. As if to demonstrate the impossibility of imagining nature without any human influence, Shelley proceeds to describe nature in societal and human terms:

> Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
>
> Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
>
> A city of death, distinct with many a tower
>
> (103-05)

From an anthropocentric description, the passage descends into an apocalyptic vision:

> So much of life and joy is lost. The race
>
> Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
>
> Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
>
> And their place is not known.
>
> (117-20)

Having removed mankind definitively from the stanza at this point, Shelley finishes the section with a description of the mountain as a place of unbounded nature, as the river "for ever / rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves," (124-25). The removal of mankind from nature predicates a shift in the poem; the poem slows and develops a rolling rhythm synonymous with the content of the lines.

The shift continues into section five, and a sense of higher knowledge and inevitability creep into the tone, as Shelley seems to comprehend some of the mountain's knowledge:

> Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: — the power is there,
>
> The still and solemn power of many sights,

---

[64] "The Power behind the natural scene has not our specific good *or* ill in mind, and we can be reconciled with nature only if we realize and accept this." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking,* 32.

> And many sounds, and much of life and death.
>
> (127-29)

Shelley subtly references Coleridge's "Hymn" by the repetition of "silently" in lines 135 and 136, indicating his ability to weave voices of his powerful older contemporaries into the imaginative landscape.[65] Their opposing visions are granted their place while Shelley confidently moves through his own imaginative vision. I follow Kapstein in thinking that lines 139-41 are a climax of sorts,[66] but the rest of the poem, which has resisted falling into a single approach to the mountain would be thrown into doubt by the lines' insidious assertion of the power of the another force over the autonomy of the human mind:

> …The secret strength of things
>
> Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
>
> Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
>
> (139-41)

Throughout the entire poem, the human mind has projected its imaginings onto the mountain, providing it with a mythology (70-74) and humanising the landscape (99-120). To cede the governance of the mind and its perceptive faculty seems antithetical to Shelley's artistic credo. Like *A Defence of Poetry*, "Mont Blanc" seems a statement of belief in profusion; much of the poem reinforces the various and the multiple. These lines would reduce the poem to a single belief. The final three lines represent Shelley at his most skilful: they demonstrate his ability to pivot from one point to another without dismissing the previous concept or prioritising the present concept. They are an affirmation of the power of the human mind to vivify and conceptualise the landscape with the imagination's perceptive power:

> And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
>
> If to the human mind's imaginings
>
> Silence and solitude were vacancy?
>
> (142-44)

While affirming the power of the imagination, the lines contain an underlying ambivalence that Shelley communicates by formulating them as a question. The question

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[65] *Leader and O'Neill*, note to line 135, 723

[66] Kapstein, 1057.

seems a real enquiry rather than a rhetorical trope. While the densely packed perceptions of the poem attest to the primacy of the imagination, there is an underlying fear of vacancy as the flip-side of the teeming mind of the poet. Instances where Shelley uses the word "vacancy" in the *Concordance to Shelley's Poetry* indicate the compelling nature of vacancy for a poet that so fervently espouses the imagination as the site of all moral and creative value.[67]

While Shelley in *Mont Blanc* creates and dismisses each mythograph,[68] indicating nothing more keenly than the fluidity and plurality of the human imagination, there remains the question of what nature would or could communicate if provided with the opportunity. In *Alastor*, the Poet's vacant mind allows him an understanding of life's deepest mysteries:

> And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
>
> Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
>
> The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.

<div align="right">(Alastor, 126-28)</div>

Glimmering beneath the narrator's confident imaginative exercise is a fear that the human mind's imaginings alienate humanity from nature. The imagination's need to fill a vacuum could prevent a possible interchange between man and nature, rendering it impossible for people to see nature for what it *is*. On the other hand, the fear that nature may indeed be dumb and have no spark to communicate outside the vivifying human mind is equally horrifying. Either way it is apparent that the interchange between man and nature, if ever there was one, is broken.

The impossibility of an imaginative interchange between poet and nature alienates Shelley from nature, as Yeats points out in "The Happiest of Poets": "His genius [Blake's] like Shelley's can hardly stir but to the rejection of Nature."[69] Careful observation and perception of the mountain entwine with Shelley's demonstration of the

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[67] There are twenty-six different uses of the word "vacant," "vacancy," and "vacantly," as the idea of a void or open space compels Shelley throughout his career. See *A Lexical Concordance to the Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 752.

[68] See Hogle, *Shelley's Process* for a discussion of Shelley's use of mythographs.

[69] Yeats, "The Happiest of Poets," *Essays and Introductions*, 53.

colouring that "the human mind's imaginings" project on to nature, but ultimately for Shelley, the human mind takes centre stage, becoming the final point of contemplation.

V.

Earl J. Schulze contends that the lack of imaginative certainty prevents the poem achieving a sense of unity. "Hard and fast distinctions between the imageless truth of being, and a Power in back of or beyond consciousness, dissolve in the face of the poet's radical effort to give coherence to conscious perceptual experience."[70] Shelley's "radical effort" lies in his attempt to provide not coherence, but to stress in his poetry the variety inherent in perception. Ironically, Shelley's poetic control lies in refusing to stand as an authority over the scene. The fluctuation of the human mind mirrors the flux of nature; "a vast river / Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves." (10-11) Nature's beauty lies in its reflection of man's imaginative life. Shelley's interest in the fluctuating nature of perception and thought precludes him imposing any final conclusion on the scene — the closest thing to a conclusion is the impossibility of certainty. This same urge towards the various informs Shelley's *Defence.* Potentiality is the cornerstone to Shelley's theory and practice of poetry:

> The infinite potential meaning of poetry is seen to depend upon the inability of words ever completely to conduct and therefore to discharge the mental energy they signify. So when Shelley goes on to transfigure words-as-ashes into words-as-veil, he does so not to lament the discrepancy between thoughts and words, but to expand his claim that 'All high poetry is infinite.'[71]

There are neither "only the good and beautiful parts" of life,[72] nor solely the pain of "repressed subtexts."[73] The poem's preoccupation is to represent each experience in its entirety, producing "a subtler language"[74] suffused with ambiguity.

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[70] Schulze, 100.
[71] Keach, *Shelley's Style,* 28.
[72] Edward Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron*, 2nd ed. (Seattle, WA: U of Washington P, 1975), 216.
[73] Rajan, *The Dark Interpreter*, 72.
[74] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna, or, the Revolution of the Golden City," *Leader and O'Neill*, VII: 32, 3112.

For Shelley, the poet must find a way to control the text in order to create a poetry that can act as a conduit for "the electric life" (701) that burns within, but he must also convey the potentiality and chaos that provide the fertile conditions of poetic creation. Shelley's technical ability, highly praised by Wordsworth,[75] provides an insight into how Shelley seeks to imaginatively control his densely woven poetry,[76] yet Shelley's heightened understanding of the chaos out of which creation is born prevents him from creating a dogmatic system. *A Defence of Poetry* allows *Alastor* and *Mont Blanc* the imaginative freedom to question, to challenge, and to respond to flux by its insistence on the immortal nature of poetry; the poetry as both inside and outside the mortal world can contemplate from on high and simultaneously empathise from within. It is freed from and subject to society, and the tension between these two states creates poetry's vitality. Poetry's ability to show the world to itself using the imagination as its visionary vehicle renders it open-ended and alive to multiplicity and chaos:

> It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world; and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; (681)

As this quotation shows, Shelley does not claim that poetry should create entirely new models and concepts; its artistry lies in its ability to estrange the world from itself, and perceive all things anew. World is not lost in Shelley's poetry; he refigures and orders it according to the poet's imaginative vision. New modes of perception and ways of figuring self and world vivify the poetry as Shelley transforms tension into creation. Chaos and control operate in tandem to figure a poetic universe that drives forward while retaining an awareness of multiple potentialities.

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[75] "Shelley is one of the best artists of us all: I mean in workmanship and style." Quoted in Frederick A. Pottle, "The Case of Shelley," *PMLA* 67 (1952): 593. *JSTOR*. 15 Dec. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>. He reports it as an oral judgement made to his biographer Christopher Wordsworth in 1827.

[76] Tilottama Rajan draws attention to the woven quality of Shelley's poetry in her essay, "The Web of Human Things: Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*," *The New Shelley*, 85-107.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Fury and the Mire of Human Veins": Yeats's Self-divided Poetics

> Nowhere, beloved, can world exist but within.
> Life passes in transformation. And, ever diminishing,
> vanishes what's outside. Where once was a lasting house,
> up starts some invented structure across our vision, as fully
> at home among concepts as though it still stood in a brain.[1]

I.

The twin principles of chaos and control are continuously and self-consciously present in Yeats's poetry. His poetics are made out of the struggle to control and master his poetry while retaining the chaos that permits creative freedom. As his self-appointed mentor,[2] Nietzsche writes, "a man must have chaos yet within himself to be able to give birth to a dancing star."[3] A section from "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty" suggests the prominence of his interest in the movement between chaos and control:

> I think that two conceptions, that of reality as a congeries of beings, that of
> reality as a single being, alternate in our emotion and history, and must always
> remain something that human reason, because subject always to one or the
> other, cannot reconcile. I am always, in all I do, driven to a moment which is
> the realisation of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the
> surrender to God of all that I am.[4]

This quotation encapsulates Yeats's understanding of self-divided humanity. Suspended between these two poles, the artist creates poetry that veers between the two states; creation comes from the pressure of expressing these potent and irreconcilable desires. Yeats's *soi-disant* poetry of power and mastery is equally preoccupied by the prospect of

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[1] Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Seventh Elegy," *Duino Elegies: The German Text, with an English Translation*, introd. and commentary J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (London: Hogarth P, 1939), 71-76.
[2] The dominant influences upon him were the antithetical fourfold: Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Pater, to whom as an *antithetical* theorist he added himself as a fifth." Bloom, *Poetry and Repression,* 206.
[3] Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. A Tille, rev. M. M. Bozman; introd. Roy Pascal, Everyman's Library (London: Dent; New York, NY: Dutton, 1958), 9
[4] Yeats, "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty," *Explorations*, 305.

powerlessness and passivity.[5] The conflicting nature of the two conceptions of uniqueness and surrender creates the "electric life" from which Yeats constructs the self, and from the self, his poetry.[6]

Imagination offers Yeats, as it did for Byron and Shelley, a power that can grant him freedom. To paraphrase Keats's great letter, Yeats's poetry engages in a vale of self-making;[7] his poetry functions as "sacred book" where he continually makes and unmakes the self. [8] He moves through different modes of being and self-understanding without offering a final definition that would stymie creative thought. Words, for Yeats, are things that can create a self, and as perfect self-expression is impossible, creation continues.[9] But Yeats does not entrap himself in an impossible paradigm; his self-creation remains deliberately incomplete, never fully identifiable with or divorced from his actual historical existence. The shifting interactions between the poetically created self and the historically contingent man create a richly textured poetry that elides compete definition. Yeats's power resides in his ability to make and re-make; he refigures self and world in every poem.

The Wanderings of Oisin is a pivotal text for Yeats's development. Remembered in "The Circus Animals' Desertion," Yeats provides a gloss on his early poem that emphasises Oisin's passivity and the emptiness of the islands on which Yeats maroons his protagonist:

> What can I but enumerate old themes,
>
> First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose
>
> Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,

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[5] "The character upon which Yeats's art is directed, with a poet's intensity, is power: it denotes mastery, self-mastery if the self is in question, as it regularly is." Denis Donoghue, *Yeats*, Fontana Modern Masters (London: Fontana, 1971), 15-16.

[6] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 701; Yeats referred to his poetry as "my poems, my true self." Yeats, "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty," *Explorations*, 308.

[7] "Call the world if you Please 'The vale of Soul-making'." John Keats, Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819, *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958), 102.

[8] Hugh Kenner, "The Sacred Book of the Arts," *Gnomon: Essays on Contemporary Literature* [1951] (New York, NY: McDowell & Oblensky, 1956).

[9] "But the self's interpretations can never be fully explicit. Full articulacy is an impossibility." Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 34.

> Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
>
> Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
>
> That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;
>
> But what cared I that set him on to ride,
>
> I, starved for the bosom of his fairy bride?

(9-16)

He first bemoans that the poet may not create, but must merely "enumerate old themes," (9) suggesting a methodical, mechanical and repetitive faculty which gels uneasily with Yeats's often quasi-mystical estimation of the role of the poet.[10] Oisin, the poet-hero of the poem, is "led by the nose" (10) by Yeats, and his chosen theme. That he claims that the poem was built out of "allegorical dreams" (11) indicates his discomfort with the unreality of *Oisin* as Yeats often deprecated allegory in his critical prose, seeking a more immediate means of transmitting his thought.[11] Oisin, in Yeats's recollection in his late poem, is a victim of his creator, one of the "masterful images" (33) that Yeats creates out of old legends to fulfil the "themes of the embittered heart." (13)

Rather, *The Wanderings of Oisin* was an ambitiously conceived work that hoped to define a nationalist poetry that married aesthetic beauty with Irish themes.[12] The poem has been dismissed by many critics as wishy-washy abstraction, or as a minor Yeatsian attempt to imitate Shelley.[13] But instead of a limited precursor to Yeats's later work, *The Wanderings of Oisin* presents the issues that preoccupy Yeats throughout his career,

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[10] Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* [1962] (London; Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1969), 107, quoted in Dudley Young, *Out of Ireland: A Reading of Yeats's Poetry* (Manchester: Carcanet P, 1975), 11.

[11] Examples of Yeats criticising allegory can be found in much of his critical prose, but one particular example fits this context: "They [allegories] can speak of things which cannot be spoken of in any other language, but one will always, I think, feel some sense of unreality when they are used to describe things which can be described as well in ordinary words." Yeats, "Edmund Spenser," *Essays and Introductions*, 368.

[12] "Might I not, with health and good luck to aid me, create some new *Prometheus Unbound*; Patrick or Columbkil, Oisin or Fion, in Prometheus' stead; and, instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patric or Ben Bulben? Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies: Reveries over Childhood and Youth and the Trembling of the Veil* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 240.

[13] "The poetry is too dream-heavy with incantatory qualities to seem more than a wearied swoon." A. Norman Jeffares, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 18 and "*The Wanderings of Oisin*, demonstrates what "imitation of Shelley" meant to Yeats in the mid-1880s and foreshadows his profounder development of those Shelleyan themes in the 1890s." Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley*, 13.

primarily the difficulty of the human longing for the eternal despite our time-bound nature. Yeats writes into his poetry contraries that cannot be reconciled, and refuse to be dissolved into the poem.[14] The "wearied swoon" detected by A. N. Jeffares reflects Oisin's diminished stature;[15] his Fenian heritage opposed to his love for Niamh, representative of eternity, were contrary states embattled for centuries. We overhear a tale related to a hostile interlocutor, by a defeated warrior, "A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry" (III. 192).[16] Age, desolation, and loss suffuse his speech as Oisin relates his legend; neither Niamh nor the Fenians represent a correct way to live. There is no didactic urge; Oisin's contrary longings gain their poignancy as both states are absolute separate. Oisin "wrecked among heathen dreams" (I. 31) refuses the Christian framework, and rejects Patrick's almost sadistic taunts, insisting on Niamh's beauty and Fenian heroism. Yeats refuses to come down on one side or another; Oisin embodies the difficulty of the poet who would approach both the eternal and the mortal worlds. Oisin's choices are not subject to conventional morality; as an antithetical creation stranded in a primary world,[17] he is subject to misunderstanding. But Oisin regrets and rejects no part of his past, instead he dreams of his future "in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast" (III. 224).

II.

Yeats begins the poem with conflict. The diametrically opposed coupling of St Patrick, the avatar of contemporary Catholic Ireland and Oisin, a Fenian poet, play their separate and irreconcilable roles. St Patrick opens the poem, describing Oisin as an aged man "With a heavy heart and a wandering mind" (I. 2) following three hundred years of

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[14] As argued by Frank Hughes Murphy: "Rather the antinomies continue to defy either a resolution in which one side can be chosen and the other safely rejected, or a dissolution into some expansive unity that can encompass both." See Frank Hughes Murphy, *Yeats's Early Poetry: The Quest for Reconciliation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1975), 2

[15] Jeffares, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, 18.

[16] As *Larrissy* does not contain a full edition of *The Wanderings of Oisin*, the edition used is W. B. Yeats, *The Poems: Revised*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1991). All quotations from *The Wanderings of Oisin* will be from this edition.

[17] Yeats describes these states in *A Vision*; Yeats refers to the antithetical as "our inner world of desire and imagination…emotional and aesthetic" and the primary as "objectivity of mind…reasonable and moral." W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* [1962] (London: Macmillan, 1989), 73.

"dalliance with a demon thing" (I. 4) The immediacy and sparseness of the description sound like an accusation from the saint, recognisable as a representative of the present in the poem, [18] and Oisin as a pagan throwback to an earlier age. St Patrick's hostility sets the poem in motion, as he courts Oisin's tale, despite his revulsion from Oisin's experience. The opposition of Oisin and St Patrick, due to their historical, ideological, and experiential differences, forces the poem into an ironic approximation of dialogue, where St Patrick and Oisin misunderstand, ignore, and undercut each other's words. Oisin tells his story, resigned to the gap between his words and Patrick's interpretation. Oisin relates the tale, affirming his experience despite its consequences, his heroism partially won from its defeat: as Yeats writes in "Anima Hominis": "The poet finds and makes his mask in disappointment, the hero in defeat."[19] As both poet and hero, Oisin suffers both states, but refuses to be crushed. For this poet-hero, if the teller will not survive, his tale must: "But the tale, though words be lighter than air, / Must live to be old like the wandering moon" (I.11-12).

Oisin's alienation from St Patrick resembles his inability to integrate with the inhabitants of the eternal islands. The duality of experience that suffuses the poem finds uneasy expression in Niamh's love for Oisin, as she, who would remove him from the mortal world, falls in love with Oisin based on his human legend:[20]

> 'I loved no man, though kings besought,
>
> Until the Danaan poets brought
>
> Rhyme that rhymed upon Oisin's name,
>
> And now I am dizzy with the thought
>
> Of all that wisdom and the fame
>
> Of battles broken by his hands,
>
> Of stories builded by his words
>
> That are like coloured Asian birds

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[18] Yeats was acutely aware of being outside the culture of Catholic Ireland, and resented the strength of its influence. He recalls John O'Leary telling him that he would never enjoy the support of the Catholic Church: "'In this country,' he had said to me, 'a man must have upon his side the Church or the Fenians, and you will never have the Church." Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 257.

[19] Yeats, "Anima Hominis," *Essays*, 500.

[20] "Everywhere in his early poetry one finds evidence of this restless dissatisfaction with a world of battling contraries." Murphy, 2.

At evening in their rainless lands.'

(I. 62-70)

Niamh's adoration of Oisin predicates itself upon his mythology; the battles and the stories which she loves seem evanescently beautiful as she describes their faded and glimmering exoticism in her eyes. His mortality is the reason for her love; battles and poetry in Oisin's world are mortal and time-bound entities. The static world of the eternal opposes "the fury and mire of human veins" ("Byzantium," 8) and Oisin's voyage through the three islands with Niamh exposes the eternal isles as repetitive and artificial. Yeats's summary of the islands in "The Circus Animals' Desertion" as "vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose" (12) summarises their emptiness for humans. Yeats hints at the incongruity of mortal existence and eternal life even before Oisin arrives at the first island; there is no simplistic affirmation of either state. As Edward Engelberg writes, "Yeats simply never was the total romantic or aesthete that provides critics with a label for his "early period."[21] While Engelberg glosses over the deep complexity of what it is to be a "total romantic," he hints at Yeats's early engagement with the serious difficulty with an art that attempts to exclude "this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world" ("Blood and the Moon," 26).

Niamh bids Oisin not to communicate with the phantoms that they see, telling him to "'Vex them no longer'" (I. 148); the gulf between the mortal and the eternal cannot be bridged. Accordingly, his human songs provoke misery in his immortal listeners on the first island: "But when I sang of human joy / A sorrow wrapped each merry face" (I. 234-35). Niamh's love for Oisin's poetry will not enable her immortal community to understand human emotion. Any dismay Oisin could have felt at their failed understanding dissolves into the frenzy of their immortal dance, where "We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance" (I. 291). This is reminiscent of *Prometheus Unbound*, where Demogorgon replies to Asia, affirming that humanity is subject to mutability:

For what would it avail to bid thee gaze

On the revolving world? What to bid speak

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[21] Edward Engelberg, "He Too Was in Arcadia": Yeats and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," *Critical Essays on W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, Critical Essays on Modern British Literature (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co, 1986), 79.

> Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these
>
> All things are subject but eternal Love.

<div align="right">(2. 4: 117-20)</div>

Yeats has carefully adapted Demogorgon's words; the verbal echo in Yeats's poem alerts the reader to Oisin's unsustainable existence as the dance nearly consumes Oisin, animating him with an otherworldly energy. The manic dance partially disguises the fact that Oisin has palpably failed to integrate with his new companions. Human longing for the immortal realised in the figure of Oisin renders him a complicated and self-divided protagonist, unable to integrate but incapable of wholly rejecting the perfection he views.

Niamh and St Patrick offer two conflicting sides of the eternal. Niamh's version of eternity separates Oisin from his Fenian comrades, and cannot offer him a community into which he can integrate. But crucially, Niamh falls in love with the Oisin's heroic values; her understanding of merit is based on the same paradigm as Oisin's. St Patrick, a representative of the eternal via the Church, condemns Oisin, particularly when he praises his dead Fenian comrades:

> Boast not, nor mourn with drooping head
>
> Companions long accurst and dead,
>
> And hounds for centuries dust and air.

<div align="right">(I. 129-31)</div>

For Oisin, St Patrick and his ilk stand opposed to heroism, to art, and to love:

> We sang the loves and angers without sleep,
>
> And all the exultant labours of the strong.
>
> But now lying clerics murder song
>
> With barren words and flatteries of the weak.

<div align="right">(II. 194-97)</div>

If Niamh and their wanderings between immortal islands often seem to offer only "monotone" (II. 671), Patrick and his fellow clerics stand for a repressive and anti-heroic society that Oisin and the immortals on the island of joy rail against in their song:

> …you slaves of God
>
> He rules you with an iron rod,

He holds you with an iron bond,

<div align="right">(I. 331-33)</div>

Both versions of eternity cannot claim Oisin as wholly theirs, but while Niamh's immortality celebrates the heroic value of the Fenian mores, Patrick's godliness demands a servile relationship to God built on self-denial and self-abasement. Yeats whispers through the poem an underlying note of doubt: he suggests that the removal of the pagan gods in favour of the Christian model which continued to dominate contemporary Ireland may not have been the better outcome. There is no knowledge won; Yeats offers neither formulas nor didactic maxims: "the myth lies in the embodiment and not in the knowledge."[22] Despite his defeat, Oisin, a Fenian hero, refuses to bow before any other principle.

Daniel Albright's interpretation of *The Wanderings of Oisin* follows Yeats's "The Circus Animals's Desertion," as it suggests that the poem is an allegory: "'The Wanderings of Oisin' is an allegory of art divorced from reality, for Oisin's islands are as sterile as they are beautiful."[23] To describe the poem as allegory distorts the poem, suggesting that there is a message or vision, cloaked in abstractions, to be conveyed. But to attempt to unravel, or demythologise the poem would lead to glaring inadequacy. There is no clear moral consensus throughout the poem, and no didactic urge. The islands are not pure "art"; Richard Ellmann describes them as "…the three islands, instead of being a refuge from life, are a symbolic representation of it."[24] The islands individually resemble a single state found within nature, purified and stretched to the most extreme kind of representation. The island of joy can countenance only joy, just as the struggle against the demon on the island of battle becomes a repetitive nightmare of infinite conflict. These islands are nature perfected into art; nature is not removed, it is simply purified into a single condition. *The Wanderings of Oisin* is a significant corrective to Yeats's borrowed maxim from Goethe: "Art is art, because it is not nature."[25] There is no total divorce between nature and art; they depend on each other. If art is nature perfected, then it is that

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[22] Daniel Albright, *The Myth Against Myth: A Study of Yeats's Imagination in Old Age* (London: Oxford UP, 1972), 61.
[23] Albright, *The Myth Against Myth,* 78.
[24] Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1954), 19.
[25] Yeats, "At Stratford-On-Avon," *Essays and Introductions*, 101.

perfection that alienates Oisin, a mortal man. Oisin is not a puppet representing a grander concept; Yeats imbues him with a sense of felt life. His character cannot be reduced to allegory, just as the Rose cannot be encapsulated in a single meaning, despite various attempts.[26] Neither Niamh and the faeries, nor the mortal realm of the Fenians proved sufficient for Oisin the poet; he required the mixture of both. The tragedy of Oisin revolves around the impossibility of such a combination. The struggle between surrender and uniqueness, the mortal and the eternal, chaos and control provides Yeats with the concept that propels his thought into poetry. *The Wanderings of Oisin* creates its own significance from its irreducibly complex vision of the conflict between two irreconcilable principles.

III.

Yeats explores the two opposing principles of mortal chaos and immortal control which dominate *The Wanderings of Oisin* in "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium."[27] The longing for the eternal wrenches Oisin out of the mortal world, and his experience of the immortal islands left him powerless. Both states, mortal and immortal seem insufficient alone; humanity's mixed condition requires both. As both states are irreconcilable, the quest towards a complete expression of either seems doomed. Desire for a purified version of either state figures as a siren song that would destroy human beings. The poet particularly, as Yeats writes, suffers from an unquenchable longing for something beyond the fallen world, while remaining unwilling or unable to relinquish entirely the mortal realm in favour of eternity. All that remains is the longing, despite the impossibility of its fulfilment.

"Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" are suffused with desire; together they form a dialogue on the concepts of nature and art, and on the relationship between chaos and

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[26] As demonstrated by Murphy in his chapter on the *Rose* poems: Murphy, 33.
[27] Harold Bloom views "Sailing to Byzantium" as strongly related to *The Wanderings of Oisin*. Bloom, *Yeats*, 348.

control. Despite arguments that would semantically divide the two poems,[28] the poems interact through imagery, themes, and their increasingly incantatory tones. "Byzantium" brings into focus the insidious doubts that plague the seemingly assertive earlier poem. In "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats plays a game of high stakes. His poem performs the strained and difficult task of discerning the level of control that the poet can lay claim to in both the mortal and the eternal realm. The poem begins as assertion, portraying a speaker (who will be referred to as Yeats) recoiling from nature's creatures, which are in love with their fecundity:

> That is no country for old men. The young
>
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees
>
> — Those dying generations — at their song,
>
> The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
>
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
>
> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
>
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
>
> Monuments of unageing intellect.
>
> (1-8)

While the first sentence is declarative, immediately separating the speaker from the generative world, Yeats juxtaposes age against youth by the organisation of his first line: "old men. The young." (1) In this way, the first line immediately sets the scene for the struggle that Yeats will have in departing from the world of nature; despite the poet's insistent condemnation of his unfitting country, he is "fastened [not only] to a dying animal," (22) but to nature in all her incarnations. The quality of the description also betrays rather more sympathy for nature than the explicit condemnation of its unthinking denizens. According to the speaker, the dying generations exist in a trap, but there is an almost nostalgic quality to the description. The speaker's recoil from nature mingles with a sense of attraction. As Alvarez writes, this stanza moves with a "living subtlety, [animating] the tension between rage and generosity, impotence and desire, between,

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[28] See Marjorie Perloff, *Rhyme and Meaning in the Poetry of Yeats* (The Hague; Paris: Mouton, 1970), 122; F. L. Gwynn, "Yeats's Byzantium and Its Sources," *Philological Quarterly* 32 (1953): 9-21.

often, an attitude and truthfulness."[29] The draw of the sensual, despite its anti-intellectual movement, does not lessen; Yeats represses the loss, and moves ahead with his choice to enter Byzantium.

"Byzantium" opens as an exact opposite to its earlier companion poem. Instead of a rejection of nature, in "Byzantium," the starlit or moonlit dome rejects man:

> The unpurged images of day recede;
>
> The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
>
> Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
>
> After great cathedral gong;
>
> A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
>
> All that man is,
>
> All mere complexities,
>
> The fury and the mire of human veins.

> (1-8)

The city locks out Yeats, as the starlit or moonlit dome "disdains / All that man is" (5-6). The terse four-syllable line hints at a veiled conflict; for the dome to reject everything human forces the man either to repudiate his humanity entirely, or to struggle against eternity itself. Joseph Hassett's argument with reference to "Blood and the Moon" becomes relevant to "Byzantium": "The poem emphasises the dichotomy between the purity of the moon and the stain of the bloody stair."[30] There is a note of incredulity in Yeats's report that the dome disdains "*All* that man is" (6) [emphasis added]. If the poet is to retain his power, it is implicit that he must reject that which rejects him, and embrace his mortality. The authority of the dome and the "monuments of unageing intellect" ("Sailing to Byzantium," 8) compel Yeats, but though they are powerfully seductive, Yeats implies his resistance to them. While there is no overt rebellion against the tyranny of the eternal, he sets the stage for an ambiguous exploration of poetic power.

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[29] A. Alvarez, *The Shaping Spirit: Studies in Modern English and American Poets* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 34.

[30] Joseph M. Hassett, *Yeats and the Poetics of Hate* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1986), 65.

The longing for eternity in "Sailing to Byzantium" becomes more pressing as the poem continues until its final stanza; the mingling of desire with a sense of certainty imbues its second stanza with an almost incantatory prayer-like tone,[31] supplemented by the repetitive structure of *ottava rima*:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress,
> Nor is there singing school but studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence;
> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium.
>
> (9-16)

The declamatory first two lines are broken by the tantalising addition of "unless" at the end of the second line, which follows on to a description of a trance-like state where soul is definitively separated from body. But despite the affirmation, nature has not been transcended: the soul must "sing," in a gesture separated from the song of the "dying generations" (3) by degree, not type. The soul also has hands and wears mortal dress; there is no means by which the poet can express the ineffable outside of images drawn from nature. The power of the vision combines with frustration as the poet remains within nature. Despite the singing of the soul, the intellect performs a sterile appreciation of its own monuments. This sterility attracts Yeats, but it is not without qualification. The studying, which replaces the singing he has previously posited as the potential saviour of his soul, seems glossed over, and does not appear preferable. The final two lines in this context are almost too neat; the *ottava rima* structure makes Yeats's journey toward Byzantium seem inevitable.[32] The imperative of rhyme has replaced the imperative of

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[31] Daniel Albright interestingly explains this using wave theory: "Soon we will see that Yeats's dispersed, uniform fields start to oscillate or radiate, to become energized; one of the gyres that govern Yeats's poetry is a rhythm of *image* and imagelessness." Daniel Albright, *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 31.

[32] Daniel Hoffman refers to Yeats's *ottava rima* poems as his "aristocratic poems," but here I argue that Yeats is struggling for, not wielding, authority. See Daniel Hoffman, *Barbarous Knowledge: Myth in the Poetry of Yeats, Graves, and Muir* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1967), 62.

logic. The stately syllables of the penultimate line ease Yeats into Byzantium, and rhyme's hegemony goes unchallenged. For despite Yeats's longing, art has not effected an escape from nature; art can merely envision an alternative rendering of nature. Longing for escape without actual freedom is the poem's actual theme.

"Byzantium," which contains a similar formulation of ambiguity in its first stanza, begins its second stanza in a methodical manner.

> Before me floats an image, man or shade,
>
> Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
>
> For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
>
> May unwind the winding path;
>
> A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
>
> Breathless mouths may summon;
>
> I hail the superhuman;
>
> I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

<div align="right">(9-16)</div>

Yeats carefully classifies his phantasmagoric vision; though this may be a poetic imagining as witnessed by its description as "more image than a shade," (10) he does not seem to control its appearance. He seems to describe, not create the image floating before him. The striking independence of the vision renders the role of the poet difficult; Yeats employs his poetic taxonomy, but he must watch the torturous struggle between death and life suffered by image without controlling its transformation into the eternal. The image is neither in nature, nor in eternity, being stranded between death and life. Though Yeats may seem to affirm in the final two lines, "I hail the superhuman / I call it death-in-life and life-in-death," (15-16) the poetic echoes from Coleridge and Tennyson act as shock waves which disrupt this apparent affirmation.

Yeats deliberately incorporates poetic echoes in his poetry; rather than acceding to the presence of his forebears with regret, Yeats uses their contrary visions to subtly direct his reader and disrupt his own text in a manner of his own choosing. As poet, he controls the chaos of other voices, and creates order from the chaos of other words, other poems.

"Byzantium" is an example of Yeats's finest mastery of his predecessors, where their poetry frees his own from the claustrophobia of the single vision. Whereas Bloom finds echoes of *Kubla Khan*,[33] it is also the case that verbal and symbolic echoes of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* haunt "Byzantium."[34] Coleridge describes life-in-death in demonic terms:

> Her lips were red, her looks were free,
>
> Her locks were yellow as gold:
>
> Her skin was white as leprosy,
>
> The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
>
> Who thicks man's blood with cold.[35]

(III. 190-94)

Coleridge freezes the Mariner in a trance as the supernatural activity works on the crew. Submission is inevitable as the supernatural overpowers human life: "The Mariner hath been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure." (VI: 55). The Mariner and the crew's fate rest upon the dice cast by Death and Life-in-Death. The individuality of the Mariner is lost, his autonomy stripped. Yeats's reference to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* hints at a dangerous passivity that threatens the autonomy of the poet and the reader. Likewise, Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" enacts stagnation, and a passivity from which the narrator cannot recover:[36] "Deep as first love, and wild with all regret; / O Death in Life, the days that are no more."[37] Further than a verbal echo, Yeats plunders Tennyson for his evocation of relentless decay with no hope of action. Far from being disruptive, Yeats transfigures the voices of his predecessors to weave strands of affirmation and doubt together, incorporating their thought to add layers to his own. His ability to control and order the thought of his predecessors adds weight to the claim of the human poet, and

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[33] Bloom, *Yeats*, 390.

[34] See T. R. Henn, *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats* [1965] (London: Methuen, 1979), 232

[35] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834), *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 173.

[36] Michael O'Neill notes this use of "Tears, Idle Tears" in his discussion of "Byzantium." See W. B. Yeats, *The Poems of W. B. Yeats: A Sourcebook*, ed. Michael O'Neill, A Routledge Literary Sourcebook (London: Routledge, 2004), 169.

[37] Lord Alfred Tennyson, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd ed. [1969] (Harlow: Longman, 1989), 266.

challenges his seeming assent to the superhuman, before which Yeats needs must be submissive.

IV.

In "Sailing to Byzantium," the longing to yield before the supernatural increases in urgency as the poem progresses, reaching a climax in its penultimate stanza. Despite earlier ambiguities, Yeats urges himself ahead; like Shelley in *Adonais*, the desire for the eternal becomes created by and creative of the poem.[38]

> O sages standing in God's holy fire
>
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
>
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
>
> And be the singing-masters of my soul.
>
> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
>
> And fastened to a dying animal
>
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
>
> Into the artifice of eternity.

(17-24)

The tone of invocation begins immediately in the stanza; Yeats summons the sages to perform his desire, and despite his earlier avowal that there are no singing schools in Byzantium, he bids them be "the singing-masters of my soul" (20). Yeats has not escaped the fertile world of nature, despite his professed desire; his continual return to the singing metaphor, established at the start of the poem as part of the "sensual music," (7) betrays his continued humanity. The desire to be transfigured, to be swept into "the artifice of eternity" (24) recalls Shelley's "white radiance of Eternity" (*Adonais* 53: 463) and contains within it the same pained implication that mortality cannot be so easily renounced. The desire to be "out of nature" (25) burns within the heart of the dying animal, but the movement into purified eternity does not come without loss. The stanza is a controlled and articulated cry that yearns to be removed from chaotic nature; paradoxically, it is the chaos of the natural world and language which creates the poem.

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[38] See my discussion of *Adonais* in chapter seven.

The poem's order, structure, and desire depend upon continued and painful longing.[39] This mortal yearning for eternity creates from the final four lines of the stanza the climax of the poem.

The final stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" prefigures the third stanza of "Byzantium." Its final image is a vision of the poet in eternity, and the poet's form is as a golden bird:

> Once out of nature I shall never take
>
> My bodily form from any natural thing,
>
> But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
>
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
>
> To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
>
> Or set upon a golden bough to sing
>
> To lords and ladies of Byzantium
>
> Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

<div align="right">(25-32)</div>

This vision of the poet is the crux of T. Sturge Moore's complaint against the poem; Moore argues that the image of the bird is as natural as "a man's body".[40] That Yeats considers Sturge Moore's analysis valid seems "amazing" to Albright;[41] however the image of the bird, the symbol selected by Yeats for the poet, is entirely within the realm of the natural. While artificial, it is not a part of "the artifice of eternity;" (24) it is man-made and time bound. The final stanza fails to offer the climax the poem seems to be leading towards as man cannot imagine himself outside nature. Yeats's desires oppose one another; even as he longs for eternity, the mortal urge to life lingers.

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[39] "Most poems fail, through craft or conception to reach an ultimate or absolute position: parts of the craft remain machinery and parts of the conception remain in limbo." R. P. Blackmur, "The Later Poetry," *Yeats: Poems, 1919-1935*, ed. Elizabeth Cullingford, Casebook Series (London: Macmillan, 1984), 53.

[40] "Your *Sailing to Byzantium*, magnificent as the first three stanzas are, lets me down in the fourth, as such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as a man's body, especially if it sings like Homer or Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies." Letter 16 April, 1930, *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937*, ed. Ursula Bridge (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1953), 162.

[41] Albright, *The Myth Against Myth*, 57.

Yeats's desire to be turned into a beautiful but mechanical bird in 'Sailing to Byzantium' is also a wish which qualifies itself by its very excess; half of the poet's mind rejects the escape from life for which the other half longs.[42]

Nature and eternity cannot be divided cleanly; the human poet, as part of nature, cannot visualise a world stripped of the natural. Yeats forces his symbols of eternity to rest upon images formed by the perception of the senses. Words do not separate cleanly from world; Yeats's poetic honesty requires this hard-won failure.

The role of the poet in eternity is also disturbing in its subtle attenuation of the scope of the artist. As Daniel Albright writes, "The golden bird in 'Sailing to Byzantium' is even more rigid, servile, an objective puppet; and if it contains any sort of divinity that divinity can effortlessly change into triviality."[43] The image of the bird, its task "to keep a drowsy emperor awake" (29) is a world away from the exalted image of the poet and poetry that we find in Yeats's critical prose. [44] The poet in eternity is a mere entertainer, the scope of art diminished to reportage. Further, Yeats has not envisioned the poet outside of nature; the poet, despite his presence in eternity, continues to require the mutable world as material for his poetry. [45] Yeats makes use of poetic echoes once more to indicate his recoil from and attraction to his symbol. Yeats invokes the figure of Shelley, defender of the primacy of the poet. George Bornstein demonstrates the verbal echo of *Hellas* in the final lines of the poem.[46] Shelley's Hassan describes Ahasuerus as one who,

…looks forth

A life of unconsumed thought which pierces

The present, and the past, and the to-come.

(ll. 146-8).

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[42] Richard Ellmann, "The Continuity of Yeats," *Yeats: Poems, 1919-1935*, 99.

[43] Albright, *The Myth Against Myth*, 56.

[44] "This is maybe what Arthur O'Shaughnessy meant when he made his poets say they had built Ninevah with their sighing; and I am never sure, when I hear of some war, or of some religious excitement, or of some new manufacture, or of anything that fills the ear anything else that fills the ear of the world, that it has not all happened because of something that a boy piped in Thessaly." Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," *Essays and Introductions*, 158.

[45] "But the conclusion to "Sailing to Byzantium" indicates that instead of Byzantium being superior to the natural world, the two worlds are interdependent; for the drowsy emperor and his court can only be kept awake by hearing of that other world, the world of time." Murphy, 101.

[46] Bornstein, *Yeats and Shelley*, 101.

The reference to *Hellas* invites comparison between Ahasuerus and the golden bird, which leads to a condemnation of Yeats's inferior vision of the poet's role. In Yeats's re-imagining of the poet, who sings "Of what is past, or passing, or to come," (32) there is no sense that the poet can legislate or perform an active role. In the preceding stanza, Yeats begged to have his heart consumed and this consumption of his heart, the site of human desire and feeling, guarantees his passivity, unlike Ahasuerus, whose thought is "unconsumed." Ahasuerus "*pierces* / The present, and the past, and the to-come," (*Hellas*, 147-48) [emphasis added] the active verb implies activity, while Yeats's choice of verb, "to sing" does not imply any level of involvement beyond observation. The opening of "Sailing to Byzantium" is an appeal against the tyranny of nature founded on impossible dream of separating body and soul. Yeats's poetry never attempts this feat without strain and ambiguity, and by the end, the ambiguity that suffuses the poem forces the reader to re-evaluate whether Yeats's desire for eternity ought to be unmitigated longing.

Yeats faces the figure of the inhuman bird in "Byzantium," and he processes his summoned image with the same meticulous method as in the preceding stanza of the same poem:

> Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
> More miracle than bird or handiwork,
> Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
> Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
> Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
> In glory of changeless metal
> Common bird or petal
> And all complexities of mire or blood.

> (17-24)

The almost exaggerated precision of the first two lines undercuts the heavy use of supernatural imagery, as Yeats appears to apply a stringent and ordered method of classification on to his vision. Yeats describes Byzantium; as G. S. Fraser argues, Yeats

takes the city beyond symbolism, and into the realm of a palpable poetic reality.[47] The poet's role has shifted considerably since "Sailing to Byzantium;" while the embittered bird can "scorn aloud" (21) the natural, it overtly relies on the natural for its subject, and further, is no longer a metaphor for the poet. Yeats is separate from his self-created image, and this affords him the space to continue his poem. While the vision compels the poet, Yeats retains the self-autonomy to order the poem. His images, at this juncture, remain subject to the poet's controlling principle, but the power struggle between the mortal poet and the images of eternity continues to rage in the background of the poem.

The fourth stanza departs from this ordering pattern, and Yeats's control over the presentation of Byzantium seems to slip, as he describes the supernatural machinery of the city:

> At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
>
> Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
>
> Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
>
> Where blood-begotten spirits come
>
> And all complexities of fury leave,
>
> Dying into a dance,
>
> An agony of trance,
>
> An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

(25-32)

The effort to express the ineffable sends the poem into spirals of negative description for two lines: "Flames that *no* faggot feeds, *nor* steel has lit, / *Nor* storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame" (26-27) [emphasis added]. The threefold repetition of negative structures seems incantatory and ritualistic as Yeats can offer no origin for his image; he can only repeat the unnatural status of a traditionally natural image of flame. Yeats delivers the reader to the purification site where mortals come to be cleansed of their natural condition. The repetitive structure of the final three lines conjures a torturous ritual; compelling, painful, and transcendent, the lines emphasise an awful power

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[47] "Yet the Byzantium of the poem, though inherently symbolic, is not merely symbolic; it is presented, it is there, we explore it like a city in a dream." G. S. Fraser, "Yeats's Byzantium," *Yeats: Poems, 1919-1935*, 209-10.

curiously impotent in the mortal world. This penultimate stanza seems to describe a supernatural force capable of controlling Yeats, yet his passivity masks a self that remains independent. The will-driven structure of "Sailing to Byzantium" has vanished; the poem is heavy with ritual that no longer involves Yeats's assent, yet the ritual cannot entirely control the self.[48] Yeats has entered a realm controlled by a supernatural power, but the final line "An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve" (32) recalls his ambiguous response to the disdain of the starlit or moonlit dome. There is a certain disbelief in the lines which mingles with the overt awe; the natural world retains a resistant power of its own in spite of the potency of the supernatural.

The final stanza begins in a frenzied manner, as Yeats whips himself into an ecstatic vision of Byzantium:

> Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
>
> Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
>
> The golden smithies of the Emperor!
>
> Marbles of the dancing floor
>
> Break bitter furies of complexity,
>
> Those images that yet
>
> Fresh images beget,
>
> That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

(33-40)

The two exclamations of the first three lines emphasise profusion. In contrast to "Sailing to Byzantium," where Yeats sought "singing-masters of my soul" (20), the spirits are greeted by smithies that physically "break bitter furies of complexity" (37). In the same way that the golden bird of "Sailing to Byzantium" remains part of nature, the spirits require the "mire and blood" (33) of the dolphins to convey them to Byzantium. The interdependence of the natural and the eternal remains, and the task required of the golden smithies seems to be endless. Conflict and violence not only remain part of the

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[48] As A. N. Jeffares writes, the cultivation of a strong personality is vital to Yeats's art, and "Byzantium" reflects Yeats's refusal to banish it from his work, despite outer authority: "And personality was all-important: it was the only bulwark against the abstraction and specialisation, against the isolation of modern life." A. Norman Jeffares, *The Circus Animals: Essays on W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 75.

poem, but form its closing image. Profusion, fecundity, and renewal reign as the images endlessly proliferate, and the sea draws its dangerous power from violent conflict: "That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea" (40). Yeats offers no final reconciliation; conflict remains the condition of creation, and the poet remains human and significantly untransfigured. As Daniel Albright writes, "the last stanza is poised on an astonishing ambiguity, as the flood of the phenomenal world almost overwhelms the aesthetic power of the marbles, as the syntactic force of the verb 'break' slowly dissipates in the violent waves."[49] Chaos and control are shown to be held in suspension, with both elements operating in tandem. For the controlling and ordering city of Byzantium to exist, the city requires the chaos of the natural world. Yeats allows his mastery to wax and wane in the poem, suspended between passivity and action as he creates images of his own oppression by eternity. His poetic power stems from his ability to hold the two principles of chaos and control together in his poem, ordering his created and creative universe in spite and because of the dangerous power of chaos over the imagination.

V.

Ordering systems come under serious poetic scrutiny in "Easter 1916." The Easter Rising provided proof for a powerful heroism that Yeats feared had vanished from Ireland,[50] yet Yeats was unable to celebrate wholly the individual heroism that it displayed.[51] Its spectre rather haunts Yeats, and forces him to question his heroic paradigm. The religion of violence that Joseph Chadwick argues to be endemic to Yeats's poetry,[52] and the idea that he was somehow out of touch with contemporary Ireland are dragged to the forefront of the poem as Yeats scrutinises his personal engagement with Ireland's ideological

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[49] Albright, *The Myth Against Myth*, 58.

[50] "I could not forsee that a new class, which had begun to rise to power under the shadow of Parnell, would change the nature of the Irish movement, which needing no longer great sacrifices, nor bringing any great risk to individuals, could do without exceptional men and those activities of the mind that are founded on the exceptional moment." Yeats, *Autobiographies,* 259.

[51] Yeats considered the events heroic, and this belief vitally colours the poem. "The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will be long remembered for its heroism." *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York. NY: Macmillan, 1973), 820.

[52] Joseph Chadwick, "Violence in Yeats's Later Politics and Poetry," *W. B. Yeats: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, ed. G. R. Taneja, New Orientations (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1995), 82.

battle.[53] Instead of confronting the political battles of the day head on, Yeats focuses on examining his beliefs, considering the role of the poet, and articulating his personal poetic response to a public event.

The first verse paragraph of "Easter 1916" relates Yeats's involvement with the men behind the Easter Rising. The first four lines begin with "I," but the first person pronoun is thrown into relief as Yeats allows it to be eclipsed by "them." The fifth line also begins with "I," but the focus remains on the enigmatic "them;" Yeats provides details of a mutual civility, yet he carefully develops the gulf between himself and the heroes of the Easter Rising. These men come from behind a counter or desk; they are heroes drawn from the Irish bourgeoisie, drawn from the middle class whom Yeats had previously considered to be anti-heroic.[54] Numb shock pervades the opening of the poem; it opens with description as if feeling its way towards poetic utterance:

> I have met them at close of day
>
> Coming with vivid faces
>
> From counter or desk among grey
>
> Eighteenth-century houses.
>
> I have passed with a nod of the head
>
> Or polite meaningless words,
>
> Or have lingered awhile and said
>
> Polite meaningless words,

(1-8)

The rhyme that Yeats employs is revealing; the half-rhyme of "faces" and "houses" insinuates the incongruity of these vivid faces among the grand eighteenth-century

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[53]Patrick Kavanagh attacked Yeats powerfully on these grounds:
> Yes, Yeats, it was damn easy for you protected
> By the middle classes and the Big Houses
> To talk about the sixty-year old public protected
> Man sheltered by the dim Victorian Muses.

Patrick Kavanagh, "Yeats," *The Complete Poems*, ed. Peter Kavanagh (Newbridge: The Goldsmith P, 1984), 349.

[54] Yug Mohit Chaudhry argues that in "September 1913" Yeats presents heroism as a Protestant and aristocratic virtue: "Yeats's portrayal emphasises their quintessential 'Protestant' qualities – passion, recklessness, unworldliness, heroism, leadership and generosity." Yug Mohit Chaudhry, *Yeats: The Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork UP, 2001), 21.

houses. Rhyming "words" with "words" emphasises the emptiness of the type of dialogue that passed between Yeats and "them." His use of the present perfect tense underlines the raw and recent nature of events; it cannot relegate the men of the Easter Rising to the past. Yeats keeps the events and their authors in a potentially present state of reference; the poet cannot harness the chaos created by the Easter Rising into the controlled space of the past. A complete response to events, a response required of the poet as Yeats writes later in the poem, is both necessary and impossible, as he cannot process the events, or the men who set them in action. Yeats's "command" over his poetry and his authoritative style are now coupled with responsibility.[55] Despite the arduousness of the task, a response is required of the poet, and Yeats must perform his task.

The form reflects Yeats's difficulty with articulating his poetic response to the events; repetition serves to underline the numb shock. As Angela Leighton writes, form intensely shaped Yeats's poetry: "form has a curious solidarity in his imagination."[56] He recognises the banality of his interaction with these unrecognised heroes, sparing himself no detail, and feigning no prior awareness of their significance. The poet, once Shelley's "unacknowledged legislator of the World," (*A Defence of Poetry*, 675) is in Yeats's uncompromising recollection, a recorder of events created and enacted by other men:

> And thought before I had done
>
> Of a mocking tale or a gibe
>
> To please a companion
>
> Around the fire at the club,
>
> Being certain that they and I
>
> But lived where motley is worn:
>
> All changed, changed utterly:
>
> A terrible beauty is born.

(9-16)

Yeats does not attempt to analyse the distance between himself and "them." The sombre final two lines witness the shock of a seismic and unquantifiable change. The syllabic

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[55] See Heaney, xii.

[56] Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 147.

heaviness of the "All changed, changed utterly" (15) encapsulates the totality of the transformation; the repetition of the word "changed" reiterates but does not expand upon the nature of the change. Yeats's silence on the significance of events denotes his demotion at this stage of the poem to the status of the golden bird of "Sailing to Byzantium," singing "of what is past, or passing, or to come" (32). The "terrible beauty," a power at once awesome and dreadful, weights the final lines with a disturbing ambiguity that Yeats must surmount to continue the poem. He must witness and record the birth of the "terrible beauty," (16) but the difficulty of the task complicates and forces the poem to slowly build toward any possible form of reconciliation or evaluation.

The second stanza seems to sleepwalk through recollections of the heroes and heroines of the Rising, detailing memories of people whom Yeats cannot seem to afford complete approval. The sense of loss and wasted promise haunts the descriptions of Countess Markievicz and Thomas MacDonagh, the former for losing her beauty through the shrillness of her opinion, and MacDonagh for dying before "coming into his force." While still filtered through the first person, and implicitly referring back to Yeats's opinions and judgements, the first appearance of "I" is in line 31, 15 lines into the second verse paragraph. The late arrival of the "I" in stanza two is significant as Yeats does not repudiate his earlier judgement of MacBride; rather he accepts the change as inevitable in the "changed, changed utterly" landscape of the post-Rising Ireland. The negative opinion of MacBride is not balanced by his inclusion in the heroic number; his previous ordering principles have dissolved and Yeats must include all factors, however incongruent, in his song:

> This other man I had dreamed
> A drunken, vainglorious lout.
> He had done most bitter wrong
> To some who are near my heart,
> Yet I number him in the song;
> He, too, has resigned his part
> In the casual comedy;
> He, too, has been changed in his turn,

> Transformed utterly:
>
> A terrible beauty is born.

<div align="right">(31-40)</div>

Yeats absolves MacBride of nothing; the half-rhyme of "lout" and "heart" and the full rhyme of "wrong" and "song" intimate Yeats's continued enmity. But his recollection has altered to a dream, and the quoted lines pivot upon the word "yet," which forces Yeats to alter the direction of the lines, and grant MacBride his earned place in Irish history. Yeats's personal feelings, and accordingly, his control over his subject are under attack; history, accuracy, and the poet's responsibility to his audience force Yeats to "number him in the song." That the poem is "*the* song" and not "*my* song" [emphasis added] subtly indicates that this poem belongs to the heroes of the Easter Rising, not to the creating poet. MacBride's involvement in events forces Yeats to re-evaluate his character as Yeats must remove MacBride from the private sphere and situate him in the national situation. This public-facing poem supports Yeats's claim that "I have always written as an Irish writer and with Ireland in my mind."[57] The fraught and troubled style of the poem, however, indicates Yeats's discomfort as he makes poetry from a given, rather than a self-created theme. His interest in poetic mastery becomes only more apparent as he adapts his art for a commemorative slant.

Yet Yeats has bent to his theme, and has showed himself and his theme to be capable of adapting to a seismic shift in public and personal ideals. Commemorating MacBride marks a turning point in the poem, where Yeats has surmounted himself and his memories in favour of a new order, in which the "casual comedy" (37) of the personal gives way to the high tragedy of public events. Yeats moves to a contemplative stanza that draws from nature analogues that aid reflection on the ideals that created the Easter Rising. The opening to the third verse paragraph sets in opposition that type of single-minded heroism that created the events of the Easter Rising to the natural world. The aggressive monomania and the almost magical quality required for heroism acts "to trouble the living stream;" (44) it seems otherworldly in a disturbing manner quite opposite to Yeats's carefully sketched images from mutable nature.

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[57] *Yeats's Letters* 2: 446.

> A shadow of cloud on the stream
>
> Changes minute by minute;
>
> A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
>
> And a horse plashes within it;
>
> The long-legged moor-hens dive,
>
> And hens to moor-cocks call;
>
> Minute by minute they live:
>
> The stone's in the midst of all.

<div align="right">(49-56)</div>

The description is absorbed in its own mimetic beauty, a beauty subject to change. Helen Vendler remarks on the musicality of this stanza,[58] and her observation is apt. Yeats marks the change of emphasis carefully; the natural world provides evidence of the danger of ossification. Nature, with its flux, movement, and change allows poetic beauty, and static and unswerving heroism implicitly opposes the values that create its commemorative poem. Without condemnation, high drama or satire, Yeats gently questions the dangers of heroism. He frees the role of the poet in this significant stanza; escaping from the refrain that haunts every other stanza, Yeats gains control over his poetry. The stanza has a sense of felt life that comes as a relief after the tense recollections of the first two stanzas.[59]

This new found freedom from events through nature, and a careful control over his role, allows Yeats the creative space to complete the poem with a powerfully personal reflection upon heroism, and its relationship to control:

> Too long a sacrifice
>
> Can make a stone of the heart.
>
> O when may it suffice?

---

[58] "Yeats's third stanza is the most musical in the poem, as it plays, "minute by minute," its delightful recursive changes on apparently "realistic" natural motifs – stream, horse, bird, clouds and active "change."" Helen Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 21.
[59] Here Yeats returns to life; as Peter McDonald writes, "Poetic form is in that sense 'living' rather than dead', dynamic rather than static, for its kinds of order do not stand still, and they are never finally 'perfected' while they can still be inhabited." Peter McDonald, *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2002), 166.

<div align="right">(57-59)</div>

The natural image of the stone, into which the characters of the Easter Rising have been subsumed, provides the image with which Yeats begins the final verse paragraph. As Vendler argues, this transformation from individuated people into symbol is an artistic statement: "stanza 3 departs from history into nature, and from realism into symbol, as it transforms the plural 'real' people of stanza 2 into the single inorganic form of a stone."[60] This transformation reinforces the power of the poet, liberating him from time and events as his controlling and synthesising eye throws imaginative perspective over history. The image of the stone troubles Yeats's thought: "O when may it suffice?" (59) figures as a genuine question as Yeats almost intones his meditation. The lines following this seem to patronise, and consider the heroes of the Easter Rising as children:

> That is Heaven's part, our part
>
> To murmur name upon name,
>
> As a mother names her child
>
> When sleep at last has come
>
> On limbs that had run wild.

<div align="right">(60-64)</div>

But this lament, as Vendler points out, is not maternal; the poem is "a durable artifact" which commemorates human events by an imaginative creation of poetic artifice.[61] Yeats alludes to the responsibility of the public; he issues an injunction to remember the men by intoning the names of these troubling heroes. Even as Yeats seems to slip into a comfortable poetic metaphor, substituting night for death, he reacts sharply against his own words:

> What is it but nightfall?
>
> No, no, not night but death;
>
> Was it needless death after all?
>
> For England may keep faith
>
> For all that is done and said.

<div align="right">(65-69)</div>

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[60] Vendler, 19.
[61] Vendler, 24.

He violently shakes himself free of his own words, and forces himself into the contemporary arena, stretching himself toward some kind of a resolution that his poem cannot offer. He cannot answer for England's politics, and must speak in speculative, not definite terms:

> We know their dream; enough
> To know they dreamed and are dead;
> And what if excess of love
> Bewildered them till they died?

(70-73)

The questions of the stanza are as yet unabated; Yeats and the public are spectators who must let the facts of their deaths "suffice." The final question, "And what if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died?" (72-73) remains unanswered; the poet represents his public, like them, he has no privileged access to the minds of MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly and Pearse. Yeats returns to his duty, and commemorates the dead men. His trimeter rhyme's clipped rhythms add a polished, dignified finish which removes it from the personal sphere. Yeats lights upon a public form, and the final lines of the poem reflect the personal and public dignity that this poem seeks to deliver:

> I write it out in a verse —
> MacDonagh and MacBride
> And Connolly and Pearse
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn,
> Are changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

(74-80)

As Vendler points out, even Yeats's use of the colour green gains in significance as this public commemorative poem uses a colour that, according to Helen Vendler, he personally despised.[62] Yeats buries the personal in favour of the public need for a dedicatory and communal art. Yeats practises self-mastery through a self-sublimating art;

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[62]"(To appreciate the force of the gesture, we have to recall Yeats's unremitting hatred of green as a political symbol; he forbade it as a color for the binding of his books.)" Vendler, 24.

paradoxically, he affirms the importance of the self by his conscious struggle to suppress it in favour of a public expression of commemoration. The self must be removed from the poem for it to be public; Yeats allows personal meditation, but only insofar as it contributes to the memorial. "Easter 1916" fashions itself from the chaos of historical-objective fact, but Yeats retains his poetic autonomy as he questions the monomania of the heroism exhibited by the heroes by his varied and measured approach to his subjects. The chaos of Yeats's personal recollections and the Easter Rising causing the transformation of public life contrasts with control of the poet and the heroes whom he commemorates. Yeats so carefully controlled the form of the poem that it represents the date of the Easter Rising, to the year (1916) and the day (24 April) through the form of the lengths of the verse paragraphs, 16, 24, 16, 24. But this control is not of a personal nature; Yeats offers full significance to the Easter Rising, even to the point of creating a new poetic form. The disturbing heroism of the dead men questions control and unswerving dedication, and this extends to the content of the poem. "Easter 1916" argues that control must be relaxed if the poet is to give full expression to the chaos of the historical-objective world. Yeats gives the balancing act between chaos and control full expression in this complex and multi-layered commemorative poem.

The vacillation between chaos and control, uniqueness and freedom, self and soul generates Yeats's poetry as he refuses to finally settle upon one type of utterance. His poetry runs the gamut between versions of selves that can express an overweening desire for resolution without submitting to any single pure state of being, if any such is possible. The power of Yeats's self-fashioning is his unremitting quest for a self that could express all, and satiate his contradictory yearnings while all the while retaining the knowledge of its impossibility. The tense play between power and powerlessness, control and chaos creates the poetry, and Yeats's unflinching poetry refuses to lose itself in artificial ease. His deliberate and self-conscious poetry struggles, glides, or swoons between opposing poles but remains always subject to a motion of his own creation.

Byron: An Uncommon Want.

"I have no life save when the swords clash."[1]

CHAPTER FOUR:

"Thoughts unspeakable": Interpretative Heroism in Cain *and* The Giaour

The Byronic hero has become critical shorthand for the "masterful, moody outlaws"[2] ubiquitous in prose and poetry since Byron's creation of this distinct brand of modern hero.[3] Substantial studies of the Byronic hero have illuminated key features and antecedents of the figure,[4] but too little emphasis has been placed on the disruption that Byron deploys to demonstrate the impossibility of a unified or total hero. The gloomy exile of Byron's Tales and earlier work often undergoes a critical separation from the comedic characters that Byron parades through his later poetry. Yet Byron refuses to offer the reader an unproblematised hero figure; while Peter Thorslev claims that Juan and Beppo cannot be considered as Byronic heroes, this chapter considers that Byron, in both comic and tragic modes, never quite delivers to the reader the hero which he seems to offer.[5] Byron questions, challenges, and undermines the notion of the hero; he increasingly de-emphasises the role of the hero in favour of the narrator, as pistol and pen become interchangeable in Byron's heroic power plays.[6] Throughout Byron's poetry looms the disturbing suggestion that the hero may be an anonymous cipher, or subject to

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[1] Ezra Pound, "Sestina: Altaforte," *Collected Shorter Poems* [1952] (London: Faber, 1984), 28.

[2] Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 118.

[3] Peter L. Thorslev indicates the scope of appeal of the Byronic hero: "Heathcliff and Rochester attest to the continued appeal of this awesome hero; and the most terrible figure in our classical American literature, Captain Ahab, has much of the Byronic Hero's aspect, of his dark soul. Lamartine and De Musset carried Byronism into the belated French Romantic Movement, and the Byronic hero is the direct ancestor of many of the pessimistic or nihilistic heroes and philosophical rebels in French Romantic and decadent literature." Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1962), 3.

[4] See Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*.

[5] Peter Thorslev does not consider *Don Juan* or *Beppo* to be relevant to any discussion of the Byronic hero; instead, he comments on the apparent schism between Byron's tragic and comic creations: "But a more important reason for excluding Don Juan from the family of Byronic Heroes is that he does not seem at all to share a common paternity: he is, if anything, far more closely related to Tom Jones or to Candide than to any of the Romantic heroes." Thorslev, 13.

[6] Trelawny reports Byron as saying: "When I am dead I am nothing; whilst I'm alive I can keep all in order with my pen or my pistol." Edward Trelawny, *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*, introd. Anne Barton (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2000), 34.

a type of interpretation and dissemination that overshadows his heroic presence. Heroism is subject to scrutiny, challenge, and disruption, even to the point of extinction.

Byron needed his poetic vocation to offer worldly strength, and his surface disdain witnesses his intense need for poetry to prove itself. [7] Thought could be heroic if that thought impacted on and changed the world, influencing others. Heroism could also come from self-mastery, even if such self-mastery was powerless to alter society. Language's potential is central to both forms of heroism. Language is not simply a source of power; darker explorations and discoveries gleaned through language point up the limits of the self's power. This dark side of language is fundamental to *Cain*. Byron actively detaches the reader from sympathy with Cain and his community by the strained language of the play. *Cain*'s comfortless verse resists the beauty of language, as Swinburne and Arnold note in their essays on Byron, but unlike Swinburne and Arnold, this chapter views the poem's "blundering, floundering, lumbering and stumbling stanzas" as a deliberate attempt to embody Cain's emotional turmoil in language. [8]

Cain: A Mystery foregrounds language; it transforms words from vehicle to subject. Byron actively makes the play's language angular and strained, forcing the reader against a wall of words. [9] Byron's "deliberate *manhandling* of language" makes *Cain* feel as if it has been translated from an Edenic language into our fallen tongue, [10] and yet this sensation of being violently detached from the play renders it compelling. *Cain* asks serious artistic questions about the nature of language, constructions of society, and the creation of knowledge. Its insistence on the fragmentary nature of language suggests no underlying unity, only the difficulty and power of utterance. The Byron music is broken; rather, Byron tears down comfortable ideas of what poetry ought to do. He does not seek

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[7] "Byron had at least as delicate a literary imagination as any of his contemporaries, but alternately bullied and protected it with something like the coarse affection shown to him by his matter-of-fact, yet slightly dotty, mother." Bernard Beatty, "Fiction's Limit and Eden's Door," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, 1.

[8] Swinburne attacks Byron's tragedies for their language and metre. See "Swinburne's Attack on Byron [1884], *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 468.

[9] Malcolm Kelsall considers Byron's dramatic writing so awkward as to make criticism difficult. See Malcolm Kelsall, *Byron's Politics* (Brighton: Harvester P; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 111.

[10] Gavin Hopps, "Byron and Grammatical Freedom," *Liberty and Poetic Licence: New Essays on Byron, Liverpool English Texts and Studies*, ed. Bernard Beatty, Tony Howe, and Charles E. Robinson, Liverpool English Texts and Studies 42 (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008), 169.

to create beauty, though many parts of *Cain* are beautiful. He writes to tease the reader into thought. Instead of condemning or ignoring the strangeness of the verse, the drama's "peculiar style" reveals the central importance of language to *Cain*'s imaginative vision.[11] *Cain*'s "stumbling stanzas" are not the result of carelessness or poverty of imagination, but of serious artistic intent.[12]

Byron's Victorian critics focussed on what they perceived to be the inadequacy of *Cain*'s poetry. Matthew Arnold is one of many influential critics who perceive Byron's poetry to be clumsy and awkward. He singles out these lines to prove his thesis:

> Souls that dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in
>
> His everlasting face, and tell him that
>
> His evil is not good![13]

<div align="right">(1.1: 138-40)</div>

Yet these lines convey with great power and concision the fruits of Byron's deliberate labour to disfigure his poetry for dramatic effect. "Everlasting," instead of being employed in its usual context of praise, becomes an insult. Lucifer spits these words out; their awkwardness adds to the power and half-articulated cry of despair that runs through *Cain*. When Arnold argues that the comparison of *Cain* to Milton's *Paradise Lost* most fully displays Byron's inferior poetic skill and slipshod artistry,[14] his judgement ignores the deliberate departure Byron makes from Milton's epic. Arnold bases his affirmation of the inferiority of *Cain* in comparison to *Paradise Lost* on the assumption that Byron is attempting the same project as Milton. This reading of *Cain* reduces Byron to the status of imitator, and a poor one at that. Such is Byron's discomfort with the perception that he attempts to write in the style of Milton that he disavows it in the Preface, while he concedes that Milton's influence may be difficult to banish: "Since I was twenty, I have

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[11] Tony Howe, "'Why Should I Speak?': Scepticism and the Voice of Poetry in Byron's *Cain*," *Romanticism and Religion*, 155.

[12] As Martyn Corbett perceptively argues with regard to Byron's dramas, "The 'ruminative' quality that is sometimes complained of in his plays is a matter of judgement, not a failure to understand the nature of drama." See Martyn Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy* (New York, NY: St. Martin's P, 1988), 83.

[13] "Arnold on Byron," *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 447.

[14] Arnold repeats Sir Walter Scott's earlier compliment to Byron as an insult in his later review. See "[Byron] managing his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality" in "Scott, from his unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*," *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 91 repeated in "Arnold on Byron," *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 447.

never read Milton; but I had read him so frequently before, that this may make little difference" ("Preface to *Cain: A Mystery*, 881). Greg Kucich shows Byron's uneasiness with his revisionary poetics in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in relation to Spenser, but while *Cain*'s relationship with Milton is no less significantly fraught, Byron definitively does not seek to turn mimic.[15]

By this juncture, Byron was an established poet, critically and commercially successful, and Byron's references to Milton in the Dedication to *Don Juan* indicate that Byron viewed himself as Milton's inheritor, not his imitator. For this reason, Byron does not offer the reader an epic; his choice of drama reflects his departure from Milton; his debts to his predecessor do not amount to a continuation of Milton's project. Byron has his own theme, and considers himself as working within a tradition of free-thinkers, not as a late-comer bound to their thought. Byron's poetical drama places language at the forefront of the poem, and the Preface states that Byron has deliberately wrenched modern diction to reflect the mental states of the characters: "The author has endeavoured to preserve the language adapted to his characters; and where it is (and this is but rarely) taken from actual *Scripture*, he has made as little alteration, even of words, as the rhythm would permit" ("Preface to *Cain: A Mystery*," 881). The tone of this is highly tongue in cheek; as Leigh Hunt points out, Byron's claims for orthodoxy barely disguise his heterodoxy.[16] Further though, Byron relies on the original rawness of the Biblical story in order to feel his way into the mind of his characters, particularly his protagonist, Cain. The roughness of the poetry mirrors the painful dawning of consciousness that Cain undergoes. To compare the diction of *Paradise Lost* to *Cain* is to ignore Byron's design. The clumsy dialogue of *Cain* forces language into the role of protagonist; it is not intended to be a sublime vehicle for the content.

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[15] Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (University Park; PN: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991), 131-32.

[16] "This [Byron's claim for orthodoxy] is not sincere. Cain was undoubtedly meant as an attack upon the crude notions of the Jews respecting evil and its origin." Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and some of his contemporaries; with recollections of the author's life: and of his visit to Italy* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), I. 217.

Cain's rebellion, violence and exile make him the exemplar of the Byronic hero for many critics.[17] However, Cain is not a straightforwardly heroic figure even aside from his fratricide. Wolf Z. Hirst considers that the play vindicates God owing to Cain's character flaws, and Tony Howe argues that Cain's "closed intelligence" prevents the reader from seeing Cain's rebellion as solely positive.[18] The jarring notes of the poetry's music reflect Byron's ambivalence towards the precise measure of Cain's heroism. The distancing performance in *Cain* makes the words seem to stutter themselves into being, and lack the rhetorical force or "conversational facility" (*Don Juan* XV. 20: 155) that Byron made the hallmark of his mature poetry. *Cain*'s stilted style is no accident; Byron foregrounds language as a painful vehicle for a consciousness that reveals "the inadequacy of [man's] state to his Conceptions."[19] Cain's dawning awareness of this gulf makes him the original poet-hero:[20] his urge to create, question, and define dominates his character. Cain becomes heroic by these instincts, and his battle with language legitimises his heroism. The darker explorations and discoveries gleaned through language illustrate the limits of the self's power, while the possibilities of words and the potential at which they hint indicate the latent grandeur of humanity.

For Cain, language is the battle-ground for the struggle towards consciousness. Words are not only a vehicle for the characters to express doubt and uncertainty; words exist in abstracted state owing to their disconnection from the thing that they describe. Byron notes throughout his poetry the difficult and fascinating relationship between words and thing, but Cain's dramatic pathos pivots on the hero's sleepwalking into danger by exploring the unknown relationship between the word "death" and death itself. Byron drags the reader back to the origins of the Word, and shows the link between word and thing as not only broken, but as non-existent for humanity. The language spoken by Cain and his society is new; the characters speak a post-lapsarian language owing to the Fall.

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[17] "His heroes are either permutations of Cain or men who have been plotted against. The consequence is that they evoke a stereotype and start from melodrama." West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art*, 94.

[18] Wolf Z. Hirst, "Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy: An Unorthodox Reading of *Cain*," *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1997), 270 and Howe, "'Why Should I Speak?': Scepticism and the Voice of Poetry in Byron's *Cain*," *Romanticism and Religion*, 157.

[19] *BLJ* 9: 54.

[20] Brewer, 98 and Howe, 163.

This problem creates continual frictions within the drama; while the characters may use this language, they speak without total understanding of its meaning. Lucifer's significance lies in his command of language; unlike Cain and his community, Lucifer is a post-lapsarian character who has a much sharper awareness of the link between word and thing. After his first Fall from heaven, he affects the Fall of Man, and this allows him access to irony and verbal duplicity. Byron subtly aligns the reader with Lucifer; our doubly fallen knowledge makes us Lucifer's contemporary, not Cain's. As in Greek Tragedies, the reader reads the play with full knowledge of the events that will unfold. Cain has no such awareness, and the reader's knowledge makes his character seem more tragic as he fumbles his way through the actions he is fated to perform.

Cain, at once brave and clumsy, is one of Byron's most sophisticated hero-figures, in large part because of the reader's difficulty in deciding whether to sympathise with or condemn him: a difficulty cunningly shaped by the work. Cain's bravery resides in his refusal to submit his will to the conventions of his society, but the horror of the fratricide precludes any straightforward identification on the reader's part. The story's Biblical source also makes the play open to accusations of blasphemy, which adds significant layers to Byron's writing as he characteristically seeks to complicate and challenge reader response to his poetry. Cain takes up verbal arms against the society into which he was born, and ends up killing his brother owing to "the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions" (*BLJ* 9: 54) as his conversation with Lucifer hints:

> ...I see thy power,
>
> And see thou show'st me things beyond *my* power,
>
> Beyond all power of my born faculties,
>
> Although inferior still to my desires
>
> And my conceptions.

(2. 1: 79-83)

The struggle that Cain enacts between ideas and the actual is linguistic; he refuses to accept tenets that he disagrees with and embarks on a tragic quest to discover the meaning of the world "death." The horror of his discovery leaves the reader with a complicated hero who struggles to communicate the extent of his conceptions but rejects

the actual state he experiences. Instead of describing Byron's preoccupation with the archetypal exile as self-indulgent or melodramatic,[21] Cain becomes a Byronic "hero", but ironically so, since Byron sets up his previous parameters of self-destructive and self-mastering heroism in order to test them to breaking point.[22] Byron weaves a farcical yet tragic clumsiness into Cain's character.

If *Manfred* is a poetical drama that presents positive mastery of self over society, then *Cain* is its darker double, enacting a mirror image of negative mastery. Manfred chooses to pursue his course, drawing grim strength from his resolution, whereas Cain stumbles into his crime, lacking any awareness of the consequences of his search for knowledge. Cain's murder of Abel is the culmination of his self-thwarting intellectual quest. From the beginning, Byron highlights words and their relationship with action, as Cain refuses to join the assembled community of Adam, Eve, Abel, Adah, and Zillah offering prayers to the Lord:

ADAM: Son Cain, my first-born, wherefore art thou silent?

CAIN: Why should I speak?

ADAM: To pray.

CAIN: Have ye not pray'd?

                                                            (1.1: 22-23)

Cain is provoked out of silence into responding to questions that seem empty, and Adam and Cain's joint occupation of the pentameter line suggests that the division between them is natural to the rhythmical structure of the line, if not its content. Adam's attempt to prompt Cain into obeisance suffers as Cain states his independence from the group even as Adam tries to draw him in:

CAIN: Have ye not pray'd?

ADAM: We have, most fervently.

CAIN: And loudly: I

            Have heard you.

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[21] "His heroes are either permutations of Cain or men who have been plotted against. The consequence is that they evoke a stereotype and start from melodrama." West, 94.

[22] "…heroism [for Byron] was intimately related to personal and social destructiveness." McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, 33.

<div align="right">(1.1: 23-25)</div>

These short sentences contain a similar tension to Hamlet's short responses to the questions of the King and Queen at the beginning of *Hamlet.* Cain's response to Adam's prompting is dangerously humorous, as he unequivocally separates himself from the "we" used by Adam, underlining the difference between "ye" who prays and the "I" who hears. The humour is ironic; Cain insists on the difference between him and his community, and Adam's demand that Cain should join the group by breaking his silence and praying, even after Cain's sardonic response, renews itself with the same injunction against silence:

ADAM: But thou, my eldest-born, art silent still.

CAIN: 'Tis better I should be so.

ADAM: Wherefore so?

CAIN: I have nought to ask.

ADAM: Nor aught to thank for?

CAIN: No.

ADAM: Dost thou not live?

CAIN: Must I not die?

<div align="right">(1.1: 26-29)</div>

The dialogue becomes like a game, with Adam and Cain batting responses back and forth. Adam and Cain express the final five lines entirely using the negative, lending a sense of unreality and lack to the conversation. Initially, Adam transforms the terms of Cain's refusal to speak, changing the terms of prayer from demand (in Cain's paradigm) to thanks, then Cain reverses Adam's statement "Dost thou not live?" to "Must I not die?" (1.1: 29) Through the dialogue's terse style, Byron amplifies the reader's uneasiness. This is not an accidental performance; the reader's alienation from the text mirrors Cain's alienation from his family. Cain is outside of his community from the beginning despite continual injunctions to participate fully; his isolation is heroic in his intellectual honesty. Yet Cain is no more articulate than his family and provides the reader with no alternative to their social mores. He protests without affirming any alternative structure, and his heroism is defined only by its obstinacy. His isolation is self-imposed and troubling for himself, his community, and the reader who knows the

ending of his tragic protest. The tense and clumsy exchange of the opening scene lays the framework for the drama, where speech expresses and embodies the tensions of *Cain*.

The form that Byron selects reflects the intensely social setting of his desperately individualist hero; the paradox he suggests lies in Cain's individualist world-view coming into conflict with the communal nature of his society. By presenting the piece as a poetic drama, Byron places the reader into Cain's world, illustrating the social nature of the second fall.[23] Byron's horror of his dramas being staged begs the question as to why *Cain* was written as a drama.[24] The choice of the dramatic poem reveals some of his intention.[25] As the *ottava rima* form suited *Don Juan's* ability to flit between subjects, *Cain* is a social poem that revolves around the notion of community as implied by the necessity of interaction between characters for the plot to develop. This emphasis on community precludes *Cain* being pure tragedy; as with his summary of the plot of *Manfred*, Byron in *Cain* seems to avoid the straightforward categories of tragedy and comedy.[26] The work regards solitude as an evil to be mocked or despised, and Byron emphasises Adah's plea against solitude as he links Adah, Cain, and Lucifer in the conversation:

> CAIN: Be thou happy then alone —
>
> I will have nought to do with happiness,
>
> Which humbles me and mine.
>
> ADAH: Alone I could not,
>
> Nor *would* be happy; but with those around us,
>
> I think I could be so, despite of death,

---

[23] "The first explicit appearance of the idea of a second fall appears in *Childe Harold IV*. The concept is mentioned again in the *Prophecy of Dante*, forms the basis of the entire argument in *Cain,* and appears throughout *Don Juan* as a standard for distinguishing the significance of different events which appear, in certain superficial ways, alike." McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, 145.

[24] Byron's letters constantly evince a terror of the performance of his plays; a representative quote from the letters can be found in a letter to Douglas Kinnaird, 13 September 1821: "I did not – and do *not* write for the stage & would not alter a line – to draw down the upper Gallery into the pit - in thunder if it could be so." *BLJ* 8: 208. See also pages 22, 23, 57, 59, 66, 67, 90, 116, 117, 224, and many others for allusions to the plays being unfit for the stage.

[25] It could be argued that this terror was simply Byron's policy so as to avoid mockery should the play fail, and a letter to John Murray supports this perspective: "You see now the good of *not* puffing before hand – if you had [praised] it too much – it would not have done half so well – (*if* it does well even now) the best way is to say little before hand - & let them find their way fairly." *BLJ* 8: 53.

[26] "I have no tragedy nor tragedies." See *BLJ* 5: 194.

Which, as I know it not, I dread not, though

It seems an awful shadow — if I may

Judge from what I have heard.

LUCIFER: And thou couldst not

Alone, thou say'st, be happy?

ADAH: Alone! Oh, my God!

Who could be happy and alone, or good?

To me my solitude seems sin;

(1.1: 464-74)

The final line's formulation "To me my solitude seems sin" reflects the difficulty of language in the drama; only through independent thought can Adah express her dependence on her community. Adah bases her claim for happiness on the surrounding love of her family, and Cain misunderstands her injunction for him to be happy as ignorance of the inadequacy of a happiness bought at the expense of dignity. Adah continues to argue for happiness, but this time does not claim to be happy; instead she uses a conditional verb, and regards happiness as something she could feel "despite" the existence of death in the world. She claims not to dread death as she does not know it, but this chimes curiously with her conception that she could be happy "despite" death. Her comparison of death to an "awful shadow" (1.1: 470) betrays more dread than her claim allows. Loneliness, it seems, would leave her at the mercy of the "awful shadow."

This exchange is fundamental to Byron's choice of the dramatic form for *Cain*. Aside from the connection that can be established with the reader/audience via the spoken word, Byron's technique rejoices in the distancing opportunities provided by the dramatic form. Thought transformed into speech directed towards another character prevents the reader from gaining access to private modes of thought:

CAIN: Thoughts unspeakable

        Crowd in my breast to burning, when I hear

        Of this almighty Death,

(1.1: 256-58)

Cain often alludes to ideas that he cannot express, or Byron makes his speech so torturous as to express a disjuncture between thought and speech. Byron refuses the reader access to Cain's inner world by the lack of an explaining narrator who could throw a gloss of interpretation over Cain's words, or an interior monologue that could display his thought. By adopting the dramatic form, Byron prevents the reader gaining any privileged insight into the mind of the hero, demonstrating the isolation of the individual hero from society and the essential loneliness of the human condition. *Cain* becomes an echo chamber as each character battles to define abstract words like death that can have no correspondence with what they describe, as what they describe remains unknown. Cain's obsession with linking the concept of death to actual death forces him into a solitude that seems unnatural and dangerous to Adah, and at the start of the play, to Adam too. The dialectic that runs through the dramatic poem is between drama and solipsism. While praising the social instinct of humanity, Cain acts in defiance of his principle and initially converses with Lucifer because he feels alienated from his family, the sole community of Eden. Like Manfred, he claims to prefer the spirit realm:

> CAIN: …and my Adah, my
>
> Own and beloved, she too understands not
>
> The mind which overwhelms me: never till
>
> Now met I aught to sympathize with me.
>
> 'Tis well — I rather would consort with spirits.

(1.1: 187-91)

The difficulty of living in the world remains unmitigated while Byron continues to emphasise the impossibility of residing outside community. Cain persists in questioning his existence and its place in the world despite the elusiveness of any alternative mode of existence. It is the will to continue questioning the status quo that makes Cain's character integral to Byron's brand of heroism. Recalling his description in *The Corsair* of Conrad being "link'd with one virtue, and a thousand crimes,"[27] Byron provides the reader with a more problematically mixed character with one heroic virtue.

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[27] Lord George Gordon Byron, *The Corsair* III. 24: 696. As *The Corsair* is not included in *McGann*, the edition used is: *Byron: Poetical Works*, 303.

Cain's exclusive reliance on reason in the face of divine inscrutability – 'I judge but by the fruits' (I. 1, 78) – need not be seen as productive of 'emancipation of mind' but as a different kind of closed intelligence that, it must be remembered, leads not to any heroic end but to the horror of fratricide.[28]

The constancy displayed by the hero is, as Peter Knox-Shaw points out, often the one extenuatingly positive characteristic of the hero in the *Tales*, particularly *Lara*.[29] Cain's constancy, and his intellectual difference from his family render him Byronic in creation, but Byron's complex relationship with the heroes of the *Tales* becomes still more equivocal in his later poetic drama.

Cain's heroism seems guaranteed by Byron, due, in part, to the nature of the quest to which he seems compelled, his struggle toward semantic awareness. For Cain and his community, words exist for conditions, emotions, and states that have never been experienced by any living creature. This abstract condition renders words and things completely separate in the universe, as language exists without connection to corresponding experiences. Actual life and abstract knowledge being separate entities is the starting premise of *Manfred*, and is the fabric of the entire drama for *Cain*:

> Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
>
> Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
>
> The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.

<div align="right">(Manfred 1.1: 10-12)</div>

Cain's significance in the context of Byron's development of his other hero-figures is that Cain experiences the original rupture between thought and reality. Manning depicts the relationship between Cain and Manfred as the difference between experience and figurative declaration: "Cain experiences what Manfred declares figuratively: the Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life."[30] To say "experiences" is to understate the importance of the difference between Cain and Manfred; Manfred can only speak with this certainty owing to Cain's dogged pursuit of the link between declarative utterance and mysterious

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[28] Howe, 157.

[29] Peter Knox-Shaw, "*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale," *The Review of English Studies* 44 (1993): 49, *JSTOR*. 8 Apr. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[30] Peter J. Manning, *Byron and His Fictions* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1978), 148.

action. Cain does not passively experience the difference between the Tree of Knowledge and that of Life; by trying to synthesize abstraction and reality Cain destroys his society. In *Manfred*, knowledge and life are painfully separate, but *Cain: A Mystery* is a return to origins in which Cain discovers the meaning of the relationship between the word "death" and mortality. Cain is the first martyr to the attempt to marry the realm of knowledge with that of life.

> LUCIFER: Dar'st thou to look on Death?
>
> CAIN: He has not yet
>
>   Been seen.
>
> LUCIFER: But must be undergone.
>
> CAIN: My father
>
>   Says he is something dreadful, and my mother
>
>   Weeps when he's named; and Abel lifts his eyes
>
>   To heaven, and Zillah casts hers to the earth,
>
>   And sighs a prayer; and Adah looks on me,
>
>   And speaks not.
>
> LUCIFER: And thou?
>
> CAIN: Thoughts unspeakable
>
>   Crowd in my breast to burning, when I hear
>
>   Of this almighty Death, who is, it seems,
>
>   Inevitable. Could I wrestle with him?
>
>   I wrestled with the lion, when a boy,
>
>   In play, till he ran roaring from my gripe.
>
>   (1.1: 249-61)

This passage exemplifies the care with which Byron demonstrates Cain's almost unbearable attraction to and repulsion from the concept of death. This indefinable concept which Cain can only name without understanding becomes the subject of obsession for each member of the community. Lucifer's pedantry becomes apparent in this exchange; Lucifer enjoys baiting Cain for his lack of understanding, playing to the knowing reader as he ironically enjoys the spectacle of man, who is subject to death, being least able to understand it at this stage of human history. He asks Cain a question that implies support

for Cain's belief in death as a physical presence, and Cain replies cagily, still assuming that death is a figure "to be seen." Lucifer subtly alters the terms of the discussion, by changing Cain's "seen" to "undergone." This word, containing overtones of an existential ordeal which Cain could not possibly understand, illustrates the arch cruelty often displayed by Lucifer. Byron makes the reader aware of the experiential nature of Cain's tragedy, and heightens the ambiguity of Cain's fratricide. If death cannot be conceptualised outside an ontological framework, Byron intensifies the reader's sense of Cain's helplessness. Far from Cain's hope of a friendship with an understanding ally, or "aught to sympathize with me" (1.1: 190), Lucifer determines, in his urbane manner, to relegate him to the position of an ignorant yokel, and have Cain articulate the direction of his thoughts in order to patronise their distance from the actual experience. Accordingly, Cain lists the responses of his family, and requires Lucifer's prompting to describe his own response to death. The hesitancy that Byron ascribes to Cain provides the power of his speech; the unspeakable thoughts that crowd into Cain's mind powerfully denote that he longs for the opportunity to confront the meaning of this word that obsesses him: death.

Cain and Abel's final confrontation is marked by difficulties of linguistic expression. Cain's metaphysical preoccupations in the earlier quotation, as Lucifer leads him to consider what actual death may be in relation to the word "death," render Cain linguistically clumsy. He dimly realises the link between his words and his actions, while Abel continues to place them on separate planes:

ABEL[opposing him]:   Thou shalt not: — add not impious works to impious
                             Words! let that altar stand — 'tis hallow'd now
                             By the immortal pleasure of Jehovah,
                             In his acceptance of the victims.

<div align="right">(3.1: 294-97)</div>

Owing to this difference, Cain and Abel speak on two different registers; Abel accepts his ignorance as he accepts his subjugation to God's will; although barely able to do so, Cain must articulate his challenge to Abel's actions, as he is half-aware of the relationship between words and things. Abel speaks the hackneyed lines of a B-list Hollywood actor,

spouting pious bombast that serves to reinforce his subservience to God. Cain seems a Caliban-like creature clumsily opposing convention, and his poverty of articulation lends a farcical edge to what ought to be a moment of high tragedy:

> CAIN: Another sacrifice! Give way, or else
>
>   That sacrifice may be ——
>
> ABEL: What mean'st thou?
>
> CAIN: Give —
>
>   Give way! – thy God loves blood! – then look to it: —
>   Give way, ere he hath *more*!

> (3.1: 308-11)

The threat Cain makes betrays a tense vulnerability as it becomes apparent that neither Cain nor Abel is aware of the consequences of the actions that the threat leads towards. When Abel asks "What mean'st thou?" (3.1: 309) Cain can only respond metaphorically. He cannot clarify his terms, or name "death" itself, as if the word could bring the action into existence. Cain's latent and fragile awareness that its utterance might summon death pervades the exchange and creates the sickening progression towards the play's tragic climax. This battle between Abel's pious exclamations and Cain's clumsy utterance pushes language to the forefront of the scene. Byron robs the audience of high tragedy, as Cain's murder of Abel becomes tragic for its emergence from human frailty, not for its revelation of potential nobility. Cain's bravery and clumsiness combine most strongly at this point in the play. In being true to his conceptions instead of his state, Cain attains the self-mastery Byron requires of his heroes to render them tragically heroic, but Cain's inability to clearly express his opposition to his state makes for farce. Language creates and reflects the mixed condition of the drama. While this mixture of farce and tragedy forms the necessary conditions for the murder, at this juncture, Byron lays the framework for Abel's death, but it is not yet inevitable:

> CAIN: If thou lov'st thyself,
>
>   Stand back till I have strew'd this turf along
>   Its native soil: — else —
>
> ABEL [opposing him]:   I love God far more
>   Than life.

CAIN [*striking him with a brand, on the temples, which he snatches from the altar*].

<div style="text-align: center">Then take thy life unto thy God,</div>

Since he loves lives.

<div style="text-align: right">(3.1: 313-17)</div>

The affirmation from Abel that his alliance is to God and not to mankind pushes Cain into the murderous rage that began at the start of the poem with dumb defiance. Death and the misery of the post-lapsarian world, Cain's preoccupation from the beginning of the poetic drama, lead him to force death, the unknown entity, into existence. The aftermath of the blow and the reactions of the community reflect the horror of the most primitive of links being made between the concept of death and its actuality. The pathos lies in the premature understanding of the most primal link between word and thing in the death of Abel. Abel seems to understand the gravity of the action for himself and Cain almost immediately. After asking Cain what he has done, he immediately forgives him, prefiguring Christ with his words:[31]

ABEL: Oh, God! receive thy servant, and

Forgive his slayer, for he knew not what

He did —

<div style="text-align: right">(3.1: 318-20)</div>

Cain is slower to recognise the significance of his act, but notes the transformation that both he and Abel have undergone:

CAIN: …Where's Abel? where

Cain? Can it be that I am he?   (3.1. 322-23)

The link Cain then makes between sleep and death, far from seeming hackneyed, comes to life as it is not a poetic attempt at metaphor; instead Cain genuinely mistakes Abel's stillness for sleep instead of death:

CAIN: His eyes are open! then he is not dead!

Death is like sleep; and sleep shuts down our lids.   (3.1: 337-38)

 Byron forces the reader to confront the horror of the original discovery in his words, and Zillah's same misapprehension augments the sensation of confronting the origin of the

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[31] "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34.

metaphor in the mind of the reader. By situating the exploration of the meaning of the word "death" through the lens of the story of Cain and Abel, Byron can brutally strike through the original mask of abstraction. Cain becomes the original poet as he discovers and reports the meaning of the first taboo word "death."

This interest in the meaning of words is of central importance for Cain's significance as hero to Byron. Cain becomes the first poet in the post-lapsarian world as he questions the link between words and things, longing to discover the link between the two, mirroring Byron's own interest in the congruence between words and things. In *Beppo*, such congruence pleases the poet:

> This feast is named the Carnival, which being
>
> Interpreted, implies 'farewell to flesh':
>
> So call'd, because the name and thing agreeing,

<div align="right">(Beppo 6: 41-43)</div>

Byron's preoccupation in the uneasy relationship between word and thing mirrors Cain's tragic obsession with the same concept. The interrogation of the link between words and their meaning is Cain's poetic form of heroism as he seeks to understand this vital connection. This passion for forcing words to display their meaning is reminiscent too of Byron's personal crusade against cant and hypocrisy;[32] Cain cuts through surface speculation of the word into the substance of what the word denotes. The element of the tragic, from the reader's perspective, is our collective awareness of death. Howe views Cain's conception of death as indicative of the character's unsuitable understanding of the idea: "Cain seems to want it both ways: to have the assurance of his simplifying metaphors (the lion) and also to reject the symbols of his parents as inadequate to his swimming visions."[33] To mock Cain's basic formulation of death, or to see his understanding as undermining his intellect, is to miss Byron's tragic intent. Cain has no locus of meaning that could possibly encompass death. He provides an alternative interpretation from within his sphere of understanding, rejecting what he feels to be inadequate to his own experience. Cain attempts to stop dogma in its tracks by

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[32]See *Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron*, 13.

[33] Howe, 162.

questioning the accepted meaning of an abstract word and forcing it into the realm of experience. This grim reminder of Byron's belief in words as things makes Cain a poet in a peculiarly Romantic sense. *Cain* reverses Maddalo's idea in Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo*:[34]

> …'Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song.'
>
> (*Julian and Maddalo*, 544-46).

Cain teaches his community in suffering what he learned in "song," here the word "death" that had before echoed abstractly through his family prior to the murder. The drama of *Cain*, and that which renders Cain heroic is his existential drive to discover the meaning of the word.

In *Don Juan* Byron contorts rhyme to demonstrate his mastery. In *Cain*, owing to the absence of a narrator and Byron the poet's apparent absence from the background, *Cain* does not display itself the way that *Don Juan* does; there is no sense of glorying in its rule-breakings. The play is not comic, excepting the dark *Lear*-like ironies that abound in an ultimately tragic vision, so these clumsy moments do not seem deliberate to the casual reader; they seem like the lapses of poor poetry. If *Cain* is to be properly understood, the reader must be repelled and magnetised by Byron's foregrounding of the ambiguous power of language. To discover the meaning of the word, to learn its dangerous implications and its dark connection with reality, language must be strained. Byron transports the reader to the beginning of human history, to the birth of language and the dawning of consciousness, and correspondingly, this infancy requires verbal innocence. When Shelley insists in *A Defence of Poetry* that "in the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry;" (*A Defence of Poetry*, 676) Byron twists this assertion round. Poetry is, for better or worse, a fallen language. If Cain is a poet, this does not guarantee the beautiful; instead, his status guarantees a searing lesson in man's drive to discover the origins and meaning of his world through an exploration of

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[34] William Keach's argument that Shelley was alive to this possible interpretation of the lines is acute, and deserves mention here: "Like Rousseau, Maddalo holds open the possibility that the words of poetry may be 'seeds of misery — / Even as the deeds of others.'" Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 202.

words. Lucifer and his double, the reader, with their ironic understanding and awareness of the gulf between word and thing, watch Cain's fate unfold as he blindly gropes his way into post-lapsarian understanding. *Don Juan* is the proper foil to *Cain*; Byron bars its musicality and sense of felt life from *Cain*'s bleak and clumsy power. In this sense, Byron used *Cain* as a vessel into which he could pour the dark undercurrent of his thought and preserve in *Don Juan* the buoyancy that keeps the poetry in motion. The discovery of the meaning of the word is *Cain*'s theme; its construction mirrors its preoccupations. *Cain*'s "stumbling stanzas" illustrate Byron's artistic mastery; language bends to theme as Byron drags the reader back to our linguistic origins.[35]

The hero's attempt at self-mastery renders him heroic; Cain's tragic grappling with language shows the troubled relationship between words and thing. The importance of language and Cain's flawed status question his heroic potential, as Byron wilfully makes a hero from a Biblical villain. While the reader may observe Cain's role with sympathy, Byron's dramatic form has distanced the reader from the hero. Byron develops distancing techniques throughout his later work. As many critics have noted, the narrator in Byron's later works often seems to dominate and control the poetry, forcing the hero into the shade.[36] This movement towards the primacy of the narrator is not fully explained by Byron moving into a comic mode, nor is it enough to say that Byron had discovered humour and irony to be his greatest poetic gifts. Rather, Byron began to develop his interest in the way perception and mode of reportage colour fact more than any straightforward action could. This process of examining and questioning the nature of perception is a major concern for Byron, and his poetry is dominated by the attempt to control or disrupt any interpretation of the text. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron attempts to control the audience's understanding of the hero by ignoring their active participation in making the meaning of the poem. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is far from Byron's first attempt at authorship, but as the poem that made him famous, it is highly significant to Byron in terms of conceptualising a hero and audience. The relationship between Byron and Harold was, and remains, an object of scrutiny for his critics and

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[35] "Swinburne's Attack on Byron [1884]," *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 468

[36] See Philip W. Martin, *Byron: A Poet Before His Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 100.

readers, and Byron apparently despaired at the interpretations levelled at the poem that seemed to regard Harold as little more than a badly wielded mask for the poet. [37] Jerome Christensen has shown that Byron was far from an ingénue even from his earliest publications when it came to using his life to bolster his poetry,[38] but at this juncture Byron came to understand that his perception of the poem was almost irrelevant to the opinions that would be formed by his readership. He attempted to greet the audience with scorn and deny their influence on how the poetry would be written:

> The opinions which have been, or may be, formed on that subject, are *now* a matter of indifference; the work is to depend on itself, and not on the writer; and the author, who has no resources in his own mind beyond the reputation, transient or permanent, which is to arise from his literary efforts, deserves the fate of authors. ("Preface to Canto IV," 146-47)

This attempt at studied indifference comes unstuck by the confusion unleashed by his statement. He claims that any opinion on the relationship between him and Harold is an irrelevance, and hopes that the work can stand alone, outside of the poet and the audience. However, the plea to posterity centres the author and demands the participation and opinions of an audience, if projected into an unspecified future. Byron's attitude towards posterity is ambiguous throughout his career, and *Don Juan* notes the problematic nature of supposing a sympathetic audience after death:

> He that reserves his laurels for posterity
>
>   (Who does not often claim the bright reversion?)
>
> Has generally no great crop to spare it, he
>
>   Being only injured by his own assertion;
>
> <div align="right">(Don Juan "Dedication," 9: 65-72)</div>

Perception becomes central to Byron's poetic output as he seeks to challenge the nature of any single interpretation or opinion, and show the ambiguity inherent in any action as the narrator, the reader, and the poet himself form their own opinions based on their own particular set of circumstances. Andrew Bennett writes that, "Indeed, poetry begins to be

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[37] Byron, "Preface to Canto IV: To John Hobhouse, ESQ. A.M., F.R.S." 146-47.
[38] See chapter one of Christensen's *Lord Byron's Strength*, "Theorizing Byron's Practice: The Performance of Lordship and the Poet's Career," 3-31.

understood as not only recording the life of the poet but actually constructing that life: poetry begins to *produce* the writer's identity."[39] This thoughtful assertion can be refined further to make space for the large emphasis Byron placed upon the relationship between poet, hero, narrator, and audience. This four-fold fluid structure allows each part to create and be created by each other constituent part; there is no controlling principle – this is a symbiotic concept. The poetry alone cannot fully produce the writer's identity; the interaction between the poet, his audience and his work form the basis for identity.[40] The life and the poetry may inform one another, but it is perception, perception of the nature of the poetry and the life that remains at the forefront of Byron's presentation of his hero. Byron's layered and sensitive approach to perception foregrounds dualities and the fractured condition of existence.

Such a view of perception and perspective is at work not only in later poems on which the present chapter has focused but also in earlier work. *Cain* and *Don Juan* seem overtly concerned with these twin problems, and the earlier works, in particular *The Giaour,* subtly explore the effects of perception and perspective. I have departed from chronology in order to suggest a mode of reading which may not seem immediately apparent. Following my reading of *Cain*, I suggest that *The Giaour* shows a similar preoccupation with language, perception, and perspective. Following the success of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage I* and *II*, Byron constructs *The Giaour* (1813) upon the shifting sands of perception. Byron added many accretions to each new edition,[41] and these serve to increase the mystery of the piece, heighten its ambiguity, and alter the impetus of the tale from simple story telling to a study of perception.[42] The central ambiguity of the poem is

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[39] Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity,* Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 2.

[40] "Byron's dark comprehension emerges because his "personal life" is equally his "poetical life" – because a final distinction cannot be drawn between the man who suffers and the poet who sees." Jerome J. McGann, "Byron and the Anonymous Lyric," *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, 259.

[41] The poem swelled from 344 to 1334 lines, and Byron described the growth of the poem as "this snake of a poem, - which has been lengthening its rattles every month" (*BLJ* 3:100). The poem went through five editions before the end of Summer in 1813, and nine more by 1815.

[42] These accretions have been variously viewed by critics, with William H. Marshall considering the poem "badly weakened" [502], whereas Michael G. Sundell argues that Byron "had a developing conception of the poem as he amplified it in succeeding versions." [589] William H. Marshall, "The Accretive Structure of Byron's *The Giaour*," *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961): 502-09 *JSTOR*. 4 July 2007

its relationship with its hero. Despite being named after him, the poem decentres its hero by its fragmentary and multi-vocal form. The poem's fractured form and plural speakers reflect its interest in interpretation; the speaker's perception and expression of events control meaning, and the reader is never allowed to lose sight of the narrated nature of the tale. Any search for an omniscient voice is inimical to the poetic design of the poem; Byron deliberately utilises fragmentation to expose the provisional nature of interpretation.

This device of having several different voices who narrate the poem indicates Byron's attempt to show the tale to have manifold and perplexing layers. The poem seeks to create a variety of speakers in order to disorientate the reader, moving him or her away from an expectation of a single truth. Byron emphasises the movement between different narrators, narrators who, on occasion, blur as the reader attempts to disentangle the identity of the speaker. This reflects the poem's use of several modes of writing within the same form. Byron investigates his subject by examining it through several different lenses: "…action is dissolved into lyric modes, description, elegy, reflection, memory."[43] This dissolution is greatly freeing for Byron, allowing him the scope to paint the Giaour and his story using any genre or mode necessary, while shoehorning the poem into a single form that could encompass the conflicting and disparate voices and moods that he incorporates into the poetry. Many critics have drawn attention to Byron's choice of *ottava rima* as the ideal verse form for his mobile switches of mood. But the form Byron uses in *The Giaour* is an earlier example of his formal cunning.[44] Byron handles a seemingly restrictive form, the octosyllablic couplet, with great dexterity, using it to mirror the unwavering rules of the society wherein the action takes place, but also to point up the many possible interpretations of the Giaour's story.

In particular, the couplet form both papers over and draws attention to deliberate fissures. The construction of the tale is fundamental to the reader's engagement with the poem,

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<http://www.jstor.org/search>; Michael G. Sundell, "The Development of *The Giaour*," *Studies in English Literature* 9 (1969): 587-99. *JSTOR*. 6 Sep. 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[43] Nellist, 49.

[44] McGann notes the importance of Byron's form in his chapter on *The Giaour* in *Fiery Dust*, 141-42.

and in *The Giaour*, its fragmented nature and use of several speakers creates one of its strongest effects. Byron forces the reader to concentrate intently on the tale to distinguish who is speaking, reconstruct the context they are speaking from, and discover why they harbour the biases that they express.[45] Byron's fragmentary construction of the tale requires the reader to hold several perspectives in balance in their imaginations. This method is not without its difficulties. The poem, which purports to be narrated in part by a fisherman, has attracted the censure of critics such as William H. Marshall, who argues that "the fisherman is intellectually out of character,"[46] and that incongruities of this kind weaken the poem. But Marshall ignores the preface to the poem, where Byron immediately distances himself from the story, allowing an anonymous Eastern balladeer apparent control of the narrative:

> *The Giaour* really has only one narrator, the ballad singer, who assumes different roles at different moments in his performance but who is himself the source of the work's final consistency precisely because he lets us know that he is assuming roles, that the poem is a virtuoso production.[47]

The balladeer performs the role of the fisherman, and his omniscient awareness and ability to enter into each character animates the text; Byron asks the reader to applaud the abilities of this itinerant storyteller. However, Jerome McGann's argument that Byron refines himself out of existence in the poem loses sight of Byron's controlling footnotes.[48] Byron uses the footnotes as a place to undercut, explain, and demonstrate his authority over his subject-matter by his travels through the region. As the only Romantic poet to have travelled through this region, Byron signals his authenticity through his understanding of local mores via the vocabulary the poem uses, and the extensive notes that explain to the reader the meaning of these esoteric terms:

> I hear the sound of coming feet,
>
> But not a voice mine ear to greet —
>
> More near — each turban I can scan,
>
> And silver-sheathed ataghan;

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[45] As Scott perceptively points out; see Sir Walter Scott, Letter to Lord Byron 6 November 1813, *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 69.
[46] Marshall, 507.
[47] McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 144.
[48] McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 143.

The foremost of the band is seen

An Emir by his garb of green:

(352-57)

In these six lines, Byron footnotes the description twice; on line 355 he describes the "ataghan" and on line 357, he explains the meaning of the "garb of green." This local knowledge does not only serve to increase the reader's esteem for Byron's apparently extensive worldly knowledge, but also situates him as a Westerner who could explain and conjure this world with an authority gained by his experiences. If readers admire the brilliance of the balladeer, they admire Lord Byron, poet and traveller; he never exits the narrative. As McGann notes in the quoted passage, the balladeer draws attention to his assumption of various guises, but Byron's work in the footnotes, questioning, explaining, and occasionally undermining the poem makes him the point of liaison between the Western reader and the Eastern balladeer, and these footnotes never allow the reader to forget that Byron is in control of the narrative. This toying with the role of the poet, the narrator, and language becomes part of the Russian doll-like structure of the poem; Byron layers our understanding of the poetical process and makes it, like the content of the poem, subject to perspective.

Byron's choice of hero raises questions surrounding how the reader ought to understand his heroism. The name of the poem being the hero of the piece is notable for its perspective on the Western character as foreign. The Giaour is Other to the Muslims of the tale and the Western reader due to the Giaour's determined individualism, which repudiates Christianity and redemption in favour of his self-autonomy. Central to this is the Giaour's understanding of Hassan's behaviour towards Leila. Instead of condemning Hassan for murdering his beloved, the Giaour considers the Muslim's response to Leila's adultery as acceptable, affirming that he would have behaved the same way in his place:

Still, ere thou doest condemn me — pause —

Not mine the act, though I the cause;

Yet did he but what I had done

Had she been false to more than one;

Faithless to him — he gave the blow;

> But true to me — I laid him low;
>
> Howe'er deserv'd her doom might be,
>
> Her treachery was truth to me;

<div align="right">(1060-67)</div>

Byron refuses to allow the Giaour moral superiority. The Giaour states that he would have behaved the same way, and the reader is prevented from empathising with the Giaour as a more sensitive and "Christian" character. As Marilyn Butler points out, if Turkish rule is untenable, Christian rule as represented by the Giaour is no more suitable.[49] When Michael G. Sundell argues that Hassan is "a weaker reflection of the protagonist,"[50] he ignores the fact that Hassan is not a lesser creation; the poem is simply not about him. Byron continually shows heroism to be subjective and makes perspective central to any understanding of heroism. The narrated quality of the work dictates the focus of the reader; in effect, the attention paid by the speakers creates his heroism. Hassan has the same right as the Giaour to heroism; as Sundell points out, "they were similar men whom fate made absolute foes."[51] The speakers' obsessive interest in the story of the Giaour creates his heroism.

Expression becomes tortured as, through the varying perspectives offered, the nature of the tale begins to reveal itself. Suggestion, fragmentary memories, and visions work to occlude statements of fact.[52] Alan Rawes points out the disturbing nature of the fisherman's recollection of his meeting with a man whom he perceives to carry a precious cargo and carries along the river only to have the stranger dump his charge.[53] Like the fisherman's report on the frightening silence abounding since the death of Hassan, the repression of speech occasioned by this strange event seems obsessive:

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[49] "The story 'proves' Turkish rule ethically unacceptable to civilized Westerners, without ever showing the Christian church in a more favourable light. The plain fact is that the poem has good Moslems but no good Christians." Marilyn Butler, "The Orientalism of Byron's *Giaour*," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, 91.

[50] Sundell, 595.

[51] Sundell, 592.

[52] Watkins explicitly links this to the accretions Byron makes: "These accretions, which expanded the poem from a 344 to a 1334-line narrative create its interpretive possibilities, and capture Byron's increasing sensitivity to social, historical, and political pressures." Daniel P. Watkins, "Social Relations in Byron's *The Giaour*" *ELH* 52 (1985): 889. *JSTOR*. 14 May 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[53] Alan Rawes, *Byron's Poetic Experimentation: "Childe Harold", the Tales, and the Quest for Comedy*, The Nineteenth Century Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 33.

> I gaz'd, till vanishing from view,
>
> Like lessening pebble it withdrew;
>
> Still less and less, a speck of white
>
> That gemm'd the tide, then mock'd the sight;
>
> And all its hidden secrets sleep,
>
> Known but to Genii of the deep,
>
> Which, trembling in their coral caves,
>
> They dare not whisper to the waves.

> (380-86)

The tale compulsively repeats its theme, as the Giaour cannot repeat the story of Leila's murder: "They told me — 'twas a hideous tale! — / I'd tell it — but my tongue would fail —" (1308-09). In the fisherman's description, sight and sound do not serve to communicate fact to him. The speck he saw "mock'd the sight," (382) keeping the actual hidden from his understanding, but the "hidden secrets" (383) remain ominous, for they are only sleeping, and could break loose into the narrative. "They dare not whisper to the waves" (386) strongly implies danger; the Genii's fears, a projection of the fisherman's mind, allow him to admit covertly that he dare not name his suspicions. Byron forces the reader into conjecture and repression. The difficulty of relating the tale for the speaker is a result of the uncertainty of the actual events that took place, and the fear of being complicit in Leila's murder. There is no certainty, no facts, and no moral laws to fall back on. Byron exposes the reader to the dizzying impossibility of objectivity or total knowledge.

Immediately following the fisherman's repression of dangerous possibilities, the poetry moves on to a discussion of beauty:

> As rising on its purple wing
>
> The insect-queen of eastern spring,
>
> O'er emerald meadows of Kashmeer
>
> Invites the young pursuer near,
>
> And leads him on from flower to flower
>
> A weary chase and wasted hour,

Then leaves him, as it soars on high,

With panting heart and tearful eye:

So Beauty lures the full-grown child,

With hue as bright, and wing as wild;

A chase of idle hopes and fears,

Begun in folly, closed in tears.

If won, to equal ills betrayed,

Woe waits the insect and the maid;

(387-401)

So abrupt a change of subject seems an obvious and almost heavy-handed movement away from the exploration of the night's events. Rather, the fisherman approaches the subject by analogy; his expression of sympathy for the beautiful victim suggests that he unconsciously accepts that Leila was murdered. The act of discussing Leila through veiled metaphor permits him not to enter into any outright condemnation of the aggressors; he can instead pity victims without entering into blame, guilt, or frightening memories. The butterfly's beauty "invites" (390) its pursuer into a chase, leaving the child broken-hearted. Initially, the beautiful pursuant is in control, able to lure the child into chasing it for its loveliness, and the child will suffer for its inability to capture its prey. Beauty lures the adult, or as the fisherman describes him, the "full-grown child" (396) into a chase that is destined only for tragedy. If the description of the child and the butterfly invites sympathy for both parties, the fisherman's pity lies squarely with the pursued. He equates insect and maid as victims of their more powerful pursuers, and the suffering of these victims is inevitable:

A life of pain, the loss of peace,

From infant's play, and man's caprice:

The lovely toy so fiercely sought

Hath lost its charm by being caught,

For every touch that wooed its stay

Hath brush'd its brightest hues away,

Till charm, and hue, and beauty gone,

> 'Tis left to fly or fall alone.
>
> With wounded wing, or bleeding breast,
>
> (402-10)

While children play, men are capricious, and the woman becomes a "lovely toy" (404) in the hands of the predator. She, like the butterfly, will be dispensed with when her beauty has gone and left with indifference, "to fly or fall alone" (409). Leila's fate, though only alluded to by the extended comparison between butterflies and maids, seems pitied by the fisherman: "And every woe a tear can claim / Except an erring sister's shame" (420-21). Yet even in the fisherman's sympathetic statement there lurks a moral judgement; "erring" reflects the moral code that remains despite any personal compassion. Shifting loyalties, emotions, and perspectives may cloud the fisherman's view, yet social mores seem hardened within the passage despite the conflicting semantic movement towards empathy.

From the earliest moment of the fisherman's narrative he identifies himself as in opposition to the Giaour, highlighting his own Muslim identity: "Right well I view and deem thee one / Whom Othman's sons should slay or shun." (198-99) His perspective as he sympathises with the plight of beautiful victims, begins to set him in opposition to Hassan and his society's mores. The thought of Leila's potential murder at the hands of Hassan disturbs the fisherman deeply, and he repeatedly distances himself from the actual events, firstly by describing the repression of speech in lines 379-87, and secondly by discussing beauty and its consequences. Both modes circle back to the original crime; Hassan's potential murder of Leila. The fisherman's torture at being forced to make a judgement on the events leads to the description of the mind's torment resembling the scorpion's writhing in flames. The description enacts the fisherman's conflicted responses to Leila's guilt, crime and punishment, and the power of Byron's image graphically depicts both his mental torment and his need to salve his anguish. This burning need for a conclusion makes the fisherman's condemnation of Leila seem not only understandable, but inevitable. After the sympathy extended to the victims of men's "caprice" (403), the fisherman condemns her brutally, and the decisiveness of the rhymed tetrameter couplets reinforces the harshness of the lines, "Too well he trusted to the slave

/ Whose treachery deserv'd a grave" (460-61). The masculine rhyme here firmly closes discussion; the rhyme of "slave" and "grave" darkly emphasises that Leila's life was at the whim of her owner, who could dispose of her at will. The fisherman, after his tormented meditation on the events of the night, and Leila's fate, decides to position himself as an ally of Hassan and society's traditional laws.

The vacillation of the fisherman's perspective provokes unease in the reader as Byron presents all moral decisions as dependent on the ever-shifting tides of opinion, memory, and emotion. This inability to discover an absolute standard does not bespeak a philosophical disdain or disbelief in any such standard existing. When Jerome Christensen states that the difference between Lady Byron and Lord Byron was the difference between her "Puritanism" and his "relativism," his opposition is too cleanly drawn.[54] Byron does not seek to persuade the reader to demolish moral standards. The poet moves from perspective to perspective, from narrator to narrator, refusing absolute values as being outside the flux of existence. *The Giaour* can almost say with Nietzsche: "Against positivism, which sticks to the phenomenon: 'There are only facts' — I would say: No, facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations."[55] It is not that facts do not exist in *The Giaour*; rather, each character interprets facts and events in separate ways, and it is the interpretation of events that captures Byron's poetic imagination. None of the speakers disavows the search for meaning, but each reaches separate conclusions based upon personal or societal bias. This struggle or quest for interpretation through perspective is what Byron focuses on in his process-driven poetry; interpretative "truth" is not a static structure; it is in a constant state of flux and subject to the perspective of the interpreter.

While Byron is always aware of the difficulty of creating meaningful categories, there is never the sense that the attempt is worthless. The fisherman's process of understanding Leila and her fate is central to this assertion, as her image haunts the fisherman and compels him to figure and refigure her image in his mind. When describing Leila's

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[54] Christensen, 80.
[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power* (New York, NY: Random House, 1968), 481

beauty, the fisherman is moved to challenge what he believes to be the doctrine of the
Koran as a result of her beauty,[56] and affirm that women have souls. His description of
Leila draws attention to her naturalness, and becomes pantheistic in its celebration of her
beauty as a reflection of the Immortal:

> On her might Muftis gaze, and own
>
> That through her eye the Immortal shone —
>
> On her fair cheek's unfading hue,
>
> The young pomegranate's blossoms strew
>
> Their bloom in blushes ever new —
>
> Her hair in hyacynthine flow

(491-96)

The description of Leila is certainly captivating; the fisherman employs natural imagery
of pomegranate blossoms and hyacinths. Interestingly, Byron uses "hyacinthine" to
describe Leila, echoing Milton's description of Adam's "hyacinthine locks."[57] However,
the fisherman cannot escape the mentality of his society; owing to this, he faces a mental
struggle to celebrate her beauty while condemning her morality.[58] His battle for
interpretive truth is central to the passage, one that exhibits his anguished attempt to
comprehend Leila both from his own perspective and his societal status. Perspective
dominates all elements of the poem as the fisherman, the monk and the reader are all
forced to interpret and receive all analysis as provisional, like the poetic fragment itself.

The Byronic hero assumes, through such devices, an endlessly interrogated role. His
heroism is constructed upon interpretation and perspective, which Byron has shown the
reader to be provisional. The reader receives only a potential, conditional, and crucially,
interpreted heroism. As Brian Nellist claims, the construct of the Byronic hero as a stable
entity is mostly a quirk of the reader's memory, as Byron very deliberately creates a hero
who moves in and out of the poetry, and in and out of our sympathies:

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[56] Byron's note is careful to point out that this is "a vulgar error," (*McGann*, 244) but the point remains that
the fisherman would have disagreed with his professed faith due to Leila's beauty.
[57] Milton, *Paradise Lost* IV: 301.
[58] This results from Leila's objectification in the eyes of the narrator: "Indeed, sexual consummation is
elided from *The Giaour*'s narrative; the poem fully subscribes to the ritual law of the harem: to see Leila is
to defile her, and it is in such corruption – the slow consuming of the pure object – that pleasure lies."
Christensen, 100.

>…from his auspicious birth in *The Giaour* he is not a fixed creature but an instrument used to challenge the reader's simplifications, a figure who shifts in and out of our sympathy to question the nature of sympathy itself.[59]

Byron complicates the reader's ability to grasp the apparent centre of the poems. *The Giaour* creates its hero out of the speakers' obsession with the hero. When the balladeer asks: "When shall such hero [as Themistocles] live again?" (6) the tale does not provide us with a hero of equal stature. Themistocles was a patriot, statesman and soldier; the Giaour is a recluse following his murder of a love-rival. Byron magnifies the Giaour by inflating his presence in the perception of other characters. The degree of his actual heroism becomes of far less importance than his perceived heroism; Byron lays the framework for a narrator that can dominate the text with far more success than the hero. The hero is less compelling than the perceivers' ability to be compelled. The Giaour is mythologized by the fisherman, the unnamed narrator, and the monk who describes him with a near pathological obsession. When the "hero" speaks, his voice is only one voice amongst many, and placed last, it gains weight by the reader's enforced wait to encounter him. When the Giaour is given his opportunity to speak, he does not directly address the reader; instead, he addresses his Confessor in order to further distance the reader from the poem.

Jerome McGann considers that "*The Giaour* really has only one narrator, the ballad singer, who assumes different roles at different moments;"[60] but his comment underplays the importance of the poem's plurality of voices and characters. Byron's technique is to draw attention to the primacy of the Giaour by subsuming the obvious differences between the characters into their fascination with his hero. The Giaour's dominance of the subject of the poetry has been quietly decentred, as *Don Juan* sees the narrator decentre its hero. By the time we move to the Giaour's speech, the stage is set for the reader to meet with a fearsome character, capable of murder and dangerous liaisons with foreign women. Even as the monk delivers his testimony of an almost inhuman character, it is marked by ambivalence about the identity of the Giaour. His protracted silence

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[59] Nellist, 52-53.
[60] McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 144.

fascinates the monk to the same degree that the reader is beguiled by Byron's withholding of the figure who promised to be the central character. Despite the monk's fear, Byron's speaker emphasises the nobility of the Giaour, and identifies it as a characteristic noticeable only to the discerning observer (or reader of the poem).

> The common crowd but see the gloom
>
> Of wayward deeds — and fitting doom —
>
> The close observer can espy
>
> A noble soul, and lineage high. —
>
> (866-69)

Byron can carefully direct his audience with such statements in his version of Milton's "fit audience,"[61] and, as McGann remarks,[62] Byron sought to create the taste by which he was measured,[63] indicating the level of control and scrutiny to which these apparently careless tales were subject.[64] Byron carefully constructs the Giaour's heroism by his fluctuating presence in the poem; he is only a hero in the imaginations of his audience, the poem's speakers and Byron's readers.

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[61] Milton, *Paradise Lost* VII: 31, 269.

[62] McGann, "Byron and 'The Truth in Masquerade,'" 205.

[63] William Wordsworth, "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1974), 80.

[64] Philip Martin tells us that "The negligence and carelessness of the tales is more or less widely acknowledged, and his derisive comments on the circumstances of their composition have been frequently quoted." Martin, 44.

CHAPTER FIVE:

"That is the usual method, but not mine": Childe Harold's Pilgrimage *and* Don Juan

At this juncture, the question of why Byron created the individual hero as such a prominent figure in his oeuvre must be considered. Byron's "uncommon want" foregrounds the two meanings of "want" with aplomb as he indicates the dearth of hero-figures whilst simultaneously coveting the same:

> I want a hero: an uncommon want,
>> When every year and month sends forth a new one,
> Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
>> The age discovers he is not the true one;
> Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
>> I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan,
> We all have seen him in the pantomime
> Sent to the devil, somewhat ere his time.

(*Don Juan* I. 1: 1-8)

Byron immediately confronts the hero's status as the central necessity of an epic poem, or in Byron's case, his poetry in general. His narrator registers his irritation with the state of the hero in contemporary literature, as the "gazettes" (3) offer gushing compliments until they discover that the feted character is not "the true one." Curiously, the narrator, while seeking to avoid the pitfalls of other authors, makes no claim for the veracity of Don Juan's heroism, instead appealing to Juan's well-known status in down-market productions such as pantomimes. The narrator minimises the scope of the hero from the outset, lending credence to McGann's view that "In *Don Juan*, Byron leaves behind everything in Milton that is divine, heroic, and ideal in order to align himself with everything else in Milton which is human, ordinary, and contextual."[1] However, McGann's statement would seem to deny that humanity can contain divine, heroic and ideal concepts, which *Don Juan* at no point contends. Rather, Byron draws attention to our mixed condition and creates a determinedly mixed hero who is presented to the

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[1] McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, xi.

reader by a narrator intent on holding the reader's attention with his verbal virtuosity. The narrator introduces his hero from a familiar and worldly perspective; the narrator is not secondary and passive, instead he is the active figure as he is the shaping power, and therefore the central character. He diminishes Juan's importance; the hero features as necessary material for his performance. Byron leaves the reader with the impression that the narrator could have chosen another hero; importantly, he establishes that the hero needs the narrator. The balance of power has shifted; the narrator's expressive power eclipses the hitherto central hero. After running through various other options, the narrator defends his choice and returns to his initial assertion: "So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan." (*Don Juan* I. 5: 40)

Yet the narrator requires a hero, whether Juan or another, for his epic. Byron's poetry revolves around the relationship between the individual and society, and the hero is the perfect vehicle for its exploration. Byron is resolutely humanist and the ebb and flow of his optimism reflects the varying level of faith that he places in the ability of the individual within society to shape his lot.[2] *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* seeks to ground itself in recognisable reality and climb towards a higher state instead of attempting to transcend the conditions of earthly existence. When Byron writes "There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV. 105: 945), the line does not reveal a continued nihilistic bent; rather, as Vincent Newey writes: "Patterns of quest and aspiration *are* present in *Childe Harold*: Byron wants (that is, lacks *and* desires) somewhere to steer, a locus of higher truth and a state of higher being. In Canto III he steers towards Nature, in Canto IV towards Art."[3] Yet Newey understates the constant counter-current in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* where Byron longs to cease, once and for all, longing for a higher state of being. The interplay between these two powerful drives propels the poem.

The attempt to seek truth and transcend the mutable conditions of the quotidian in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto III develops Byron's attempt to wrest the Wordsworthian

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[2] See Bostetter, 254.

[3] Vincent Newey, *Centring the Self: Subjectivity, Society and Reading from Thomas Gray to Thomas Hardy* (Aldershot: Scolar P, 1995), 181.

concept of Nature to his own perception of value. The provisional character of identity expressed by the dissolution and reintegration of Harold reflects the status of nature in relation to man, as the individual projects meaning onto his surroundings which remain subject to the shifting and eddying of impressions. Byron continually draws attention to the "made" condition of humanity's understanding of nature and reminds his reader of the human focus of his poetry by his use of language:

> Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;
>
> Where roll'd the ocean, thereon was his home;
>
> Where a blue sky, and glowing clime, extends,
>
> He had the passion and the power to roam;
>
> The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam,
>
> Were unto him companionship; they spake
>
> A mutual language, clearer than the tome
>
> Of his land's tongue, which he would oft forsake
>
> For Nature's pages glass'd by sunbeams on the lake.
>
> (*CHP* III. 13: 109-17)

This stanza shows Harold adapting nature to the particular needs that require fulfilment in the self. He perceives "friends" and a "home" (13: 109-10) in order to feed his desire for companionship, and on to an external and inhuman nature, Harold extrapolates "a mutual language" (13: 115) that he prefers to the conversation of society. While couching itself as a descriptive passage, the stanza draws attention to the synthetic mode of Harold's perception. The construction of the phrase "Where rose the mountains, there *to him* were friends" (13: 109) [emphasis added] indicates the self-made relationship between unfeeling nature and Harold's ability to anthropomorphise his surroundings. The following stanza continues in the same vein as Harold more obviously creates an alternate anthropocentric universe:

> Like the Chaldean, he could watch the stars,
>
> Till he had peopled them with beings bright
>
> As their own beams; and earth, and earth-born jars,
>
> (*CHP* III. 14: 118-20)

By insisting on the constructed nature of any relationship with nature refigured as a conscious presence, Byron moves away from Wordsworth's conception of nature which humanises and connects man and nature: "Byron steadfastly refuses (as Wordsworth does not) to internalize or humanize the attributes of divine authority, freedom, and creative might."[4] Newey's phrase, "steadfastly refuses" indicates Byron's constant opposition to joining two disparate elements into a stable, permanent and synthetic poetic union. His constant reminder of the man-made connection between self and nature or divinity undermines and interrogates Coleridgean and Wordsworthian poetics that claim to transcend humanity and discover an external message that can be read by the poet.[5] This is not to say that Byron chose to downgrade nature to mere scenery.[6] Byron instead refuses to countenance the almost sanitised and safe version of nature he perceived when man and nature are shown to be synonymous, or that man can meaningfully control nature. The image of a dialogue between man and nature, repeated as late as the final few stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* should not be taken to mean that the narrator has a privileged insight into nature, or that their conversation resembles a man speaking to men. By this late stage of the poem, nature is prized for its otherness, and its dissimilarity to mankind, and mankind for its ability to animate nature using the mind. What Byron demands is the reader's awareness of the synthetic nature of the creation, situated in an act of the will. The interview between man and nature revolves around what can be read into nature by the observer; longing, combined with an inability to be satiated create the self. The speaker can mingle, but never unite with Nature. Man and Nature are separate, though they can flow into one another.

> I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
>
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
>
> From all I may be, or have been before,
>
> To mingle with the Universe, and feel
>
> What I can ne'er express, yet can not all conceal.

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[4] Newey, 205.

[5] For examples of this, see "Tintern Abbey" or "Hymn Before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamounix."

[6] Timothy Morton's excellent essay on *Manfred* and eco-criticism provides a reading of Byron that indicates Byron's engagement with nature and demonstrates the often over-looked relationship that Byron has with nature. Timothy Morton, "Byron's *Manfred* and Ecocriticism," *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies,* ed. Jane Stabler (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 155-70.

(*CHP* IV. 178: 1598-1602)

Instinct and feeling, and the intense longing for community with Nature propels the narrator to escape the confines of "all I may be, or have been before." As in *The Giaour*, what the speaker "may be" is questionable; perspective and interpretation form a self that changes moment by moment. "To mingle with the Universe" (178: 1601) requires a degree of passivity on behalf of the speaker; feeling as opposed to assertion allows this communication between the self and Nature. This passivity shows Byron to withdraw from a purely will-driven concept of the hero. Instead, Byron shows a range of emotional inflections within his exploration of the hero; passivity and activity become twin poles between which he moves. Extremities, such as self-overcoming, strength and force gain their intensity only by the presence of their opposites lurking behind or within the text. The mingling of power and powerlessness defines the Byronic self, which shifts between different modes of being as the parameters of the self fluctuate and alter.

There can be no complete union; oneness between the individual and the other cannot be achieved, despite all attempts. The individual becomes hero by his mixture of singularity and universality, as Byron weaves into his presentation the recoil from and attraction to other people, forces, or places which almost, yet never fully, mirror the self. While William Hazlitt may have intended his comment that *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* shows Byron creating "everlasting centos of himself" as a jibe, this observation becomes fundamental to Byron's poetic process.[7] While Byron does not pour autobiography on to the page as Hazlitt suggests, exploration of the self is the theme of the poem. This centrality of the self propels the individual into the hero, as Byron seeks a locus through which to explore the complex pattern of alienation and community, aspiration and doubt, and self and other. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan* show Byron's deep engagement with questioning the roles of hero and narrator in his poetry The hero and the narrator stand in these poems as mutually dependent entities; one acts or suffers and the other communicates.

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[7] Hazlitt, *Lord Byron*, *Liber Amoris; The Spirit of the Age, The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 136.

The gulf between the narrator and the hero offers a further variation on Manfred's saddened theme: "The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life."[8] In *Childe Harold* the poetry opens up a gap between the figure of Harold and the more knowing narrator who underlines the forced, projected character of Harold's communion with Nature. Byron incessantly explores this gap as he shows the mind's ability to animate the mute and external in the same way that spirit animates matter:

> Could he have kept his spirit to that flight
>
> He had been happy; but this clay will sink
>
> Its spark immortal, envying it the light
>
> To which it mounts, as if to break the link
>
> That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.

(*CHP* III. 14: 122-26)

The opening condition proves to be unfulfillable; Harold cannot keep "his spirit to the flight," (14: 122) and the inevitable falling away finds expression through enjambed line-endings which capture a cycle of yearning and disappointment, and renewed yearning. The individual's ability to transcend the conditions of life can only be sustained for a limited period of time before the mortal part of man wrests control away from the spirit. This mixed condition, and the individual's alienation from fellow humanity despite his need for society, render the self's predicament difficult and ambiguous. In the same way, Byron's poetry is dependent on the reader's reception. Byron's awareness of the difficulty of separating self from hero, poetry from reader, and spirit from matter led him to manipulate and project a hero and a narrator whose ambiguous identities would captivate by their dual performance.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is the poem that launched Byron on to the literary scene and propelled him into the realm of celebrity. When Jerome Christensen discusses the "literary system of Byronism,"[9] it is in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* that Byron starts to examine the role of the hero and the possibilities and limitations of the creation:

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[8] *Manfred* 1.1: 12
[9] Christensen, xvi.

> Byron too, pilgrim of eternity, seeks out and relishes, far more than his Romantic contemporaries, the limits inherent in writing whilst using them to dramatize the clash between limitless energies and bounded existences.[10]

A key phrase here is "seeks out and relishes"; Byron makes poetic capital, as Beatty and Newey imply, out of his sense of divisions. Byron most strikingly demonstrates mankind's mixed condition by enacting a split between hero and narrator where one acts, and the other reports. But this method requires action to be the centre of the poem, and *Childe Harold* becomes an increasingly lyrical narrative. Lacking a quest, the "precariously open" narrative becomes internalised.[11] Byron casts on to the narrator the burden of making something happen in language, and the narrator becomes active by Harold's lack of expressive capacity. The challenge of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was to create an epic poem that could house the hero, his narrator, and the poet. The difficulty of this endeavour becomes apparent by the evolution of the poem from a travelogue to an intensely lyrical poem preoccupied by the growth of the poet's mind. The spontaneity of the poem resides in the seeming freedom of the poet to record all elements of his journey, both psychological and geographical: "The trust lies not so much in the knowable self as in what happens on the page when he picks up the pen."[12] Byron's difficult relationship with both parties stems from his vacillation between over-identification and faltering identification with each. Harold, propelled purposelessly through foreign lands, becomes second to the lyric self that bursts to the fore, and "Harold is pushed to the margin."[13] The poem seems to lack stability, with Harold apparently lending the poem a centre through the first three cantos,[14] only to be dismissed by the poet as a needless invention due to public disregard for the character's separation from the poet. Byron seems, at this stage of his career, incapable of separating poet, narrator and character sufficiently. This blurring of the boundaries led the audience to transpose the life of the poet onto the presentation of the hero. It is disingenuous to argue that Byron wanted his work to stand outside of his

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[10] "Preface," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, viii.

[11] Rawes, 7.

[12] Nellist, 42.

[13] Rawes, 13.

[14] Comparing the poem with Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Geoffrey Ward writes: "Of course, *Childe Harold* does not at all feel like Eliot's poem: but both are concentrated, centreless epics whose lack of a stable centre for experience is their true subject," "Byron's Artistry in Deep and Layered Space," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, 210-11.

biography; from his earliest publications, Byron utilises his biography as a means of creating poetry and drawing the frame of reference back to the self. Byron's irritation at this juncture is his lack of control over the three entities of narrator, hero, and self; their blurring is largely due to a lack of understanding as to how best to manipulate the possibilities of the self in poetry, and the boundaries between the hero and his narrator. By 1816, when Byron publishes "When We Two Parted," he could expertly misdirect, manipulate, and speak to his audience.[15] *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is Byron's apprenticeship, and performing the self was a technique learned in the poem via the ambiguous relationship between the three parties in the poem. Where Shelley's early work, *Alastor*, manages to define the difference between its hero and narrator with different philosophical worldviews, Byron has not quite managed the necessary demarcation, nor does he glory in the ambiguity or the possibilities inherent in their similitude. The identification of the hero with the historical poet is so complete that when canto III's opening with its autobiographical revelation shifts to a sketch of Harold, the movement does not feel sufficiently like a movement. Byron seems to be donning a costume rather than seeking to create another character:

> He, who grown aged in this world of woe,
>
> In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life,
>
> So that no wonder waits him; nor below
>
> Can love, or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,
>
> Cut to his heart again with the keen knife
>
> Of silent, sharp endurance:

<div align="right">(CHP III. 5: 37-42)</div>

Byron's uneasy amalgamation of self and hero veers on the edge of mawkishness as he seems to narcissistically mythologize the self with only the slightest of veneers to act as an ill-fitting mask. Yet Byron's self-awareness in these early stanzas of canto three prevents any such slide into self-interested confession. He experiments with the ability of

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[15] See McGann on Byron's masterful use of this poem: "Byron and 'The Truth in Masquerade'," 191-209.

the self to act as a connective device in lieu of the hero, and he projects himself into the poem to mingle with the hero in fertile and enriching ways.[16]

Byron's practice in *Don Juan* and *Beppo* has clear links with as well as evident differences from his preoccupations in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The critical story of his career being a movement from tragic beginnings to mature comedy does not encompass Byron's pervasive interest in the nature of the poet, his narrator, and the hero. In *Don Juan* Byron becomes fully alive to the possibilities of the split and similarity between the three parties of the poem. As Jerome Christensen argues, the performance of Harold and his narrator compared to Juan and his narrator differs mainly by the approach that Byron takes to their status:

> He [Harold] provides the artifice of order, awkwardly gives (to borrow the phrase applied to Harold in the preface) "some connection to the piece"— the task that the narrator and hero of *Don Juan* will perform with wanton facility.[17]

"Wanton facility" encapsulates the narrator's joyful freedom and vigour in the poem. Not only is Byron now aware of the multitude of possibilities on offer to him via the narrator and hero's relationship to each other and the poet, but he exploits them with exuberance. The audience's equation of Harold with Byron, which was a cause of anger and frustration for Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (as he sought to separate distinctly from Harold, or identify fully with his hero), becomes a blessing for the possibilities it offers the poet in the later work.

Andrew Rutherford has contended that Harold and Byron are two distinct entities,[18] and Jerome McGann has carefully charted the movement between poet, narrator and hero in the poem to demonstrate the scope of Byron's achievement.[19] However, Philip Martin's analysis of the persona problems of the poem indicates Byron's early difficulty with characterisation:

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[16] M. K. Joseph argues that Byron's talent for self-projection becomes apparent in *Beppo*, but this interest begins earlier in Byron's poetry. Joseph, 136.

[17] Christensen, 67.

[18] Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study*, 28.

[19] McGann, *Fiery Dust,* 69.

> The difficulty for the reader of *Childe Harold* is that, with the exception of the opening stanzas, this caricature is so imperfectly and inconsistently sketched that neither the distinctions from Byron nor the similarities to him are made sufficiently clear…Finally we are left with the impression that the Childe has been used as a device by which Byron can watch himself perform."[20]

The final sentence here is unduly harsh, suggesting that Byron's inexpert manipulation is only egocentric in its failure. Egocentrism becomes a fallback for a young poet attempting an epic achievement with slight knowledge of where the pilgrimage will take both hero and poet, and a still slighter understanding of the essential differences between the two. The growth of the poet is vitally important to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and the reader can chart the development more successfully than in any other Romantic poem.[21] Jerome McGann carefully demonstrates the importance of the poem, as he writes: "In a sense it [*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*] is Byron's most important work: no other poem contains more information about himself and his ideas, not even *Don Juan*."[22] Harold is, as McGann argues "…an objective correlative of the poet's own deep uncertainty of mind,"[23] and this observation allows the critic a vantage point from which to view Byron's mature poetic undertaking, *Don Juan*, even as the appeal to Eliot's idea of an "objective correlative" grants *Childe Harold* its brilliant, unstable success.

From this vantage point, the achievements of *Don Juan* become most dazzling. Byron's confidence in his ability to manipulate the relationship between poet, narrator, hero, and audience allowed him to turn outwards, and pit his poetic principles against those of his contemporaries. Despite many critical claims that Byron had no plan during the construction of *Don Juan*,[24] Byron's "Dedication" to the poem, unpublished in his

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[20] Martin, 21.

[21] Byron's lax editorial policy in contrast to Wordsworth, who remodelled his *Prelude,* allows the reader much scope to observe Byron's changing poetics.

[22] McGann, *Fiery Dust,* viii.

[23] McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 76.

[24] To avoid citing numerous examples, I have included what is to my mind the most influential and intelligent argument for this case: "*Don Juan*, in other words, is almost a contradiction in terms: an epic on no plan. Its peculiar epical qualities, in fact, have continually entangled the minds of good and even sympathetic critics. No one yet, for example, seems to know exactly what sort of epic it is. Its names are legion: modern epic, epic satire, negative epic, mock epic, romance epic, epic novel, novel in verse, realistic epic – and many others." McGann*, Don Juan in Context*, 3.

lifetime, and his "Preface," make clear that he intended the poem to stand in opposition to the Lakers' influence in poetry. In the "Preface," Byron harangues what he perceives to be the dreariness and obscurity of Wordsworth and his fellow Lakers, sparing no sensibilities in his assault on their poetic merits:

> Let me be excused from being particular in the detail of Such things as this is the Sort of writing which has superseded and degraded Pope in the eyes of the discerning British Public; and this Man… has found some hundreds of persons to misbelieve in his insanities, and hold him out as a kind of poetical Emanuel Swedenborg — or Richard Brothers — or parson Tozer — half Enthusiast and half Imposter.[25]

Byron's offensive against his contemporaries becomes a part of a long running poetic showdown as Byron lambasts the Lakers for what he finds presumptuous obscurity mixed with supposed moral righteousness that he reads as cant.[26] When Jerome Christensen argues that *Don Juan* represents no set of poetical beliefs, he underestimates Byron's position, which is built on opposition to what he perceives as a pernicious influence on the reading public.[27] He levels his attack against the writers and the audience that could reward such "trash;" the uneasy recognition that Byron himself has appealed to the same audience lurks beneath the surface. His unspoken fear lies in a suspicion that he has perhaps more in common than he would care to admit with the poets that he denigrates. The references to Southey are particularly loaded with spite and disdain; there is a conscious recoil from the British audience that propelled Byron to poetic fame:

> …or it may be supposed the work of a rival poet, obscured, if not by the present ready popularity of Mr Southey — yet by the Postobits he has granted upon Posterity & usorious self-applause in which he has anticipated with some profusion perhaps the opinion of future ages who are always more enlightened

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[25] Lord Byron, "Preface to Cantos I and II," *Byron's "Don Juan": A Variorum Edition*, eds. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, Vol. 2 (Austin, TX; Edinburgh, Scotland: U of Texas P; Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957), 3-4.

[26] The word "showdown" is chosen due to the animosity between Byron and Southey particularly. See Tim Fulford, "Poetic Hells and Pacific Edens," *Romanticism on the Net* 32-3 (November 2003) Oct. 2 2008. <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/009259ar>.

[27] "Byron's position is to have no position: he turns in order to keep turning." Christensen, 218.

that Contemporaries — more especially in the eyes of those whose figure in their own times has been disproportioned to their deserts.[28]

Byron had begun to consciously write for posterity with his later tragedies *Marino Faliero* and *Sardanapalus*;[29] he feared the audience that rewarded "Southey's unsaleables" with the enthusiasm that his own poetic productions had garnered.[30] Byron attempts to define definitively his opposition to these Lakist trends as he seeks to position himself as part of a poetic tradition exemplified by his hero Pope.

Byron in the "Preface" and the "Dedication" performs his difference from his contemporaries, and the demarcation between hero, narrator and poet is analogous. The character of the narrator becomes of crucial importance to the poem, and Steven Bruhm's analysis indicates the clarity with which Byron sketches the narrator:

> While readers of *Manfred*, *Cain*, or *The Corsair* will have no trouble aligning Byron's heroes with Sedgwick's definition of the Gothic, they will also see the speaker of *Don Juan* as something closer to the domesticated Victorian bachelor, with his petty cattiness, his hypochondriasis, his wry detachment. Wry detachment but also *sexual* detachment.[31]

Byron clearly distinguishes the narrator's personality from Juan, even to the exclusion of the hero. Martin claims that the narrator's starring role owes to the redundancy of the hero, but this diminishes the artistic intent behind this emphasis. The prominence of the narrator's personality over and above the character of the hero is the logical conclusion of Byron's hard-won appreciation of the importance and influence of the writer and recorder of history. The apparent passivity of Juan is a natural result of the narrator's controlling ability.

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[28] Byron, "Preface to Cantos I and II," *Byron's "Don Juan": A Variorum Edition*, 2: 6

[29] In a letter to Douglas Kinnaird on 13 September 1821, Byron indicates his anxiety about the performance of the tragedies, but also tellingly notes that much of his opposition stems from the contemporary state of the Theatre: "…but surely the past experience shows that in the *present state* of the English Stage – no production of mine can be adapted to an audience."[my italics] *BLJ 8*: 209. Byron seems to look to posterity for a just evaluation of his work. The insistence that Murray should publish, and Byron abate his losses if necessary also indicates Byron's masked hopes for future audiences to appreciate his new "high" style (see the postscript on a letter to John Murray, February 12 1821, *BLJ 8*: 77).

[30] *BLJ* 3: 101.

[31] Steven Bruhm, "Byron and the Choreography of Queer Desire," *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies,* 20.

> Byron's claim that he has grown 'weary of drawing a line which every one
> seemed determined not to perceive' has of course made no real difference to the
> poem. But it marks his awareness of the redundancy of a surrogate hero such as
> that formerly proposed, and his sense, possibly, of the advantage of the poem's
> narrator, rather than the hero, laying claim to the weight of experience that allows
> him to promulgate his own feelings and opinions. This, after all, is the case of
> *Don Juan*.[32]

The hero is not redundant; the poem spends seven stanzas of the first canto discussing who ought to be the hero, which indicates two vital components of the importance of the hero; first, that the poem needs something to discuss, and second, that the fact that there is a hero is of far higher importance than the actual identity of the hero. Juan's character is almost an irrelevance to the narrator, but even he is certain that he requires *somebody* to discuss. The need for a subject is fundamental to Byron's poetic practice: "Looking backwards at the *Lyrical Ballads* and *English Ecologues*, it is quite likely that Byron would have defined a Lakist poem as a poem about a non-event."[33] While I would hesitate to claim so little for Byron's critical acuity as Martin does here, Byron would have recognised the strong internal bias to the poetry of the Lakists and seek to reverse it in his epic: The fascinating element that Byron introduces into the epic is the power that the narrator seeks to assert over the hero; he attempts to dominate the text and the audience despite his lowlier role as the teller of the tale as opposed to the hero of the story.

In order to wrest dominance from the hero and the heroic tradition, the narrator immediately takes control of the text. The surety of the handling, coupled with an insouciance of delivery denotes an educated and urbane gentleman, accustomed to dominating situations:

> Most epic poets plunge in 'medias res',
>   (Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road)
> And then your hero tells, whene'er you please,

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[32] Martin, 100.
[33] Martin, 86.

> What went before — by way of episode,
>
> While seated after dinner at his ease,
>
>   Beside his mistress in some soft abode,
>
> Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,
>
> Which serves the happy couple for a tavern.
>
>
> That is the usual method, but not mine —
>
>   My way is to begin with the beginning;
>
> The regularity of my design
>
>   Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,
>
> And therefore I shall open with a line
>
>   (Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
>
> Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father,
>
> And also of his mother, if you'd rather.

<div align="right">(DJ I. 6&7: 41-56)</div>

Both stanzas are quoted in their entirety to indicate Byron's full use of the form as he weaves his way into tradition by a heightened awareness of the standards that his narrator will choose to desert. The first two lines of stanza six begin with a confident statement of the approved method for the epic and the detachment shown by the narrator to this tradition displays the education of his narrator, and his active decision taken to ignore standard practice. Lines three and four begin to indicate why the narrator would choose to depart from standard methodology: "And then your hero tells, whene'er you please, / What went before — by way of episode" (I. 6: 43-44). Normally, the narrator asserts (I. 7: 49), the epic poet's narrator allows the hero to speak for himself, and to deliver his tale to the assembled audience. For the narrator of *Don Juan*, this demotion would be unacceptable. He intends to take a starring role in his performance; Juan must remain material rather than the centre of the piece. Stanza seven's assertion follows on directly from the narrator's outline of typical epic procedure. It announces its chosen difference with a flourish, implying equality with the great epic writers as he announces his own method with no apology, but aplomb. The humour enters with the third and fourth lines of the stanza as the reader is reassured that: "The regularity of my design / Forbids all

wandering as the worst of sinning" (I. 7: 51-52). This manoeuvre guarantees amusement, for as the poem proceeds, digression becomes one of the central features of the epic. The final four lines of stanza seven draw attention to the narrator's ability with wordplay, which manages to downplay the introduction of Juan's family life by its show-stealing intent. The narrator asks the audience to admire his virtuosity as he informs his reader that the line took "half an hour in spinning." (I. 7: 54). The narrator constantly reminds the reader of the synthetic quality of the poem which is dependent on the ability of the poet/narrator. The narrator has transformed himself from recorder of the facts of a heroic life into a poet-god, with the faculty to perceive and present his hero just as he chooses. In Byron's elegant corruption of Voltaire, no character can be a hero to his narrator.

This new hierarchy has serious implications for Byron's epic poem. The narrator refuses to award Juan primacy in the poem, which forces Juan into the unusual role of the other in what should be his poem. The othering eye of the narrator deliberately renders Juan a spectacle, assigning value and motives to Juan's actions that suit his storyline. The diminution of Juan should be seen as the narrator performing the role of editor none too subtly in the poem in order to display his importance and learning in contrast to Juan, formed as the passive neophyte in order to contrast to our urbane narrator. While the narrator displays his personality via his articulate delivery of the tale, he writes in fetters while he follows Juan's progress, but Juan simultaneously provides the narrator with the occasion to assert himself. The narrator is split between the chaos of Juan's action and poetic control, just as Byron has split heroism in *Don Juan* between the hero and the narrator. He renders Juan's action passive by his lack of a voice, and transforms the text into an active principle by his ability to emphasise or ignore what he chooses. Steven Bruhm considers this movement an "oddity" of the poem:

> Thus, my second oddity: the narrative splitting that will mark the Byronic narrator throughout *Don Juan* , the narrative splitting between erotic indulgence and narrative proficiency is both crucial to appreciating Byron's poetic pleasures in the poem and impossible to imagine or sustain.[34]

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[34] Bruhm, 17.

The movement between "indulgence" (the indulgences vary in type; they are not uniformly erotic) and "narrative proficiency" seem essential to the poem. The device allows Byron to demonstrate with the most clarity the difficulty of assigning the terms activity and passivity to the hero or the narrator with any certainty. The narrator must work with the constraints of the tale and push the boundaries into digression and self-assertion while continuing to narrate the story. The power to control the emphases and omissions of the story render him an active participant in the tale. On the other hand, the hero may have the adventures and be the ostensible reason for the narrative, but the silencing of his voice as he cedes control of his tale to its teller forces him into a passive role.

The narrator becomes the Machiavellian "impresario" (*DJ* IV. 80: 640) that stage-manages Juan's presentation to his audience, forming his own and Juan's identity as he crafts his poem.[35] Becoming the impresario allows the narrator to run the poetic carnival of *Don Juan*; his assumption of the role becomes a vital part of his battery of techniques that ensures his prominence in the text. Organising and performing his pivotal role as manager of the entertainment offers him a proprietal glamour, and guarantees that he cannot be forced out of the text, which has become his by his crafty assumption of ownership. His gleeful juggling act of the narrative and his personal digressions with the epic prevent him becoming quite "the 'Improvvisatore'" (*DJ* XV. 20:160). Byron ostentatiously departs from the epic form with his characteristic *sprezzatura*, with "Hail, Muse! *et cetera*. –" (*DJ* III. 1: 1), yet he continues to insist on its written, poetic form — as he writes to John Murray, "I have read over the poem carefully – and I tell you *it is poetry*."[36] Angela Esterhammer draws a useful distinction between the performance of the improviser and the cognitive nature of poetic form:

> There is, therefore, a crucial distinction to be made between *inspiration* as a
> private, cognitive aspect of the act of composition, one that traditionally has

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[35] As Angela Esterhammer writes, the improvisatore often makes use of this possibility in his performance: "The improvising performer seems to create not only new verses, but a *new identity*, on each occasion and for every audience, in a manner that may strike speculators as impetuous, opportunistic, or too overtly performative." Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 7.

[36] *BLJ* 8: 192.

religious or spiritual connotations, and *improvisation* as a performative, public, normally secular phenomenon.[37]

Byron typically has his narrator insist on an either/or formulation; without doubt the narrator offers the reader a performance which often tips into spectacle, yet he also emphasises the crafted nature of the verse. From the beginning, Byron's narrator demands the reader's applause for his rhythmic contortions: "And therefore I shall open with a line / (Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)" (*DJ* I. 7: 53-54). While it is performance, it is not unpremeditated; Byron's narrator adopts both the role of the improviser and the poet; with this dual status, he can gain access to all possible areas of the poet-reader, improviser-audience relationship which he wishes to explore. The reader moves between an understanding of the text as a chaotic and random series of events as we participate in the narrator's colourful rendering of Juan's travels, and the text as a poem, seriously engaged in poetry and poetics. By yoking together these strands, Byron presents the reader with a careful simulation of carelessness, as he invokes the chaos of the text by his honed narratorial control.

This adoption of the dual role mirrors Byron's simultaneous presence and absence from the poem. Byron insistently writes himself into the text; this allows him the freedom to let the sheer force of his personality run rampant through the text, inciting critics and readers to respond to a real or imagined insight into the poet's mind. As the narrator begins to sketch the characters of the scene and reveal his personal views, education and impressions, it begins to feel as though Byron is falling back on to the safety of biography as he did in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Philip Martin even ignores the narrator's discrete character, and conflates him with Byron:

> The pieces of Greek and Latin and the allusions to classical writers are not to be seen as Byron's anxious declaration of his credentials. They are facetiously handled, reminders to the reader that this is a poem by Lord Byron of Newstead, Harrow, and Cambridge, whose education and rank allow him to treat writers of antiquity with exclusive familiarity.[38]

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[37] Esterhammer, 4.
[38] Martin, 186.

Martin's irritation at Byron's "facetiously handled" allusions seems to fall precisely into the trap that Byron deliberately sets for his reader, who firstly may fail to separate narrator and poet, and secondly, fail to notice Byron's interest in provoking his more earnest readers. Byron chooses to introduce into the work certain biographical details that would immediately call to mind the circumstances of his marriage and upbringing to an enlightened circle. The portrait of Donna Inez seems to incorporate details of his estranged wife's characteristics, such as her fondness for mathematics, ("Her thoughts were theorems, her words a problem, / As if she deem'd that mystery would ennoble 'em" *DJ* I. 13: 103-04) in order to toy deliberately with his readers who would recognise the parallels. Martin's po-faced reading of these lines, as he seeks and finds his Lordship to be a spoiled aristocrat, refuses to consider Byron's artistry as he moves between identification with, and estrangement from, his narrator's voice.

Byron both bemoaned and gloried in his conflation with his creations,[39] and enjoyed adding to the blurred boundaries. As Peter J. Manning indicates, Byron's technique was not accepted unequivocally: "Byron's dissolution of the boundaries between artistic merit and force of personality which the nascent profession of literary criticism was determined to uphold did not go unchallenged."[40] He picks out an example from *Don Juan* where Byron seems to materialise over the text to throw his personal life and opinions unmasked onto the canvas:

> Suspicious people, who find fault in haste,
>
>   May choose to tax me with; which is not fair,
>
> Nor flattering to 'their temper or their taste,'
>
>   As my friend Jeffrey writes with such an air:
>
> However, I forgive him, and I trust
>
> He will forgive himself; — if not, I must.
>
>   (*DJ* X. 11: 82-87)

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[39] Trelawny record Byron as saying: "Now, confess, you expected to find me a 'Timon of Athens,' or a 'Timur the Tartar': or did you think I was a mere sing-song driveler of poesy, full of what I heard Braham at a rehearsal call '*Entusamusy*,' and are you not mystified at finding me what I am – a man of the world – never in earnest – laughing at all things mundane?" Trelawny, 39.

[40] Manning, "*Don Juan* and the Revisionary Self," 211.

Manning reads this as Byron's denial of critical authority,[41] but here Byron insinuates that the quarterlies are parasitical operations rather than sites of infallible judgement. His tone, by turns petulant and patronising, punctures Jeffrey's self-appointed role as arbiter of taste with its amused and amusing aside "As my friend Jeffrey *writes with such an air*" [emphasis added] (X. 11: 85) which reproves Jeffrey's high-minded judgement of Byron's work. Byron refuses the right of Jeffrey and his kind to have any control over his text; the narrator may try to wrest control over the narrative from the hero by his digressive facility, but Byron will not tolerate external authority. Refusing to halt his *Don Juan* on the advice of Murray and his coterie,[42] Byron shows steely resolve even as he teasingly rebukes Jeffrey. There are many other examples through the poem where Byron deliberately undermines or provokes people in positions of authority, notably the reviewer from the *British Review*:

> For fear some prudish readers should grow skittish,
>
> I've bribed my grandmother's review — the British.
>
>
> I sent it in a letter to the editor,
>
> Who thank'd me duly by return of post —
>
> I'm for a handsome article his creditor;
>
> Yet if my gentle Muse he please to roast,
>
> And break a promise after having made it her,
>
> Denying the receipt of what it cost,
>
> And smear his page with gall instead of honey,
>
> All I can say is — that he had the money.

<div align="right">(DJ I: 209-10: 1671-80)</div>

These provocative lines deliberately seek to goad or amuse readers according to their professed moral position; the reader must decide whether they are for or against Byron. His feigned fear of "prudish" readers growing "skittish" (I. 209: 1671) works to feminise

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[41] "The staged camaraderie disguises the institutional relationship of author and reviewer, denying the primacy the quarterlies claimed and holding a contest carried out in print within the fiction of a conversation among friends." Manning, "*Don Juan* and the Revisionary Self," 221.

[42] For an example of Byron's response, see particularly his letter to Murray regarding the group's opposition to *Don Juan*: "You are right – Gifford is right – Crabbe is right – Hobhouse is right – you are all right – and I am wrong – but do pray let me have that pleasure." (206-7) *BLJ* 6: 206-10

any moral censure of the poem (reinforced by his use of feminine rhyme) and compounds any moral outrage such readers may have already felt by claiming that he had bribed *The British*. W. S. Ward misses the point somewhat when he notes that Byron hardly had reason to harangue this review, having garnered many excellent notices from their writers, if with a moralising slant.[43] Byron deliberately chooses a review with an avowedly moral streak to indicate that, despite what the moral reader may believe, or the pretensions of the world of letters, such practices are rife within Grub Street. The muse may be "gentle", but there can be no doubting the business-like attitude of the worldly poet who emphasises "what it cost" and whose final affirmation is "All I can say is – that he had the money" (I. 210: 1680). That the claim is false only adds to the fabric of ambiguity and doubt that Byron has woven into the poem. Poetic accolades may or may not be bought rather than earned by the poet from a willing reviewer.

While Christensen focuses on Byron's ability to force the reviewers into defensive positions by his libellous claims, the seduction he focuses on should be considered on a far larger scale than the material facts of the contract between author and book buyer.[44] Byron's reputation, which had come to precede him even by the time of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III & IV*, had now become something that Byron could use to his poetic advantage. The preconceptions that his audience would bring to the text would allow him to tease, provoke, and intrigue his reader. His understanding of his various groups of readers would now permit him to layer *Don Juan* with jokes, information, and insights available to specific classes of readers.[45] His epic revels in its ability to direct and misdirect its reader, deliberately subverting information and stereotypes to puncture any societal shibboleths that he wished to deconstruct, forward his personal opinions, and destabilise received information as towards his reputation. The relationship between hero, narrator, and poet remains blurred, but in *Don Juan*, this haziness works to Byron's poetic advantage.

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[43] W. S. Ward, "Lord Byron and "My Grandmother's Review"," *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1949): 25-26. *JSTOR*. 22 Feb. 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[44] "The defense implies alternative assumptions about the transaction: either by buying a book I have made a contract to be seduced or I have been seduced into contracting to buy a book." Christensen, 228.

[45] "Byron might proclaim a lordly indifference, but he remained uncommonly attuned to the expectations of his readers." Manning, "*Don Juan* and the Revisionary Self," 211.

The Giaour, *Cain*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan* attest to Byron's endlessly complicated and complicating expression of heroism. He tests the boundaries, and his sinuous poetry embraces the flux between what Louis MacNeice describes as a contest between "an element of wish-fulfilment and a certain recognition of hard facts."[46] Fact and report, action and interpretation, self and other; each contrary must struggle for precedence as Byron moves between the pistol and the pen for his definition of heroism.[47] Hero and narrator begin to lose their traditional meanings, as the hero's heroism comes to depend on it being interpreted as heroism, and the narrator's interpretive dependence on the hero reveals itself to be open to bias, delusion and transience. Their relationship is symbiotic, and Byron infuses each principle with the self. Byron's early work betrays unease with the difficult boundary lines between hero and narrator, but as his work matures, he begins to glory in the blurring of identities and the clash of contraries. Perspective, struggle, and self-mastery come to be the governing principles for Byron's construction of heroism.

Byron uses every available weapon in his artillery to garner interest and interaction with the poetry on the page. There is no final separation between the poetical self and the "real" self. [48] Byron masters the poetry and makes it speak with his voice, yet he accepts and encourages the participation of his reader, allowing for the multiple interpretive strands available to poetry.[49] Byron writes interactive poetry, always alert to his reader, his image, and society itself. He controls his poetry by constantly "reading" his reader, yet he remains alive to the endless interpretive chaos of readership, where the reader finally can misunderstand, ignore, or defy authorial control. His vigorous reaction to the incidental, the various, and the random require him to embrace chaos even as he fights to

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[46] Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1938), 7.

[47] Trelawny, 34.

[48] "Byron's dark comprehension emerges because his "personal life" is equally his "poetical life" – because a final distinction cannot be drawn between the man who suffers and the poet who sees." Jerome J. McGann, "Byron and the Anonymous Lyric," *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, 259.

[49] The interactive quality of *Don Juan* is highlighted by Peter J. Manning, "*Don Juan* asks less for comprehensive interpretation than for participation." "*Don Juan* and Byron's Imperceptiveness to the English Word," *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, 234.

control his poetry. Hero, narrator, and poet, bound together by the creative act, perform a precarious balancing act before the reader, blurring into and distancing themselves from the self. Heroism, split between hero and narrator, projections and independent creations of self, develops through Byron's challenge to fact by interpretation. Byron problematises the hero; his will-driven poetry refuses to settle for a single interpretation.[50] The dark contraries of Byronism haunt his concept of the hero, complicating heroism by exposing it to doubt and chaos despite the assertion of the will.

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[50] Michael Cooke argues that Byron's contribution to poetry is his emphasis on the will: "Byron goes beyond Coleridge and Wordsworth in recognizing the will, the individual's conscious deeds, as thwarting the potential reconciliation between man and nature, man and his existence in altering time. This recognition constitutes a special contribution to the philosophy of the romantic lyric, or indeed to romantic philosophy." Cooke, 21.

Shelley: A Power Girt Round with Weakness

> **A neutral tone is nowadays preferred.**
> **And yet it may be better, if we must,**
> **To praise a stance impressive and absurd**
> **Than not to see the hero for the dust.[1]**

CHAPTER SIX

"This soul out of my soul": The Trial of the Hero in Shelley's <u>Epipsychidion</u>

Epipsychidion makes a hero out of its protagonist. Shelley lays bare the stresses and strains involved in the topic of heroism for a Romantic poet; it is the protagonist's deliberate straining to create and order the self and his universe that makes him heroic. The Shelleyan hero negotiates a self-aware passage between versions of chaos that are both recalcitrant and productive even as he displays the urge to control and order the verbal universe. The hero must steer between the Scylla and Charybdis of overweening chaos or control. Shelley enacts the hero's attempt to will himself into being while retaining a melancholy alertness to the poem's continual state of becoming. Transience haunts the poem, as Shelley creates a hero alive to the impossibility of static permanence and completion while he continues to strive for complete expression.

Shelleyan heroism defines itself by fluidity; its continual shaping and refining of the self and its surroundings allows the poem to accumulate, not cancel meaning with every assertion.[2] Thus, the "annihilation" glimpsed at the close (587) both draws on and advances more extremely beyond previous uses of "kill" (557, for example).[3] Those uses have implied a redefining destruction of normal modes of apprehension; "annihilation" holds unstably and desperately to this reworked and optimistic meaning, but it stares in the face the collapse of the poet's hopes. The hero must incorporate into his heroism — that is, a performative commitment to his own unfolding poetic enterprise — every element that he draws into the poem. No assertion cancels previous assertions; the hero

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[1] Donald Davie, "Remembering the Thirties," *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet P, 1990), 35.
[2] "No image here cancels another, but again no image here supports another." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 210.
[3] *Leader and O'Neill*, 512-28.

both constitutes and is constituted by his text. The hero and his world are constantly interrogated and reshaped without casting aside their previous manifestations. The hero's determination, combined with his ability to expose his weaknesses, earns and sustains his heroism as he shoulders the weight of his previous perceptions while continuing to develop further images to create the self and its universe. A proliferation of jostling images and impressions defines the self and its universe as the hero struggles to control the presentation of self and world. The universe is, for *Epipsychidion*, both created and creative. Shelley depicts Emily as a "Poor captive bird!" (5) as the circumstances of the created world, Emily's imprisonment, are described by the poet. Yet the poet's portrayal of Emily is not factual, but "vitally metaphorical" (*A Defence of Poetry*, 676). In this sense, Shelley renders the self and its universe both created and creative, offering both material circumstance and the poet's shaping imagination space to compete within the frame of the poem. It is within this space, where the pre-created material world must be manipulated by the poet's imaginative vision, that the taut and tensed Shelleyan brand of heroism is created.

The poet's attempt to order the chaos, and engage in this Dantescan pursuit of perfection by undergoing a purgatorial trial, becomes the defining feature of the Shelleyan hero in the created and creative universe.[4] From the beginning of the poem, a sense of struggle galvanises and sends shock waves through the poem, as the poet-hero swings between assertion, and continual questioning of that which he asserts:

> Sweet Lamp! my moth-like Muse has burnt its wings;
> Or, like a dying swan who soars and sings,
> Young Love should teach Time, in his own grey style,
> All that thou art. Art thou not void of guile,
> A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless?

(53-57)

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[4] Timothy Webb shows Shelley's immersion in Dante: "It was as a poet of love that Dante exerted perhaps his greatest influence over Shelley. *Epipsychidion* could hardly have been written without the example of Dante; the debt is close and unmistakeable, since Shelley's poem is based not only on the *Vita Nuova* but on the first Canzone of the *Convito*, which Shelley translated in full, and Dante's commentary which he excerpted in one of his notebooks." Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1976), 291.

Emily transforms from the "Poor captive bird" (5) into a "Sweet Lamp" (53) that burns his "moth-like muse" (53) as Emily becomes a beautiful, yet deadly type of captive. While sweet, she harbours a dangerous capacity for wounding the poet-hero, yet Shelley's "Or, like a dying swan who soars and sings," (54) does not develop Emily's potential deadliness. Instead, he focuses on the mortal danger the poet-hero must face in order to "teach Time, in his own grey style, / All that thou art." (55-56) The poet-hero must contend with the weight of Time, and teach Time in "his own grey style," (55) the poet-hero's original voice must sing in a traditional metre. This pressure bearing down on the poet-hero, as he is surrounded by difficulty and danger, renders even assertion ambiguous. His affirmations are shot through with doubt, as his rhetorical question comes to seem genuinely in need of a response: "Art thou not void of guile, / A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless?" (56-57) As the poet-hero has shown us by Emily's double nature as both victim and aggressor, Shelley's hero is in an ambiguous universe, where there can be no single meaning. Images, assertions, metaphors build up without cancelling one another; the poet-hero's imaginative experience must be ordered and refined into poetry to render the poet heroic. This focus brings into the fore the crux of Shelleyan heroism: Shelley's hero is heroic in an existential sense; he becomes a hero through the attempt to become a hero.

Therefore the chaos of the at once created and creative world requires an ordering system of the hero's making; Shelley does not imagine his hero in a vacuum. The four-way relationship between the poet, the hero, Emily, and the text is the dominant preoccupation of *Epipsychidion*. Before trying to establish the nature of the hero in the poem, Shelley first requires the reader to consider the identity of the poet. The Preface to *Epipsychidion* presents the reader with a patently false history of the poem. It posits the author as a dreamer, who sought to create "a scheme of life, suited perhaps to that happier and better world of which he is now an inhabitant, but hardly practicable in this" (512). Imploring the reader for pity instead of contempt, the Preface seeks to circumvent harsh criticism by asking for indulgence to be granted to a deceased and mistaken poet. In a contrapuntal gesture, the writer of the Preface also hopes that "a certain class of readers" (512) will understand the true beauty of the poem, and even appends an excerpt from Dante to

indicate the superior quality of the poem. The aristocratic condemnation of any hostile audience as "dull" is an addition that Shelley makes to Dante's text which individuates Shelley's appropriation of Dante's original lines:

> Whence, if by misadventure, chance should bring
>
> Thee to base company (as chance may do)
>
> Quite unaware of what thou dost contain,
>
> I prithee, comfort thy sweet self again,
>
> My last delight! tell them that they are dull,
>
> And bid them own that thou art beautiful.

Richard Brown writes that the supreme confidence of these lines lies not only in their being an adapted translation from Dante's *Convivio*,[5] but that Dante's canonical presence supplements Shelley's heroic effort.[6] Shelley's use of this adapted quotation foregrounds the text as an independent entity that exists beyond the poet.[7] But the interaction between Preface and poem disturbs any reading of the text as divorced from the poet. Shelley's insistent personalising of the poem demands that the reader should pay attention to the change that Shelley has made to the original text, and that the reader must consider his reasons for so doing. The poem situates itself on a level beyond the reader, and by disrupting and refiguring Dante's original lines, Shelley foregrounds the poet's ability to individuate his voice. The interplay of biographical information being disseminated, its misdirection, and outright disavowal renders *Epipsychidion* a multi-layered and complex poem.[8] Shelley makes reference to his former wife and children, his relationship with Mary, and his feelings for the idealised addressee of the poem clearly decipherable to

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[5] "In contrast to the condescension displayed in other parts of the Advertisement, these Dantean references assert an absolute confidence in the superiority of the idealist's enterprise." Richard E. Brown, "The Role of Dante in *Epipsychidion*," *Comparative Literature* 30 (1978): 226. *JSTOR*. 6 Jan. 2009 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[6] Webb shows the interaction of Shelley and Dante's poetry in *Epipsychidion*: "*Epipsychidion* is, in fact, an extraordinary example of the way in which translation can interlock with original composition. More than in any of Shelley's other poems it might be described as bilingual in conception." *The Violet in the Crucible*, 303-04.

[7] *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poems and Prose*, ed. Timothy Webb, critical selection, G. Donaldson (London: Dent, 1995): "Shelley's version of the Italian is fairly accurate except that he has added "tell them that they are dull," 421f.

[8] Sperry discusses the poem as a "curious mixture of revelation and disguise" in a highly insightful study on the poem in Stuart Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 1988), 176.

readers with knowledge of his biography.[9] This knowledge, combined with the Preface's attempt to detach Shelley from the poem, serves only to encourage readers to perform their own detective work. Knowing Shelley to be the real author and having the letters that explicitly link the fictitious Emily and the actual Teresa, leaves the reader with the impression that they have "decoded" the poem. *Epipsychidion* is often viewed as a poem primarily notable for its autobiographical interest.[10] It can be difficult for the reader to decide whether the poem provides an exploration of an ideal or a veiled autobiographical experience. Exploring the many factors that result in a poem's creation, Shelley transforms the poetic problem of creating a hero and his universe into an imaginatively liberating challenge.[11]

Epipsychidion foregrounds the artistry of a poet, who often presents his imaginative conceptions as outstripping their linguistic vehicle. Shelley underscores the poet's heroism in creating beauty despite the limitations of language; the hero propels the poetry forward in an act of bravery as the reader watches Shelley fit and shape words to his vision. Shelley forces language to represent experiences that seem almost impossible to recount, yet the lushness of language and its almost physical existence afford words their own tangible presence.[12] The poet-hero, it seems, is trapped between the palpably sensual beauty of his language, and the urge to make words fit his purpose. A swooning fluidity co-exists alongside the tensely will-driven and their interplay electrifies the poem; Shelley deftly weaves *Epipsychidion* from their energising tension. The poet-hero enlists the form of the poem to mirror his quest to enact heroism throughout the poem. Shelley

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[9]The relevant biography is made reference to by Kenneth Neill Cameron in "The Planet-Tempest Passage in *Epipsychidion*," *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, selected and ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York, NY: Norton, 1977), 651.

[10] Mark Sandy refers to *Epipsychidion* as "Shelley's autobiographical *Epipsychidion*" in the first line of his "Epipsychidion", *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 24 August 2004. The Literary Dictionary Company. 27 August 2008. <http://litencyc.com/php/sworks/php?rec=true&UID=5313> Also, Richard Holmes refers to the poem as "the most nakedly autobiographical poem [Shelley] ever wrote" in Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 635.

[11]I Nancy Moore Goslee's sensitive analysis of the "seductive and exhilarating" experience of interpreting the drafts of the poem can be extended to the experience of reading it, when she identifies the mixture of artistry and "intensely emotional lyric voice and complex biographical background" that constitutes *Epipsychidion*. "Dispersoning Emily: Drafting as Plot in *Epipsychidion*" *The Keats-Shelley Journal* 42 (1993): 108.

[12] Timothy Webb points out this "lush quality" of language that Shelley creates: *The Violet in the Crucible*, 302.

engages in an extraordinary and skilful manipulation of the couplet in *Epipsychidion* as the words of the poem seem to battle on, despite repeated injunctions to be silent. From the earliest section of the poem, the narrator is aware of the impossibility of the performance it seeks to give:

> High, spirit-wingèd Heart! who dost forever
> Beat thine unfeeling bars with vain endeavour,
> Till those bright plumes of thought, in which arrayed
> It oversoared this low and worldly shade,
> Lie shattered; and thy panting, wounded breast
> Stains with dear blood its unmaternal nest!
>
> (13-18)

The form enacts the description; Shelley makes the verses soar, as his words "Beat thine unfeeling bars with vain endeavour" (14). The heroic couplets, rhythmically complete every two lines, fear being silenced, and must propel themselves forward by extending, refining, and refiguring their initial conceptions. Trelawny's recollection of Shelley, "I always go on until I am stopped, and I never am stopped" reflects a very real and stubborn urge in *Epipsychidion*,[13] where the poet-hero battles to continue as he wills his "wingèd words" (588) to become actual ("The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me." 388).

Shelley's poet-hero condemns from the beginning the words in which he exists, painting a portrait of an impassioned and fatally impotent self soaring above the world. Emily's status becomes ambivalent; she is a representative of the actual, yet she comes to stand for an ideal only possible in the verbal universe:

> …I measure
> The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
> And find – alas! mine own infirmity.
>
> (69-71)

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[13] "I always go on until I am stopped, and I never am stopped." Trelawny, 75.

All attempts to describe Emily, or find her likeness are doomed; the poet-hero does not here celebrate the uniqueness of his lover.[14] Instead he focuses on the imaginative poverty that bars him from creating other such paragons. Yet, as the poet-hero does not enter the world to search for another Emily, seeking instead in the "world of fancies," (70) he gestures to the impossibility of Emily's actuality. Blighted from the beginning, the hero's quest figures itself immediately as impossible. Heroism will be figured not by success, but by struggle. The heroic couplets indicate the seriousness with which Shelley took his endeavor to create a poem of heroism. Shelley contends with past poets such as Dryden and Pope, and with his familiar rival Byron,[15] to produce a competing poetic universe. But Shelley unbuilds and rebuilds an achieved poetic model; his couplets build and sustain what is less a monument to than a "flight of fire" ("The Two Spirits — An Allegory," 3) shadowing an idealised love of his own conception. His lines reflect not a static and guaranteed form of heroism; they draw attention to the difficulty of heroism, the strain and struggle required of the poet-hero, and the interplay of action and passivity. Shelley draws for the effect of his poetic rhetoric on the example of *improvvisatori* such as Tommaso Sgricci who seem both to conjure words at will and surrender to a power of inspiration beyond themselves.[16] In an earlier fragment, "Frail clouds arrayed in sunlight lose the glory," Shelley had evoked what such a process of inspiration might feel like: "There is a Power whose passive instrument / Our nature is" (18-19), he writes, his Spenserian stanza mimicking a control that is active in the very process of depicting itself as a "passive instrument."[17]

Epipsychidion cannot be still; its peculiar artistic honesty demands a poetry of flux, shifting tones, and an acceptance of transience. In order to preserve both imaginative will alongside a poetry of yielding flux, Shelley carefully shapes without circumscribing his poems. The delicate mingling of the yielding imagination alongside the will creates the

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[14] As Paul A. Vatalaro argues, "Elusiveness of this kind breeds frustration, but in the process sustains desire, which, in turn, brings about pleasure." See *Shelley's Music: Fantasy, Authority, and the Object Voice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 87.

[15] "Byron and Shelley also fought a mental 'war' in order to inspire each other to create new poetic visions, "to build the universe stupendous" in their works." Brewer, 18.

[16] See Dawson, "Shelley and the *Improvvisatore* Sgricci: An Unpublished Review," 19-29.

[17] Quoted from *The Poems of Shelley: Volume Two: 1817-1819*, ed. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews (London: Longman, 2000), 7.

subtle and musical poetry of *Epipsychidion* as language becomes at once shimmeringly beautiful, yet inadequate to transcribe feeling and thought. If words cannot express the whole of Shelley's conceptions, he enacts a drive to persist in producing more descriptions, more images, to bring his poem as close to his thought as possible. As P. M. S. Dawson writes: "As a poet, Shelley knows that, while his words obscure his conceptions, they are also the only means he has of expressing them; as Jerome McGann has shown, he can only 'reveal' them by 'reveiling' them in words and images."[18] The perplexing yet enriching difficulty of creating a poetic form capable of containing vision, re-visions, and adjusting perspectives plays throughout Shelley's poetry. He harnesses words to vision, insisting on the poet's creative ability to move from thought to thought, vision to vision. The imagination creates an ever-expanding web of impressions; Shelley weaves each perspective into his personal poetic ordering system without detracting from any earlier manifestation of imaginative power. Shelley often seems to speed through various images and metaphors in an attempt to capture the elusive essence of his thought or experience:[19]

> This various world with as inconstant wing
>
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower. —
>
> Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
>
> > It visits with inconstant glance
> >
> > Each human heart and countenance;
>
> Like hues and harmonies of evening, —
>
> > Like clouds in starlight widely spread, —
> >
> > Like memory of music fled, —
> >
> > Like aught that for its grace may be
>
> Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.
>
> ("Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," Version A, 3-12)

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[18] P. M. S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980), 257. He quotes Jerome J. McGann, "Shelley's Veils: A Thousand Images of Loveliness," in *Romantic and Victorian: Studies in Memory of William H. Marshall*, ed. W. P. Elledge and R. L. Hoffman (Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1971) 198-218 (206 esp.)

[19] "It is typical of Shelley's language to give the effect of skating on a succession of similes." Angela Leighton, "Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*," *The New Shelley*, 230.

The stanza attempts to crystallise the experience of Intellectual Beauty, and a succession of similes that attest to the difficulty of capturing the moment in language dominate the imaginative description. The evanescent imagery, through its inability to convey any totalising and complete encapsulation of the experience, manages to attest to the ineffable nature of Intellectual Beauty. All the images are allied by their shadowy and "ghostly" status, and the fleeting quality of the imagery encapsulates as far as possible the liminal moment. The importance of poetry resides in its attempt to define experience, which can only be further deferred as successive images come to redefine or adjust each previous vision. Its failure or success is less important aesthetically than the bravery of the attempt to convey as closely as possible the poet's dream. In *A Defence of Poetry*, the poet has a clearly defined responsibility as one of the "unacknowledged legislators of the World." (701) Shelley's assertion that "A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds" (680) is regularly quoted, but immediately following this, Shelley highlights the symbiotic relationship to his readership: "his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why" (680). The poet must strive to "move" and "soften" and convey to the audience as closely as possible the beauty of the original conception. Such an attempt requires intellectual courage, as Shelley will not end-stop his imagination. His ordering mind battles with the proliferation of imaginative images to order, define, and shape the poetic universe, and Shelley refuses to allow the ordering mind a false victory. Shelley shows this rigorous formula as the poet-hero attempts to access an imaginative truth within his heart:

> …I know
>
> That Love makes all things equal: I have heard
>
> By mine own heart this joyous truth averred:
>
> (126-28)

While the poet-hero may "know" and "have heard," the experiential nature of truth in *Epipsychidion* demands that the poem must perform its truth before the reader in order to guarantee for it a special status. Here, the poet-hero tails off, as this "joyous truth" (128) must be earned by the poet before the reader, not affirmed without proof. As the poet-hero tells his story, he is always alive to the presence of the reader, and draws the reader's

attention to the "told" nature of the tale. Shelley's draft of the poem has "She met me, Reader, upon life's rough way" (72),[20] and the replacement of "Reader" for "Stranger" in the final version of the poem is suggestive of the poem as performance. The poet-hero must order, not tame the chaos before the reader, as the chaos of productive images overwhelms yet never stifles the poetry.

The poem begins immediately with Emily, regarding her as an imprisoned poet, "my adored Nightingale" (10) whom the poet-hero cannot free: "I weep vain tears" (19). The opening establishes the impossible nature of the liberation required to bring the lovers together; being separated from his lover requires the imagination to take centre stage, enacting alone an impotent and unattainable love affair. The one-sided nature of the poem haunts the poet-hero; having established the poetic creativity of his lover, the necessity of singing her into existence outside of her prison enacts a power over her. Yet despite her silence, the poet-hero prays that she retains the ability to amend his song: "I pray thee that thou blot from this sad song / All of its much mortality and wrong" (35-36). But despite his prayer, the poet-hero's utterance is the whole of the poem; his inability to adequately describe her torments the poet-hero:

> Ah, woe is me!
>
> What have I dared? where am I lifted? how
>
> Shall I descend, and perish not?
>
> (123-25)

Shelley's hero suggests from the outset that his union, description, and conceptualisation of Emily are creations of the imagination, not artificial but involving artifice. His insistence on the autobiographical fact of the poem, offered in the preface, renders the poem an intense and evanescently beautiful performance. The questions in the quotation above witness the hero's consternation as he over-leaps the bounds of the possible; according to the preface, and the style of the poem, *Epipsychidion* occupies the hinterland between autobiography and art.[21] The questions do not function as merely rhetorical.

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[20] *Leader and O'Neill*, n. to l. 72, 796

[21] While Roberts takes Shelley's fictive preface to *Epipsychidion* to represent "the kind of playful but 'noisy' slipperiness that characterizes Shelley's ironic use of the form," I see its fiction as creating and sustaining the dangerous and consuming action of *Epipsychidion*. Roberts, 191.

They suggest the difficulty of the enterprise attempted, and the dizzying abyss immediately beneath the poet-hero's woven words. Rarely has a poem seemed more like "This firmament pavilioned upon chaos," (*Hellas*, 772) to borrow Shelley's words from *Hellas*. The potential destructiveness of his poem preoccupies the poet-hero throughout the poem, as he seeks to describe, order, and further his passion, while attending to his avowed belief in yielding plurality. *Epipsychidion* contains some of Shelley's most passionate declarations on behalf of free love, which seem incongruous in a poem devoted to a vision of the One, or Emily. Rather than reflecting Shelley's disorganisation, or his iconoclastic and self-interested opposition to marriage,[22] the arguments against marriage disrupt his single-minded worship of Emily. The attack on marriage belongs to the poem's celebration of endless quest and the inevitable transience of passion, poetry, love, idealisation: *Epipsychidion*, by the poet-hero's worship of Emily, is committed to what it knows will fail. Such worship can be fatal, as in *Alastor*, where the poet-hero of this earlier work is destroyed by his passionate quest for the "veilèd maid." (*Alastor*, 151) *Epipsychidion* warns against the very kind of adoration that opens the poem, where Emily is literally everything to the poet-hero, "Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate / Whose course has been so starless!" (130-31):

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

The worship of Emily could diminish the hero into a narrowness that prevents growth, openness, and fluidity; his self-conscious awareness of the danger attendant on his adoration creates pinpricks of doubt that lends its own qualifying urgency to the overly

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[22] Readings, such as Teddi Chichester Bonca's, suggest that this poem is intensely egotistical and unable to transcend the self, and his celebration of free love at this stage of the poem could support this argument: "*Epipsychidion* was monstrous, Shelley realized, not because Teresa Viviani fell short of his ideal, but because its six hundred lines of gorgeous verse created a radiant Paradise that encompassed little more than the poet's own narrow world of Self... Perhaps *Epipsychidion*'s frankly autobiographical nature prevented Shelley from achieving the kind of self-transcendence that he celebrates and exemplifies in *Prometheus Unbound*." Teddi Chichester Bonca, *Shelley's Mirrors of Love: Narcissism, Sacrifice, and Sorority*, SUNY Series in Psychoanalysis and Culture (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1999), 122.

hyperbolic passages on Emily. The poet-hero acknowledges the temptation to mythologize, to ideally represent and manipulate the individual into "idealised representation" that bears little correspondence to the actual person.[23] Shelley's "language of desire" is a siren song that draws the poet into a verbal universe of his own creation, united with his poetic object but divorced from the actual subject of his longing.[24] The poet-hero's desire for the One throws Emily's individual meaning into question:

> In many mortal forms I rashly sought
> The shadow of that idol of my thought.
> And some were fair — but beauty dies away:
> Others were wise — but honeyed words betray:
> And One was true — oh! why not true to me?

> (267-71)

Lines 267-71 suggest that the poet-hero's error was to search for perfect correspondence in another mortal, and his fetishisation of "that idol of my thought" (268) led only to disappointment in the mutable terrain of the human world. These prior manifestations of subsequently disappointed perfection cast deliberate doubt on the poet's affirmation of Emily's fitness for complete adoration:

> …and in her beauty's glow
> I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night
> Was penetrating me with living light:
> I knew it was the Vision veiled from me
> So many years — that it was Emily.

> (340-44)

The poet-hero seems acted upon at this juncture, in a manner analogous to, if more vitalising than, the Moon's installation of him in a cave where "I then was nor alive nor dead: —" (300). Recognition of Emily as the perfect object of the heart's idolatry has been disrupted by insistent memories, principles, and experience. The poet-hero's hope to install Emily as the perfect One wavers and casts doubt upon itself; the rhyme of "me"

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[23] G. Kim Blank, "Introduction," *The New Shelley*, 9.
[24] Blank, "Introduction," 9.

and "Emily" suggests subtly the mind-created provenance of Emily's perfection. Shelley holds the chaos of doubt, mutability, and change in check, allowing these forces into the poem to complicate, question, and challenge the relentless forward thrust of *Epipsychidion*. The poet-hero's quest to create and sustain his adoration requires a sophisticated ordering system, as Shelley forces human chaos to combat ideal control; the poem builds itself from the interplay of its chaotic elements into authorial order.

Shelley drags to the forefront the stress and strain of poetic production in order to present the poet-hero as a multi-layered creation.[25] The hero's use of symbols to describe the history of his relationships with women mirrors Shelley's creative task. The poet-hero's stylised production of this significant female "other" is notably symbolic and "poetical." The hyperbolic descriptions of Emily's predecessors heighten a sense of hyper-reality, wherein fact and invention operate an uneasy co-existence:

> There, — One, whose voice was venomed melody
>
> Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers;
>
> The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,
>
> Her touch was as electric poison, — flame
>
> Out of her looks into my vitals came,
>
> And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
>
> A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
>
> Into the core of my green heart, and lay
>
> Upon its leaves; until, as hair grown grey
>
> O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
>
> With ruins of unseasonable time.
>
> (256-66)

These heightened metaphors add a sense of fantasy to the description of his early lover. Thus, the presentation of a poisonous woman compared to a flower features an ostentatious use of alliteration in the first two lines, with the "m" sounds of "venomed melody" (256) and the "b" of "blue nightshade bowers" becoming metapoetic as the poet-

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25 "The attraction and delight of the multistable image is that in both concealing and revealing something that is present all the time it conveys multiple messages simultaneously so that the artist or author who employs the device communicates at once on more than one level." Behrendt, 2.

hero draws the reader's attention to the synthetic quality of his description. The "heightening of effect" that many critics recognise in *Adonais* is equally present in these descriptions,[26] for here Shelley draws attention to the poetic existence of the women, drawing them away from his actual autobiography, but retaining their correspondence with his personal reality.[27] The juxtaposition of "living" and "killing" and "green" and "grey" in consecutive lines are standard oppositions that overtly poeticise the presentation of the woman. These highly stylised opposites seem two-dimensional in contrast to Shelley's attempt; Shelley creates a vital poet-hero by weaving together suitable strands of biography and poetic invention.

With deliberate artistry, Shelley blends the fictional Emily of the poem with the actual Teresa Viviani to create an enriching confusion between the actual and the poetic.[28] Shelley's poet-hero tries to take his descriptions into symbolic and mythological territory by means of his highly stylised presentations of his former lovers. As Brown shows, Shelley's poet-hero's experience with these women mirrors Dante's enslavement by the false lady of the *Convivio*, parts of which Shelley had translated in 1820, a year prior to *Epipsychidion*'s publication.[29] Dante's example provided Shelley with an artistic model that prevented *Epipsychidion* from sliding into being "quite simply and openly an autobiography of Shelley's love-life."[30] *Epipsychidion* folds or collapses reality into invention, biography into poetry.[31] The disappointments of the poet-hero of the text should not be confused with a failing in Shelley's abilities to sustain the poem. Shelley's design includes subsuming elements of the historical poet's life within his poet-hero's existence, while acknowledging the impossibility of complete self-referentiality. As Angela Leighton puts it, "It is not the absence of the historical in this work, but rather its

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[26] Behrendt, 254.

[27] Like Timothy Webb, I am suspicious of biographical readings that simplify the artistry of the poem: "A recent biography reads the passage with a touching, literal-minded innocence: 'It is possible that, despairing of Harriet Grove, he did have a first experience of sex with a woman *encountered by a well*." Shelley might have been well advised to produce that *Symposium* of his own." Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible*, 299.

[28] Unlike Bostetter, I consider the blending of the actual and the idealised to be an artistic strategy rather than confused artistry: "The confusion between the real and ideal Emily, which "literalists" are always accused of stirring up, existed quite simply in Shelley's mind and was built into the poem." Bostetter, 203.

[29] Brown, 228.

[30] Richard Holmes, *Shelley on Love: An Anthology* (London: Anvil P Poetry, 1980), 205.

[31] I take this formulation from Andrew Bennett: "Shelley in posterity, his ghosts, then, involves an attempt to fold or collapse the future into the present." Bennett, 170.

constant pull, which gives to Shelley's breathlessly figured love poem a peculiar tension."[32] This "peculiar tension" sets the poem in motion, as Shelley must build a creation that synthesises the historical-objective universe with poetic invention in a work that affects us as yielding to and shaping experience.

The poet-hero's presentation of the women in his poem renders interaction between biography and poetic invention a difficult and dangerous pursuit. By styling his wife as the Moon, Shelley veils Mary, but does not disguise her. As James Bieri writes, the lines quoted below are "the most hurtful lines Mary would read in *Epipsychidion*."[33]

> And I was laid asleep, spirit and limb,
>
> And all my being became bright or dim
>
> As the Moon's image in a summer sea,
>
> According as she smiled or frowned on me;
>
> And there I lay, within a chaste cold bed:
>
> Alas, I then was nor alive nor dead: —
>
> For at her silver voice came Death and Life,
>
> Unmindful each of their accustomed strife,
>
> (295-302)

The rhythm of these lines mirrors the disconnected floating sensation the poet-hero describes. "I was laid asleep" is an ironic echo of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," "we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" (46-47).[34] This ironic verbal echo reflects less Shelley's departure from Wordsworth, but rather *Epipsychidion*'s obsession with forging for itself the terms of its engagement with, understanding of, or expression of love. Edward E. Bostetter writes that: "The role Shelley usually assigns to himself (or to the 'I' of the poems) in the love experience is one of passivity and masochism."[35] Yet the ironic echo here works to highlight the dangerous nature of passivity, where the poet-hero, stricken and enchanted by the Moon is "nor alive nor dead" (300). Every set of oppositions, including Death and Life, which Shelley uses to define the ultimate clash,

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[32] Leighton, "Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*," 224.

[33] James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography: Exile of Unfulfilled Reknown, 1816-1822* (Newark, NJ: U of Delaware P, 2005), 226.

[34] *Leader and O'Neill*, n. on l. 295, 797.

[35] Bostetter, 212.

are imbued with a strangely deadened sense that prevents any active behaviour. Mary Shelley, in her incarnation as the Moon, prevents Shelley, who in a biographical reading becomes the poet-hero, from activity; her spell-binding "silver voice" (301) seems otherworldly and pernicious. This mingling of biography and artistry shows Shelley at his intangible greatest; Shelley disrupts any critical urge to deny either his biography or ignore his technical ability. When Harold Bloom writes that the reader ought to forget the biographical referents of the poem, he underplays the energising and fatal tension between poetry and biography that both propels the poetry's figuration, and destroys its motion.[36] Despite Angela Leighton's reading of figurativeness which argues that the strain of the performance destroys the poem, it seems that the figures, though doomed by their own peculiar referents to biography, mythology, and poetry, also create themselves from the same; Shelley's withholding of his conviction both creates and destroys *Epipsychidion*.[37] The previously quoted description of the Moon/Mary succeeds by the mingling of biography with technical artistry: "According as she smiled or frowned on me; / And there I lay, within a chaste cold bed" (298-99). Shelley draws attention to the fragile union of biography with art, and *Epipsychidion* behaves as a hybrid. The performance of the poet-hero in the poem captures the reader's attention, as the act of creating a poem becomes what the poem is, in some sense, "about." Thus Shelley makes use of biography but does not write an autobiographical poem; Shelley's personal artistry combined with the poet-hero's self-conscious transformation of the literal into the literary renders *Epipsychidion* an exploration of the dangerous beauty of poetic language. His heightened creativity enraptures the poet-hero, just as the portraits he draws of the women seem perilously seductive; the fear that shimmers throughout the text is that Shelley's figurations of love may be the true idol of his thought, not the lovers themselves. Yeats would bring into full consciousness the risk of being enthralled by art rather than life; in "The Circus Animals' Desertion" he comments retrospectively: "Players and painted stage took all my love / And not those things that they were

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[36] "The sun-moon-comet figures in the poem, biographically associated by scholars with Emilia, Mary and Claire Clairmont, respectively, are by contrast fully integrated into the poem and read best with their biographical referents forgotten." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 209.

[37] "Such falling passages betray the strain of a figurativeness which cannot in the end, carry the poet's conviction." Leighton, "Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*," 231.

emblems of" (31-32).[38] Bloom astutely comments on Shelley's fear that language may prove inadequate.[39] But the poem nurses a counter-fear; owing to the lushness of the poetry, *Epipsychidion* may recoil from the actual in favour of the seductive power of words.

A Defence of Poetry proposes that: "the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet" (697). The sense of pathos that the highest of the arts can only offer the reader a pale imitation of the imagination's original conception makes the creation of poetry an act of bravery, particularly in the context of *Epipsychidion*. The poet-hero must strive to deliver the closest approximation of his thought to the reader; struggle defines the creative process. William Keach remarks that:

> The speed of the mind will always outstrip the winged words it needs to articulate – even to itself – its flights of desire. This is not an attitude that squares with a view of Shelley as a writer who anticipates modern beliefs that thought is only a mode of language. Yet it is an attitude inseparable from both the achievement and the expressed limitations of speed in his poetry.[40]

The sense of the inability of language to convey thought resounds through *Epipsychidion*: "These words conceal: — If not, each word would be / The key of staunchless tears. Weep not for me!" (*Epipsychidion,* 319-20) Yet Shelley does not quite deny that words can depict thought; the poet-hero hints that he chooses to use them to conceal in order to preserve himself and the reader from "staunchless tears". The poet-hero chooses to conceal, and only obliquely hint at trauma. Language is the only way for the poet to convey his vision or experience, yet an impediment to the flow of thought that runs through the poem. "Ay, even the dim words which obscure thee now / Flash, lightning-like, with unaccustomed glow" (*Epipsychidion*, 33-34). Yet as this quotation shows, there is a thrilling quality to the "dim words" as the poet-hero can manipulate them into showing an "unaccustomed glow". That language requires an artist to wield it beautifully

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[38] *Larrissy*, 181.
[39] "[the lines are] a self-conscious descent into the awareness of inadequacy to sustain relationship, or even to describe it." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 215.
[40] Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 183.

renders the poet a hero, and also makes language bright with possibility. Shelley's constant attention to this unwieldy "other" shows language as the primary site for potential to be transformed into sensual beauty by the relentless struggle of the poet-hero. Achievement and limitation twine together as the inseparable condition of poetry; language's potential becomes one of the driving forces of *Epipsychidion*.

The fates of the hero and of language are bound together; the hero cannot exist without language and language requires a theme to express. The poem and the hero occupy the same existential terrain, exulting and suffering together: "*Epipsychidion* visibly lurches and starts with the tides of the speaker's confidence."[41] The poet-hero of *Epipsychidion* is acutely aware that his poetic existence is in words, and his challenge is to create a poem that is adequate to imaginative experience. Perhaps the description that proves the most difficult is the attempt to describe sexual intercourse. Before the poet-hero endeavors to depict the physical act of love, he immediately shows words to be inadequate to his experience:

> And we will talk, until thought's melody
> Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
> In words, to live again in looks, which dart
> With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
> Harmonizing silence without a sound.
>
> (560-64)

The "thrilling tone" of silence and the "voiceless heart" (563) seem to denote the ideal for the experience of sexual intercourse. Further, the sexual bliss Shelley's persona explains as being dependent on a lack of language is evident earlier in the poem. When the poet-hero describes his ideal dwelling, it is defined by its lack of human interaction, and therefore lack of language:

> And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
> With that deep music is in unison:
> Which is a soul within the soul—they seem
> Like echoes of an antenatal dream.—

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[41] Brown, 227.

(453-56)

Conveyed through struggle, this Edenic pre-verbal state cannot completely be defined by language. Yet the sensual language caresses the description, as the lines propel themselves towards the ecstasy they describe through carefully-wielded poetic control. The harmony described mirrors the musicality of the language; Shelley offers compelling poetry that belies any depreciation of language. The metaphors and concepts that drip from the lines are not many attempts to say the same thing, but shifts and refinements. The shift from "is" to "seem" indicates the ever-more rarefied sense of wholeness. The description of the physical act begins by describing the process of their sexual coupling:

> Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound.
>
> And our veins beat together; and our lips
>
> With other eloquence than words, eclipse
>
> The soul that burns between them, and the wells
>
> Which boil under our being's inmost cells,
>
> The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
>
> Confused in passion's golden purity,

(565-71)

The poet-hero is increasingly aware of the paradox of verbalising an experience that is definitively non-verbal, yet the growing excitement of the lines enacts the perplexing and overwhelming nature of passion. The lines, "The fountains of our deepest life, shall be / Confused in Passion's golden purity" (570-71) betray, yet thrive on, the strain of their attempt to convey a physical experience in words. The logical drift of the conception fails as the pressure to redefine increases; Shelley wishes to claim for "Passion" a purity that is often denied, and makes the reader guess how separate fountains or wells can be "confused" in "purity". The lips' actions are described through eloquence and words, implying that kisses are a secondary function of the lips' primary use, language. Language cannot convey the physical act, as the attempt to explain a kiss fails through the narrator's inability to escape language:

> …and our lips
>
> With other eloquence than words, eclipse
>
> The soul that burns between them,

(566-68)

Paradoxically, Shelley's poetry is at its finest when he enacts the linguistic failure of the poet-hero's attempt to express an experiential act, a failure that sparks off the famous breakdown of *Epipsychidion*:

> As mountain-springs under the morning Sun.
>
> We shall become the same, we shall be one
>
> Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?

(572-74)

Shelley's narrator tries to express and maintain the urge to become one. When the idea of "two" enters the text, its physical appearance on the page destabilises the concept of oneness that the narrator has attempted to stabilise and enshrine in the text. A corresponding passage from "On Love" demonstrates the intensity of Shelley's conception of the oneness of ideal love:

> Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed:[42] a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap.
>
> ("On Love", 632)

This impulse towards complete identity with another is often criticised,[43] but the heroism of the poet-hero is nowhere more apparent. He directly faces the struggle to accommodate love despite the divide between self and other. Parallel and irreconcilable states; the autonomy of another person, and the desire to become one with the other create frantic negotiations between the hero's desires, and his understanding of his and Emily's actual divided state. The poem is not about the achieved self describing his lover and "love's rare Universe" (589). *Epipsychidion* is an exploration of the act of constructing the self and its universe. This important qualification allows for one of the dominant preoccupations of the poem: the difficulty, even impossibility of making two people into one entity. The attempt propels the poem, as Stuart Sperry shows when he

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[42] "These words ineffectual and metaphorical - Most words so - No help -" Footnote to "On Love," 821.
[43] Bonca, 122.

defines the movement of *Epipsychidion* as a dialectical interplay between two contrary modes of conceptualizing Emily:

> For there are two major impulses that govern the work as a whole. One is centrifugal: the effort to externalize Emily, to see her as an influence governing nature and humankind, a power concentrated in the universe of sun, moon and stars. The other is centripetal: the recognition that Emily and her power are constituents of the self.[44]

Epipsychidion is born out of the struggle to define, and the poet-hero uses every possible metaphor in the hope of defining their love. Sperry's argument implies that there is a movement from a centrifugal externalisation of Emily to a more sophisticated understanding of his lover as a centripetal internal figure. Instead, when the poet-hero hopes to have defined the couple as a single entity, the sophistry and inaccuracy of the statement lead him to continue to push his poetic exploration to the brink of the ineffable:

> One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
>
> Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,
>
> Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
>
> Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
>
> Burning, yet ever inconsumable:
>
> In one another's substance finding food,
>
> Like flames too pure and light and unimbued
>
> To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
>
> Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away:
>
> (575-83)

For all the soaring fluency of the couplets, the metaphor of the meteors is a difficult and strained performance. With "twin-hearts" (575) Shelley indicates the almost incestuous nature of ideal love, reminding the reader of the relationship between Laon and Cythna in *The Revolt of Islam*, or between Prometheus and Asia in *Prometheus Unbound* where the lovers seem to represent the ideal male and female principles.[45] The metaphor exposes its impossibility by inviting the reader to imagine "meteors" (576) whose flames expand

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[44] Sperry, 162.
[45] Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis*, 99-100.

while remaining inconsumable. Perhaps there is some hint of Shelley's humour in the placement of "In one another's substance finding food" (580) after the avowal of the inconsumable nature of their meteor love. Emily cannot be accommodated as a mere facet of the self or a compact soul within a soul. Her outer external existence must be taken into account in order to provide an accurate account of their love. Neither centrifugal nor centripetal imagery is equal to a full description of love. Both must be used to depict the sensation as best possible, but their contrasting depictions can cause confusion in the poem, as the poet-hero attempts to do justice to each way of seeing himself and Emily.

While it is easily demonstrable that Shelley uses centrifugal and centripetal imagery to depict Emily, there is never any final recognition that Emily is a projection of the self. The closing lines of the poem proper, before Shelley appends his separate urbane final lines, record a struggle that goes unresolved until its climactic implosion:

> One hope within two wills, one will beneath
>
> Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
>
> One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
>
> And one annihilation. Woe is me!
>
> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
>
> Into the height of love's rare Universe,
>
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
>
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

<div align="right">(584-91)</div>

The idea of one hope in two wills, and one will beneath two minds struggles as it attempts to unify the lovers by placing a linking oneness in the midst of their separation. From the pattern of "one" within or beneath "two", suddenly the word "two" vanishes from the onward-driving couplets, making the repeated "one" sound dangerously close to mania. Within four lines, the word "one" is repeated eight times, and language's failure to replicate a feeling or affect the outer universe drives the poet into annihilation. The hero's understanding of the failure of his expression demonstrates the strain of using language to express love's sensation and experience in language. Emily and the poet-hero cannot

finally combine; language prevents his hope to twine the two inseparably.[46] The intensity of the protagonist's struggle creates his heroism; his linguistic battle to create a self, and then unite the self with another is an impossible task that continues until its intensity consumes the poetry. There is no final awareness that Emily is a constituent of the self; Shelley's questing hero fights to the boundaries of language to find a way to draw a discrete individual into the self without losing himself, or her.

Shelley does not permit his poet-hero to shy away from his beautifully tortuous trial to portray accurately experience in words. The failure of expression at the final stage of the poem signals the end of the poet-hero's attempt to express the ineffable. The annihilation of the poet-hero mirrors the final failure of language to articulate love. This final failure is prefigured by many smaller failures of expression throughout the poem,[47] which serve to indicate the tentative and indeterminate nature of expression. The success of the poet-hero rests upon his ability to convey to his readers the nature of his experience. Shelley forces the fates of the hero and of words into one entity as they are forced to perform themselves as a bound entity without an independent existence. Corresponding to the difficulty of completely separating or uniting Emily and the poet-hero, language and the hero participate in one another's existence. Language's inadequacy becomes the inadequacy of the hero and vice versa:

> …Woe is me!
>
> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
>
> Into the height of love's rare Universe,
>
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
>
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!
>
> (587-91)

The breakdown of the hero through language deliberately calls into question the nature of heroism, and the role of the poet. Shelley trains the eye on the frantically paddling legs of the swan rather than its smooth glide through the water. Yet these lines retain a sparkling

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[46] As G. Kim Blank writes, "The last line here is not, as some of Shelley's earlier detractors have maintained, a display of some kind of pathological weakness on Shelley's part; it is Shelley coming up against the limits of language." Blank, "Introduction," 10.

[47] Sperry claims that the first comes at line 33 in Sperry, 161.

artistry, they are fluent, expressive, and musical. The lines are fine-spun even as they claim to be a record of the poet-hero's defeat. Shelley's move to lay bare the emotional and creative straining of the poem is a deliberate gamble, as Shelley compels his reader to immerse and sympathise, or imaginatively reject the poem. The strain and panicked utterance of *Epipsychidion*'s final moments seems to betray a loss of imaginative control, as the breakdown witnesses the hero's dizzying physical collapse. One perspective, that Shelley suffered a failure of nerve only to showcase personal weakness offers an explanation for the panic and hysteria suffused in the breakdown.[48] Yet Timothy Webb suggests the close of *Epipsychidion*, as witnessed by its coda, to reflect Shelley's "highly calculated approach to poetic art."[49] These disparate viewpoints reveal the complexity of *Epipsychidion*, which engages in an intense questioning as to the relationship between the poet and his art, and the nature of poetic heroism.

The magnitude of the hero's failure witnesses the scale of his struggle. Instead of sublimation, repression, or detachment from the whirling chaos that surrounds him, Shelley forces his hero to face that creative and destructive chaos head on. The poet-hero no longer has the strength to order his universe; he cannot control, define, or re-figure the verbal universe. He must fall upon the thorns of life; the poet-hero's defeat surrounds him in dizzying glory. Shelley focuses the reader upon this unflinching description as the stakes of art become life or death. The delicate balance between the sensation of intensely heightened emotion and the carefully crafted artistry of the poem spotlights the nature of Shelley's involvement in the poem as the poem at once yields to emotion and conveys it through poetic artistry. The poet and his hero are not divided entities; rather they share an existence as Shelley's hero is bound to Shelley by the nature of poetic creation.[50] Shelley creates the "verbal universe" from the interaction of the poet-hero and the historical poet.[51]

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[48] Bostetter, 216.

[49] Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977), 41.

[50] Michael O'Neill's argument for the incomplete autonomy of the poem argues for the play between accommodation and resistance: "And yet the poem's autonomy is never absolute. *Epipsychidion* is enriched by the resistance its subject offers to its language." "Shelley's *Epipsychidion*: The Before Unapprehended Relations of Things," *Essays in Criticism* 37 (1987): 135.

[51] O'Neill, "Shelley's *Epipsychidion*: The Before Unapprehended Relations of Things," 135.

The final lines of *Epipsychidion* are a coda to the intense collapse suffered by the poet-hero immediately before. Their tone, courtly, ornate, and measured seems completely opposed to the earlier hyperbolic breakdown, seeming to bear out Timothy Webb's assertion of a calculating and highly wrought poetic structure:[52]

> Weak Verses, go, kneel at your Sovereign's feet,
>
> And say: — 'We are the masters of thy slave;
>
> What wouldest thou with us and ours and thine?'
>
> Then call your sisters from Oblivion's cave,
>
> All singing loud: 'Love's very pain is sweet,
>
> But its reward is in the world divine
>
> Which, if not here, it builds beyond the grave.'
>
> So shall ye live when I am there. Then haste
>
> Over the hearts of men, until ye meet
>
> Marina, Vanna, Primus, and the rest,
>
> And bid them love each other and be blessed:
>
> And leave the troop which errs, and which reproves,
>
> And come and be my guest, — for I am Love's.

<div align="right">(592-604)</div>

Reiman and Fraistat write that the coda "restates the central theme of the entire composition;"[53] instead it seems that there is a radical disjuncture between the coda and the body of the poem. Through the device of his *envoi*, Shelley calls into question the authenticity of his previous performance. M. H. Abrams describes the standard for poetic utterance in the Romantic period as authenticity: "A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings."[54] Shelley's *envoi* emphatically does not simply make the internal into the external. Based on the concluding lines of Shelley's translation of the first canzone of Dante's *Convivio* and a Dante sonnet to Cavalcanti, Timothy Webb, while indicating these starting points,

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[52] "However, the conjunction of these lines on the flagging of inspiration with the traditional author's address to the completed poem should be enough to show that they too are the product of a highly calculated approach to poetic art." Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood*, 41.
[53] Reiman and Fraistat, 407.
[54] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 22.

clearly states that Shelley's *envoi* is not a translation from Dante.[55] "Sonnet. From the Italian of Dante Alighieri to Guido Cavalcanti," translated by Shelley and published in 1816 in his *Alastor* volume, contains the name "Vanna" used in the coda to *Epipsychidion*, and offers the same refined coterie effect that Shelley creates in his *envoi*:

> Guido, I would that Lapo, thou, and I,
>
> Led by some strong enchantment, might ascend
>
> A magic ship, whose charmèd sails should fly
>
> With winds at will where'er our thoughts might wend,
>
> And that no change, nor any evil chance
>
> Should mar our joyous voyage; but it might be,
>
> That even satiety should still enhance
>
> Between our hearts their strict community:
>
> And that the bounteous wizard then would place
>
> Vanna and Bice and my gentle love,
>
> Companions of our wandering, and would grace
>
> With passionate talk, wherever we might rove,
>
> Our time, and each were as content and free
>
> As I believe that thou and I should be.[56]

This urbane sonnet shows Dante hoping to be led by enchantment, along with his fellow poet Guido Cavalcanti and his friend Lappo Gianni, out of the mutable world to a longed-for place of contentment and liberation. Shelley's translation already sees the Romantic poet adding "some decorations of his own";[57] he emphasises "their strict community," and the contentment and freedom that would be enjoyed by the group; united by the nobility of love.[58] Shelley's *envoi* to *Epipsychidion* focuses specifically on the influence that his words may have; the interest in posterity evinced by these lines follows from

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[55] Webb, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poems and Prose*, 421f.

[56] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, vol. 1 1804-1817 (London; New York, NY: Longman, 1989), 451.

[57] Webb, *Violet in the Crucible*, 281.

[58] "Like Guido [Cavalcanti] Dante accepted love as being, for better or worse, fundamental to the noble life." Winthrop Wetherbee, "Dante Alighieri," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2008 ed.), Center for the Study of Language and Information, 5 July 2008. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dante/>.

Shelley's intense awareness of his partly perpetuated distance from his audience,[59] and his sense of bravely lacking "the philosophical grounding apparent in Dante."[60]

The *envoi* casts itself somehow adrift; its isolation from the poem proper and from its Dantescan models offers it a precarious individual sensibility. The first canzone from the *Convivio*, translated by Shelley, seems to provide the thirteen line form Shelley uses. Three of the five sections of the Dante's first canzone are written in 13 line stanzas, but Shelley's *envoi* employs its own rhyme scheme, deliberately asserting its formal independence.[61] Created out of canzone and sonnet, the *envoi* feels like a carefully unfinished sonnet; while retaining the final couplet, it measures thirteen rather than fourteen lines, and it obeys no conventional rhyme scheme. O'Neill, quoting Weinberg, usefully shows Shelley's determination to move boldly between two incompatible states: "*Epipsychidion* charts a daring course between the "despotism" of convention and the "anarchy" of subversion."[62] This ambiguity of power pervades the coda; it refers to the Sovereign at whose feet the "weak verses" (592) shall kneel, verses who obey their creator, but are linguistic masters of the poet-slave. The unnamed sovereign, who cannot master the words, is impotent, as is the poet-slave. The verses, though weak, contain a liberated power that allows them to circulate among the world into the hearts of men and meet "Marina, Vanna, Primus" (601). The *envoi* purposely detaches itself from the poem, and this creates the coterie effect Bloom dislikes,[63] but more importantly, it also coldly counters *Epipsychidion*. If Marina, Vanna and Primus are Mary Shelley, Jane Williams, and Edward Williams renamed in the poem, then the absence of Emily, the poem's supposed inspiration, is a glaring omission. The lines insist on Love's plurality, asking

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[59] "In practice, Shelley normally preserves the distinctions between himself and his audiences even while claiming through his language to overcome them." Behrendt, 66.

[60] Michael O'Neill, "Cathestant or Protholic?: Shelley's Italian Imaginings," *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* 6 (2001): 165.

[61] Curran shows the extent of Shelley's formal independence in his chapter on the sonnet, following François Jost: "It is perhaps surprising to realize the truth of François Yost's [sic] observation: "In English literature the prize for prosodic variety in sonnet composition undoubtedly goes to Shelley, if we restrict the competition to major poets up to his time…He never used the same [rhyme scheme] twice." Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York, NY; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 54, quoting from François Jost, "The Anatomy of an Ode: Shelley and the Sonnet Tradition," *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982): 232.

[62] Michael O'Neill, "Cathestant or Protholic?: Shelley's Italian Imaginings," 160, quoting A. M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 288, n. 64.

[63] Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 209.

Marina, Vanna, and Primus to enter into a mutually loving relationship outside of societal conventions. The asserting narrowness of *Epipsychidion*'s obsessive love for Emily has vanished. In its place, Shelley sketches a poet directing his verses while striving to affect subordination to his words. These lines, meticulous, well-written, and almost arch in their private scheme, contrast strongly with *Epipsychidion*'s tone of breathless revelation. Shelley's *envoi* offers the reader another perspective on the poem that blocks any understanding of the poem as an artless poetic outpouring.

The different perspectives of the Preface, *Epipsychidion*, and the *envoi* to the poem (not to mention Shelley's letters about *Epipsychidion*) disrupt the reader's ability to formulate any single response to the poem.[64] The chaos of multiple voices which the reader must juggle reflects the poetic quest of *Epipsychidion* which struggles to incorporate the masses of competing ways of figuring the verbal universe. This is not an innovation in Shelley's poetic oeuvre. In *Alastor*, the separation of the poet and the narrator allow the reader to observe the ambivalent posture of the narrator towards the poet's quest, and the Preface to *Alastor* acts as a third perspective on the action of the poem. These modes of detachment from the action of the poet-hero allow the reader to critique the text while recognising its complexity. As Timothy Clark and Jerrold Hogle emphasise, Shelley includes within *Alastor*'s representation of the hero a dissenting element, a "'patching together' of multiple voices" that precludes complete admiration for the poet.[65] The use of several voices and several systems of value allows the reader a freedom to make a choice between interpretations, and also complicates the relationship of perspective to truth. In *Alastor*, the relationship between the Poet and the narrator, despite some critics' conflation of the two figures,[66] allows room for an ambiguity in the poem that continually prevents conclusive judgement. [67] The freedom Shelley allows the reader in *Alastor* should be contrasted to the claustrophobic nature of *Epipsychidion*. Shelley does not

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[64] See, in particular, the letter to John Gisborne, June 18 1822, *Shelley's Letters* 2: 434.

[65] Timothy Clark and Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction," *Evaluating Shelley*, ed. Timothy Clark and Jerrold E. Hogle (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996), 3.

[66] Although briefly distinguished from the Poet at the outset, the narrator has continued such a close and sympathetic observer that his character has seemed virtually submerged in that of Shelley's hero." Sperry, 38.

[67] "Just where it rises to a point of affirmation, Shelley's narrative characteristically complicates and qualifies itself to leave us more than ever in doubt." Sperry, 28.

create several distinct voices and perspectives within the poem proper; these voices are collapsed into one single vehicle, the poet-hero bound to language. The Preface and the coda offer strangely dissonant tones, yet these remain isolated from the poet-hero's performance in the poem. The insular and claustrophobic voice of *Epipsychidion* performs a spectacle, albeit a spectacle that is more difficult to witness. The poet-hero's quest to order the versions of chaos that he invites, tolerates or challenges in the poem are self-aware attempts to figure and re-figure the self, and by extension, the verbal universe. The poem, despite the prodigious efforts of the poet-hero, cannot be finally realised. As Wordsworth writes, the poet-hero's quest is to create "something evermore about to be"[68] (*The Prelude* VI: 608).

The task of harnessing language and forcing it into an expression of thought becomes a form of bravery; to apply heat and pressure to one's expression, to come as close as possible to the thought or experience of which the poet dreams is a form of intellectual and emotional heroism performed before the reader. The choice that echoes through *Epipsychidion* is between melting into language's sensuality and continuing the quest to accurately convey experience. Harold Bloom accurately pinpoints Shelley's dilemma as an attempt to do justice to the complexity he saw as integral to the human mind and the human experience: "The pains of psychic maturation become, for Shelley, the potentially saving though usually destructive crisis in which the imagination confronts its choice of either sustaining its own integrity, or yielding to the illusive beauty of nature."[69] The poet's choice becomes a decision between makeshift truths and an almost scientific zeal to delineate and scrutinize his concept. Intellectual and emotional bravery become the test of the Shelleyan poem, as it seeks to scrutinize and convey thought in language. The lack of an absolute and unwavering conviction in Shelley's poetry is not an indication of failure, but rather a sign of Shelley's intellectual muscularity as he forces his hero through trials that blast through all illusions of a totalising solution.

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[68] Wordsworth, *The Prelude* [1850] VI: 608, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, 217.
[69] Bloom, "The Internalisation of Quest-Romance", *Romanticism and Consciousness*, 5.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"His Mute Voice": The Two Heroes of <u>Adonais</u>

Adonais scrutinises elegy's transcendental ambitions. If any transcendental moment exists, it must be reached by the poet-hero. Complicating matters in *Adonais* is the fact that this figure is double in construction, at once the elegising Shelley and the elegised Keats. Elegising Keats was a significant act for the older poet, who had sought to act as Keats's protector, while engaging in poetic rivalry.[1] These anxieties and tensions provide a partial explanation for *Adonais*'s radical refiguring of the elegy. Shelley's impulse to centre his memorialising persona in the poem while simultaneously seeking to provide Keats with a fitting memorial typifies the double focus that runs through the poem. *Adonais* puts the genre of elegy on trial in order to interrogate its ability to accommodate two poet-heroes. Just as Shelley forces language to its breaking-point in *Epipsychidion*, *Adonais* (written just after *Epipsychidion*) explores and comes close to exploding the genre it uses.[2]

Adonais's questioning of the elegy's parameters generates conflicting views of Shelley's purpose in the poem. Arthur Bradley names *Adonais* as the central text in considering Shelley's religious impulse, while Harold Bloom claims that *Adonais* equates to a denial of myth.[3] However, Shelley's poem is more complex than either position allows. Peter Sacks provides us with a succinct definition of elegy that indicates how revolutionary Shelley's refiguring of elegy is: "… the objective of an elegy is, after all, to displace the urgent psychological currents of its work of mourning into the apparently more placid, aesthetically organized currents of language."[4] By contrast, *Adonais* refuses such

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[1] See Andrew Epstein, "'Flowers that Mock the Corse Beneath': Shelley's *Adonais,* Keats, and Poetic Influence," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 48 (1999): 90-128.

[2] Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies In The Genre From Spenser To Yeats* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 165.

[3] "[*Adonais* is] the poem with which religious readings of Shelley begin and – perhaps – end." Arthur Bradley, "'Until Death Tramples It to Fragments': Percy Bysshe Shelley after Postmodern Theology" *Romanticism and Religion*, 191 and "Much of the poem frankly denies the myth rather than chronicles its defeat." Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 9.

[4] Sacks, 145-46.

sublimation of its psychological currents. Indeed, Shelley, so to speak, studies the nostalgias so far as elegy is concerned; at times he undermines the conventions of elegy by following them so closely as to expose them as empty tropes.

Every gesture is examined. Shelley's opening is a performance of poetic struggle.[5] As he ostentatiously carries out the verbal rites appropriate for an elegy, he seems trapped within the generic paradigm:

> I weep for Adonais — he is dead!
>
> O, weep for Adonais! though our tears
>
> Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!
>
> And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years
>
> To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,
>
> And teach them thine own sorrow, say: with me
>
> Died Adonais; till the Future dares
>
> Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
>
> An echo and a light into eternity!
>
> (1: 1-9)

The stanza contains four exclamation marks, and attempts to incite the reader and the addressed mourners. The first line immediately situates the self as the central mourner, who seeks to inspire others to mourn. Shelley directs the action of the poem, focussing on those of his choosing. He commands, accuses, flatters, and dismisses each mourner as he moves on to his next theme. His approach to his muse Urania, the "mighty Mother," (10) is not one of supplication, and yet along with power goes impotence as he questions his own directives:

> O, weep for Adonais — he is dead!
>
> Wake, melancholy Mother, wake and weep!
>
> Yet wherefore? Quench within their burning bed
>
> Thy fiery tears, and let thy loud heart keep
>
> Like his, a mute and uncomplaining sleep…

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[5]Sacks, 147. Everest disagrees, arguing that "the poem itself proceeds at a stately and heavily punctuated slow pace, highly unusual for Shelley," Kelvin Everest, "Shelley's *Adonais* and John Keats," *Essays in Criticism* 57 (2007): 238.

<div align="right">(3: 19-23)</div>

> Most musical of mourners, weep again!
>
> Lament anew, Urania! — He died,

<div align="right">(4: 28-29)</div>

Manic movement defines this stage of the poem, as the excess of contradictory commands overwhelms the reader. The treatment of the mourners (akin to the reader here) creates a disorienting effect at the start of the elegy, and signals to the reader that this will be a departure from what they have come to expect from the elegy, a typically Shelleyan rupture.[6] What is emphasised is the difficulty of providing genuine consolation rather than simply performing the gestures of consolation. Shelley wants to separate the gesture from the action, and, as in *Epipsychidion*, he points up the schism between poetry and life.[7]

The poem's search for a fitting display of mourning from other sources than the self resembles a quest, but the confounding factor is the lack of any confirmation as to what is sought. The reader enters a disorienting space where, like the mourners, he or she is bewildered by what Shelley seeks. Sacks' description of the "inadequate mourners" suggests that there could be an appropriate reaction; however, Shelley's inexhaustible search belies this.[8] These figures remain in the poem for a large portion of the elegy as Shelley attempts to shape the elegy so that it will provide the consolation and transcendence it is supposed to deliver. Through no fault of the mourners the elegy denies its consoling powers. The elegy droops under the weight of the abstractions that pause to pay their respects to *Adonais*, and their failure to inspire the longed-for consolation and transcendence generates stanzas that are beautiful, but beautifully listless:

> And others came…Desires and Adorations,
>
> Wingèd Persuasions and veiled Destinies,

---

[6]"Shelley's practice of using a traditional form but opposing the attitudes associated with that form is evident." Michael O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life,* Macmillan Literary Lives (London: Macmillan, 1989), 122.

[7] "Between idealism and history, love and life, feeling and fact, there is an awkward split, which seems to spoil the poem's very courtly ideals." Leighton, "Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*," 225.

[8] Sacks, 148.

Splendours, and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations

Of hopes and fears, and twilight Fantasies;

And Sorrow, with her family of Sighs,

And Pleasure, blind with tears, led by the gleam

Of her own dying smile instead of eyes,

Came in slow pomp; — the moving pomp might seem

Like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream.

(13: 109-17)

Shelley performs a complex movement in this stanza as he blends and contrasts the gathered mourning abstractions. The languid language and slow pace of the metre allow the abstractions almost to melt into one another while retaining enough of their individual character to block any complete identification between them. These blends and contrasts imbue the stanza with a richly woven texture. The symmetry of "wingèd" and "veiled" illustrates how nearly Shelley makes the figures synonymous, but refuses to allow perfect congruity. Correspondingly, Shelley makes Keats's presence in the stanza an undercurrent that makes it an uneasy compound of the two poets' poetry. The abstractions are allegorical of Keats's own mental processes, and the final lines of the stanza deftly allude to "To Autumn."[9] Shelley's stanza silently memorialises Keats's poetry, not the man. His words recall Keats's words, and enact the transference of energies between the elegy and Keats's own poetry.

 The procession of mourners gathered to mourn Adonais is a full complement of the ideal, and even these are listed as "others". Shelley does not show them to be disingenuous or lacking in the requisite sorrow, and continually emphasises their overwhelming love for the departed:

To Phoebus was not Hyacinth so dear

Nor to himself Narcissus, as to both

Thou Adonais: wan they stand and sere

Amid the drooping comrades of their youth,

With dew all turned to tears; odour, to sighing ruth.

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[9] Reiman and Fraistat, 415.

(16: 140-44)

Line 143 was revised to "faint companions of their youth" in Mary Shelley's edition of 1839, and the effect markedly alters the sense of the stanza.[10] For "drooping comrades" implies these figures to be beaten warriors; strength, though failing, resides in the description. The alteration to "faint companions" reinforces a sense of timorous feebleness; the weakness here changes them from those overpowered by a greater force, to those who could never fight. This mirrors the growing awareness in *Adonais* that the elegy, which strains under the weight of its two heroes, cannot provide consolation. The elegy changes in shape, from being the cause of Shelley's attempt to wrest the genre into consolation, to being a vehicle for Shelley to house his dual heroes. Having failed to create consolation, the elegy goes in search of transcendence. The inability of the characters within *Adonais* to furnish a suitable response to Keats's death is due to Shelley's incapacity for satisfaction. Shelley reaches this realisation by stanza eighteen, as even the march of time has not eased his suffering: "Ah woe is me! Winter is come and gone, / But grief returns with the revolving year" (*Adonais* 18: 154-55). The fault lies in the genre that promises consolation but gives nothing. By clinging so closely to the conventions of the elegy, Shelley pulls away veil after veil from a genre that is revealed to be unable to meet the demands of the self.

The insistence on satisfying the urge of the living poet's persona instead of solely commemorating the dead subject through the conventions of elegy leaves Shelley open to accusations of narcissism.[11] Sacks suggests that Shelley's elegy can be read as how not to mourn;[12] certainly, its self-absorption affects some critics as a kind of suicide note.[13] Yet it is more appropriate to read Shelley's elegy as preoccupied by control and poetic power;[14] Shelley shoulders the responsibility of the elegising poet as he seeks to provide an adequate memorial. His duty to articulate and shape the poem could never result in

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[10]Reiman and Fraistat use "faint companions" while *Leader and O'Neill* favour "drooping comrades." The 1839 reading [provided by Reiman and Fraistat] almost certainly represents a revision Shelley wished to make to the 1821 text.

[11] Sacks, 159.

[12] Sacks, 165.

[13] For example, Ross Woodman: "Thus his *Adonais* emerges as a metaphysical defence of suicide." Ross Greig Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1964), xiii.

[14]Michael O'Neill, "*Adonais* and Poetic Power," *The Wordsworth Circle* 35.2 (2004): 50-57.

simple commemoration. Shelley's hyper-awareness of his duty to his subject and his simultaneous impulse to refigure the conditions of Keats's life and death give rise to the sensations of guilt and power that permeate the poem. The act of renaming Keats allows Shelley the power to transform his image and biography to suit the direction of the elegy he wished to write, an act that Paul de Man describes in relation to autobiography:

> We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life…[15]

Shelley's elegy anticipates de Man's suggestion that the autobiographical project can produce the life. He can refigure the circumstances of Keats's life and death by reversing the traditional direction of biography, thereby controlling Keats's life on an aesthetically potent level. He emphasises the status of *Adonais* as a work of art in his letters,[16] and this aestheticism absolves part of Shelley's guilt for re-writing Keats. Keats is a constituent of the poem rather than its dominating presence. With Keats reborn as Adonais, the threat of biography can be avoided, repressed, and side-stepped. Aestheticism allows Shelley the freedom to manipulate Keats's image in his privileged position of author of the text and allows Shelley to sidestep any criticism the poem may attract for the way it seems to figure Keats.[17]

This transformative ability shows Shelley seeking to transform critical opinion. As Kelvin Everest indicates, Shelley did not necessarily view Keats as so great a genius as the elegy suggests,[18] but he certainly hoped to help the younger poet's route to greatness.[19] Part of the elegy's urgency is the imaginative difficulty of refiguring Keats to his peers and the wider public as a poetic genius, and by extension, displaying the also neglected talents of his champion. Michael O'Neill draws attention to Shelley's self-conceived role of protective champion.[20]   But there is a darker involvement at work that

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[15] Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1984), 69.
[16] *Shelley's Letters* 2: 294.
[17] As suggested by Franta, 128.
[18] Everest, 237.
[19] "I am aware indeed in part [tha]t I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass [me] and this is an additional motive & will be an added pleasure" *Shelley's Letters* 2: 240.
[20] O'Neill, "*Adonais* and Poetic Power," 54.

James A. W. Heffernan may overstate but certainly requires us to pause over.[21] As Shelley considers himself the champion and memorialiser of Keats, it is interesting that the classicism of the poem seems resolved to display Shelley as the more learned poet in comparison to the determinedly middle-class author of "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." There is a sense that Shelley provides Keats with an elegy he could not have written suffused with a learning that he did not possess.

This element of *Adonais* is an integral part of the guilt and power that constitute much of the elegy. However, Shelley did not write the poem to denigrate Keats; his supposed diminution must be considered as part of Shelley's wider scheme, which was to demonstrate his poetic power and strength in comparison to his peers, or as they seem in the poem, Shelley's aesthetic competitors. While Keats's poetry can mingle with Shelley's elegy, Shelley will not countenance living rivals in his elegy. Vincent Newey is insightful when he argues that the poem can be considered as part of a long-running dialogue between Shelley and Byron, where Shelley does not seek to equal Byron, but rather to better him. [22] So, the poetic mourners that form a procession to mourn Adonais are presented in a fascinatingly ambiguous fashion. The seeming admiration for the poets, beginning with Byron and Moore, is interwoven with criticisms that indicate Shelley's hope to surpass his rivals. The presentation of Thomas Moore flatters immediately, but it becomes apparent that he is not an imaginative, but a mimetic poet:

> In sorrow; from her wilds Ierne sent
>
> The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,
>
> And love taught grief to fall like music from his tongue.

> (30: 268-70)

This lack of imaginative capacity strips Moore of the essence of poetry according to *A Defence of Poetry*.[23] In stanza thirty five, Leigh Hunt is reduced to a mute mourner. That there is a whole stanza dedicated to Hunt is a nod to the relationship between Hunt and

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[21] James A. W. Heffernan, "*Adonais*: Shelley's Consumption of Keats," *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, 173-91.
[22] Newey, 171.
[23] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, *Leader and O'Neill*, 682.

the late poet, but the stanza emphasises the nurturing qualities of Hunt as opposed to any writing skill:

> What softer voice is hushed over the dead?
>
> Athwart what brow is that dark mantle thrown?
>
> What form leans sadly o'er the white death-bed,
>
> In mockery of monumental stone,
>
> The heavy heart heaving without a moan?
>
> If it be He, who, gentlest of the wise,
>
> Taught, soothed, loved, honoured the departed one,
>
> Let me not vex, with inharmonious sighs,
>
> The silence of that heart's accepted sacrifice.

<div style="text-align: right">(35: 307-15)</div>

Hunt is represented as a grieving figure, but one defined by silence, and one whose role in relation to the dead poet is feminine and nurturing. In contrast to the narrator's active grief, Hunt evinces "the silence of that heart's accepted sacrifice" (315). This stoicism is directly aligned to Hunt's silence, and the alliterative effect Shelley uses with the gentleness of the "s" sounds creates an air of softness and quiet grief. Hunt is neutralised, turned into a passive presence in the elegy, and his personality melted into silence on to which Shelley can impute his own meaning. Byron's presence in the elegy is more difficult for Shelley, as their rivalry and dialogue colours other poems by both poets. Shelley's creative ego would often be pricked by envy and awe of Byron's poetic achievements.[24] Shelley's conception of Byron as the most iconic and gifted of his contemporaries is evident, but his approach to Byron in *Adonais* seems more distinctively ambiguous:

> Thus ceased she: and the mountain shepherds came,
>
> Their garlands sere, their magic mantles rent;
>
> The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame
>
> Over his living head like Heaven is bent,

---

[24] "Byron has read to me one of his unpublished cantos of *Don Juan*, which is astonishingly fine. It sets him not only above, but far above all the poets of the age. Every word is stamped with immortality. I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, and well I may; and there is no other with whom it is worth contending." *Shelley's Letters* 2: 323.

An early but enduring monument,

Came, veiling all the lightnings of his song

(30: 262-67)

This presentation of Byron shows him to be a great but circumscribed poet bound by the early and often oppressive adulation of his public. The sense of heaviness that surrounds the Byronic figure strongly contrasts with the self-fashioned poet of mobility often noted by later critics.[25] Like Atlas, Byron seems a poetic titan weighed down by the world; his earthly fame prevents him soaring through and beyond language. Interestingly, Shelley makes use of Byron's most lauded attributes and language (his fame and his "lightning" bolts of *Childe Harold*) in order to demonstrate his own comparatively "unbound" status. The fame that the elegising poet lacks allows his poetic flame to burn more brightly.

Shelley's declared independence from the opinion of critics and his peer group increases this air of poetic freedom. Later critics have emphasised Shelley's own sensitivity to criticism and postulated that Shelley projects his anxieties on to Keats, even insinuating that Shelley's refiguring of Keats is "an insult,"[26] but Shelley does not shrink from throwing down the gauntlet to his poetic or critical adversaries. His independence of thought in the "Preface to *Adonais*" and verse bespeaks his aristocratic and poetic individuality.[27] Shelley demonstrates his critical acuity by stressing his contempt for the accepted opinion of reviewers; the high pitch is designed to demonstrate the ideal condition of the artist, described in *A Defence*: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (701). His poem justifies his eloquent bombast as he hopes that the excellence of his poem will substantiate the status that he describes as fitting a poet in *A Defence*:

Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they

appeared, were called in the earlier epochs of the world legislators or prophets:

a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. (677)

This should be linked to Shelley's performance in the Preface and *Adonais*. In both of these texts Shelley lays claim to what is often considered to be the most optimistic

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[25] Joseph, *Byron the Poet*, 78.

[26] Heffernan, 177.

[27] Shelley, Preface to *Adonais*, *Leader and O'Neill*, 530.

element in *A Defence of Poetry* where Shelley argues for the primacy of the poet. The Preface to *Adonais* is a deeply serious and poised performance, as Shelley puts on the mantle of legislator and prophet in a move to condemn the behaviour of the critic, remake the accepted pantheon of great contemporary poets, and project for Keats a poetic life in futurity. This position allows and even requires Shelley to write from a place of authority and judgement, and he embraces the role, condemning the critic whom he accuses of "killing" Keats:

> Against what woman taken in adultery dares the foremost of these literary
> prostitutes to cast his opprobrious stone? Miserable man! you, one of the
> meanest, have wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the
> workmanship of God. Nor shall it be your excuse, that, murderer as you are,
> you have spoken daggers, but used none. (530)

The biblical language of this passage demonstrates the extent to which Shelley assumes a dramatically prophetic role in both the Preface and the poem. A similar effect is used in "Ode to Liberty" as Shelley appropriates the voice of prophecy, and Webb makes the point that Shelley consistently uses Biblical prophets as analogues.[28] That he embraces the role to such a full extent adds to the sense of highly conscious artistry that the poem seeks to project. Shelley's "highly wrought *piece of art*" allows him to don the mantle of prophet and legislator and gives him the authority to refigure Keats as Adonais, and assemble his own pantheon.[29]

Shelley's poetic quest in *Adonais* represents an attempt to figure, populate, and assign value to his self-created aesthetic universe. However, Shelley cannot ignore the tensions that rage through his aesthetic and commemorative project, which are apparent in his transformative handling of the elegy. As Arthur Bradley observes, "Shelley's *Adonais* is both an attempt to monumentalise Keats's loss and an attempt to resist or evade all monumentalising gestures."[30] Arguably, one problem for Shelley lies in the power of Keats's voice in the poem. The figure of Keats and his poetry is embedded in the work,

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[28] Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood*, 45.
[29] *Shelley's Letters* 2: 294.
[30] Bradley, "'Until Death Tramples It to Fragments': Percy Bysshe Shelley after Postmodern Theology," *Romanticism and Religion*, 201.

and cannot be escaped throughout the poem. The living poet and the dead poet, the commemorator and the commemorated are bound together as the persona meets his mirror image in the poem.

Adonais is no exception to the Shelleyan experimentation with the boundaries of the self. Like *Epipsychidion*, Shelley experiments with the idea of "twin souls" ("Would we two had been twins of the same mother!" or "One passion in twin-hearts" *Epipsychidion*, 45 & 575) by imbuing Adonais' figure with attributes that belong to the Shelleyan figure in the elegy.[31] Urania reproaches Adonais for his defenceless beauty coupled with his desire to mingle with the world:

> 'Oh gentle child, beautiful as thou wert,
>
> Why didst thou leave the trodden paths of men
>
> Too soon, and with weak hands though mighty heart
>
> Dare the unpastured dragon in his den?
>
> Defenceless as thou wert …

(27: 235-39)

The description emphasises the mightiness of his heart, but shows Urania chiding the childish Keats for attempting to grapple with the "unpastured dragon" (238). Shelley emphasises his weakness over and above his mightiness, and the allegorical nature of the description heightens the foolishness of Adonais' endeavour. This depiction of childish weakness finds a match within a few stanzas in the description of the Shelleyan figure:

> A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift —
>
> A Love in desolation masked; — a Power
>
> Girt round with weakness; — it can scarce uplift
>
> The weight of the superincumbent hour;
>
> It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
>
> A breaking billow; — even whilst we speak
>
> Is it not broken? On the withering flower
>
> The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek

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[31] Angela Leighton describes *Epipsychidion* as "a practice ground for *Adonais*"; Leighton, "Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*," 228.

The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

<div align="right">(32: 280-88)</div>

The doubling of Adonais and the narrator gives way to another pair of doubles; Shelley and the "self" that he writes into the poem. The identification with the dead poet co-exists with this disconcerting self-projection, indicating the fluidity of the boundaries between self and other. Shelley emphasises the constantly shifting nature of his image, pointing to its transience. It becomes a breaking lamp, a falling shower and a broken billow, and Shelley focuses the reader's attention on the fleeting nature of time by pausing the flow of images to ask rhetorically: "even whilst we speak / Is it not broken?" (285-86) Suffering has formed the "pardlike Spirit" (280) into a spectre who is "Love in desolation masked" (281). There is a significant emphasis on the connection between beauty and weakness. This magnified image almost reaches the point of parody as the figure absorbs the guilt of Actaeon and Cain, and the guiltless suffering of Christ. Shelley's own personal frailties were well documented, as Judith Chernaik writes:

> [The unsympathetic reader]…inevitably takes each appearance of the Poet to be
> inflated autobiography, the romantic self-projection of a poet whose actual frailty
> is only too well established by contemporary accounts of his susceptibility to
> fainting fits, nervous seizures, visions and hallucinations.[32]

However, Shelley crucially illustrates the figure as "a Power / Girt round with weakness;" (281-82) and the line-ending "power" emphasises this element of the figure. The Power may be surrounded by weakness, but the weakness may be due to the desolation, which only masks the spirit of love that is the substance of the figure. The straining towards a romanticised mythical identity is a poetic fiction that collapses even as it is wrought; Shelley critiques and calls it into question even as he forms the myth. In contrast to *Alastor,* where the narrator follows the Poet on his journey to destruction without noting any dismissive reactions from any outsiders (the closest thing to a character outside the narrator and the Poet is the Arab maiden), the "pardlike figure" (280) is thrown into relief by the reaction of the rest of the mourning throng:

> All stood aloof, and at his partial moan

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[32] Judith S. Chernaik, "The Figure of the Poet in Shelley," *ELH* 35 (1968): 566. *JSTOR*. 19 Mar. 2008
<http://www.jstor.org/search>.

> Smiled through their tears; well knew that gentle band
>
> Who in another's fate now wept his own;

<div align="right">(34: 298-300)</div>

The knowing and gently undercutting narratorial observation demonstrates Shelley's self-questioning artistry. He continues with this presentation, and emphasises that Urania fails to recognise him:

> As in the accents of an unknown land,
>
> He sung new sorrow; sad Urania scanned
>
> The Stranger's mien, and murmured: 'who art thou?'
>
> He answered not, but with a sudden hand
>
> Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,
>
> Which was like Cain's or Christ's — Oh! that it should be so!

<div align="right">(34: 301-06)</div>

Shelley continues to magnify the figure into the role of the ultimate outsider and exile who suffers the excruciating pain of Cain and Christ. The polarities of these two figures are synthesised for some critics by their extreme experience of pain,[33] but Shelley courts disbelief by forcing the two antithetical figures into a single symbolic space. The breaking off from this description bespeaks the difficulty for Shelley's narrator to continue in this vein, not simply due to the pain of self-recognition as Chernaik suggests,[34] but as also because the figurative wrenching of two disparate concepts into one symbolic sense grows insupportable. Urania's later failure to recognise the Shelleyan figure contrasts with the presentation of the Byronic figure weighted down by his fame. There is a sense that the Shelleyan figure has been squeezed out of the poem by his narrating alter-ego.

To be squeezed out of the poem by another force is an integral part of the structure of *Adonais*, and the figure of Keats, despite his transformation into Adonais, lurks in the text. The need to commemorate Keats dominates the text as much as Shelley's attempts

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[33] Chernaik, "The Figure of the Poet in Shelley," n. 18, 582.

[34] See also "It is not until the final line of his presentation – "oh! that it should be so!" (306) that the sudden breaking through of emotion suggests that the elegist is lamenting his own fate." Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland, OH; London: Case Western Reserve UP, 1972), 20.

to control and demonstrate his personal poetic power. Keats's status as a poet, and further, a poet Shelley claims as the last member of an elite pantheon, has a complicated effect on Shelley's elegy. Shelley weaves Keats's poetry into his text, and allows Keats's words to redirect the reader, signify other meanings, and contaminate his thought with different emphases. The elegy becomes the site of an exchange of meanings, and Keats's words retain a subterranean force:

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

> (43: 379-87)

Adonais retains within its structures manifold echoes of Keats's poetry, and it is no accident that critics are able to "discover" elements, reconfigurations, and subversions of Keats's thought and verse. Keats's oeuvre becomes "a portion of the loveliness" (379) of *Adonais*. The quotations and allusions from Keats's poetry are not only a device with which Shelley can build an adequate argument for Keats's greatness. They are also embedded in the elegy and contain their own sphere of reference. The words lie outside of Shelley's complete control as they recall Keats's poetic stature and output, thus directing the reader to an alternative frame of reference, one, in effect, created by the dead poet. This vacillation between Shelley's artistic control and the chaos of an external and contrary source of meaning, fires the elegy into the forward-bursting form that it assumes. Keats's language and ideas press against Shelley's poem, refusing to inhabit in any docile way the semantic space allocated to them. *Pace* Heffernan, Shelley does not consume Keats's poetry. The two poets and their poetry entwine, simultaneously inhabiting and creating alternative spheres of reference. Shelley's poem brims with multiplicity of interpretations, rendering it comparable to "Life, like a dome of many-

coloured glass," instead of the "white radiance of Eternity," (53: 462-63) he claims to desire.

Shelley never offers the reader an unmitigated, unquestioned vision or argument in the poem. In stanza 43 he does not wholly embrace the idea of Keats as "a portion of the loveliness;" the shifts and oscillations of tone in this stanza alone indicate an alienation from the position even as it is being recorded. The strangeness of the diction strains the sense of Shelley's initial assertion: "He is a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely" (43: 379-80). If Adonais is "a portion of the loveliness," then the line following it suggests that he is no longer: "which *once* he made more lovely" (43: 380). The lines move from the present tense to the past tense, suggesting the transient and confused nature of Adonais' status as the narrator struggles with the chaos of change as he attempts to control the poem. Chaos, time, and transience become tyrannous as Shelley performs the poem, a poem that seems to wrest itself from the grasp of the narrator. The one Spirit "compels" the world to wear the forms it does, and "tortures th' unwilling dross;" (384) Shelley's language resists and attempts to control the tyranny of transformation. Adonais has not melted into "the loveliness;" he retains his identity. Whereas in *Epipsychidion* identity's retention is a painful truth, "We shall become the same, we shall be one / Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?" (*Epipsychidion*, 573-74), in *Adonais* there is a steely insistence on Adonais' continued status as an individual. Even by stanza 46, Adonais retains enough uniqueness to be recognised and welcomed by the pantheon of the greats:

> 'Thou art become as one of us,' they cry,
> 'It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
> Swung blind in unascended majesty,
> Silent alone amid a Heaven of Song.
> Assume thy wingèd throne, thou Vesper of our throng!'

<p style="text-align: right">(46: 410-14)</p>

This vacillation between two positions does not indicate a paucity of vision on the part of Shelley's poetry, nor an inability to convey exactly what he means. The poem embraces ambiguity and an endless state of becoming as the condition of poetry. Shelley never

fully adopts any single position in the poem; all are tried on and recognised as poetic or psychological methods to mythologise, memorialise, or honour the dead poet. Struggle characterises the ending of *Adonais*. Shelley's verse and the trajectory of his thought urge him on beyond the bounds of his comfort, and the poem remains in a state of becoming as opposed to reaching the posited "afar" (55: 492).

> Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
> Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
> They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
> A light is passed from the revolving year,
> And man, and woman; and what still is dear
> Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
> The soft sky smiles, — the low wind whispers near:
> 'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,
> No more let Life divide what Death can join together.
>
> (53: 469-77)

The beginning of stanza 53 immediately draws attention to Shelley's wish to draw away from the intensity of his vision, as if the absolute image of Eternity that he has conjured compels him like a siren song. The rhetorical questions heap up on one another, hypnotising the narrator towards a repudiation of human life. The vacillation and mutability of life are shown to be mortally dangerous to the poet; things "dear" to the poet will inevitably "crush" him or if repellent, "make thee wither" (53: 473-74). The recasting of the marriage vows indicate the ambiguity inherent in these lines. Shelley forces the reader to confront a seriousness of intent while noting the dark parody of these lines' appropriation for his "joining" with Adonais in the afterlife. The images do not provide an escape from life, and despite the thrust of the lines to speed the narrator to the life beyond life, the hypnotic persuasion required shows how keenly the unspoken life drive burns within Shelley's narrator. The previous stanza more keenly demonstrates the unacknowledged but ever present life-urge in the elegy:

> The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,

> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
>
> Until Death tramples it to fragments. — Die,
>
> If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
>
> Follow where all is fled! — Rome's azure sky,
>
> Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
>
> The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

<div align="right">(52: 460-68)</div>

The stanza opens immediately with "The One remains;" while it may remain, this "One" beggars description and empties language of meaning in its perfection. However, "the many" belongs in human language, as we recall how often Shelley shows the realm of the mortal and its language to be incompatible with the Eternal.[35] The poet would have to renounce his language and his identity in order to participate in "The One." As The Earth says in *Prometheus Unbound*:

> Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
>
> Which rules with daedal harmony a throng
>
> Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

<div align="right">(Prometheus Unbound 4: 415-17)</div>

This idea of senselessness and shapelessness may be compelling to Shelley's narrator, but it retains a threatening ineffable quality that inhibits the narrator from description of "The One." Instead, we pass immediately to the many:

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

<div align="right">(52: 462-64)</div>

This presentation of life in its sculptured multiplicity is a beautifully ambiguous image, and its "stain" is reminiscent of the same ambiguity inherent in Blake's use of the word in his "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*:[36]

> And I made a rural pen,
>
> And I stained the water clear.

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[35] See particularly stanzas 23 and 24 of *The Witch of Atlas*, and the first act of *Prometheus Unbound*.
[36] Blake, "Introduction," 12.

> And I wrote my happy songs
>
> Every child may joy to hear.

Staining is not a wholly negative act for either of these Romantic poets, and it is the spectre of Death here that holds the destructive role. After Death is figured as a destroyer of the life's many-coloured dome, Shelley's narrator moves straight into outright self-persuasion as he girds the self with two consecutive exclamations. The final two lines of the stanza generate the same explosive ambiguities so characteristic of these final stanzas, as the narrator lists the manifold beauties of existence, from Rome's azure skies to music and words, only to dismiss them as unable to convey the ideal beauty that they reach toward. The listing technique has a double effect on the reader; it shows the banality of these splendours by comparison to the eternal, but it also demonstrates the tremendous beauty of earthly achievements and pleasures. Despite the narrator's death-drive, there is no mistaking the equal urge that binds him to life. The final stanzas of the elegy do not read like a suicide note; they read as if Shelley's narrator is attempting to write a suicide note against an equally powerful desire to remain subject to the glorious mutability of life.

The penultimate stanza enacts a heightening of poetic power. Shelley's words have conjured all too potently the fire which consumes the cold mortality. Words, previously viewed as "weak" have become, as for language in *Prometheus Unbound*, a power unleashed like a sword that cannot be sheathed:

> That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
>
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,
>
> That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
>
> Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
>
> Which through the web of being blindly wove
>
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
>
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
>
> The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
>
> Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

<div align="right">(54: 478-86)</div>

It begins slowly and emphatically, with "That Light …That Beauty…That Benediction," performing a move to distance the narrator from "the eclipsing curse of birth" (480) which still allows him to sense the absolutes he cites. Love penetrates the web "blindly wove" (482) by mortal creatures and burns brightly, acting upon Shelley to consume the "last clouds of cold mortality" (486). The web, then, protects mortals from the sustaining Love that acts to consume life, subsuming all into its brightness. While Shelley here welcomes the destructive power of Love, its consuming force helps to create the ambivalence of the final stanza, which gathers its trajectory from the final lines of this stanza.

The final stanza of *Adonais* is far from resolved. Power and control over his life's autonomy seem wrested from the poet as he is borne along by a power of his own invocation; the consuming force of Love hangs over the stanza as Shelley's rhetoric propels it to the fore:

> The breath whose might I have invoked in song
>
> Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
>
> Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
>
> Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
>
> The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!
>
> I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
>
> Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
>
> The soul of Adonais, like a star,
>
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

(55: 487-95)

The darkly ambivalent poetry of the final stanza strains toward an affirmative statement as Shelley's eyes are fixed on "the inmost veil of Heaven" (493). The breath "descends" (488) onto the narrator creating the repetitive and lulling line, "Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng" (489), a line which does not indicate where the narrator will be driven except to say far from the known quantities of mortal life. The final personal pronoun in the poem reveals doubt, not optimism; the persuasive formula at the end of *Adonais* never fully convinces that "the abode where the Eternal are" (495) is the

desirable place to be. There is a grim sense of Shelley's prophetic rhetoric forcing him along against his will.

This poem's awareness of what is at stake in formal self-mastery precludes any absolute belief in a "beyond". Such a "beyond" remains a concept figured by the poem itself. The Spenserian stanza employed by Shelley is perhaps the longest and most intricate form of stanza which renders the form difficult to manipulate as it demands that only three sounds account for nine lines' worth of rhymes. This adds to the heightening of artifice and allows Shelley to skate dangerously on the edge of the elegy as his manipulations become more obvious. This is a self-created rhetorical construction, and as such, a creation that the narrator cannot surrender to or deny. This creation is both paradoxically owned by and in control of its creator. The final moments of *Adonais* record the difficulty the poet has in either submitting to or denying the transcendent moment sought and wrought by its language. "His mute voice" (3: 27) sounds through the poem, sparking the elegy into paroxysms of doubt, self-assertion and competition. This drive to centre both self and other without dissolving into oneness propels Shelley towards the finale that ultimately reaches the pinnacle of Shelley's self-constitutive elegy. The heightened tension of *Adonais* should be read as a product of the scale of Shelley's ambition; his poem must satisfy both poet-heroes in order for the elegy's existence as a genre offering transcendence and consolation to be possible.

Shelley's concept of the hero reaches its most dramatic climax in his development of the first-person poet-hero. Using the hero, Shelley experiments with heroism, the genre, and with tropes as he discovers the limits of language, and so the limits of human desire and possibility. The hero, in Byron's mould, communicates "the rage and the fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions" (*BLJ* 9: 54). Shelley's hero, instead of decrying the limits of his existence, explores the relationship between his state and conceptions. Harold Bloom argues strongly for the defeat of metaphor by the tyranny of inner and outer, subject and object: "The polarities of subject and object defeat every metaphor that attempts to unify them, and it is this characteristic defeat that both defines

and limits metaphor."[37] Yet Shelley alchemises defeat into a singular beauty, allowing the hero and reader a flight into "love's rare Universe" (*Epipsychidion*, 589) won by heroic exploration of the outer limits of poetic possibility. While the hero may discover insurmountable boundaries, his heroism resides in the creation from this seeming limit an aesthetic beauty that transcends the edges of possibility.

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[37] Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 101.

Yeats: "there is always a phantasmagoria"

**"I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume"[1]**

CHAPTER EIGHT

"My poems, my true self:" Self-fashioning in "The Tower"

From his earliest poetry, a preoccupation with the figure of the poet is central to Yeats's thought. *The Wanderings of Oisin* reflects the serious attempt that Yeats made to create a poetic self from an early stage in his career.[2] Daniel Albright isolates "his painstaking construction of personality" as Yeats's major achievement as poet and considers Yeats's "own life as his only satisfactory myth."[3] However, Yeats's life and personality become suitable for poetry only when it becomes crafted verse. Yeats had no patience with a poetry of ideas that existed to expound a theory or philosophy for its own sake. His work subordinates all concerns to the level of their ability to become a thing of beauty, and his historical life becomes a theme most valuable for its aesthetic possibilities. As he writes to George Russell on 2 May 1900: "If you want to give ideas for their own sake write prose. In verse they are subordinate to beauty which is their soul if they are true. Isnt [sic] this obvious?"[4] Yeats's effort to make his soul should be viewed in this context; the self becomes material for poetry, poetry is not a vehicle for the self. The creative poet becomes hero by his ability to hew a poetic life out of an historical existence. Yeats attempts to transform the historical self into a poetical creation, and the labour of self-fashioning renders the process heroic:

> Now shall I make my soul,
>
> Compelling it to study
>
> In a learned school

("The Tower," 181-83)

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[1] Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, *The Complete Poems*, ed. with introd. and notes Francis Murphy (London: Penguin, 2004), 675.
[2] See chapter three for a fuller discussion of *The Wanderings of Oisin*.
[3] Albright, *The Myth Against Myth*, 1.
[4] *Yeats's Letters* 2: 522-23.

Yeats used alterity as a principal tool in his poetry; he often sought to approach the self from the outside by the construction of "others," either created by the poet or taken and redrawn from life.[5] When Albright argues that Yeats does not fully animate the other in his poetry, he discerns a principal ambivalence in Yeats's mode of poetical creation:

> To some extent, Yeats tried to translate his intimate, public self directly into an objective, verbal image; but although he included his friends in his poetry, even distant people, they all remain stylisations or shadows, and Yeats was left alone with the form-trace of his own life as his only satisfactory myth.[6]

The self becomes the only vital principle to the poet, a fact which both celebrates the self and highlights the essential solitude of the poet. Yeats's attempt to "make my soul" ("The Tower," 181) becomes the overarching principle in his poetry, and the construction of other characters and selves aids self-definition. Yeats bestows vitality on friends, relatives, and strangers in the poetry, yet remains, by turn painfully or triumphantly, alive to their less palpable presence. They seem less vital than Yeats's authorial self, but the necessity of peopling his verse with myths, friends, and relatives elevates their presences from Albright's description of "shadows" to ghosts haunting the poetry, half-visitant, and half-created. The translation from life to artistic language is not as a negative becoming a photograph; rather Yeats shows the struggle involved in the artistic transformation. His strong-lined descriptions of self and other through the lenses of mythology, history, or philosophy reflect the various modes required for the attempted transformation that self and other undergo in being made into poetry. The poetry emphasises its "made" condition as the poet turns hero by his transformative quest. That the transformation remains hauntingly incomplete provides the tension between the poet and his material, and the putative "self" that remains suspended between the two.

That the transformation remains attempted rather than complete disrupts any simple translation from biographical self to poetic self; the poet cannot sketch himself directly into poetry:

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[5] I take my definition of this term from Derek Attridge, who figures alterity as an encounter: "when I encounter alterity, I encounter not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other." See *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 24.

[6] Albright, *The Myth Against Myth,* 1.

> A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy,
> whatever it may be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks
> directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria.[7]

It seems that this "phantasmagoria" is indefinably suspended between art and life, and resists definition. In this case, to what end should the critic search for any putative Yeatsian self that is so difficult to define? It is the recurring search to define, to modify, and to seek the self that thrusts the concept of self to the forefront of any analysis of Yeats's poetry. The heroism of Yeats's attempt resides in the creation of various models of the self that he painstakingly fashions, only to refuse to assert the final validity of any such models. His heroes perform within the verbal arenas that Yeats provides for them; Hanrahan, Michael Robartes, Cuchulain, and many others are never granted an autonomous existence outside of Yeats's poem. Heroism is experiential and rooted in the poem itself. Yet this does not offer uncomplicated affirmation to the poet. Their fictive existence becomes a source of pride and frustration in "The Circus Animals' Desertion":

> I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
>
> I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
>
> Maybe at last being but a broken man,
>
> I must be satisfied with my heart, although
>
> Winter and summer till old age began
>
> My circus animals were all on show,
>
> Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,
>
> Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.
>
> (1-8)

This stanza illuminates Yeats's poetic practice by beginning immediately with the self, where, as the poem later informs us, all the myths begin. Yeats despatches mythology: he presents the reader with the artifice of poetic creation, the search for a theme. That we are offered the specific length of time the poet has been struggling themelessly acts to demythologise any bardic pretension, leaving the reader with a speaker who is "but a broken man" (3), itself another mask. Yeats deprecates the poetic creations that he has previously offered as being mere "circus animals…all on show" (6), moving the poetry

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[7] Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 509.

out of the realm of high art into a degraded populist spectacle. Yeats never presents the heroes outside the ostentatious control of the poet; by his constant presence, the poet becomes his heroes' puppet master, as he directs his creations through his created themes. The heroes are "*my* circus animals" (6) [emphasis added], displayed at his whim. As John Holloway points out in the context of "The Tower," Yeats constantly demonstrates the created nature of his heroes and turns the magician's hand towards the reader:

> It is part of the nature of these poems that they do not offer to depict and describe things which the reader is invited to envisage as having prior, independent existence. On the contrary, the reader is invited to see them as called into being by the *fiat* of the poet, peopling a world *ab initio* as part of the creative act. [8]

When Yeats turns to the creation of his own identity through poetry, the problem of self-definition dominates the poetry, signalling the impossibility of any absolute or objective definition.

"The Tower" is Yeats's most prolonged attempt to build a self through poetry outside of the implied author standing behind the work. The poetry occupies a space between Wordsworthian lyrical self-communion and Byronic audience awareness. The poem performs the difficult task of addressing the audience while questioning the self. Immediately Yeats throws the reader into the dialectic that he sets up in the poem between a commanding authoritative self, and a troubled insecure fragmented self. Stan Smith points out the divided nature of "The Tower," arguing that the commanding self reveals an undercurrent of doubt and uncertainty: "For *The Tower*, which Yeats spoke of as 'evidence to show that my poetry has gained in self-possession and power'[9] nevertheless carries with it, as a kind of subversive verso, a message of failure and defeat."[10] To describe the undercurrent of the poem as straightforward defeat seems inaccurate. More potent is the hovering fear of a defeat from which the poet cannot recover, or convert into a victory by his transformative ability. The beginning of the poem does not disguise the pain of age, registering "a message of failure and defeat" as

[8] John Holloway, "Style and World in 'The Tower'," *An Honoured Guest: New Essays on W. B. Yeats*, ed. Denis Donoghue and J. R. Mulryne (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), 97.
[9] Yeats, *A Vision*, 8.
[10] Stan Smith, *The Origins of Modernism: Eliot, Pound, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal* (New York, NY; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 163.

its pronouncement as opposed to a subversive undertone. There is no acceptance of defeat at this early juncture; "The Tower" grimly seeks to fight, despite the pain, rage, and frustration that dog the poet. "The Tower" oscillates between making pain and fear of defeat its central emotional state, and protectively embedding these chaotic elements as a repressed message. It is this vacillation between the poet's commanding tone and external oppressive forces, here represented by age, that provides the tension necessary for the conditions of Yeatsian soul-making. The reader watches the poet create his "phantasmagoria" out of the man sat at the breakfast table; this creative struggle becomes the centre of the poem as Yeats shapes the biographical self into the poet-hero before our eyes.[11]

The reader is thrust directly into the high psychological pitch of the poem, as the rhetorical question demands of the reader or self:

> What shall I do with this absurdity —
> O heart, O troubled heart - this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail?
>
> (1-4)

The body, divorced from the self in this passage, seems at odds with the mind that defines the "I" that the poem continues to describe. This body-soul schism seems to support Smith's thesis that the poem is split between the mortal temporal self, and the poet whose commitment is to eternity: "*The Tower* combines both quarrels, pitting the practical man, concerned about the entail of property, against the poet, owing allegiance to that larger, intangible heritage, 'smitten even in the presence of the most high beauty by the knowledge of our solitude.'"[12] While Smith's terminology is drawn from Yeats's own "Anima Hominis,"[13] the speaker seems not to see the relationship between body and soul, man and poet as a quarrel, but as a negotiation. The poet mourns musically for his

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[11] I return here to Yeats's description of the poet-self in a poem: "A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it may be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria." Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 509.

[12] Smith, *The Origins of Modernism*, 156.

[13] Yeats, "Anima Hominus," *Essays*, 492.

decaying body, alive to its and his art's mutual dependence: "O heart, O troubled heart" (2). The body, rendered in brutish imagery, is vital to Yeats's poetic creation, not as a sublime adversary, but a dying animal, subject to time. The adversarial relationship is between time and the whole man, encompassing body and soul. The placement of "The Tower" after "Sailing to Byzantium" is significant, as "The Tower" seems to have absorbed the knowledge won by the earlier poem.

"Sailing to Byzantium" records Yeats's attempt to create an art independent of nature, free from a dependence on the "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," 40). Sturge Moore famously criticised Yeats for failing to escape from nature, instead enacting the imagination's failure to transcend the temporal.[14] Steven Matthews claims that the end of the poem seems unconvincing, and "Byzantium" is Yeats's attempt to respond to this problem:

> The ending of "Sailing to Byzantium" remains a deeply felt but vulnerable improvisation; the poem's closure not really persuasive, and the poem remaining to be rewritten as "Byzantium" three years later, a poem which plays variations upon the *ottava rima* form, but whose own closure seems in its turn undermined by an unstoppable replication as "images that yet / fresh images beget.[15]

However, the ending of "Sailing to Byzantium" is deliberately unconvincing; as my chapter on Yeats's poetics argues, he creates an ambiguity that opens *The Tower*, and purposely fails to satisfy the reader or the self. In "The Tower," Yeats seems to respond immediately to the conclusion of "Sailing to Byzantium": "The Tower" begins where "Sailing to Byzantium" leaves off. Having registered the impossibility of an escape from nature, Yeats grounds his speaker firmly in the corporeal world. As James Olney writes, "it is clear that for Yeats creation is a human/divine and mortal/immortal affair that is both circular and continuous."[16] This both/and construction suggested by Olney aptly describes Yeats's quest to write a poem of the whole man. Age is the adversary of, yet spur to, both poet and man; the poet depends on the ongoing existence and experiences of

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[14] *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence*, 162.

[15] Steven Matthews, "Yeats's 'Passionate Improvisations': Grierson, Eliot, and the Byronic Integrations of Yeats's Later Poetry" *English* 49 (2000): 138.

[16] James Olney, *The Rhizome and the Flower: The Perennial Philosophy of Yeats and Jung* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: U of California P, 1980), 262.

the man to create poetry. Their enemy is the march of time; thus the aged body is the unnamed "absurdity" at the start of the poem, and the highly rhetorical opening line in perfect iambic pentameter skilfully draws attention to the dramatic construction of the question. The second and third lines continue in iambic pentameter, allowing for the dramatic voice to develop and move from a pained repetitious lament ("O heart, O troubled heart," 2) to an embittered ironic question. Yeats considers the bodily symptoms of age as other to the self, as the speaker refers to it as "tied to me" by an external force. He reinforces the force of this violation of the self by the animalistic image the speaker offers as analogy, comparing it to a dog's tail. The use of trimeter in this line acts to emphasise it, as the terse brevity with the metre contrasts to the flexibility afforded by the pentameter line.

The following lines, after one further trimeter line, continue in pentameter, formally indicating that Yeats has recovered himself after the break into the abrupt, though characteristically Yeatsian,[17] trimeter measure. Yeats invokes Wordsworth, implicitly comparing his own evaluation of his ageing self with the Romantic poet's examination of his changed nature in age in "Tintern Abbey":[18]

> Never had I more
>
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
>
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
>
> That more expected the impossible —
>
> No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly,
>
> Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulben's back
>
> And had the livelong summer day to spend.
>
> <div align="right">("The Tower," 5-11)</div>

 In contrast to Wordsworth's poem of age, Yeats registers no loss of his boyhood faculties, affirming instead the superior nature of his imagination in age. Hugh Kenner,

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[17] Helen Vendler even describes Yeats as "inventing" the trimeter quatrain mode in English: "Because Yeats 'invented' the trimeter quatrain as a major form in English verse, it is more closely identified with him, and with Ireland, than the ready-made inherited forms that he embraced." See Vendler, 202.

[18] Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth*, 131-135.

Richard Ellmann and Stan Smith have noted the references to Wordsworth in the poem,[19] with Smith particularly developing an argument for Yeats's interest in Wordsworth's counter voice: "…the very presence in Yeats's text of these alien voices, of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, is an acknowledgement of failure."[20] Yet there is no failure, acknowledged or not in Yeats's use of his poetic predecessors. These alien voices are chosen by Yeats; they do not break into the poetry. Yeats weaves their words carefully into the fabric of "The Tower," affirming his status as the creating and controlling poet. At this juncture, Yeats chooses to master Wordsworth, proving his worth over the dead poet by means of his vigorous mind in age.[21] Yeats's prose when discussing Wordsworth often adopts a patronising or scornful tone, despite his obvious respect for much of his work. Most notable in the context of this Wordsworthian invocation is Yeats's horror at Wordsworth's decline: "Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust."[22] The speaker's desperate urge is to claim for itself the energy Yeats felt had vanished from Wordsworth's late work. Yeats does not bow to Wordsworth's authority, nor is he overwhelmed by his poetic presence.[23] Rather Yeats requisitions Wordsworth's poetry, and uses it to strengthen his own; his use of Wordsworth's poetry is an appropriative gesture, not a defeat in the shadow of his language.

Yeats's control over Wordsworth's poetry acts as a symbol of his vigour in contrast to Wordsworth's diminished faculties. He strengthens his poetic authority by contrast to Wordsworth's voice; his ability to incorporate and manage Wordsworth's highly original poetry in his own voice is his crowning glory. However, the chaos that encroaches on to the poem from the outside, the original difficulty of ageing, does not exit the poem. The speaker can control language, but he is unable to prevent the physical decline inevitable

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[19] Kenner, *Gnomon*, 25; Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats,* 156-65.

[20] Smith, *The Origins of Modernism*, 163-64.

[21] As Kenner points out: "'Or the humbler worm' is a tip to the reader; it isn't Yeatsian diction but a parody of Wordsworth's. Unlike Wordsworth, Yeats the poet has passed sixty undiminished and needs no man's indulgence." Kenner, 25.

[22] Yeats, "Anima Hominis," *Essays*, 506.

[23] Smith seems to suggest this when he writes "…though the occurrence almost places a kind of Wordsworthian parenthesis around the Yeatsian texts." Smith, *The Origins of Modernism*, 156.

for the man, and thus for the poet. The tone, when registering the increasing strength of his imagination and correlating it to his declining physical health, is bitterly ironic as the speaker considers alternate modes of existence without poetry:

> It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
>
> Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
>
> Until imagination, ear and eye,
>
> Can be content with argument and deal
>
> In abstract things; or be derided by
>
> A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

(11-16)

Daniel Albright argues that this section represents Yeats's "good humour of old age."[24] This interpretation ignores the darkness of the poetry, which balances irony with a very real concern that poetry is no longer an appropriate mode for the ageing man. The humour that Yeats employs here could more aptly be described as savage, as his speaker refuses the realm of the supernatural in favour of the mortal sphere. As Patrick J. Keane remarks, "As these defiant, even fierce, declarations affirm, Yeats's subject, for all his obsession with the supernatural, is *this* world, envisioned as somehow darkened and irradiated by its interaction with the other [the supernatural realm]."[25] "Darkened and irradiated" describes this complex interplay between shadow and light, doubt and assertion built into these lines. "It seems that I must…" performs a wearied balancing act. The line conveys a range of emotions, incorporating sarcasm, bewilderment, and thought; crucially, the self is defined by its vital dramatic voice and its status as a mental creation. Yeats can "choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend" (12) as these philosophers are contained in the words passed down through the tradition.[26] Like Plato and Plotinus, Yeats fashions himself upon the page, but he seeks, using the force of his personality, to push beyond the potential abstractedness of words and suffuse his self-presentation with a sense of felt life.

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[24] "This descent into abstraction is surely a last resort for a poet, especially for a poet with Yeats's intense hatred of abstractions; but it is all treated with good humour of old age." Albright, *The Myth Against Myth*, 10.

[25] Patrick J. Keane, *Yeats's Interactions with Tradition* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1987), xvii.

[26] As Keane states, the reader can trace "A similar pattern of use and abuse obtains in Yeats's employment of the ideas and images of Locke, and the Neoplatonists, Vico, and a host of others from Homer to the English Romantics." Keane, 13.

Yeats does not just summon his visionary company, but he judges them and decides whether to join them. This could seem like intolerable swagger; Yeats gives himself the right to be the controlling and summoning hero among spirits of Plato's and Plotinus' eminence. Yet he seems to avoid this by the vulnerability he suffers in the earliest part of the poem where he mourns the bodily decrepitude that advances upon the self. The turbulent emotion of the early section makes his question seem natural to the passionate speaker. His arrogance shifts into heroism; the implication of such an alliance is a rejection of the mutable world of men in favour of the spiritual plane described in Yeats's reading of the Platonic system. The question also seems riddled with dramatic intensity; the reader is poised to discover if Yeats can justify such self-aggrandising, or whether the speaker can accept his alignment with the dead philosophers which would place him outside the mutable world. The tone of the stanza, however, seems sarcastic and ironic, suggesting that these philosophers lack an insight into the actual. The enlarged imagination of the older poet seems incongruous with any move to narrow his vision into the purely spiritual plane, and the Yeatsian speaker resents being forced into this exclusive society which excludes the "excited" self that the poem celebrates as being more potent than in his youth. It is his age that demands such an accommodation to the spiritual plane that is derided for its over-cerebral nature:

> Until imagination, ear and eye,
>
> Can be content with argument and deal
>
> In abstract things; or be derided by
>
> A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

(13-16)

The implication of these lines is that imagination, ear, and eye cannot be content with argument and abstract things alone, and that the Yeatsian self commits itself as much to the corporeal as the cerebral. Contentment with the abstract alone would be a retreat from the responsibility of the poet to engage with the substance of the material world. This discontent with mere abstraction is registered in the lines immediately before the passage, where Yeats parallels the engagement with recollected youth undertaken in "Tintern Abbey". The excited, passionate and fantastical is not dead in Yeats, unlike Wordsworth

who discovers the difference between the younger self and the aging poet to be an insurmountable gulf defined as the movement from feeling to thought:

> … for such loss, I would believe,
>
> Abundant recompense. For I have learned
>
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
>
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
>
> The still, sad music of humanity,
>
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
>
> To chasten and subdue.

("Tintern Abbey," 88-94)

Like Jerome McGann, Yeats seems to detect in "Tintern Abbey" a loss which has not delivered "abundant recompense."[27] Unlike Wordsworth, Yeats would not wish to believe in being so remote from his earlier state. Yeats refuses to consider the rupture between youth and age as being a complete break with his earlier state; "The Tower" revolves around a struggle to separate age from the self. He emphasises instead the continuity between his youthful nature and his current situation. Old age's decrepitude seems an absurd mockery instead of a reflection of his present mental state.

Thus, to counter the poem's conception of the abstract power of Plato and Plotinus, Homer and Raferty become important to Yeats for their poetic creativity. Despite their blindness, they created in words legendarily beautiful women that resound through the ages.[28] Their blindness allowed the imagination access to an otherworldly beauty independent of the factual evidence of sight. Yeats summons Homer as the archetype of the blind poet who fashioned the governing female archetype of his own poetry, Helen of Troy. Helen must "all living hearts betray[ed]" (53) because her beauty is not of the world, but from the One that Plato and Plotinus hailed as being from a higher world of archetypes. To look for Helen in everyday society without a transforming poetic gaze is to be betrayed by the poet's words into seeking, *Alastor*-like, for the ethereal in the

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[27] "'Abundant recompense' is a 'cherished madness of [Wordsworth's] heart.' To read that fearful myth as 'truth' is to learn nothing from it." McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, 299.

[28] "In Raferty he found an appealing historical precedent for his vision of a literary maker whose creativity could voice, intensify, and transform the preoccupations of his milieu." : James Pethica, "Yeats, folklore, and Irish legend," *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, 137.

corporeal. James Olney points out Yeats's interest in transforming the everyday world into the eternal forms:

> By the time they [real people] reach the page of Yeats's autobiography, these real people have been changed, changed and transformed utterly, so that a great beauty, not terrible but ideal, has been born out of the meeting of the historic facts of their existence and the artist's shaping vision.[29]

Olney emphasises the importance of artifice over degraded corporeal reality in the poetry, and yet his view risks overlooking the poetry's fascination with the chaotic fecundity of life.[30]

The controlling poet harnesses the chaos he presents; his art lies in his ability to create from the "foul rag and bone shop" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," 40) from which the ladders ascend. Ultimately all mythology is fashioned and developed from life's plurality. Yeats writes "There are two realities, the terrestrial and the condition of fire. All power is from the terrestrial condition, for there all opposites meet…but in the condition of fire is all music and rest."[31] There is a critical tendency to emphasise one characteristic over another at this juncture and characterise Yeats as a poet of heaven or earth. Patrick Keane exemplifies critics who emphasise Yeats's earthly poetics when he remarks:

> But it is a music without poetic words, a condition *too* disembodied for a poet caught in "sensual music" and attracted to the fleshpots of language. For a singer to be "struck dumb in the simplicity of fire" would be to lose all "power," to sacrifice the antinomial tension from which his art springs.[32]

To apply this judgement to all Yeats's poetry would be to over-simplify; while Keane responds to a Yeatsian cue, Yeats does not always reject the condition of fire. Instead, the tension between "simplicity" and "power" is central to his creativity. Yeats may, in some poems, seem to embrace one or the other exclusively, but when reading any poem in the context of his oeuvre as opposed to as a discrete entity, the reader can gauge the poetic potential of the tension between the two conditions, spotlighted strongly in "The Tower."

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[29] Olney, "From 'Some Versions of Memory/ Some Versions of *Bios*: The Ontology of Autobiography'," 5.
[30] Olney, "From 'Some Versions of Memory/ Some Versions of *Bios*," 5.
[31] Yeats, "Anima Mundi," *Essays*, 523.
[32] Keane, 116.

Hanrahan becomes symbolic of this productive tension between earthly and eternal modes. As a creation, Hanrahan is pure imagination, and exists in the realm of the mind via the text. He figures as one of Yeats's heroic characters, interacting with supernatural powers and his status, as hedge schoolmaster, often implied authorship of nationalist poetry.[33] Yet for all his Irish heroic situation, there is something "broken" and all too human about him, too:

> And I myself created Hanrahan
>
> And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn
>
> From somewhere in the neighbouring cottages.
>
> Caught by an old man's juggleries
>
> He stumbled, tumbled, fumbled to and fro
>
> And had but broken knees for hire
>
> And horrible splendour of desire;
>
> I thought it all out twenty years ago:

(57-64)

This statement of creation contains the speaker's pride at his commanding vision, and his ability to give mythological life to a creation through the chaos of the variable. Whilst asserting his control over his subject matter, the rhyme scheme within the first four lines slurs; "Hanrahan" and "dawn" pointedly refuse to sound harmoniously together. This jarring serves to indicate pointedly that the stanza is a created structure, and the recurring use of "And" at the start of each line seems repetitive. The end rhymes of the next two lines are also half-rhymes, and he strains both words to fit the rhyme; the poet's control has its limits, and here language almost escapes his harnessing insistence on the rhyme. Language mirrors content as "Stumbled, tumbled, fumbled" (61) jolts the line, and anticipates Hanrahan's broken knees. The rhyme of "hire" and "desire," causes the reader to recoil from their bitter unity in rhyme. "The horrible splendour of desire" marries the beauty of longing with its corresponding pain and degradation. Yeats depicts Hanrahan's struggle through these lines with close attention to his stumbling existence, but the final

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[33] For a fuller discussion of Yeats's interest in the folkloric tradition, see Edward Hirsch, "'And I Myself Created Hanrahan': Yeats, Folklore, and Fiction" *ELH* 48 (1981): 880-93. *JSTOR*. 7 July 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

lines indicate a disengagement from his creation. Yeats inhabits a plane different from the unphysical hyper-reality where his textual creation dwells; his status as author of Hanrhan "And I myself created Hanrahan" (57) reinforces their essential difference, as at the start of the stanza Yeats seems all author, and Hanrahan a separate and literary dependent creation. Yet Hanrahan remains earth-rooted by the physicality of Yeats's description; Yeats's description of Hanrahan's broken state, painfully mirrored by the form, resembles the poet's description of his own personal frailties. As Hanrahan is a creation of Yeats's, so Yeats comes to resemble Hanrahan. As the poem progresses, the reader becomes aware of the mutual dependence of Yeats and Hanrahan, as Yeats longs to be left with Hanrahan, the poet depending on Hanrahan as Hanrahan exists as a creature of Yeats's imagination: "Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan,/ For I need all his mighty memories" (103-04). Yeats and Hanrahan are mixed entities, and self-fashioning must find a way to accommodate natural and supernatural.[34] Author and creation, man and poet, body and soul all meet in the poem; the mingling and blurring between each is never completed nor can the poet divide these antinomies conclusively. "Yeats," like Hanrahan, is a composite hero, defined by the variety of his influences.

Indeed, the emphasis on the body and the mortal begins to get the upper hand as Yeats recreates the story of Hanrahan. Yeats's description of Hanrahan's "broken knees" is physical before it runs into the supernatural, when he depicts Hanrahan following the bewitched cards in his frenzy. The intensity of the memory of his own creation haunts Yeats to the point of breaking off his own reverie:

> O towards I have forgotten what — enough!
> I must recall a man that neither love
> Nor music nor an enemy's clipped ear
> Could, he was so harried, cheer;
> A figure that has grown so fabulous
> There's not a neighbour left to say

---

[34] As Olney writes of Yeats's poetry: "What is the natural without the supernatural, what is time without eternity, and what is the consciousness of the incarnate state without the unconscious inhabited by discarnate spirits?" Olney, *The Rhizome and the Flower*, 245.

>When he finished his dog's day:
>
>An ancient bankrupt master of this house.

<div align="right">(73-80)</div>

The "O" of the beginning of the line recalls the reader to the anguished emotion that suffused the speaker at the start of the poem, where "O" is also used. The flourish of "enough!" at the end of the line emphasises the emotional breaking-point that has been reached, and the poet's act of control in stopping the reverie and changing the subject from Hanrahan, an explicitly fictive creation, to "an ancient bankrupt master of this house." Yeats tries to assuage the pain of recollecting the story he wrote about Hanrahan by moving to a memory of an actual person. The shift allows him to attempt to avoid the remembrance of his individual creativity. Against this creative assertion of individuality that proves here to be a painful act, Yeats finds comfort in locating himself within a tradition, and wrote "…that the more noble and stable qualities, those that are spread through the personality, and not isolated in a faculty, are the results of victory in the family struggle."[35] The fictiveness of memory complicates this; Yeats's use of "fabulous" stands out, again pointed up by its position at the end of the line, and flags up the createdness of memory, and the movement from fact, to history, to mythology.[36] The actual former owner of the house has become a fabled and fictive character who inhabits "The Tower" in the same manner as Hanrahan; Yeats's verse generates both figures, and their existence depends on his imagination. Despite his temporal existence, there are no witnesses to recall the objective facts of his life, even one so simple as the year that he died: "there's not a neighbour left to say / When he finished his dog's day."(78-79). The downbeat colloquialism, "dog's day," strips the man's life of any heroic pretension, even introducing an antiphonal anti-heroic effect as Yeats allows his imaginative control to be challenged by the commonplace fact of mortality. And yet, as so often, that concession to commonplace fact and the resulting momentary dispiritedness subtly alert us to the poet's all-managing presence, contriving a counter-note to set off his more triumphant

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[35] Yeats, "If I were four-and-twenty," W.B. Yeats, *Explorations*, 270.

[36] Cairns Craig's book, emphasising memory over imagination in Modernist poetry, seems to be a false dichotomy in the case of Yeats. Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry: Richest to the Richest* (London: Crook Helm, 1982).

assertions. In "The Tower" the fabric of the poem subsumes both fact and fiction, making them into a single imaginative substance.

Yeats's dismissal of Hanrahan, the product of his imagination, from the poem is one of the most dramatic moments in the poem, where the poet appears to be overcome by the recollection of his own narrative. Byron's lines, previously quoted in chapter 1, on the subject of poetic creation provide a useful gloss for Yeats's abrupt stagger from the recollection of his creation's actions:

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
>
> A being more intense, that we endow
>
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
>
> The life we image, even as I do now.
>
> What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
>
> Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
>
> Invisible but gazing, as I glow
>
> Mix'd with the spirit, blended with thy birth,
>
> And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth. [37]
>
> <div align="right">(CHP III. 6: 46-54)</div>

Hanrahan as creation possesses such a "being more intense," a "being" that is both the created matter of Yeats and the agent that alters the creating poet. Hanrahan is the "soul of [his] thought" and Yeats cannot be defined without consideration of Hanrahan, as they feel together; Yeats might say to or of Hanrahan that he is "blended with thy birth." Hanrahan is not a confessional creation, nor created as wish fulfilment. Hanrahan's intensity comes from his blurring with the Yeatsian self. This mutual dependency, while here creating an almost intolerable intensity, underlines the self-created nature of the soul, as its multiplicities are self-generated if difficult to rein back. Yeats then moves to a portrait of the other defining features of his soul, namely the men of action that fascinate him throughout the collection:

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[37] See chapter one, footnote 42.

> Before that ruin came, for centuries,
>
> Rough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to the knees
>
> Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow stairs,
>
> (81-83)

The link between Yeats and these warriors is via the Great Memory as he inhabits the same tower, and his act as poet is to claim them as his ancestors, to align himself with those with whom he wishes to identify and channel for his poem, and for other poetry. Such grounding in tradition is central to Yeats's performance in "The Tower," as Robin Skelton comments: "Tradition and the idea of tradition meant a great deal to Yeats. Indeed, a part of his answer to the authority problem was to indicate the poet's position in a number of traditions and his possession of a multiple-stranded heritage."[38] Crucially, Yeats creates this "multi-stranded heritage," and chooses both his ancestors and his descendents. This capacity centres the poet-hero his strength lies in his ability to conjure, judge, and lead those to whom he permits entry. Yeats emphasises this strength to choose who will enter the poem, and the ability to define the terms of their entry by the commanding tone he assumes in the next stanza: "As I would question all, come all who can; / Come old, necessitous, half-mounted man" (89-90). Yeats's questioning of his assembled interlocutors consists of discovering his similarity or difference from the standard response to age:

> Did all old men and women, rich and poor,
>
> Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,
>
> Whether in public or in secret rage
>
> As I do now against old age?
>
> But I have found an answer in those eyes
>
> That are impatient to be gone;
>
> Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan,
>
> For I need all his mighty memories.
>
> (97-104)

The speaker's interlocutors do not respond to his question with words; instead the poet-hero reads a response in their eyes. The interpreting and controlling poet provides his

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[38] Robin Skelton, *Celtic Contraries*, Irish Studies (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990), 81.

own reading; the speaker privileges location over wealth; "who trod upon these rocks or passed this door" (98) indicating the totemic importance that Yeats places on the tower. Having received his answer, the speaker dismisses his interlocutor, but insists on Hanrahan's continued presence. The lines imply that the interlocutor has the power to take Hanrahan away from Yeats; the controlling poet-hero here admits the symbiotic relationship between poet and creation. While Hanrahan and the interlocutor require the speaker to write them out in verse, he is equally dependent on his creation to sustain him. His imaginative store depends on their continued imaginative existence, and the interlocutor, though supposedly "real," is as real as Hanrahan in his position in the speaker's mind. Their presence attests to the speaker's creative imagination. For the poet, the location and his creation retain their power, but the presence of an "actual" interlocutor becomes superfluous. Within the poem, everything is subject to the poet-hero's attempt to transform experience into verse. As Anna Balakian writes, Yeats's interest in poetic artifice makes his poetry "self-contained as a canvas, detached from the normal measurements of time — such is the world of artifice that emerges from many of Yeats's major poems."[39] The speaker explicitly draws his presentation of them from his individual perception of them, not from their "actual" selves. Likewise, the poet-hero creates the self from his perception of value, and he creates a self-definition rather than accepting one imposed from outside himself.

The final stanza of the section provides the greatest shock to the system that Yeats has shaped. Moving from a discussion ostensibly about Hanrahan, Yeats fashions a stanza that seems to burst through his reverie and plunge directly into a discussion of his own life:

> Does the imagination dwell the most
> Upon a woman won or woman lost?
> If on the lost, admit you turned aside
> From a great labyrinth out of pride,
> Cowardice, some silly over-subtle thought

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[39] Anna Balakian, *The Fiction of the Poet: From Mallarmé to the Post Symbolist Mode* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992), 112.

> Or anything called conscience once;
> And that if memory recur, the sun's
> Under eclipse and the day blotted out.

<div align="right">(113-20)</div>

The jolting power of the stanza lies in the sudden move into apparent self-exposure. Harold Bloom reads the stanza in this way, seeing the lines as focussing on a confessional and self-abnegating emotion: "What is immensely moving here is Yeats's clear self-condemnation, for he implicitly states a failure of desire on his part in his love for Maud Gonne."[40] The shock of the rhetorical question plays on its double sense of demanding the answer from the speaker and the reader. Immediately Yeats implies an answer by emphasising "the lost." The effect of the missing "I" from the stanza suggests a failed attempt at distancing that the reader can detect. Its tantalising half-exposure invites the reader to conjecture as the poet mesmerizingly turns his words against himself. Yeats's speaker uses the stanza to question himself, and the use of the second person serves to make the attack seem both scathing and self-immolating by its attempted diversion. The power of memory is a strong controlling presence in the stanza; memory forces imagination to dwell upon the woman lost, which makes an avowal of one's deficiencies is inevitable. Memory's dominating pressure controls imagination, which has the power to render the sun "Under eclipse and the day blotted out" (120). Despite any attempt to control or distort, the imagination can only resurrect the memory and enliven it, not change it wholly or transform remembered loss into gain. This final stanza creates a crisis point, where Yeats's speaker suggests that the autonomy of the self may be a treasured illusion. Memory yokes imagination, seeming outside of the poet's control ("and that if memory recur," 119), and this test of the poet's autonomy is dangerously suggestive of the self's subordination to an involuntary force.

However, where Yeats seems to reveal the most, and confess to an autobiographical conflict that encroaches onto his art, a closer examination shows him to retain a firm grip on the verse. Sincerity is a dangerous concept in Yeats's poetry, and the points where Yeats seems most to bare his heart are often sites of the most self-conscious artistry.

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[40] Bloom, *Yeats*, 351.

Yeats reacted against the idea of confessional and sincere poetry, drawing on earlier paradigms to realise his image of an impersonal art:

> If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged amid all its accidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even when what I alter must seem traditional.[41]

Yeats reflects his horror of the "egotism and indiscretion" of a confessional poetry untouched by traditional rhythms and his formal mastery. The stanza comes into being by the echo of the word "labyrinth" from the preceding stanza, suggesting that linguistic patterning predicates the crisis point rather than a spontaneous breaking free from previous repression. This echo indicates the importance of the patterning of language providing the pattern that the poetic imagination follows. Thus theme is dependent on language, not the other way around. If we accept form and language as crucial to this section of the poem, then the lines require a closer reading than a traditional biographical understanding can supply. Peter McDonald notes the centrality of form to Yeats's struggle with chaos and control of poetic language: "For all that, form is the serious heart of the poem … where such 'authority' as poetry bears must reside."[42] McDonald's emphasis on authority throws up vital questions for these lines, as Yeats uses poetic form as a weapon against the helplessness suggested by the seeming tyranny of memory. By poetic self-fashioning, Yeats can retain control even as the poem seems to slip into uncontrollable self-display.

Subversive formal control subtly suffuses the lines, even as the content suggests helplessness in the face of memory. The differing uses of rhyme in the section mirror the powerfully complex emotional reproach that the lines suggest: the rhyme of "most" and "lost" is a visual rhyme, but it sounds as a half rhyme, and the semantic implication of the rhyme starkly indicates total lack. Likewise, all the rhymes in the poem (except "pride" and "aside") are off rhymes, and stretch toward each other rather than fitting naturally. This device is not accidental; the rhymes feel willed by the poet instead of seeming

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[41] Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 522.
[42] McDonald, 6.

natural effects of the language. The straining toward the expected rhyme underlines the pressure under which Yeats's artistry places itself; the form implies his attempt to have control over the language as he touchingly affects to fail to force the words into the rhyme he wills. Yeats's quest for control asserts his personal heroism, as the vacillation between achievement and defeat suggests the mingled vulnerability and pride of the speaker. The rhetorical question that sparks the rest of the stanza is ambiguous; the use of the verb "to dwell" suggests "to linger," "to ponder," and "to reside," and in this sense, the poet chooses to linger on the women, and directs his imagination to melancholic meditations. That he answers his own question with "If on the lost, admit you turned aside," does not have to suggest emotional honesty; Yeats disarms the reader with a stark admission of guilt, but one that accuses each reader; like Eliot's electrifying accusation, Yeats seems to say "You! Hypocrite lecteur — mon semblable — mon frère!"[43] The description of the pain visited on the poet is deliberately over-wrought, clearly indicating the imaginative nature of the poet's surroundings: "And that if memory recur, the sun's / Under eclipse and the day blotted out" (119-20). Though the experience of remembering "the woman lost" (114) is painful, it is a willed pain, heavy with the dramatic emphasis that provides him with "metaphors for poetry."[44]

It is superficial to view Yeats as an egomaniacal poet, and a more productive way to view his tendency to self-dramatize and create a personal mythology is to see it as a reworking of Byron, a link developed slightly by Steven Matthews and Edward Larrissy.[45] Jerome McGann's and Jerome Christensen's readings of Byron's poetry suggest that Byron converts his historical being into poetry: "Byron reveals and thereby manipulates his poetical machinery in a self-conscious drama of his own mind."[46] This description is as revealing for Yeats as it is for Byron; the mind's mental theatre plays through the poetry, refusing the doctrine of the impersonality of the poet invoked by modernist poets such as

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[43] T. S. Eliot, "The Burial of the Dead," *The Waste Land*, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 2002), 55.
[44] Yeats, *A Vision*, 8.
[45] See Matthews, 127-141; Edward Larrissy, *Yeats the Poet: The Measures of Difference* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994). 7, 13, 30, 125-8 and 172.
[46] McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, 45.

Eliot and Pound.[47] Yeats provides an interesting counter-balance to the Modernist Movement by virtue of his simultaneous belonging and not-belonging to the same school as Eliot and Pound.[48] Donoghue points out this distance, pointing to Eliot's ambivalent commentary on Yeats,[49] and Yeats's choice of poems in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* is idiosyncratic in its choice of selection, de-emphasising the Modernists in favour of a wide selection of Victorian poets and the Georgians.[50] Yeats, like Byron, utilises the self as a means of claiming poetic independence. The self is text, but it is strengthened by its insistent pull toward its source, the poet. Poet and hero are inextricably bound in their attempt to re-create themselves on the page, welded into the phantasmagoria that is the poet-hero.[51]

The self's spiritual, incorporeal status is first defined in this section of the poem, and the mental hero is accepted as a self-generated entity. That "self" is self-fashioned creates a wealth of opportunities for the poet, but also affirms the Yeatsian "ghostly solitude" ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," 40) that haunts the poetry. Kenner suggests that "what his published books are 'about' is the effort to fabricate a durable self."[52] This is the Yeatsian heroic paradigm; the urge to create and control poetry, an earthly medium, in the face of a corresponding urge toward the surrender to a higher sphere outside the

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[47] "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality… This process of depersonalization…that art may be said to approach the condition of science" Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, 17.

[48] "Yeats fights Modernism as hard as he can, only to find himself acknowledging that he is Modernist to the marrow of his bones. But this paradox is itself typical, for the Modernist often travels a road as far as it will go, only to wind up in some exactly opposite place." Daniel Albright, "Yeats and Modernism," *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, 75.

[49] "Eliot regarded Yeats as chiefly a presence, a personality, a genius no doubt, but fortunately for orthodox religion and general good sense a foreigner, a provincial scandal. The truly modern movement could proceed without taking much notice of Yeats or the news from Dublin." Denis Donoghue, "The Hard Case of Yeats" *The New York Review of Books* 24.9 (May 26 1977): 3.

[50] See *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935*, ed. W. B. Yeats (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1936). Its de-emphasis of Modernism in favour of Yeats's acquaintances and Georgian and Victorian poets led to Auden denunciating the volume: "I challenge anyone in this court to deny that it is the most deplorable volume ever issued under the imprint of that highly respected firm which has done so much for the cause of poetry in this country, the Clarendon Press." W. H. Auden, "The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats," *The English Auden*, 390.

[51] "Phantasmagoria" is taken from Yeats's description of the creative poet: Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 509.

[52] Kenner, 208.

mortal world.[53] The idea of conversing with entities outside the self is an illusion, and poetry, paradoxically, as it suggests communication, serves to underline the solitude of man's condition. The world exists as it is perceived, and the poet's vision can people his universe as he chooses.[54] The importance of the Yeatsian self in this context is its attempt to perceive and yet control the universe outside of the poetry.

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[53]"But while Yeats might, like Nietzsche, caricature Plato as a scarecrow, he remained drawn to what Nietzsche denigrated in *The Dawn S*542 as the "mystic lights" of Plato." Keane, 33. See also Thomas R. Whitaker, "The Dialectic of Yeats's Vision of History," *Modern Philology* 57 (1959): 100-12. *JSTOR*. 29 Apr. 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

[54]Yeats's interest in Berkeley is traced by Donald Davie: Donald Davie, "Yeats, Berkeley and Romanticism," *A Travelling Man: Eighteenth Century Bearings*, ed. with introd. Doreen Davie (Manchester: Carcanet P, 2003), 131-36.

CHAPTER NINE

"Lock, stock and barrel:" "Adam's Curse," "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz" and "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" through the lens of "The Tower"

Section three of "The Tower" begins with Yeats recouping his forces after the crisis point of the final stanza of section two. In this section he fortifies his previous ambition to use the power of the mind to self-create, and pushes further towards a fuller explication of what constitutes the Yeatsian self. The stanza starts with a confident affirmation of the timely nature of his quest to create an integrated self. Having drawn on his imagination and location in the previous section to create himself, Yeats now creates a history for himself and his descendents, a line of descent through which he can trace his chosen people. As Edward Larrissy shows, "Yeats is seeking an aristocratic kind of rootedness, albeit of a palpably factitious kind."[1] The contrived nature of Yeats's ancestry-creation does not diminish the aesthetic power of his attempt; instead, Yeats's insistence on the chosen nature of his inheritance and inheritors adds an air of independence, and willed authority to the section:

> It is time that I wrote my will;
>
> I choose upstanding men
>
> That climb the streams until
>
> The fountain leap, and at dawn
>
> Drop their cast at the side
>
> Of dripping stone; I declare
>
> They shall inherit my pride,
>
> The pride of people that were
>
> Bound neither to Cause nor to State.
>
> Neither to slaves that were spat on,
>
> Nor to the tyrants that spat,

---

[1] Edward Larrissy, "W. B. Yeats: The Tower (1928)," *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, Blackwell Reference Online. 08 January 2009.
<http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9780631204350_chunk_g97806312043505>

> The people of Burke and of Grattan
>
> That gave, though free to refuse —

<div align="right">(121-33)</div>

Yeats does not find men for his will; he chooses those that will "inherit my pride." The verbs in this section all point to the *sprezzatura* which Yeats links to the aristocratic virtue that he previously traced in the "Introductory Rhymes" in *Responsibilities* when writing to his forebears: "Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun" (18). The verbs applied to himself and the men he selects as his ancestors involve confident assertions of will: "choose," "climb," "drop," "declare," "inherit," "gave." Defined by their self-assertion and pride, these men stand in opposition to the unheroic, herd-like mentality that Yeats deplored amongst his contemporaries:

> Comic songs of a certain kind were to be driven from the stage, every one was to wear Irish cloth, every one was to learn Irish, every one was to hold certain opinions, and these ends were sought by personal attacks, by virulent caricature and violent derision.[2]

Yeats portrays his chosen Anglo-Irish men as proudly independent figures; they are linked to Burke and Grattan by definition of what they are not. They are not "bound;" as self-created figures standing within a self-elected tradition; they stand apart from transient concerns of "Cause" or "State." This freedom from external control in favour of self-definition gained through tradition links Yeats, his inheritors, and his predecessors; their proud nature enacts in miniature the quest for self-hood in "The Tower."

These lines of grand assertion give way to a description reminiscent of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" where a succession of images is used to reflect the indefinable quality of the object of description:

> Pride, like that of the morn,
>
> When the headlong light is loose,
>
> Or that of the fabulous horn,
>
> Or that of the sudden shower
>
> When all streams are dry,

---

[2] Yeats, "The Controversy over *The Playboy of the Western World*," *Explorations*, 227.

> Or that of the hour
>
> When the swan must fix his eye
>
> Upon a fading gleam,
>
> Float out upon a long
>
> Last reach of glittering stream
>
> And there sing his last song.

<div style="text-align: right">(134-44)</div>

The beauty of the images, culminating in the emblem of poetic inspiration, the swan and its swansong, has a near-hypnotic effect. The melancholic slow beauty of the lines lulls the reader into a receptive state.[3] Yeats moves deliberately through his images, beginning with light, moving to the sound of the horn, progressing to the sensation of a shower amidst the dry streams, and concluding with the swan. Advancing from sight to sound, touch to life, Yeats makes his passage through sensation, valuing the material and generative world that becomes all-important in this section. The swan, Yeats's symbol for the soul derived from Shelley,[4] "must" fix his eye upon a fading gleam, since instinct, not intellect, is the governing quality of the swan's life. In accordance with Yeats's instinct to continue with poetry and the mortal elements of man instead of resorting to the abstraction of philosophy, the poet focuses on the swan's final moments as a performance of his last song. In "The Tower," one cannot abstract the body from the soul and remain human. The quality of feeling gleaned through nature leads to Yeats's final repudiation of Plato and Plotinus, philosophers who, in the poet's view, denigrate the mortal in favour of a higher plane of ideas:

> And I declare my faith:
>
> I mock Plotinus' thought
>
> And cry in Plato's teeth,
>
> Death and life were not

---

[3] Referring to "Byzantium," Olney writes: "Yeats's language, here and in any number of other poems, is intended, with its rhythmic effects, to reproduce in both poem and reader something of that same state of conscious unconsciousness as was the poet's in his moment of creation." Olney, *The Rhizome and the Flower*, 250.

[4] See Michael O'Neill, "'The All-Sustaining Air': Yeats, Stevens, Rich, Bishop – Responses to Romantic Poetry," *The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Literature in Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. Damian Walford Davies and Richard Marggraf Turley, foreword Lucy Newlyn (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2006), 148-49 for a discussion of Yeats's appropriation and adaptation of Shelley's swan.

> Till man made up the whole,
>
> Made lock, stock and barrel
>
> Out of his bitter soul,
>
> Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
>
> And further add to that
>
> That, being dead, we rise,
>
> Dream and so create
>
> Translunar paradise.

(145-56)

It is fitting that, after Yeats draws an analogy between himself and the swan through natural imagery and sensual language, he refutes Plato and Plotinus with the strength of the soul-making he has undertaken during the poem. There is no longer any question of whether Yeats will throw over his mortal preoccupations including poetry in favour of the intellectual mode that worships Platonic Ideas over natural existence. Yeats does not counter Plato and Plotinus through a cerebral mode of argument. Instead, he mocks and cries, offering instinctive emotion as his counter-argument rather than rational intellect.

Yeats offers the crux of his argument in the poem as a hard-won knowledge gained through the self-creation performed in the poem. The argument is succinct, insisting on the unity of body and soul, conveyed through harsh monosyllables that eschew ornate diction. The trimeter that Yeats employs affords the rhyme more prominence, and his words acquire a sense of certainty based on their rhythmical, clipped diction:

> Death and life were not
>
> Till man made up the whole,
>
> Made lock, stock and barrel
>
> Out of his bitter soul,

(148-51)

The shift between the monosyllabic diction of this quotation in contrast to the more complex language in the later part of the passage quoted below is marked, a tonal shift registered by elongated words that soften the trimeter effect; the vowel sounds elongate the lines, making them seem more meditative than his earlier use of the metre:

I have prepared my peace

With learned Italian things

And the proud stones of Greece,

Poet's imaginings

And memories of love,

Memories of the words of women,

All those things whereof

Man makes a superhuman,

Mirror-resembling dream.

(157-65)

Yeats moves without stanzaic break from an assertion of his personal philosophy on the man-made nature of death to his peace with external objects from which the poet forms his soul. This shift of tone reflects Yeats as "capable of many viewpoints, many perspectives."[5] The whole self consists of every detail, from the "learned Italian things" (158) to "memories of the words of women" (162) and it is the task of the poet to select, analyse, and synthesise everything in order to fashion for himself the "superhuman / Mirror-resembling dream" (164-65). Curiously, the act of selecting from the memories, weighting the external impressions and the poet's imaginings raise him from the mortal sphere to creating a superhuman dream. As Coleridge does through his concept of the primary and secondary imaginations, Yeats emphasises the synthesising nature of the imagination which privileges the poet's perceiving eye as possessing the "living power" of imagination. Coleridge's definitions prefigure Yeats by their insistence on the vital power of the imagination and its perceptions to create a coherent entity:

The imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create, or where this process is rendered

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[5] Skelton, 155.

impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is

essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[6]

The importance of Coleridge's theory for Yeats thought is two-fold; Yeats can link the

connection of the infinite I AM belonging to the primary imagination to his idea of the

Anima Mundi, which denotes the One Mind from which particular conceptions flow.[7]

Secondly, Coleridge's theory insists on the vital nature of the imagination, both in the

sense that it gives life to "dead" objects, and that it is centrally important to being human.

Yeats shows the poet's act of creation to be drawn from the mortal realm which he cannot

and will not repudiate. The act of synthesis provides the transfiguring quality of the

second imagination, and this synthesis, when it approaches the Anima Mundi, infuses the

poetry with the "living power" that Coleridge describes. Yeats uses both the primary and

secondary imaginations to create poetry; his resolve to present the whole man demands

interaction with "dead objects." To imbue them with life is, for Yeats, the cornerstone of

the self's heroic act in relation to the world. As he writes in *Autobiographies*, "I thought

there could be no aim for poet or artist except expression of a "Unity of Being."[8] The self

is a created entity, formed from memories, external objects, and a tradition. Heroism

comes from the self-conscious fashioning of one's own soul from these disparate

materials; to exercise choice, control and synthesis denotes a hero.

Yeats's return to nature becomes a natural development for the poem in the context of his

promotion of constructing a self through synthesis of thought, memory and dead objects

through the transformative power of the poetic imagination:

> As at the loophole there
>
> The daws chatter and scream,
>
> And drop twigs layer upon layer.
>
> When they have mounted up,
>
> The mother bird will rest
>
> On their hollow top,
>
> And so warm her wild nest.

---

[6] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 167.

[7] Yeats, "Anima Mundi," *Essays*, 507-35 [see particularly 507 and 519].

[8] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 304.

(166-72)

Yeats's action in "The Tower" suggests a disparity between his willed brand of heroism and the instinctive behaviour of the daws. The contrast between what elsewhere is willed and the instinctive, vulnerable, natural behaviour described here shows these lines offering a sudden, surprising glimpse of a non-heroic vision. Yet there is a striking similarity; the daws have layered seemingly disparate objects in order to build a nest, just as Yeats's speaker has built the poem out of objects taken from available themes to create the shape of an individual poem. When Helen Vendler refers to the shape of the poem as having "an autobiographical form,"[9] this perfectly describes how Yeats has fashioned the poem from several traditional forms into a mixture that denotes the individuality of the poem and the poet-hero. As Vendler suggests, the section also looks backward to Yeats's speaker's decision to make his will, and the men to whom Yeats bequeaths his tradition. After the proud solitude of an unchanging Anglo-Irish tradition, this section provides a nurturing view of the poet's role in shaping his successors: "The poet, by such an analogy [to the mother bird] — made conspicuous by its isolation in a single truncated stanza — bequeaths to his successors not only the spiritual values of faith and pride, but also the instinctual values of warmth and generative power."[10] The description of the birds, though far from an original image and adorned with no personal interpretation within the lines, becomes quintessentially Yeatsian by its correspondence with his other poems. "The Stare's Nest by my Window" contains one of the most famous Yeatsian references to birds, as the final line of each stanza contains an image of nesting birds which act as an emblem for hope despite the growing violence around the nest:

> We had fed the heart on fantasies,
>
> The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
>
> More substance in our enmities
>
> Than in our love; O honey-bees,
>
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.

(16-20)

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[9] Vendler, 197.
[10] Vendler, 199.

The symmetry of the form shows the first line in each stanza to contain nine syllables, faltering slightly from the even-numbered tetrameter lines of the following three lines, containing eight syllables. The final refrain line, with its ten syllables, seems almost a corrective to the tentative nine-lined first line. Contrasting with the matter-of-fact despair that Yeats records as the condition of Ireland, the plea for the honey-bees to "come build in the empty house of the stares" (20) gains an edge of desperation as he seeks for a regenerative sign from nature.

In "The Tower," the return to the natural world of the birds is an optimistic version of the "foul rag-and-bone shop" (40) of "The Circus Animals' Desertion." The natural world provides the mirror to poetry, rather than the dead world of objects that seem unfit for poetic creation. Despite the speaker's admission that "the foul rag-and-bone shop" provides the material for poetry, the image of the daws affirms an organic art that is rooted in the land. The description provides the reader with an insight into the tradition that Yeats hopes to shape by his poetic labour. This effort to fashion a lasting tradition shows Yeats's poetry anticipating and measuring itself against Auden's later pronouncement in his elegy for Yeats: "poetry makes nothing happen."[11] Auden's ambivalent lines, which do not quite condemn poetry to meaningless words, reflect a tension within themselves which mirrors the fragility of Yeats's tradition building. Yeats, even at his most flamboyantly arrogant with his dismissal of Plato and Plotinus, still needs, in his poetry of willed heroism, an image of the yielding and nurturing natural world.

This negotiation between the will-driven heroism and a yielding organic poetry of the self mirrors Yeats's similarly complex understanding of the relation between the self and other in his poetry. Yeats's labour to shape "The Tower" in order to centre the self is the dominant theme of much of his oeuvre. "Adam's Curse" and "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz" serve as prominent examples of Yeats's treatment of the self amongst other characters in his early and late years. "Adam's Curse" is often considered

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[11] W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber, 1966), 142.

as an autobiographical poem that reflects Yeats's failed love for Maud Gonne. Denis Donoghue represents this view as a critic who accepts the poem to be a transcription of Yeats's personal feelings: "A poet, who has loved his beloved for years and still loves her but now hopelessly and knowing his hopelessness, speaks to her and her sister."[12] This gloss of the poem's content loses the ambiguous nature of the dialogue; the three characters do not seem to communicate; they offer their own take on the theme of labour until they are silenced by the invocation of the word "love" and the speaker takes the poem out of the conversation into his private reverie. At no point in the poem is "that beautiful mild woman" (2) named as Maud's sister, nor is Maud named. The failure in the poem is the inability of the poet to control and dominate the situation, which came to be the governing principle of Yeatsian verse in the later poetry.

The poem begins with the speaker setting the scene, which he describes as three figures discussing poetry, but Yeats grants the reader only the speaker's ideas about the difficulty of creating poetry:

> 'A line will take us hours maybe;
>
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
>
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.

(4-6)

The poem obeys the artistic manifesto set out in these lines; constructed in iambic pentameter and written in heroic couplets, the poem possesses a living voice. The first two sections are written in fourteen lines, uneasily making use of the sonnet length while ignoring the traditional rhyme scheme. Helen Vendler provides a useful entry point as to Yeats's artistic understanding of the form:

> What the sonnet meant to Yeats, historically speaking, was verse consciously aware of itself as written, not oral; verse from a European court tradition; verse knowing itself to be artifice, and often speaking about its own art; verse (though of Italian origin) associated with the essential English lyric tradition, from Wyatt and Surrey through Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Keats.[13]

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[12] Donoghue, *Yeats*, 37.
[13] Vendler, 147.

By writing in this fourteen-line form Yeats subtly uses the form of his poem to support the content of his artistic manifesto. The verse discusses the labour of artifice, and openly discusses its own condition, but ignores the strictures of the traditional sonnet rhyme scheme. As Vendler argues, such departures are vital to Yeats's poetry, and must be noted by the reader to catch the fullness of his meaning. In this context, Vendler's argument that Yeats embraces the Irish tradition in his departure from the norm seems justified:

> They are part of his way of saying, to his English readers, "I am not writing the English sonnet as you know it. Even though I know it more intimately than you, it is for me a site of experiment, whereas for you it is a site of cultural memory.[14]

Yeats dispenses with some of the artifice of the sonnet form in an attempt to get back to the spoken word, which he closely allied with the Irish poetic style.[15] This mastery of the poetry via his artistic beliefs contrasts with his inability to affect his two companions in the poem. Instead of replying directly to the speaker's complaint, the "beautiful, mild woman" (2) shifts the conversation into her own territory: the lot of women. While sympathetic to Yeats's complaint, she creates an analogy to the poet's initial complaint, assuming the labour of womanhood to be equal to the status of the poet's grievance, sidelining the elevated status of poetry:

> 'To be born woman is to know -
>
> Although they do not talk of it at school -
>
> That we must labour to be beautiful.'

> (18-20)

The last line is at once complaint and near-imperative: it voices weariness but also compulsion. Yet while the woman follows on from Yeats's sense of the labour involved in beauty, there is a strange disconnection. It is an almost abstracted conversation, punctuated with silence. The final stanza gains in power as it shifts from "we" to "I," thereby sidestepping the fin-de-siècle twilight that seems to fall on the group:

> We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
>
> We saw the last embers of daylight die,

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[14] Vendler, 181.

[15] See Yeats, "What is Popular Poetry," *Essays and Introductions*, 3-12.

And in the trembling blue-green of the sky

A moon, worn as if it had been a shell

Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell

About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:

That you were beautiful, and that I strove

To love you in the old high way of love;

That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown

As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

(28-38)

The line "I had a thought for no one's but your ears" betrays Yeats's desire for connection with Maud, and the strange disconnection described earlier comes into focus as the longed-for conversation between the two has failed to blossom. Yet Yeats converts this failing into a shimmering affirmation of the beautiful and flawed fragility of the twilight of their love. The beauty of the lines lies in their elegiac sweep; the poem almost demands weary feeling as a catalyst to transform into artistic power. As in "Words," Yeats suggests that words and fulfilment act contrapuntally. One failure creates the success of the other. The first six lines are governed by shared experience; the scene is communal, and is witnessed without any participation from the figures in the poem. The first line rhyme of "love" does not rhyme with a partner in the same section; it is isolated from its corresponding rhyme "enough" in the previous section. Its effect is to draw attention to the matchless quality of "love;" it would have rhymed with "enough" had it been part of the previous stanza, but the line break removes it from the quantifiable suggestion of the word "enough." The metaphor of the moon "as if it had been a shell" (31) is obviously a created image, and fashioned by the poet's transforming vision. This is poetry at its most self-consciously poetic as it builds images and works for its status as a creative and created entity. Having finished recounting the community's actual presence, Yeats can imaginatively conceptualise his understanding of events, and his recollections in solitude allows him the centrality denied to him by his memory of the

exchange. Donoghue notes the stylishness of Yeats's handling of his theme, and comments on its achievement of rendering his defeat in powerful verse:

> Yeats's mastery in the later poem ["Adam's Curse"] is a remarkable achievement of style, and its proof is composure, the dignity of tone with which time's cruelty is received. It is proper to speak of such poetry as a form of power, even where the official theme is the defeat of that power. The poet is not obliged to report that his values prevail, as a practical matter, in the objective world.[16]

While Donoghue is right to note that the content of the poem is a defeat of his love, the final lines offer, despite the elegiac content, a display of the poet's ability. Yeats states his recollections as facts, and he does so with the conviction of an authoritative presence; "*that* you were beautiful" (35) and "*that* hollow moon" (38) as definite phrases indicate how Yeats's certainty wins the reader's unconscious assent. Control and mastery of memory is the soaring victory of the poem that stands quite apart from the elegiac content. In this poem, Yeats offers the reader the perfection of the work wrought from the imperfection of the life.

By "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz," Yeats can tackle the theme of the poet recollecting two powerful women in a new manner, but like "Adam's Curse," the negotiation of power between the elegised and the elegising poet is at the forefront of the poem. The opening of the poem is beautifully crafted; its slow stately syllables usher the characters into the poem, showcasing the aesthetic ability of the poem to create and control the mood:

> The light of evening, Lissadell,
> Great windows open to the south,
> Two girls in silk kimonos, both
> Beautiful, one a gazelle.
>
> (1-4)

As Helen Vendler argues, Yeats invites the reader into the poem by the beauty of the tableau; he does not command, instead he woos by the lissom "s" sounds, and the striking

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[16] Donoghue, *Yeats*, 39.

image of the two unnamed girls.[17] The ABBA rhyme encloses the image and makes it stand as a self-sufficient part of the poem, untouchable by the violence that follows it. As quickly as Yeats creates the scene, he introduces the violence of time to challenge his tableau;

> But a raving autumn shears
>
> Blossom from the summer's wreath;
>
> The older is condemned to death,
>
> Pardoned, drags out lonely years
>
> Conspiring among the ignorant.
>
> I know not what the younger dreams —
>
> Some vague Utopia — and she seems,
>
> When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,
>
> An image of such politics.

(5-13)

The violence that Yeats introduces into the scene threatens the beautiful, timeless tableau at the beginning of the poem, but cannot wholly negate it owing to his choice of form. He condenses ten years into seven lines to reveal the destruction visited on the women, and writes brutal verse to witness their beauty perverted into loneliness, conspiracy and political opinion. But the brutality Yeats introduces into the poem is not his final mood; he continues to meditate on them, and again recalls the tableau that began the poem:

> Many a time I think to seek
>
> One or the other out and speak
>
> Of that old Georgian mansion, mix
>
> Pictures of the mind, recall
>
> That table and the talk of youth,
>
> Two girls in silk kimonos, both
>
> Beautiful, one a gazelle.

(14-20)

He does not wish to discuss with them the passage of the years; as in "Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" Yeats seems to wish to "spit into the face of Time / That has transfigured

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[17] Vendler, 207.

me" (17-18).[18] The poem firmly, if gently, insists on its verbless condition despite time's transforming power. Yeats attempts to direct and control time with his vision, dragging the poem and the women within it back to the original scene, despite the transformation that time has wrought. The deictic definiteness of "that table and the talk of youth" (18) emphasises the temporal control that the speaker attempts to gain. The tableau has shifted psychologically from the start of the poem; Yeats is no longer describing; the reader is witness to an act of will where the poet circumvents time to deliver himself, his subjects, and the reader to his chosen location. Yeats does not take the reader to Byzantium, but he performs the same gesture of using his poetic control to transport the reader and wrest the scene into his controlling imaginative vision.

Despite the control imprinted on the poem by the speaker, he remains on the periphery as Yeats directs the reader's attention to the women. In the first tableau, they are straightforwardly presented to the reader, but in the second, while superficially presented in the same manner, they are the product of the controlling speaker's imaginative vision. The next verse paragraph moves Yeats to the centre; leaving behind description of the women, Yeats now evaluates them and converses with their "shadows."

> Dear shadows, now you know it all,
>
> All the folly of a fight
>
> With a common wrong or right.
>
> The innocent and the beautiful
>
> Have no enemy but time;

(21-25)

The effect of this change of direction is to make the poet the focus as he directs, advises, and evaluates. The women have moved from being corporeal memories to shadowy presences that Yeats addresses. The reader's gaze is now trained on Yeats communicating with them. Significance has shifted, and Yeats claims that the shadows have learned "all the folly of a fight," (22) a truth that he states as beyond question, and one to which he is privy. The women are treated with pity, but he laces pity with a patronising edge that gives prominence to the superior and commanding speaker. This shift centres the poet as

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[18] Yeats, "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner," *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 132.

the driving force of the poem now displays the speaker as the most important presence in the poem. The speaker pronounces, and his word as the controlling figure is taken as fact. The mounting tension of the poem, after the verbless tableaux of the first stanza, is toward action, action which is now possible owing to the centrality of the poet-hero:

> Arise and bid me strike a match
>
> And strike another till time catch;
>
> Should the conflagration climb,
>
> Run till all the sages know.
>
> We the great gazebo built,
>
> They convicted us of guilt;
>
> Bid me strike a match and blow.

> (26-32)

The return to "we" is important to this section; we recall "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" where Yeats and his company seem united in such a way that all action seems to stem from their alliance with Yeats as the central principal. The imperatives in this section suggest a burning desire for action. Helen Vendler argues that Yeats performs a startling turn from his earlier scorn to supplication,[19] but Vendler does not take into account the significance of the shift that Yeats performs in these lines.

The women, whom Yeats acknowledges as performing a strong, if ultimately misguided role in the nationalist movement, are transformed into being the speaker's muses. They cannot affect anything; as shadows, Yeats has ruled them out of meaningful temporal action. They can "bid him" but he will perform the vital act of striking the match. Spatially, the poem has performed a seismic shift. The opening of the poem saw the speaker describing the scene with no apparent presence within it; in the first stanza, the poet is behind his subjects, directing the reader's gaze toward their dominating presence. By the end, Yeats's speaker stands at the centre of the action. From his description of the action in the final part of the first stanza where the women act completely independently of the speaker who observes and condemns, the speaker now claims that they acted in

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[19] Vendler, 228.

collaboration: "we the great gazebo built" (30). The "us" is the speaker and the sisters, as with the description of Synge, Lady Gregory, and the speaker in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited;" "they" refers to the rest of society. More daringly than the construction of the gang of three in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," Yeats has allied himself with the sisters in a synthetic union unsupported by the description in the first stanza of the poem where the sisters seem isolated, their actions both futile and misguided. "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz" performs one of Yeats's most characteristic manoeuvres; the centring of the poet-hero in the poem. Simultaneously, he also conveys a haunting sense of his deep affinity with these tragic, beautiful, and lost women that now stand as shadows behind him, where once they shone in the foreground. Yeats captures beautifully the pity of the transition, but it is a hardened pity that refuses to exculpate their choices, and capitalises on their fallen condition by moving into their place. The ambivalence of the poem's treatment of the women, which veers between tenderness and a corrective urge, combined with its move to centre the self in place of the ostensible subject, make it one of Yeats's most powerful poems.

In Yeats's elegy, poetry teeters on the brink of connection between the world of thought and the world of action. The hovering imperative "Bid me strike a match and blow" (26 & 32) occupies an area between the abstract and the actual. The reader, the speaker and the objects are marooned in the arena of language, but the poet's words, pregnant with energy, seem filled with the promise of "something evermore about to be."[20] In the domain of the poetry, Yeats discovers that his speaker, the poet-hero, must always stand at the centre of his chosen community. The poet, as the figure who attempts to transform and transfigure scenes from the imagination or the temporal world, must remain in control. Yeats's poetic victory is his role as the main actor in his own drama, the Prospero commanding the Ariels and Calibans of his poetry. This creates a kind of splendid isolation that is communicated even in some of Yeats's most outwardly instructive poems, as William Pratt comments of "Under Ben Bulben": "Yeats's words are as unforgettable as any he wrote, but the sort of advice they offer would be the despair of

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[20] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* [1850], VI: 608 *William Wordsworth: The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, 217.

any poet of lesser genius; his poem stands much more as a final piece of self-definition than as a creed for other poets."[21] This observation highlights the highly solitary nature of even Yeats's most outwardly instructive poetry as he claims for himself, in a supremely arrogant gesture, a *savoir-faire* that he denies to his potential descendents. He offers advice in one breath, while his centrality precludes any successor claiming the same, or similar ground. "Irish poets, learn your trade / Sing whatever is well made" ("Under Ben Bulben," 68-69), which stifles any poet's individual voice where Yeats claims to offer a successful formula.[22] Seemingly, the choice for Yeats's successors was to either emulate or reject the Ireland that Yeats had created. Yet Yeats deliberately forces them into this role; Yeats is by necessity always the centre and circumference of his poetry. The poet-hero, as in "Cuchulain Comforted," remains a part of a community; he may be outside of it but the need to belong remains. Yeats's figuring of characters outside of the self is always a creation of silhouettes rather than inheritors or autonomous creatures. They remain figures defined by their status as modes of the Yeatsian mind.

Returning to one of Yeats's earlier poems seems appropriate at this juncture; in my reading, "The Tower" is central to Yeats's creation of his personal brand of heroism, and the poet's relationship with his reader is highly significant for his construction of the poet-hero. "The Tower" is a pivotal poem, as each of my readings of Yeats's earlier and later poems feed into a fuller understanding of "The Tower" as Yeats returns to former concerns, and foreshadows future preoccupations. "The Fisherman" seems particularly resonant in the context of the Yeats's figuring of his successors, and by extension, an audience. His choice of metaphor in "The Tower" for his own vigorous youth and that of his successors is climbing the mountain to fish; this is central to his creation of his ideal reader in the earlier poem. In "The Fisherman," Yeats immediately situates the fisherman climbing the hill, emphasising his perception of the fisherman over his independent existence:

Although I can see him still,

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[21] William Pratt, "An Irish Symbolist: William Butler Yeats," *Singing the Chaos: Madness and Wisdom in Modern Poetry* (Columbia, MO; London: U of Missouri P, 1996), 99.
[22] See Donald Davie's description of Yeats as "the great ventriloquist," "Austin Clarke and Padraic Fallon," *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Manchester: Carcanet P, 1975), 42.

> The freckled man who goes
> To a grey place on a hill
> In grey Connemara clothes
> At dawn to cast his flies,

(1-5)

As with Yeats's recollection of himself, and his imaginings of successive generations, he situates the fisherman in an unmistakeably Irish location. The fisherman's grey clothes match the grey hills, adding to the sense of belonging to the nature that surrounds him. The fisherman is a part of nature, not separated by modern preoccupations with wealth or status. In "The Tower", the rootedness of the speaker and the fisherman vitalise them, and render them capable of bearing the symbolic weight with which Yeats's burdened them. Yeats's hope for an art of deliberate rootedness seems,[23] in "The Fisherman", to be one of the poet's hopeful dreams.

After a description of the fisherman as representative of the Irish race, the speaker reveals that his hope has no correspondence with reality:

> All day I'd looked in the face
> What I had hoped 'twould be
> To write for my own race
> And the reality;
> The living men that I hate,
> The dead man that I loved,

(9-14)

The speaker had spent "all day" hoping to create a suitable myth of an ideal audience that could inspire him into poetry. The line "and the reality," (12) though metrically in keeping with the other lines, is noticeably shorter on the page, and renders it visually starker for the reader. "The living men that I hate" (13) when paired with "the dead man that I loved" (14) renders the first line implacably opposed to the plural present unworthy men, and poignantly elegiac toward the single dead man to whom he refers. The consequence of the degraded modern taste the speaker describes culminates in the final

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[23] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 193-4.

line of the first stanza: "And great Art beaten down" (24). At this stage, reality seems to have swept away the speaker's hope of writing for "my own race" (11); the stark diction chosen by Yeats indicates his isolation from "living men" and reveals the self-created nature of his finest hope of a suitable audience. This exposure of the fictive nature of the fisherman as opposed to the cruel reality of contemporary society leaves the end of the stanza bereft of hope, and crushed under the weight of the abstract facts of modern Ireland. The passion Yeats brings to the final lines of the poem is an exultation of the possibilities of a poetry written for an ideal reader; as the poem concludes with the triumphant exclamation of the poet's intention to write for his self-created figure, there is an ambiguity present for the poet who would hope to write for "my own race" (11). The figure, created out of "scorn of this audience" (27), holds no correspondence with "the living men that I hate" (13). Yeats recognises and celebrates the poet's isolation, but there is a hollowness in the celebration as the self is once again thrown into the "ghostly solitude" ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," 40) that haunts the text.

In "The Tower" Yeats forms the description of himself from a similar description of the fisherman in his earlier poem, lending a claustrophobic sense to the poem as the reader recognises the link between the self-portrait and the fisherman. The identification of Yeats's speaker, and by extension, Yeats himself, as the ideal reader, is uneasy; as both poet and reader, the self lacks correspondence with outer reality. To break free from this prison of the self, Yeats attempts to present the young, upstanding men as ideal readers, created by the example of his own hard-won model. Like the mother-bird, Yeats's nurturing qualities allow him to furnish his chosen men with a tradition. He claims to hand down a tradition to his chosen men, but its constructed nature complicates the beneficent gesture; Yeats dictates, his successors must follow him. When Robin Skelton refers to "his pseudo-scholarly devotion to a great "line" of Irish scholars and orators - Swift, Burke, Grattan, Goldsmith;"[24] he accentuates what he perceives to be the bogus nature of Yeats's tradition building and ignores Yeats's awareness of the manufactured nature of his quest for a tradition. This proud tradition, of which Yeats names himself a member, is a created entity in the same manner that Yeats fashions the fisherman out of

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[24] Skelton, 82.

his need for a community. That his creation may be a necessary fiction of the poetic mind, as Yeats so movingly admits in "The Fisherman," does not indicate sophistry or self-deception on the part of Yeats. Rather, it reveals in one of Yeats's most characteristically double modes, the poet's vacillating belief in the potency or the ineffectiveness of the poet's imagination.

Yeats seems to enjoy being at the end of a powerful tradition, elegising its passing rather than attempting to sustain its presence.[25] As Thomas R. Whitaker points out, isolation is often a condition of the modern poet, and the self-made tradition may be, as the same critic observes, the condition of "greatness."[26] "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" contains the potent image of the poet and his friends standing at the end of an era: "We were the last romantics" (41) makes the case for the grandeur of Yeats and his community. This statement is a complicated aristocratic assertion that simultaneously affirms their status as the last romantics while elegising their loss. There is an arrogance in his assumption of the right to name himself and his chosen friends "the last romantics;" this gesture assumes there will be no continuation after they pass, and it also enlarges his significance, and by extension, that of his circle. When Winters writes that "His concern with his uninteresting relatives and ancestors would seem to be part of the same [self] dramatization,"[27] and argues for the insignificance of their autonomous existence, he points out the Yeatsian tendency to over-blow, expand, or exaggerate the significance of his community. Yet, for Yeats's poetry, the dry facts of the "true" significance of his friends and family are irrelevant. The importance of his subjects always resides in the power of his recollections as the community gains its importance by their suitability as material for Yeats's potent myth of the self. Yeats does not blind himself to the self-created nature of his community, nor does he show them to be invulnerable to time, death

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[25] "And in many ways Yeats's poetry has seemed to be an end. Few poets followed his example, either in theme or style." Daniel Albright, "Introduction," W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright, Everyman [1990] (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), lv.

[26] "The isolated modern poet's need to forge his own tradition may itself be a condition of great achievement: his spiritual inheritance is that of adversity, with its attendant opportunities." Thomas R. Whitaker, "On 'Meditations in time of civil war,'" *Critical Essays on W. B. Yeats*, 40.

[27] Yvor Winters, *Forms of Discovery: Critical & Historical Essays on the Forms of the Short Poem in English* (Chicago, IL: Alan Swallow, 1967), 210.

or alternate histories. The tension between "art" and "life," and their constant intermingling forms one of the most recurrent explorations in Yeats's poetry.

"The Municipal Gallery Revisited" shows Yeats directly facing history as it interacts with his personal mythology; in this moving late poem, the myth of the self and its community comes under scrutiny. At the beginning of the poem, Yeats faces the alternative myths of artists presenting perspectives differing from his own, imagining their own tradition and creating a troubling counter-mythology. The speaker refers to the gallery of portraits as "an ambush" (2); the faces around the room are known figures to Yeats, figures immortalised in postures that seem incongruous, or hauntingly reflective of his personal experience. As Parkinson notes and the title indicates, the speaker is in a gallery, able to point to Ireland's most famous contemporary figures and indicate them as figures with whom he has a personal relationship: "The poem has an eye to its effect on his reputation as a social creature."[28] Parkinson's statement takes Yeats somewhat at his word; the situation is not social in any ordinary or straightforward sense. The speaker forces the scene into the social arena by imposing his own experiences and feelings onto the artistic subjects.

The poet's imaginative attempt to animate the artist's viewpoint with his own memories allows the reader to begin to see the level of poetic engagement involved in Yeats's attempt to transform the real into the poetic. The reputations of the painted subjects depend on the painter; the speaker's belief, albeit oscillating, in the reality of this assembled community, lends the scene its power. The power struggle taking place is based on whether authority is awarded to the onlooker or the looked upon. Gazing at the portraits of the dead creates pathos for "an old man looking at the portraits of his dead friends,"[29] but an underlying concern to show the centrality of the poet-figure remains integral to the poem. As Stan Smith notes, Yeats uses the personal pronoun "I" 2265 times in his oeuvre, and "we," and "us" 472 and 174 times respectively.[30] Though "The

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[28] Thomas Parkinson, *W. B. Yeats Self-Critic: A Study of His Early Verse* and *The Later Poetry* (Two Volumes in One) (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: U of California P, 1971), 61.
[29] Winters, 227.
[30] Stan Smith, *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction* (Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble Books, 1990), 146.

Municipal Gallery Revisited" does use "we" several times, it serves to show their isolation from the rest of society ("we three alone," 45) and becomes still more fragile as Yeats is the only one of the three left alive to expound the myth. The creation and commemoration are a solitary task for the poet.

The first stanza shows the speaker regarding the paintings, first describing some of what he sees, and then introducing his own perspective on the subject. Commenting on the portrait of Kevin O'Higgins, the speaker notes the artist's interpretation of O'Higgins, but appends his own perspective:

> Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
> A gentle questioning look that cannot hide
> A soul incapable of remorse or rest;

> (5-7)

The gulf between the perspective of the speaker and of the artist is apparent, but the poem tries to yoke them by claiming that the look "cannot hide / A soul incapable of remorse or rest" (6-7). This is a personal interpretation that Yeats tries to foist upon the painting, and the gap between his vision and that conveyed by the paintings in the gallery forces Yeats to realise that Ireland is created by its chroniclers; memory is only as significant as its expression in poetry and the arts:

> … 'This is not,' I say,
> 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland
> The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'

> (10-12)

This avowal is a double-edged realisation. It celebrates the creativity and transfiguring nature of art, but it also mourns the passing of a reality that was palpable, which cannot be rendered wholly by the artist. This moment of loss, as the poet recognises the unrecoverable nature of history and the impossibility of expressing his personal history, sparks the breakdown at the start of the following stanza:

> Heart smitten with emotion I sink down,
> My heart recovering with covered eyes;

> Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
>
> My permanent or impermanent images:
>
> (17-20)

The first line is ceremonious; the diction is slow and measured, and the repeated "s" sound gives a sonorous sound to the pentameter. The stately marriage of action and emotion as the speaker sinks down creates a gradual and graceful motion. The mirroring in the next three lines between "recovering / covered," (18) "I had looked / I had looked" (19) and "permanent / impermanent" (20) is consciously dramatic; Yeats's speaker struggles to recover himself before our eyes as the repetition of words and phrases suggests the difficulty to articulate amid strong emotion. According to Winters, this section is difficult owing to Yeats baring his emotions before the reader, and questions Yeats's presentation of his speaker: "But this is an account of an old man looking at the portraits of his dead friends and is understandable in a measure; it seems a somewhat unscrupulous and undignified play for our sympathy."[31] This analysis ignores that this instant, where the speaker is momentarily overcome by his emotions is notable for seeming to forget the presence of his audience. The slow sinking down is a brief defeat of the speaker by time, loss, and memory, and the poet requires this dignified crisis in order to create. His experience is central; his experience of grief and response to the portraits slow the poem. Ironically, the speaker's collapse allows him mastery of the poem, albeit a mastery tinged with troubled irony.

Yeats despairs of the ability of portraiture to convey the qualities of its subject, and mourns the passing of unique individuals; he dreads that art cannot capture the detail, nor can the future offer such continued patterns of excellence:

> But where is the brush that could show anything
>
> Of all that pride and that humility?
>
> And I am in despair that time may bring
>
> Approved patterns of women or of men
>
> But not that selfsame excellence again.
>
> (28-32)

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[31] Winters, 227.

Keane argues that "Yeats's final commitment *is* to "the unique,"[32] but he ignores the subtlety of the speaker's phrasing. The speaker's rhetoric cannot locate the brush that could reflect all, and despairs of finding "that selfsame excellence again" but he does not deny the possibility. The pathos of the lines stems from the painful uncertainty in the poetry that he creates, which may, like the paintings he deprecates, fail to express adequately the excellence of his contemporaries. The isolation is stark; Yeats is standing at the end of a tradition, doubtful of any successors and without any contemporaries. The "ghostly solitude" ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," 40) becomes palpable in the poem, as description of his dead friends becomes mythology, and mythology a self-created construct. Locked into his own creative and created memories, Yeats writes in "the cold snows of a dream" ("The Road at My Door," 15).

There is a splendour to the isolation of the position of the Yeatsian speaker, which is not fully grasped by Daniel Albright's analysis of Yeats's poetic pattern. Albright reflects on Yeats's self-fashioning imagination as a tragic isolation: "He finds what he has painfully sought, what he has painstakingly constructed, is nothing but an image of his own simple perishing face."[33] The Yeatsian speaker, undeceived as to the nature of his construction, is not shocked by isolation; the solitary nature of his endeavour is more ambiguous than Albright implies with his "nothing but" summary. Yeats claims that permanent art is the product of solitude; things of value proceed from the isolation:

> The sense for what is permanent, as distinct from what is useful, for what is unique and different, for the truth that shall prevail, for what antiquity called the sphere as distinct from the gyre, comes from solitaries or from communities where the solitaries flourish.[34]

This did not prevent Yeats from bemoaning the isolated nature of the work of art: "I dislike the isolation of the work of art. I wished through drama, through a commingling of verse and dance, through singing that was also speech, through what I called the applied arts of literature, to plunge back into social life."[35] These positions are not as

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[32] Keane, 189.
[33] Albright, "Introduction," *The Poems*, lvii.
[34] Yeats, "Bishop Berkeley," *Essays and Introductions*, 401.
[35] Yeats, "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty," *Explorations*, 300.

contradictory as they may first appear; the difference between "solitary" and "isolation" for Yeats is the subtle difference between being alone and loneliness. The solitary artist writes out of pride, but must avoid creating a work of art which lacks the necessary rootedness in life. The word "rooted" occurs twice within sixteen lines, and its repetition is vital to the pattern of Yeats's thought in the poem. "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" demands that the work of art must at least attempt to ground itself in an experience of life shared by the poet's chosen company. The complexity of the penultimate stanza is often overlooked:

> (An image out of Spenser and the common tongue).
> John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
> All that we did, all that we said or sang
> Must come from contact with the soil, from that
> Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
> We three alone in modern times had brought
> Everything down to that sole test again,
> Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.

> (40-47)

Yeats boasts of his achievements with his fellow "last romantics" ("Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," 41) and reiterates their manifesto. It is his central position that generates further critical interest. He is the lynchpin of the tradition he describes, and the "we" gains its power from the Yeatsian central force. Yeats draws strength from his alliance with two other respected figures, but makes the self seem the main source of ideals. He stands at the centre, recording, and thereby controlling the transmission of their shared beliefs while affirming the Romantic distance between his community and society at large in "we three alone" (45). It is what Synge and Lady Gregory represent in relation to Yeats that renders them powerful presences in the lines. "We three alone" resembles Yeats's oft-returned to lines from Berkeley "We Irish do not hold with this"[36], and the creation of the "we" demonstrates Yeats's need to create a select company in opposition to the "filthy modern tide" ("The Statues," 29) of the new and ever-growing Irish bourgeoisie. A. N. Jeffares persuasively shows Yeats's rejection of the modern

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[36] Yeats, "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty," *Explorations*, 300.

industrialised Ireland in favour of his aristocratic beliefs,[37] yet, as Paul Stanfield shows, "Yeats loved hopeless causes to distraction."[38] This Yeatsian "hopeless cause" holds in suspense two of Yeats's most treasured imaginative truths; first, that the hero must make his mask "in defeat,"[39] and second, that the poet must centre himself in his work, fighting to "enchant, to charm, to bind with a spell themselves and the passers-by?"[40] In "The Municipal Gallery Revisted," "we three alone" (45) fight valiantly to preserve the dream against the mob, yet Yeats is aware of his imaginative licence, and in the poem, preserves a heroic mythology that serves to encapsulate the direction of his work.

This assertion of the central role of the self prepares the reader for the rhetoric of the final stanza, in which Yeats's speaker attempts to impose on the reader a method for evaluating the poet:

> You that would judge me, do not judge alone
>
> This book or that, come to this hallowed place
>
> Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
>
> Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
>
> Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
>
> And say my glory was I had such friends.

(50-55)

While the passage seems to ask the reader to focus on Yeats's friends, in no way does Yeats divert our attention away from him. Yeats's friends add to his power, as their separate brilliance adds force to his cause. They offer protection, and move him beyond criticism by their presence in the poem as their support for Yeats's cause creates a gulf between the reader and his audience. Yeats is the central part of a glorious and quickly disappearing generation that stands aloof from the modern condition, insisting on being judged as "the last romantics" ("Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," 41) as opposed to the degraded standards of modern criticism and art.[41] This belief allows Yeats's diction to

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[37] See Jeffares, "Yeats, Public Man," *The Circus Animals*, 15-28.

[38] Stanfield, 67.

[39] Yeats, "Anima Hominis," *Essays*, 500.

[40] Yeats, "Magic," *Essays and Introductions*, 43.

[41] This Yeatsian move suggests the reasons for, as Declan Kiberd detects, Seamus Deane's resentment against Yeats's imperious demand for the poetry to be read in his own terms: "There is, for instance, in the

command as it insists on its right to demand how he is judged. He diminishes the importance of "this book or that" with the characteristic *sprezzatura* of the late Yeatsian poetry in order to direct the reader, displaying his mastery of poem and audience. As in "The Tower," the importance of Yeats's community rests on its ability to perform as an index to the self; the characters never escape the reader's constant awareness of the Yeats's artistic control.

The final section of the "The Tower" focuses on the self, emphasising its created nature and dispensing with any notion of handing on a tradition to others. It is a resolutely self-regarding passage which simultaneously treats the self as subject and speaker. Having stated his departure from the pride and faith of his earlier days by claiming to pass this tradition on to younger, vigorous men, Yeats proceeds to return to his central struggle of self-fashioning:

> Now shall I make my soul,
> Compelling it to study
> In a learned school
> Till the wreck of body,
> Slow decay of blood,
> Testy delirium
> Or dull decrepitude,
> Or what worse evil come —
> The death of friends, or death
> Of every brilliant eye
> That made a catch in the breath — .
> Seem but the clouds of the sky
> When the horizon fades;
> Or a bird's sleepy cry
> Among the deepening shades.

> (181-95)

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commentary of Seamus Deane, a smouldering resentment against the fact that, in order to be a major critic of Yeats's work, you have to buy absolutely into that work on its own set terms." Declan Kiberd, "Yeats and Criticism," *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, 126.

Edward Larrissy reflects that the style of "The Tower" seems "more rambling and discursive,"[42] yet a close examination of Yeats's method in this section challenges his assertion. Yeats starts purposefully in his task, closing the poem with a declarative and methodical tone: "Now shall I make my soul, / Compelling it to study" (181-82). Patrick Keane views these lines as linking directly to the second stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium," arguing for a positive vindication of the eternal part of the man, the poet: "This is poetry's revenge, the will's revenge against Time's 'it was.'"[43] While Keane is correct to assert a poetic victory at this juncture, it is not a victory without serious concessions. To overplay the revenge ignores much of the earlier part of the poem which emphasises the claims of the body as crucial to the speaker's selfhood. These claims must be repressed; the poet cannot control time's onward process. The speaker celebrates and controls what he can, the immortal part of the self. The self forces the soul towards its appropriate occupation in the light of the aging body, as the two bound entities must operate sympathetically. He does not disguise that decline is inevitable, using "till" not "if." When Yeats moves into a discussion of the "worse evil", (188) the poetry moves into a tone less declarative, and more emotional. The continued use of trimeter adds to the strangeness of the verse, as ballad stanzas would have alternated with a tetrameter line, the reader is poised for a conventional form that does not come. Helen Vendler writes, "Yeats's genius for specificity of language carries this list."[44] The specificity of Yeats's loss is not simply the death of friends or renowned beauties of his day, but rather that these losses, like his own vitality, will fade in significance, becoming as "the clouds of the sky / when the horizon fades" (192-3). That the beauties who could make him catch his breath, and the friends that occupy much space in Yeats's poetry could become inconsequential to his aging self is a horrifying thought that he leaves to close the poem. The "enraged cry of frustration at the loss of youth" that opened the poem has given way to a bleak description of what will occur as aging encroaches on the poet's mind.[45]

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[42] Larrissy, "W. B. Yeats: The Tower (1928)."
[43] Keane, 187.
[44] Vendler, 200.
[45] Larrissy, "W. B. Yeats: The Tower (1928)."

The poem does not close in the same emotional high pitch in which it began; the poem fades out, describing a bird's "sleepy cry / Among the deepening shades" (194-95). The use of the word "shades" contains multifarious literary echoes, notably of Dante, Homer, and Virgil. Their use of the word often refers to the underworld, and the figures encountered by Dante, Aeneas, and Odysseus, and Yeats's use of the word often follows this meaning, as well as the more standard use of the word that refers to light effects.[46] "The Tower" encompasses both meanings, holding them in suspension to bring out the fullest range of interpretative possibilities. "Shades" implies the death of the self that the speaker never names; death is always considered in the abstract; despite making his will, and rage at being shackled to "decrepit age," Yeats represses death. The "deepening shades" imply the speaker's growing incorporation into the realm of the eternal and incorporeal, and the shades also suggest the fading of light that marks the end of the day and the speaker's inexorable movement into death. Shades in Yeats's conception occupy the hinterland between life and death, and his description in "Byzantium" of the man/image/shade is described as midway between the vitality of life and extinction of death: "I hail the superhuman; / I call it death-in-life and life-in-death" (15-16). The shades are transitional and incomplete as they straddle two worlds, defined by both the eternal and corporeal, having "breathless mouths" (14) that evoke the natural without participating in its temporality. The form of the poem follows suit in this incompleteness; Yeats tricks the reader out of the proper formal ending of the poem. The final section should be split into four quatrains rhyming ABAB, but the final line of the section is missing; Yeats rhymes the final B rhyme with the previous B rhyme, offering the illusion of a completed ending. The incompleteness of the structure mirrors the "shades," where the twilit and transitional mode rules the poem's ending instead of the definite emotional complaint of the poem's beginning.[47] Yeats's artistry guarantees the poem the elegiac, pensive, and ambiguous ending that the poem demands, making the transformation within the poem complete. The poet-hero is remade, the form altered and personal to the poem,

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[46] Yeats uses the word "shades" in these poems, and my brackets list the year and what the word connotes in the poems' context. "Anashyua and Vijaya" (the dead) (1886) "Indian to His Love" (1886) (the dead) *The Wandering of Oisin* 2 (1889) (ambiguous) *Baile and Aillinn* (1903) (light effects) "The Grey Rock" (1913) (the dead) "The Three Hermits" (1913) (the dead) "A Prayer on going into my House" (1918) (light effects) in *A Concordance to the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 704.

[47] See Vendler, 200.

and the mood starkly opposite to the poem's beginning. "The Tower," created, controlled, and formed by an act of will, forces the poet-hero to function as the ultimate test of the poet's ability to fashion and re-fashion the self.

Yeats's achievement is to create "a poetry of action;"[48] his poetics of will demands a central figure to manipulate, and the poet becomes heroic through the exertion of centring the self. As Daniel Albright writes,[49] Yeats's poetry explores power and the will; the hero acts as the ideal medium to test the poet's courage and ability to create and sustain his own poetic universe. All poetic value for Yeats is found in the attempt to transform the personal life, and the actual self into a poetic life and the poet-hero.[50] Harold Bloom's remarks on the nature of Romantic art help to illuminate the fundamental similarities and dissimilarities between Yeats and his romantic predecessors in their use of the hero:

> Romantic Art moves to heal the double division of man, between his consciousness and the outward world, and in his consciousness of himself. But this division was found to be largely inescapable, except in privileged moments, or in the continuous exertion of artistic creation.[51]

Instead of moving "to heal" the division in man, Yeats's hero negotiates this division through the poetry, and each poem enacts a different conclusion, a different way of momentarily deciphering the world. The crucial similarity is the ideal of "continuous exertion" where the poet-hero labours to create or display to his reader this hard-won "momentary stay against confusion."[52] The play of power and authority in the text, and the mastery of self and other through linguistic display make Yeats's poetry require a hero to display his self-fashioned and performed self to fullest effect. This controlled and controlling artfulness allows Yeats to avoid the pitfalls of the purely personal; where the poetry finds its individuality is not in a confessional display. The poetry performs the

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[48] Alvarez, *The Shaping Spirit*, 40.
[49] "If he struck Auden and Eliot as amoral, even indifferent to truth, he nevertheless reminded them that poetry is incantation, spell, charm – an art dedicated not to correctness but to power." Albright, "Yeats and Modernism," *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, 62.
[50] Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 522.
[51] Bloom, *Yeats*, 442.
[52] Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*, ed. Mark Richardson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2007), 132.

alchemical attempt to transform the actual quotidian reality of the life into the realm of art, and its medium is form:

> If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged amid all its accidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even when what I alter must seem traditional.[53]

Poetic form offers the yoke under which the poet must labour as he fashions his work in the self-imposed shackles of traditional metre; labour effects the crucial transformation from fact into art. As Keane observes "this paradoxical fusion of autonomy and obedience, of gaiety under self-imposed constraint" is the hallmark of the Yeatsian relationship with form,[54] and his poet-hero wrestles with centring himself despite the demands of formal practice. The attempted transformation from accidental personal life, into the shaped and defined poetic life, allows the poet to centre himself, surrounded by characters fashioned by the masterful poet. Yeats's mature work finds its power from fashioning and performing the central and controlling poetic self directly before the gaze of the reader.

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[53] Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," 522.
[54] Keane, xv.

"How Beautiful an Order": Conclusion

The poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Yeats self-consciously performs the poet's struggle to move between the twin poles of chaos and control. Throughout the thesis I have explored the complex staging of the movement between extremes that kindles the "electric life" (*Defence of Poetry*, 701) of their poetry. In all three poets, the poem is the site of creative conflict. The tension between chaos and control provides the "ashes and sparks" ("Ode to the West Wind", 67) that endow their poetry with a distinctively performative quality.

Byron's poetry understands itself through sensation, propelling itself forward by its seemingly inexhaustible craving to express, explore, and stage individual perspectives:

> The great object of life is Sensation — to feel that we exist — even though in pain
> — it is this "craving void" which drives us to Gaming — to Battle — to   Travel
> — to intemperate though keenly felt pursuits of every description   whose
> principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from accomplishment.[55]

Sensation, for Byron's poetry, both provides occasion for, and is the subject of, his verse explorations. His "doubly serious" (*Beppo* 79: 632) poetics demonstrate his keen interest in and engagement with questions of poetic production, and the role of self and hero in his poetry. Byron's hero is the poet-hero who records, and thereby shapes, the history of sensation. Individual perspective becomes the centre of Byron's poetics; Byronic heroism develops out of a preoccupation with the power of perception. The heroism of "writing" replaces the heroism of "doing" as Byron, by displacing the active hero in favour of the lyrical self, spotlights the power of words.

Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* acts as a model for his poetry, not simply through its content, but also and more centrally through its expression of its content. Shelley's poetics are never content to settle for a single idea, or gloss over complexity. *A Defence of Poetry* becomes kaleidoscopic as it offers the reader myriad perspectives, each shimmering with other potential ways in which to conceptualise poetry, the poet, or the self. His concept of the hero evinces the same sinuous ability to move between two

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[55] *BLJ* 3: 106

seemingly opposite ideas. This dialectic, which balances a yielding poetics of fluidity with a forceful and powerful assertion of the will,[56] animates Shelley's poetry. Fluid movement between the assertion of the will and an open and yielding passivity entwine expressively.

Yeats's self-fashioning is the hallmark of his poetry. Yeats makes poetic capital from the tension between "a poet" and "someone at the breakfast table," as he seeks to create a self that at once epitomises and transcends the purely personal.[57] This fascination with contraries permits Yeats's central achievement, the creation of a hero-generated oeuvre that enthrals through its presentation of various incarnations of the self.

Byron, Shelley, and Yeats unite through their poetic risk-taking. Their performative intelligence demands that the poet should hold in suspense both chaos and control, remaining open to the fertile and generative capacity of chaos, while displaying authorial command. These intensely individual poets, though connected by their deep preoccupation with staging the conflict between chaos and control, retain a self-conscious independence through their centring of the performed self. To study what binds them together is also to comprehend more fully their remarkable, though complementary, singleness.

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[56] Hugh Roberts suggests that the interest of Shelley's prefaces lies in "their openness to the chance of being doubted," Roberts, "Noises On: The Communicative Strategies of Shelley's Prefaces," 193. This openness, I suggest, is present in Shelley's individual creation of the hero.
[57] Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions*, 509.

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