

**“I AM NOT THINE: I AM A PART OF THEE”:
NEGOTIATING SUBJECTIVE
ENTRAPMENT AND THE
ROMANTIC PERSISTENCE
ON VISION IN PERCY
BYSSHE SHELLEY’S
LYRICS**

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2000

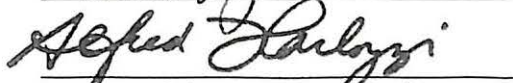
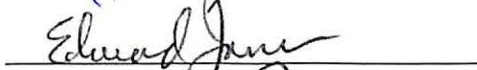
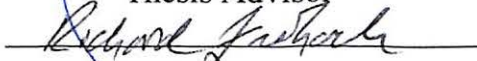
**Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College of
Oklahoma State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 2004**

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PREFACE

CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Percy Bysshe Shelley was attacked often by readers and critics alike for his unapologetic denunciation of contemporary societal values, especially those pertaining to the British mores surrounding marriage and orthodox religion. So too, his attempts to revolutionize and liberate such a highly conventional poetic form as the Romantic lyric resulted in a virtual barrage of harsh criticism for striving towards the obtuse and convoluted. Furthermore, many denounced what they considered Shelley's overt libertine philosophy, one that so outraged the masses that it resulted in his admonishment from British society in 1816. Just as Shelley felt his ideals toward individuality and love were inseparable in his art, his critics found in that complex art justification for their suspicions on his delinquent nature and inferiority as a writer. John Mullan explains in *The Lives of the Great Romantics* this constant convergence of Shelley's public artistry with his private affairs and the reader's natural affinity for keeping both in mind:

In Shelley's case the poetry seemed to force biography on the curious reader, and often to tempt the hostile critic to reflection on the poet's life. This was not only because the lyrical verse beloved of...readers seemed to speak directly of particular occasions of rapture or dejection. It was also because some of his most self-consciously idealistic writing seemed – and, indeed, still seems – to insist that ideals should be practised, that manners

of living and writing should not be dissociated. For Shelley, we could say, the personal was the political...he was the first to stake the creative claims of atheism, and, with the possible (and still obscure) exception of Blake, was the first to turn a politics of sexual liberation into poetry.

(Introduction, xiii)

Others, though often biased in their exclamations, would use personal recollections of the artist to justify Shelley's superiority as both a writer and a man. Persons such as Shelley's friend, Edward Trelawny, the man made infamous for claiming to have snatched Shelley's heart from his funereal pyre, details in his memoirs:

To know an author, personally, is too often but to destroy the illusion created by his works....Instead of the high-minded seeker after truth and abstract knowledge...we find him full of egotism and vanity, and eternally fretting and fuming about trifles. As a general rule, therefore, it is wise to avoid writers whose works amuse or delight you....Shelley was a grand exception to this rule. To form a just idea of his poetry, you should have witnessed his daily life; his words and actions best illustrated his writings.

(Mullan 271)

The problem with these on-going attempts to give meaning to the poetry by revealing the nature of the writer is that they circumvent Shelley's own attempts to dissociate his writings from overt self-reference or the "vanities of the great" (*Complete Poems* 39).ⁱ Nevertheless, it seems impossible for critics and readers to separate the personal voice of Shelley from the speaker of the poem and, more importantly, to harmonize the poet's deference for denying ego with the reverential embrace of mind and personal vision over matter.

THE QUESTIONS

If aspects of biography and personal philosophy so often overlap when discussing Shelley's poetic practice, as Mullan suggests, then an analysis of how both characteristics influence his art is not only beneficial but necessary, not only in order to understand the madness to his methods but to also further comprehend just where and how Shelley often falls short of his goals. The issues of most influence on Shelley's lyric sensibility primarily revolve around conveying certain truths that the spirit of life makes clear to an engaged and questioning mind, though these truths must be ciphered through one's imagination and become mere words due to the immutable essence of language. Taking

ⁱ Shelley uses this term in the Preface to *The Revolt of Islam* to support his own theory that critics may not be moved by his poem but that it should not matter as long as he writes "fearlessly" in disapproval of a world of men who all too often worry first about the critical acclaim and, after, about the usefulness (a word Shelley gave great priority to in his letters) of the thoughts within. The reference to "vices and vanities of the great" denotes, for him, those that denied the "lofty-minded Lucretius" (38-39) but it could easily apply to the actual vanity of artists and critics of his time merely seeking immortality and acclaim instead of investing in the improvement of their art. Shelley shows strong contempt for vanity and self-involvement, wishing to avoid "all flattery to those violent and malignant passions of our nature which are ever on the watch to mingle with and to alloy the most beneficial innovations. There is no quarter given to Revenge, or Envy, or Prejudice" (39). Selfishness and ego, not to be confused with mere self-awareness, lie at the heart of these "malignant passions." As Shelley wrote these words in 1817, only a year after writing his "Hymn," I am inferring that the same conscious endeavor to resist self-aggrandizement seems to be a reoccurring attempt in much of the poetry from this period, if not all of it.

this into consideration then, is it possible to reconcile the subjective ideal and objective reality through poetry and, if so, how? In a poetic medium that relies on conformity to standards and tradition, how does one work around those standards in order to come closest to an envisioned higher “spirit” of existence? In other words, can Shelley really manipulate traditional lyrical themes and the conventionalized language prevalent throughout early British Romantic poetry in order to avoid entrapment in a subject-object dichotomy or selfish ego, as Shelley thought it? And, if it is indeed possible to renegotiate this stylized artistic medium, to what extent did Percy Bysshe Shelley truly succeed at finding that liberation in his poetry? These are questions this thesis seeks to answer.

IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS

Though “Alastor” is an early narrative and not lyrical, it is a predecessor worthy of discussion here due to the extent to which it exudes what would become Shelley’s characteristic strained relationship between self-love or ego-centrism and imagination. This is the first acclaimed work to also illustrate the precarious balance between interior feeling and objective reality. Indeed, by the end of “Alastor” and moving into the more conventionalized elements of “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” “Mont Blanc,” the set of love poems “To Jane” and *Epipsychidion*, it becomes more apparent to the Shelleyan reader that the subjective and objective are incapable of being separated, that the balance is little more than an illusion. Shelley’s greatest weakness may well be this persistence on the interconnection between mind and world and his insistence that reality is little more than the perception of the individual (the poet) and the individual’s attempts to

infuse this perception with new relationships and meaning through imagination, thereby creating poetry. The trap that Shelley increasingly falls into, however, is that human beings are limited to their own fictions, fictions which usually fall back on subject-object relations, even when these relations are far from the canonized, fixed and dead metaphors Shelley so abhorred. My work is invested in penetrating those fictions in Shelley's poems in order to discover how the poet's formidable ambiguities of language, his controlled style in the lyrics and the overarching motifs within most of his poetry reveal a poet conflicted by a desire to break free of egocentrism even as a reliance on the foregrounding of the mind's wanderings and the act of conscious creation itself inevitably keep him bound.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to my advisor and mentor, Dr. Martin Wallen, for his continued generosity in support of my educational endeavors and this thesis. The ceaseless questions and discussions throughout the year resulted in a much firmer grasp of my argument in relation to the critical reviews already established. His focus on making my own obtuse style of writing simpler will no doubt benefit the reader of this thesis. His critiques also substantially improved my revision process, even as I still struggle for that elusive perfect phrase. Many thanks for helping me to find my point amidst all the wordiness. I also wish to thank my other committee members, Dr. Edward Jones and Dr. Richard Frohock, for their continued support over the years. My enjoyment of literature and the inspiration to teach it to others are the direct results of seeing first-hand the great love for teaching exhibited by these three wonderful instructors. Finally, I cannot thank my mother and family enough. The extent of my gratitude is beyond words.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	SHELLEY: THE CONTRADICTION	1
	DEFINITION OF TERMS	2
	SHELLEY AS EGOIST	3
II.	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	5
	“ALASTOR”: POSITIONING SHELLEY’S NARRATIVE POEM AMIDST THE ROMANTIC IDEAL	5
	WHEN OBJECTS ARE BOTH OF THIS WORLD AND BEYOND IT: REFORMATTING EGO INTO IMAGINATION IN THE COMPANION PIECES “HYMN TO INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY” AND “MONT BLANC”	20
	WHEN SYNTHESIZING “I” and “THEE” GOES AWRY: PENETRATING OBJECTIFIED WOMEN WITH SELF in the “TO JANE” POEMS AND <i>EPIPSYCHIDION</i>	35
	“TO JANE”: A FOURSOME	39

EPIPSYCHIDION: A "SOUL OUT OF MY SOUL" 51

CONCLUSION 58

BIBLIOGRAPHY 62

I. INTRODUCTION

SHELLEY: THE CONTRADICTION

Critics often agree, regardless of their predilections toward Shelley's artistry, that Shelley is a "philosophical poet who passionately questions the traditional formulations of religion and philosophy, and who will accept no authority for belief other than that of his own mind, his own senses, his own powers of intuition" (Cherniak 33). Percy Bysshe Shelley, in every form of creative expression, revealed himself as unabashedly questioning, a "nonbeliever" in doctrine or dogma and a skeptic toward that which was already perceived to be classified or understood in conformity to standard beliefs or norms. With regards to poetry, the standard ideal for what poetry should incorporate, even be all together, often revolved around the highly successful modes set forth in the late eighteenth century by predecessors like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These Romantic poets afforded an unprecedented re-evaluation of the forms, language, and subject matter appropriate to British poetry in order to find beauty in everyday themes more accessible to the common man and, therefore, appropriate to a greater understanding of the basic stages of life and the characteristics inherent to all of humanity. However, even with this influential shift, class mores and Christian doctrine still reigned supreme. To this world, Shelley's blatant denunciation of systematic rules and principles, with their "centralizing tendency to inculcate a particular set of morals" (Haines 59), and his inconsistent traversing of artistic philosophy and poetic voice or

form in order to seek a deeper Truth, albeit oftentimes an indeterminate or ambiguous one, marked him a radical for life. It is Shelley's skepticism and continual questioning, however, which illuminate a creative reinterpretation of traditional lyrical themes.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

When discussing Shelley's attempts to move away from conventionalized lyrical elements, it is important to note first those very formalities from which he perhaps is attempting to disentangle himself in his poetry. Lyrics usually invoke the performative "I" by which the poetry itself becomes highly personal, self-involved and subjective, tending toward "self-reference" of the actual poet, such as detected in Wordsworth's *Prelude* or Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight." Often involved as well in this lyrical formation of identity or the self is the idea of an "interior journey in quest of one's true identity and spiritual home" (Abrams 6). The Romantic lyric differs as well in its treatment of the object, whether this object is that of nature in relation to man or man in relation to his beloved. The typical courtly "Petrarchan lover or Cavalier gallant of...seventeenth-century love poems" often becomes, in Romantic poetry, identified with the individual personality of the poet himself, making biographical criticism relevant to modern studies of the poet in relation to his art (Abrams 6). One might also note that a lyric usually begins with a description of a local landscape, a looking outward at the world, which, in turn, awakens a memory or thought that leads the lyric speaker to achieve an insight or come to a resolution of some kind. In this way, the "natural scene has become a primary poetic subject" (Abrams 7) and the observation or accurate description of nature leads to a stimulus of thought. For Shelley, however, this stimulus

of thought does not necessarily stem from the actual attributes of that being observed, nor does it lead to “anything more than high possibilities” (Abrams 646).

SHELLEY AS EGOIST

While many of Shelley’s poems are prototypes for conventional lyrical structure, these poems also counteract eighteenth and nineteenth century conventions by using the poet’s relationship to language and subject-object relationships as a means to reveal barriers and yet still seek unrelentingly to understand what lies beyond those barriers all at once. Even the motif of “double vision” or “doppelgangers,” Shelley’s envisioning of a prototype of the speaker-poet’s better self or his ideal in humanity or nature according to Shelley’s own philosophy, adds an interesting twist whereby Shelley can contemplate the “spirit” of things by bringing into being a similar, mirrored self or sensory experience that, on the surface, remains outside the sphere of his own egocentrism and yet is directly tied to it. In many of the later poems, but extending to an examination of “Alastor,” “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” and “Mont Blanc” as well, Shelley negotiates most readily this on-going struggle with Wordsworthian ego. The reader cannot deny, when looking primarily at Shelley’s lyric, that Shelley surpasses the traditional elements of that form. However, Shelley never fully realizes a lyric devoid of ego, albeit an ego that may take on an entirely different form from that apparent in the work of his predecessors.

The traditional structure of moving from a description of a particular outer landscape inward becomes re-negotiated in Shelley’s poetry so that the landscape or object being described, in essence, already reflects a more predominant inner landscape of the imagination and cannot be separated from it. Many times, the revelation of the

poet or subject's imagination and its interaction with the object of the poem, whether it be a love interest or the landscape or something as ephemeral as Truth and Beauty, reveals itself through the use of reflection or a seeing in others something similar to ourselves. In this way, Shelley employs dual perception because his descriptions and imagery so often make the subject and object interchangeable. Shelley's self-conscious questionings reinforce a dependence on the self and ego in poetry, subsequently leading into an ongoing reliance on personal vision that, oddly enough, makes Shelley's poetry both more complicated and yet more attuned to the traditions of those Romantic poets who came before than some researchers suggest.

It is Shelley's continual questioning of the world and the poet's relation to it that suggests his recasting of the old lyrical themes. This is most obvious in his poems "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Mont Blanc," and "Ode to the West Wind," in which his studies of the sublime begin to "centre on the human subject rather than on the natural object... [and] there develops a new and even complex theory of creativity as a psychological activity" (Leighton 13). However, before examining these lyrical poems more closely, we should set the stage with an even earlier work, one that already hints at the conflict between "psychological activity" or imagination and the lengths to which this faculty works as both a creative and destructive element in the poem. As will become increasingly apparent, Shelley's poetry in no way achieves an ego-less lyricism, regardless of how creatively and devotedly Shelley works to tackle the challenge.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“ALASTOR”: POSITIONING SHELLEY’S NARRATIVE POEM AMIDST THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

Since the onset of the twentieth century, many critics have insisted upon various interpretations of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s first published volume, *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, due to, as most readily judge, ambiguities within the major poem that are attributed to the title. In fact, the individual work “Alastor” contains such a wide range of interpretive possibilities that it seems as though Shelley, through his use of ambiguous language, insists upon an opening of the metaphoric door to multiple interpretations of the text. However, one comment central to the bulk of criticism available on the subject reaffirms the notion that “Shelley finds his myth, his great theme; in effect, finds himself. ‘Alastor,’ composed in the autumn of 1815, is conventionally taken to be Shelley’s first mature and valuable poem of some length” (Bloom 8). It is in this first poem deemed “valuable” that Shelley works toward a growing disdain for Wordsworthian egoism and seclusion while simultaneously exploring the destructive and creative properties of such egoism on the poet. In this chapter, through examination of specific elements of “Alastor,” I intend to show the factors that contribute to Shelley’s inability to deny the underlying ego that pervades even the most creative and imaginative poetry, even when that poetry is less stylistically demanding than the strict conventions of the lyric.

Even in the short poem “To Wordsworth,” written shortly before “Alastor,” Shelley reacts against Wordsworthian conventions and, at the very least, hopes that he will never desert his own radical beliefs or revolutionary “Songs” of the imagination. Once impressed with Wordsworth’s renderings of humanity, filled with commonplace lives and experiences and created from newly imaginative and provocative detail, Shelley’s perception of Wordsworth’s art changed to displeasure as Wordsworth grew conservative in nature and focused more on the self or ego in his poetry as he became more content with solitude. Shelley attempts to form a direct antithesis against that egoistic focus and the isolation that comes with finding the individual’s poetic identity. He, instead, is motivated by a need to obliterate this foregrounding of identity and to comprehend the absolute purity of a “power” or “vision” that, though hidden in a constantly changing universe, unites all things. Unlike the “Poet of Nature,” Shelley suggests that he will not weep at the ever-changing quality of life but, instead, for the disappearance of a “voice [that] did weave / Songs consecrate to truth and liberty...” (ll. 11-12).ⁱⁱ In essence, Shelley sees Wordsworth’s later art as lacking political and philosophical truths in contrast to the radicalism that filled the earlier poetry, and he interprets this loss as a kind of death to be mourned. This is similar to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s statements in the *Biographia Literaria* implying that Wordsworth, “where he is indeed Wordsworth,” is a master of his craft but often falls short of his own lofty goals and revolutionary claims. Ironically, it is a fate or shortcoming similar to Shelley’s own, if critics of Shelley are to be believed. In any case, because the creations of “To

ⁱⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all references to specific lines from Shelley’s poetry and prose derive from Ingpen and Peck’s ten volumes of *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*.

Wordsworth” and “Alastor” are separated by only one year, it may be assumed that “Alastor” is motivated by the same reluctance to indulge in Wordsworthian constructs.

In “Alastor,” Shelley’s own inquisitiveness and idealistic tendencies as a poet lead him to struggle with Romantic conventions in Wordsworth’s poetry, and it is this struggle between the active mind and the experiences within the outer world that influences much of his later work as well. Earl Wasserman goes so far as to suggest that the entire *Alastor* volume “displays Shelley’s division between the inadequacy of the temporal world and the possibly illusory, certainly tormentingly solipsistic, aspirations of the mind” (8). This places humanity’s dreams and its existence in constant struggle, unlike Wordsworth’s tendency to absorb the earthly landscape into his own peaceful, meditative reflections. In addition, Shelley’s landscape, the “temporal world” which Wasserman discusses, is already nothing more than an object of the poet’s mind. It is what Stuart Curran calls “the pastoral of the mind....It is perfectly what it is, but at the same time it is not sufficient, for it at once implies what it is not and promises what it could be” (127). In other words, Shelley’s poetic world assumes a seemingly faithful representation of reality, but, as a conscious re-creation, it is much more involved than that.

Furthermore, whereas Wordsworth relies on the eternal questionings of life to awaken the intellect and create a true communion between the individual and nature, Shelley sees the contemplation of the universe as an examination that only *reaches* toward the realm of truth. Evidence of this theory evolves out of the narrator’s proclamation to the “Mother of this unfathomable world” that he is “Hoping to still these obstinate questionings / Of thee and thine...” (ll. 26-7) while still fully aware that “...though ne’er yet / Thou has unveiled thy inmost sanctuary...” (ll. 37-8). These lines

suggest that the “questionings” of mysteries have yet to be answered, and no great revelation appeared to the poet in the past. Therefore, the poet pessimistically fears the chasm between him and the veiled sanctuary he seeks will remain forever in place. Similarly, Shelley’s looking outward at the world lies in direct contrast to Wordsworth’s; Shelley’s resurrection of the poet’s “impatient wandering” (l. 300) through nature does *not* necessarily result in an “unveiling,” a definite formulation of truth or full understanding of the world and the individual’s place within it. As Vincent Newey proposes, Shelley’s “psychological quest...brings into focus both the search for plenitude and the dark underside which is vacancy, introversion or despair” (4). This dark vacancy, introversion and despair are later to be re-acknowledged and reincorporated as themes in Shelley’s more prominently critiqued poem from 1816, “Mont Blanc.” At least here, however, psychological wandering ceases to be a noble pastime or that which brings knowledge, illumination or memories; the only revelations in “Alastor” are those of the narrator, not of the poet; and even these are steeped in “incommunicable dream, / And twilight phantasms, and deep noon-day thought” (ll. 39-40). Therefore, unlike Wordsworth, Shelley “was not going to find his inspiration in the accepted materials—in the emotions on the surface of human life; in the ordinary moral values; or in the purely aesthetic sensations” (Campbell 196). Nonetheless, Shelley’s common motif in “Alastor,” as with the majority of his poetry, relies on the soul’s quest, a search for communion with the world that often remains unrealized, lending itself neither to the pleasing imaginative completeness of Keats’ vivid details nor to the moralizing accouterment of Wordsworth’s poetry.

Shelley's defiance of conventional and oft-praised poetic practices of the time, in conjunction with similar problematic factors to be discussed in his later artistic endeavors, likely account for why Shelley's poetry went virtually unnoticed, was considered "quite incomprehensible" for the reading public of his day (Campbell 195) and was even regarded as containing a "'vein of unhealthy sentiment'" (Campbell 190). Indeed, Shelley seems less concerned with what the poet in "Alastor" seeks than with the effects of the quest on the Wordsworthian character that must find an answer or lose himself to death in the process, whether that death is, for the poet, a reality or, in terms of Shelley's perspective of Wordsworth, a stifling of creativity in favor of convention. It is as though Shelley suggests that, by seeking a definite answer, the poet ends up creating self-imposed limits on knowledge and denies the infinite possibilities within the universe as well as within poetry. In stark contrast, Shelley himself remains content throughout his career to leave what he seeks undefined, as though it is "the shadow of a shadow" or veiled (Campbell 191).

Furthermore, the poet-philosopher's continual contemplation of the depths of knowledge and his visionary search for an ultimate truth result in a separation from the rest of humanity. The thoughtful poet figure is lost in a solitary state while stirred by these mysteries of the unfathomable, much as the voice or speaker in most of Wordsworth's poetry isolates himself in his attempt to forge a bond with nature. However, seclusion for Shelley's poet means that he loses the ability to connect with other humans and, as William Keach states, this allows the reader to imply "the failure of an expanding consciousness to find resolution in nature's plenitude" (40). In other words, the poem develops out of an anti-Wordsworthian response, a "sense of the

inability of nature to satisfy the...quest for truth” (Bygrave 157). Therefore, in Wordsworth’s poetry, nature “can save people from the alienation, frustration and triviality of contemporary, mainly urban life” (Bygrave 156) while, in Shelley’s poems, a solitary relationship with nature is more of an evasion of social responsibility or a rejection of humanity outside of that humanity which is the subject’s ideal. This is made most evident in Shelley’s Preface, in which he ends with a passage from Wordsworth’s

The Excursion:

They who...keep aloof from sympathies with their kind,
rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human
grief...are morally dead....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...the lasting misery and
loneliness of the world....

“The good die first,
And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket!” (2)

The youthful poet in Shelley’s poem seeks knowledge but, in doing so, he mistakenly begins to neglect the living world around him. He does not care for the solace of the Arab maiden who loves him, nor does he search for knowledge in any realm where human beings coexist, living instead in the wild or among the ruins and memorials where only “dead men / Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around...” (ll. 119-20). In

fact, the poet seems to inhabit a medium between these two classes of beings Shelley mentions in his Preface. He is, at first, virtuous because he continues to seek knowledge and truth in the world around him, but his search becomes flawed and his humanity is, therefore, perceived as tragic and unfulfilled by some critics. He is of “those men with vision who allowed their private search for truth to carry them away from their public duty...proper subjects for tragic literature” (Reiman 25). Indeed, the poem’s ending assumes a similar position in that the poet’s tragic demise is a “woe too ‘deep for tears’” (l. 713), one that the “surpassing Spirit” leaves behind in its wake.

Of even more importance to this poem is Shelley’s insistence as well that “the Poet’s self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin” (1). In this passage, Shelley obviously equates a solitary existence with both the ego and the poet’s ultimately self-destructive, tragic downfall resulting from the inability to replace that ego with communal discourse. In his solitary state, the poet’s intellect is solely focused on the “I,” and this focus relies on a supreme egotism, one in which everything that does not incorporate or conform to his high and superior thoughts is rejected, much as the Arab maiden who loves him dearly. His ego-centricism results in perceiving spirits and mysteries only as a narcissistic mirroring of himself:

Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought; its music long,
.....
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.... (ll. 151-61)

An increased love of self leads the poet to dream of a female poet of mystical qualities. This dream corresponds directly with his ego because the veiled maid is an ideal of his

own self-projection and contains the limitless possibilities that abound within “knowledge and truth and virtue” (158). As Donald Reiman suggests, “...because he refused to accept the natural outlet for his human social instincts, they were distorted into a monomania” (21). Indeed, egoism, self-love, and narcissism are all interrelated within Shelley’s poem while his overt examination of these elements becomes even more apparent through numerous letters to friends. Wilson points to specific examples from Shelley’s letters, in which Shelley remarks to his friend, Thomas J. Hogg, that “I cannot endure the horror [of self-reflection], the evil which comes to the self in solitude...” (76). Shelley further laments over the incongruities associated with life in a note to Elizabeth Hitchener:

...How racking it is to the soul...to find that perfect virtue is very far from unattainable, to find reason tainted by feeling, to see the mind when analyzed exhibit a picture of irreconcilable inconsistencies, even when perhaps a moment before, it imagined that it had grasped the fleeting phantom of virtue. (Wilson 79)

The first passage emphatically addresses Shelley’s natural inclination to avoid any manner of self-indulgence; the latter shows the extent to which Shelley reveals a want to project his mind outward and fully “grasp” what is really beyond human faculties to understand fully. Just as the veiled maid stands in for the abstract qualities of “truth and virtue” in Shelley’s poetry, Shelley openly concedes that his own mind also creates inharmonious pictures in attempts to identify and categorize what is otherwise fleeting, illusory and impossible to ascertain. One is left with little wonder as to why critics so often believe Shelley’s poet-speaker to be a representation of Shelley himself.

The poet figure in "Alastor," upon waking from his dream vision, is still trapped in that mental state that has yet to realize the vision is unattainable, however. Instead, he emerges as a sort of melancholic wanderer reminiscent of the character in S.T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." After much searching, the poet-wanderer finally realizes that he cannot understand or breach the universal power or "spirit" of the vision. As the poet's main objective is to find and embrace that fond vision once again because it is not directly identifiable in the objects of his surroundings, the poet loses himself to his own egocentric goal, falsifies the vision in doing so, and ceases to acknowledge his rightful place in relation to all of humanity. The role of the searching poet may indeed reflect the self-same anxiety Shelley remarked upon within the context of his letter to Hitchener listed above. As Donna Richardson further suggests about the role of the poet in the poem, "...the Poet's dream reflects Shelley's belief that people feel compelled to comprehend the universe but can only do so imperfectly by projecting necessarily incomplete and egocentrically-generated images" (184). Shelley's divergence from Wordsworth is made most clear as Shelley expresses the sorrow that comes with this realization and instead acknowledges the poet's disassociation from both the natural world and society, saying that the poet is now resigned to only a "mute conference / With his still soul" (ll. 223-4). The poet is not awakened to truth in nature but, instead, is assailed by the loss of the mysterious power or vision he beheld only briefly in his mind. Furthermore, after his vision, the poet "not only failed to recover the reality, he failed even to meet a delusive substitute. He is as far from shadows as from reality" (Wilson 170). Perhaps this inability to accept the objects outside his visionary

control as possible lesser representatives of that self-same vision he seeks further denotes why he is no longer allowed the return of such a vision.

The motif of imagination as both creative and destructive, as conclusively illustrated above, evolves out of this notion that imaginative faculties provide for the potential acknowledgement that truth and beauty combined as the spirit of all things does exist while, simultaneously, it remains an illusive mystery. For this reason, even with the poet's untimely death, the vision "does not preside over his death; [instead] it is extinguished like the horned moon, whose two lessening points seem intended to remind us of it [the poet's reflection in the vision through the portrayal of the double stars or two lessening points in the sky]" (Wilson 164).

The title "Alastor" denotes this psychological torment evoked by such a loss as that of the vision, even though that loss is only of something imaginary. The poet is unable to find his imagined ideal because it cannot truly "exist in the [physical] world, but also because it is merely the reflection of his own mind, his own inner being. The poet is on a deluded quest to find himself in an externalized form" (Bygrave 156). This apparatus of delusion is indeed a problem that recurs in much of Shelley's poetry, moving the poet to re-stylize the lyrical elements throughout his short career. Shelley's friend, Thomas Love Peacock, provided the fitting title to denote a demonic figure that haunts and torments a human. Though many critics have found the title troubling in relation to the actual poem, Stuart Curran finds a strategic merit to this relationship and insists that the demon stems from within, stating:

"Alastor" acknowledges the paradox implicit in romance:
that imaginative escape, which compels the genre, must be

temporary, that the imagination empowered and celebrated by it, as Johnson's Imlac so perceptively remarked, is "a hunger... which preys incessantly upon life."

(148-9)

Shelley's title seems even more appropriate when one considers that the demonic figure becomes the poet's own illusory imagination. Bygrave suggests further that the "alastor" in question cannot be considered the ideal double of himself in the veiled maid, but instead must be "a reflection of the poet's true, alienated self rather than the idealized self-image....Searching narcissistically for an idealized version of his own self, the poet becomes the very opposite of that idealized self-image" (156). This opposition is reiterated consistently through Shelley's use of mirror imagery to evoke the sky's "starry eyes" much like "His eyes [that] beheld / Their own wan light...(ll. 469-70) in the fountain's reflection and "as the human heart, / Gazing over...the...grave / Sees its own treacherous likeness..." (ll. 472-4). This passage corresponds with that notion that the alienated self becomes the opposite of the idealized image and, indeed, becomes the true torment because it realigns the poet with his double failure to find that which he most desires or to devote himself once more to social, communal concerns. Nonetheless, both the alienated self and the idealized image, whether configured as opposites through the distortion of mirror imagery or as likenesses, continue the idea of the subject's reciprocating gaze: the poet projects onto other beings what he either wishes to see or fails to see, both of which stem from one mind. Furthermore, even such ephemeral qualities as "Hope and despair, / The torturers" (ll. 639-40) become conflicting emotions that the poet evidently attributes to this inner "haunting" of the mind.

Due to the poet's above-mentioned final revelation that his search is in vain, his forlorn acceptance that the ideal is forever outside the reach of mortal bounds can only end in attempting to traverse into a realm beyond mortality. Because the poet cannot solemnly commit himself to returning and engaging himself actively with the living world around him, he resigns himself to death instead. After his dream vision, he oversteps his bounds once more, as Reiman suggests:

In his pride the Youth again reasons that, if man can find no fulfillment within this life, perhaps he should seek his destiny beyond the grave. "Startled by his own thoughts," he suspects that he is being tempted to evil; but seeing "no fair fiend near him," he finds a little shallop and follows "a restless impulse... to embark / And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste...."

(ll. 304-05, Reiman 23)

It is even suggestive of the quest dynamic that, if the quest is "for a completed self...the only completion is that of death....A lifelong quest for an ideal may be the inner striving of the spirit against the constraints of the probable, but it is also a striving against life and in the pursuit of death" (Curran 148). Instead of escaping from his seclusion and seeking union with those around him once more, the poet dives more deeply into his egoism. At least before, the poet was still capable of interacting, however passively, with those few who welcome him into their home. However, after his vision, not only can the poet-wanderer not be one with the spirit of the world, but he can no longer associate and reside with the mere "cottagers" he once beheld in childhood. Instead, the poet drives himself onward toward death, wasting away in reckless abandon of physical cares even while

those around him try to stall and comfort him with “human charity” and “call him with false names / Brother, and friend...” (ll. 255, 268-9). The Spirit or Power almost seems to hover over, guiding him onto that impenetrable realm and holding “...commune with him, as if he and it / Were all that was” (ll. 487-8). For the poet, even the act of dying is self-induced, almost selfish, as he willingly denies communion with those who wish to help him in attempts to fall once again under the spell of such incommunicable dreams and visions brought about by a final deep sleep.

Shelley seems to insist that the speaker needs intercourse with other people in order to let loose his egotism and, eventually, the poet dies because a necessary and profound interaction between him and people ceases to exist. As Nathaniel Brown asserts, Shelley was capable of substituting the term “love” for that of “imagination” (33). Shelley thereby insists upon the necessity of communal interaction, remarking in *A Defence of Poetry*, “The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature and identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own...” (*The Complete Works* 118). The problem, once again revealed in this sentence, lies in Shelley’s perception that “our nature” or “identification of ourselves” is first and foremost the subject at work. That these objects of “thought, action or person” may or may not be similar to our own is made considerably less relevant as long as the subject remains the active or acting force and the object remains passive. Furthermore, in contrast to Shelley’s theorizing that the “secret of morals is love,” the reader of “Alastor” is left pondering where exactly love resides. Instead of interacting or actively conversing with the townspeople who encounter him, the poet avoids actively participating in their world and, thus, no longer loves (ll. 254-71).

Similarly, the cottagers and mountaineers do not see him as human but instead an ambiguous “fleeting visitant” (257) or “spectral form” (259). In essence, the poet’s quest to find and embrace this egocentric “vision” culminates in his separation from the world he once sought to know, leading to desolation, destruction, and eventual death in the process. If love and imagination are intertwined, and if we can assume love disappears from the poet’s world, then imagination must disappear as well, leaving no other alternative but death. Therefore, only the finality of death brings about a state in which flagrant self-awareness or egotism diminishes or disappears as the mind’s endless imaginings and creative faculties are brought to a physical halt.

Shelley’s primary argument in the ending of “Alastor” seems to be that, without conversation or direct involvement with one’s community, one can never fully work out what lies beyond personal understanding because the limits of individual intellect are enslaving and serve to keep the spirit of things in the living world at an unattainable distance. In this way, love, or community, and imagination most likely rely heavily upon each other for success and, when ego overrides either, destruction occurs. To expound on this complicated relationship, one must realize that, even though the poet is fully aware that an otherworldly spirit exists, understanding the entirety of this powerful vision is impossible because it remains “veiled” and steeped in mystery. The imagination can only help to inform one, like the poet, of the existence of that vision and interpret it so that a connection is made between the unfathomable world, the poet, and the object. In other words, one cannot fully interpret the spirit, but is instead motivated in thought or action by the loss of that spirit in its physical form, represented here as the loss of the veiled maid and the loss of communion with nature and society. Neil Fraistat suggests as well,

“Matter here remains unredeemed and unredeemable, nor has the Poet’s goal been to redeem it so much as evade it. It appears transformed here finally, as in Wordsworth, but its only satisfactory transformation is into nothingness, just as the Poet’s only proper end is annihilation” (159). This idea of annihilation reappears in the close of *Epipsychidion* as well, in which “Shelley’s dream of union thwarts itself in the recognition that only ‘annihilation’ can make it possible” (O’Neill 111), suggesting:

One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation....

(ll. 584-7)

In other words, “annihilation” is sought out in the latter as that which creates a union of “one immortality” while, in the former poem, Shelley’s poet seeks annihilation because his irresolvable quest has already made it clear to him that union is impossible on earth. However, this union of the self with an ideal recreation of the self, what the mind envisions as its prototype, is rendered impossible in death as well, since the veiled maid is lost forever and never reappears to the poet, not even in his final visionary foray into death’s realm. Indeed, the entire plot of “Alastor” seems a fanciful attempt by Shelley to show the negative consequences of getting caught up in egoistic and selfish plans without taking into consideration the world around. Simultaneously, however, Shelley implicitly beckons the reader to undergo a complicated, self-indulgent quest into uncovering veiled nuances of egotism embedded in the writing by using as his motif the very characteristic he wishes to escape, but cannot.

WHEN OBJECTS ARE BOTH OF THIS WORLD AND BEYOND IT:
REFORMATTING EGO INTO IMAGINATION IN THE COMPANION PIECES
“HYMN TO INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY” AND “MONT BLANC”

As suggested by Angela Leighton, “it is Shelley who is perhaps the first consistently unbelieving poet of the sublime. It is he who still looks on the landscapes of infinity, but who expresses the possibility, in his poems, that they do not ‘look at us in return’” (24). Due to his “scorn of orthodoxy” (Abrams 644) and unwillingness to yield to a religious creed, Shelley could at once admire David Hume’s idea of the sublime and yet see beyond Hume’s implication that “the sublime rarely loosens its allegiance to theology” (Leighton 11). In other words, because Shelley cannot commit himself to a named deity or prescribed religious constraints, he displaces religious origin in favor of invoking a sublime, unnamed presence or “aura” that holds both a “reciprocating but distancing effect in any object” (Leighton 24). Therefore, as Leighton suggests, “the characteristic of the Shelleyan sublime will be its ‘unbelief,’ and its recognition, therefore, that what the human imagination confronts in its creative aspiration may be only a vacancy” (24). Possibly, due to that “unbelief,” Shelley is capable of moving beyond the wholly personal lyric and into a poetic world without personal limitations. However, I argue in this chapter that Shelley cannot rid himself of subjectivity in these lyrics because the object of illumination, the primary object of Shelleyan consideration, is not so much nature or humanity or even the “secret strength of things,” but instead the

extent to which these intersect and how human beings seek to give meaning to that relationship.

Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc" evoke Shelley's characteristic concern with an entity outside one's self but also confirm a struggle to imagine and call forth that entity when otherwise hindered by the boundaries language and relationships imply. Simon Haines similarly feels the bonds of language in attempts to explain further this phenomenon in Shelley's writing:

[The entity]...is not so much what Wilson Knight called a "true object"...as an unseen power or presence external to us, a something which blows, drives, chariots, moves, destroys and preserves the visible things of the world whilst remaining invisible itself. It is not so much a... "thou" which is also an "I" as an object of the speaker's perception which is nevertheless more than an "It"...This entity, power or presence is...the one he spent his life as a poet trying to represent in either its transcendent or its immanent aspect, the one whose "awful shadow...Floats though unseen amongst us" in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," the one called Necessity in *Queen Mab* and *Alastor*, the one whose secret strength informed the universe of things in "Mont Blanc".

(Haines 152-3)

The ultimate question to arise from such a complicated subject-object design then becomes: to what extent is the object, as Shelley presents the imagination's perception of that reality, a "reality beyond as well as in the sensory world, beyond as well as in the

poet himself" (Haines 155)? Haines goes on to expostulate (though using "Ode to the West Wind" as his *modus operandi*) an answer that incorporates a similar reinforcement of the subject's dominance over that which is at its mindful disposal, an answer applicable to Shelley's presentation of intangible objects in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc":

The trouble is not with Shelley's excited apprehension of the power, nor even with the suggestion that it may be a moral power as well as a natural one; it is with the absence of any thinking about how that power could be a moral force outside the feelings of the thinker, which is also an absence of thinking about the feelings themselves. The only relation the power has... is with the speaker. The impression given, inevitably, is that he cannot distinguish, or does not want to, between his powerful desires and the power....The command is "Be thou me", not "Be thou in me"; not "may the force be with you", but "may you be the force".

(Haines 161)

This last statement lends powerful credence to the idea that the subject and object are often intertwined and, more to the point, the poet's consciousness as subject remains the primary essence of Shelley's works. This betrays Shelley's criticism of a megalomania that persists throughout British Romantic Poetry, especially in the works of reverential artists such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. Shelley has, in essence, found himself facing a similar conflict as the poet-wanderer in "Alastor." Unable to ignore the power or force,

he seeks out new ways to define both it and his relationship to it, a relationship which is still reliant on his own imagination to denote as opposed to the power itself. Though he avoids much of the autobiographical self-references as well as the indicative and oft-used pronoun of these predecessors, he still subtly infuses his work with a return to the penetrating gaze of a subject and acceptance of what is both seen and not seen in order to recognize fully the fleeting spirit linking all things to man and nature.

In both “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and “Mont Blanc,” Shelley creates a speaker attempting to address the hidden power of the landscape for just such a reason. This is what Laura Claridge assumes “sets up his representational strategies of self-advocacy versus systematic determination” (122). The object, therefore, is not really “beauty” or the mountain and nature then, but instead the “nature and the very existence” of a “presence” (Leighton 48). While the object gazed upon is representative of this presence, the object also lacks the presence. Therefore, the subject admires the object from which the presence or spirit has fled. The presence, therefore, is an aura lying outside the human mind, it is only through the mind’s attempts to relate it to himself in some capacity that it can be acknowledged, if not fully understood. Interestingly enough, even with all the similarities enumerated above, these two poems are most often paired and cited for their divergence from the strategies of Wordsworth. Whereas Wordsworth described “the effect of the sublime as a collapse or defeat of the mind before the object of its contemplation” in his unfinished essay, “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” Shelley is already associating the thoughts of the mind and external things as equal (Leighton 51).

The final stanza of “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” is most noted for its Wordsworthian return to “tranquility and...a code of sympathy for mankind” (53).

However, there is a distinct difference in the beginning because the nature of the object being looked at is a “Power described as at two removes, being neither world nor shadow, but...also twice ‘unseen’, and thus doubly unavailable to the senses” (53). In other words, the speaker is not necessarily addressing the “Spirit of Beauty” but instead seeking an answer from a “Power” within the world that “Beauty” has left desolate, asking in stanza two:

Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
Of human thought or form, -- where art thou gone?
Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?
(569, ll.13-17)

Therefore, the “Hymn” *appears* to contain not one but two objects at the same time, that of the mutable Spirit of Beauty and the “Power” that has its origins in a vague, unseen, sublime world outside both objective reality and beyond the speaker’s perception of that reality, a power that yet inhabits all things. Just as Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” laments a higher spirit that has disappeared, Shelley’s “Hymn” describes the “poet’s perception of a beauty that is inconstant, that leaves the world ‘vacant and desolate,’ and that is yet the chief source of meaning in a world otherwise accidental, formless, purposeless” (Chernaik 34). In the narrative poem “Alastor,” Shelley’s poet wishes to invoke “some lone ghost, / My messenger, to render up the tale / Of what we are” (ll. 27-29); similarly, his lyrical “Hymn” reveals another seemingly autobiographical projection of the poet “pursuing / Hopes of high talk with the departed dead” (ll. 52-53) . The speaker of the “Hymn,” much like the wandering poet, lays claim to no theological or philosophical resolutions, insisting only that he will attempt a youthful, “passive” deference and continue to examine the binding spirit of all things. Traditional reliance on

certain conventions or names, like Wordsworth's affirmation of a compassionate God, offer little satisfaction here:

Ask why the sunlight not for ever
Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain-river,
Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,
Why fear and dream and death and birth
Cast on the daylight of this earth
Such gloom,--why man has such a scope
For love and hate, despondency and hope?

No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
To sage or poet these responses given--
Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven,
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells--whose uttered charm might not avail to sever.
(ll. 18-29)

Because proof of Heaven or God has never been offered to other poets, Shelley's speaker determines to resist "that frail spell" of codifying the sublime with moral or theological truths and to accept life only as a mental journey incapable of ending in the fulfillment of conclusive answers. Therefore, the "Power," for Shelley, is indifferent to human questions or human life; and the speaker's obstinate questions will not be stilled, unlike Wordsworth's reassurance in *The Excursion* of an "infinite benevolence and power" as the "One adequate support / For the calamities of mortal life" (IV, ll. 10-11). It is as though Shelley, through the ongoing presence of his poet-speaker's stream-of-conscious progressions (as well as regressions) and his focus on the mind's interpretation of the outer world, finds solace in the eternal question--the "mystery" and the journey--as opposed to the revelations or reflections to come from looking out upon those objects.

The appearances of so-called "objects," especially when man's finite mind is central to its determination, can be quite deceiving. As Earl Wasserman notes, the

“Intellectual Beauty” in the “Hymn” is neither “an abstraction nor a personified fiction like the subject of the usual eighteenth-century ode, but a self-subsisting reality,” all the while made meaningful “by the imagination’s power to transcend mutability” (191-2). In other words, the “Hymn” functions as a translation between “Shelley’s ambiguous conception of selfhood [making]...his point of reference repeatedly alternates between the human and the transcendent” (191) and, thus, not completely a formed egotistical “I” and not completely without that “I” either. The object of the “Hymn” oscillates between the presence and the absence of Intellectual Beauty or that “Power” that inhabits and leaves behind shadows of things, even making self-perception shadowy. Wasserman points to this duality, stating, “all that is worthy in a self is the transient presence of Intellectual Beauty’s shadow...[thus] the only self is the occasional presence of the shadow in the individual mortal form, which otherwise has no self, being but a medium” (194-5). The onlooker becomes the beneficiary of finding the beauty in things from which the presence has dissipated and finds in those things, as well as in the acknowledgment of a spirit far-removed, a communion. This communion creates a kind of double vision or mirrored reflection: the “Spirit of Beauty” cannot penetrate with a gaze of its own but it “dost consecrate / With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon / Of human thought or form” (ll. 13-15). The insistence of “human thought and form” reveals that the human mind is the true active agent in this process, as the Spirit is limited to illuminating only that which the mind perceives. That the poem begins by intermingling an object, the unseen force, with the speaker’s assignment of value to that force (here it is valued for its “mystery”), and that the poem resolves into the final dominance of the speaker’s praise for that force clarifies the restrictive presence upheld by the subject-

object dichotomy, regardless of Shelley's attempts to outmaneuver that constraint. The speaker insists on his presence from the beginning of the poem and reasserts the prevalence of mind over matter (or spirit as matter here) in the end.ⁱⁱⁱ This speaker, just like the object, is capable of both containing the power and containing the void that this all-encompassing power leaves behind. Nevertheless, the speaker assigns himself an identity of his own designation because, in the same way that Shelley is limited by his fictive creation, the speaker is limited by his assumptions of who he is. Thus, only the speaker gives meaning to the world around him through relationships defined by language, a power that the objects of his gaze, no matter how sublime the force behind these, lacks. This creating of a self of the speaker's designation cannot be forgotten, even in those instances in the poem when it otherwise appears as though the speaker loses himself in or mirrors the object of his own imaginative re-making. I say remaking here because the speaker does not make the object so much as he becomes the secondary creator. The object is there before and after he looks upon it, but the looking is a creative and destructive process in its own right.

The poet's desolation over the void left by the power occurs as well in Shelley's "Mont Blanc." At play once again is "the convoluted and interchanging action of mind and things" (Leighton 63) so that object and subject are inter-related. A "reciprocal

ⁱⁱⁱ The constant subject makes itself most abundantly clear in the seventh and final stanza with the words "...to my onward life supply / Its [the spirit's] calm" (ll. 80-1). Some might assume that this last stanza actually perpetuates a role reversal, whereby the speaker becomes the object of the Spirit's "spells" (l. 83). He even suggests his own complacency and dormant nature as though he will become once more as he was in his "passive youth". However, the ability of the speaker to continue to speak for the object and, more importantly, to create meaning and seek the "truth of nature" from whence the spirit has fled "as if it had not been!" (l.77) is an active endeavor that overrides any empowerment of the Spirit over the speaker. It is also especially hard to empower an inanimate, transient object that is known by only a vague presence or lack thereof in the natural forces the speaker expounds upon. That the final stanza ends with a benediction to "love all human kind" (l. 84) indeed emphasizes that perhaps the Spirit is less important than what its musing upon brings forth from the poet--a love for its binding to all things, including all of mankind.

relation of mind and universe” (Leighton 63) suggests that neither the landscape of the imagination nor the outer landscape exists as an object but, instead, a co-mingling of the two, as the first five lines make evident:

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark--now glittering--now reflecting gloom--
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings.

(ll. 1-5)

This reflexivity between the universe of things and the poet’s interpretation of this universe leads the reader to believe that man and nature both lend to the atmosphere a double sense of solemnity and tranquility. Again, in lines 33-48, the speaker enters into a trance-like vision by which the fixation of the external creates a picture within his mind.

Wasserman notes:

Within the individual “human” mind, thought is again recognized as neither subjective nor objective, but the result of an “unremitting interchange” of the dark mind with the “clear” universe of things (39-40)...the introspective trance has confirmed that reality is neither the subjective impression nor the external thing, but the active and irresolvable mental tension between the two that is embodied in the word “Seeking.” The scene of that tension is not the noisy universe but a silent (“still”) cave of the mind, and to the mind the universe exists only so long as the act of seeking continues—nothing exists except as it is perceived.

(226-7)

In other words, the “cave of the witch Poesy” functions as the poet’s interior subjectivity in which sensory images are mere shadows or “phantoms” of that external universe, the Ravine, which the mind wishes to know in absolutes, but cannot and so continues to “seek.”

The speaker’s vision, described as “trance-like” or “passive”^{iv} within the poem, could easily confuse the reader into assuming that the mind is not the sole acting agent working in order to conceptualize the sublime but that it instead becomes the object acted upon by the scene--or Necessity’s--overwhelming power. However, the individual mind exists as more than just a receiver of sensory impressions. As these impressions of the outside world appear, the mind moves from merely gazing upon those imprints into a state based on comprehending and categorizing those objects into important associations. Haines suggests that the objects perceived in their physical state segue into a consideration of the relationship between man and the world and, thus, the “new apprehension of the universe of things is matched by a new sense of the self as a real and independent...participant in that universe” (123). But, exactly how independent can man be from the universe when he is forever seeking meaning and renegotiating the very impressions and thoughts that universe evokes? The continual subjection of the physical to the speculative, in which the mind’s creative powers work to sculpt the “unsculptured image” (l. 27), shows the fascination Shelley had with the mental experience as opposed to the reality. Shelley’s poetry delights in making the reader aware of its own constructed artifice while simultaneously hinting at man’s revelations as constructs or recreations of what has been envisioned and taken from the world.

^{iv} This is especially noticeable early on in lines 35-8, where Shelley encourages the perception of the fantasmal scene overwhelming him as he watches and his mind “passively” (l. 37) takes it in as though in a “trance sublime and strange” (l. 35).

The problem with this Shelleyan concern with something as abstract as the power and spirit uniting all things is that, beyond our attempts to do so, an “object can never be fully drawn up into the mind...language can only stand in for objects” (O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings* 44). This desire to call forth the intangible and unattainable creates a problem that adds to the oblique and confusing nature of some of Shelley’s passages. Words like “power” and “spirit” reappear throughout the poem, although the term “power” is both the deified “Power” of the fourth section and, in the end, a noun to describe the poet’s acts of intuition.^v Similarly, relationships are constructed, destroyed and constructed once again using terms like “thou” and “thine” in relation to the speaker’s “I,” analogous to nature’s own creative and destructive qualities enumerated in the admirable scenes of Mont Blanc’s streams and crags. The speaker assesses an inanimate object and, though it is announced as “thou,” he depicts with that one term both the object and the power behind it, which could increasingly confuse the reader as to whether the power exists in the object or possibly even lies within the poet’s mind. Power in “Mont Blanc” is the Ravine of Arve (l. 11), then the Power in likeness of the Arve (l. 16), the voice of the great Mountain (l. 80), and the “secret Strength of things / Which governs thought” (ll. 139-40). While it is true that some of these mirror each other, there are definite incongruities in Shelley’s terms and, even when codified by language, the object being sought out by the speaker is often determined by both presence and absence. The fact that the speaker proclaims “thou art there!” (l. 48) suggests once again that a Power exists but that it also remains in question because the speaker seems to

^v In the fifth and final section, Shelley states, “Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: --the power is there, / The still and solemn power of many sights (ll. 126-7). The importance of the plurality of “sight” conjures up once again the theory that there are many different interpretations of the Power because the source of that Power lies outside the human mind’s ability to capture it. The “advertising mind” (l. 100) must instead look upon what is left behind--the power and forces of nature--since the ultimate “Power dwells apart” (l. 96) from even the scenery that is fathomable and capable of being examined through language.

despair of ever knowing precisely where it resides.^{vi} That Shelley assigns a “thou,” but that the term holds a multitude of meanings and is used interchangeably when discussing the mind, the object, and the power connecting and lying outside both, corresponds with his attempts to engage something beyond the regular subject-object relationship, insisting only on the continual relationship between what the mind perceives and that external world that cannot quite be objectified in full. It is through this denial of distinction between the external and the internal that imagination gains power and can seek out, though in vain, a vision or power beyond the conventional limitations of memory and mere physical sensation (Wasserman 229). In this way, the poem serves as Shelley’s “assurance to the faithful onlooker of his own separate existence and value” (Haines 120).

Shelley lends great credence to a subjective imagination and its ability to provide new meaning to what it views in an attempt to discover the spirit inherent in all things, however vain that attempt may be. This shift of power from the landscape or exterior object to the observer occurs in “Ode to the West Wind” as well. The inconstant Spirit that governs the mutable, flowing energy behind the wind, the spirit of Autumn’s being, becomes identifiable with that power which governs thought or, as Wasserman states, “the energy flowing from the one Power acts identically in nature and mind” (240). On rare occasions, Shelley continues to play with these separate ideals by insisting upon altogether separate poems, such as “Hymn of Apollo” and “Hymn of Pan.” More characteristically, though, he preferred to conjoin opposing forces. As Milton Wilson

^{vi} After all, where exactly is “there” situated? The word implies that the Power lies outside any real designated place such as the River of the Arve or Mont Blanc. It also suggests that such a sublime presence lies outside what language makes comprehensible by delivering into meaning--“there” is purposely vague and open to many interpretations. In the idiomatic sense, “thou art there” means “thou art here,” so that it is both intimately present and tantalizingly absent.

suggests in *Shelley's Later Poetry*, Shelley's "argument...is characterized by a sort of dialectic without synthesis. Passion and tenderness, spirit and heart, Pan and Apollo, meet but do not cooperate" (37), just as the subject and object of Shelley's lyrics both intermingle and separate. The merging of these conflicting paradigms in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc" and the acknowledgment of an impenetrable "Power" that lies fundamentally behind all things constitute the themes of most of his lyric poetry.

The problem most readily associated with this idea of a simultaneous unity of all things exists in the inescapable use of language and, to be even more technical, traditional language or archaic terms of reference. In the "Hymn," Shelley retains a lyrical form that asserts a conventional formula and the poet's control over the vehicle of thought, managing a highly regular rhyme scheme within each stanza.^{vii} In "Mont Blanc," the lyrical structure through which Shelley plays with these new concepts is more complex but still relies on a language that specifies between "I" and "thou" and suggests the possibility that a voice exists which might answer the speaker's questions. However, for Shelley, the address of "thou" only serves to describe that which the Power is "like." This "I" and "thou" relationship serves to point the poet towards that unfathomable original, but not to objectify the source of the power, at least not in this particular instance. The landscape of the mountain in "Mont Blanc" (ll. 16-20) or the objects acted upon by the wind in "Ode to the West Wind" (stanza II) become a mere hint towards a hidden presence and, therefore, the speaker's object remains "estranged and unknown" (Leighton 64). In other words, the object named in the landscape is merely a "veil" of that more

^{vii} Each line has an iambic rhythm; the first four lines of each stanza are written in pentameter, the fifth line in hexameter, the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh lines in tetrameter, and the twelfth line in pentameter.

original, substantive Power being sought and, thus, that object serves to make the speaker aware that the power exists. The power perhaps lies in the continual coming and going or change from presence and absence as well as that which is found beyond the individual self.

Shelley may begin his poems with these oblique references that appear to hinder the old subject-object dichotomy. However, these constructed relations still infuse the moment with meaning, a meaning that is primarily self-constructed. The final result in “Ode to the West Wind” typifies the blend of subject and object with the final cry of the speaker to “Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!” (ll. 61-2). Here, Shelley wishes to make the spirit of the speaker and the spirit working in and beyond the wind indistinguishable. If this were to happen, the speaker’s voice would cease to be because the spirit inherent in all things exists outside of communicable thought. The speaker is not made mute but anxiously calls out an imperative for the “Spirit fierce” to infiltrate him. With a similar return in “Mont Blanc,” his “most abstruse poetry...explores the possibilities for an escape from a seemingly inescapable prior determination” at the same time that it “would seem to invest in the equally typical Romantic program of subject/object delineation” (Claridge 123, 126). Tied to the Romantic sensibility, Shelley could only reach in vain toward a complete negation of ego, much as he could only reach toward expressing the sublime forces of “Mont Blanc” when bound by the language of his predecessors. As a poet, he delegates himself to the position of re-imagining and sculpting the world according to his interpretation because “the poet must lay claim to becoming himself the signifier par excellence” (Claridge 128).

Furthermore, the speaker continuously confronts an unresponsive landscape, as is noticeable by the statement that “None can reply” to the questions of origin and relationship to creation in “Mont Blanc” (l. 75). In essence, the speaker can assume a conversation with a mute object while, in actuality, performing a kind of “interior monologue, the representation of a mind in the activity of contemplating a natural scene...and the thoughts which arise about it” (Welburn 119). At the same time, however, Shelley does not completely eradicate the notion that the Power could speak back in turn. It might be suggested that, because Shelley does not deny this Power a voice, one must assume that the voice remains silent; and “because this voice cannot be anthropomorphised as a presence, its relation to the poet is precarious and doubtful” (Leighton 69). In other words, the voice is at once distanced and not distanced from the speaker, or as Leighton summarizes, the poet “acknowledges its infinite distance from himself, and its inability to speak apart from himself” simultaneously (69). Once again, in the final question, the use of “thou” pulls the poet toward personifying the Power, but the fact that the presence is only where “none beholds” it (ll. 132) places the power beyond “human apprehension” so that no final resolution or insight into containing that Power is achieved:

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

Leighton insists that “Shelley neither affirms nor disproves the nature of his object” but reveals instead that the Power exists only in relation to the “human mind’s imaginings” (71). In this way, even the absence of the Power must qualify as “thou” because there is no pure vacancy or end to contemplation, even though looking on objects reveals the lack

of that Power. The loss of this term “thou” from the poem would only result in a problematic vacancy within creation, whether that creation is Shelley’s poem or the world. Instead, the speaker envisions the lone spaces with imagination’s help, even when he does not--in fact, nothing does--inhabit the dark empty spaces where power resides. The speaker must rely on physical imagery and language to evoke what he cannot see, again applying to imagination to create concrete meaning out of the abstract and sublime. Through the convention of setting a “thou” in relation to his “I,” the speaker is capable of “resisting ‘vacancy’” and re-acknowledging the importance of the “human mind’s imaginings” (l. 143), all the while simultaneously synthesizing the “I” and “thou” relationship into one. Furthermore, his final exclamation that there is a “secret strength of things” governing thought and matter contradicts itself; he insinuates that silence and solitude are *not* vacancy to the mind, and thus switches the terms so that thought is actually the driving force and true “governor of the ‘secret strength of things’” (O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings* 51). If it were otherwise, we would not strive to create and to imagine that which is beyond our comprehension, and we would not project ourselves into and control that scene in the process.

WHEN SYNTHESIZING “I” and “THEE” GOES AWRY: PENETRATING
OBJECTIFIED WOMEN WITH SELF in the “TO JANE” POEMS AND
EPIPSYCHIDION

As I made apparent in the previous chapter, it is the continual correlation between our desire to harness the power through imagination and our acknowledgment of the

objects influenced by our imagination of that power that is most present in Shelley's natural descriptions. Shelley attempts to represent the common world in a new light, as one consisting of a continual "screen of process or change, full of images fusing and unfusing, against a nature reduced, abstracted...permanence fighting change, the skeleton visible through the [painted] veil of flux" and mutability (Wilson 288). This desire to find a communion in disunion and to merge subject and object also governs Shelley's poems where the subject is a lover gazing on his beloved. When it comes to analyzing Shelley's object in female form, however, one must introduce yet another mode of domination and slavery: the wish to possess the beloved sexually.

For Shelley, "total interpersonal communion—intellectual and imaginative as well as sensual" (Brown 82) was key to his understanding of poetry and a necessity in his relationships with women. In *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley defines the sense of communion as a "sympathy," and Nathaniel Brown discusses Shelley's idea of this sympathy as a "reciprocated" exchange outlined in a similar fashion by Sigmund Freud's pupil, Theodor Reik:

...[The basis of love lies in] ego-fulfillment....Thus the first love-object is a "glorified ego, the phantom self as we imagined it in our day-dreams," a construct analogous to Shelley's prototype. The second love-object is "the embodiment of this desired image in a real person"-- Shelley's antitype. Reciprocated love is therefore an interchange of ego ideals. Each person loves the ideal of himself in the other. (43)

This “interchange of ego ideals” or shared sympathy suggests that we imaginatively project the idea of our best self into others just as they reciprocate and do the same with us, which could imply that the other also becomes us. Here, once again, lies the blending of subject and object through imagination and self-projection, which, for Shelley, seem to go hand in hand. The “sympathy” insists on a union of two minds, which at first appears to suggest that both the subject and object become a vacancy in the process. The importance given to the other becoming us implies that vacancy is not experienced, however--we may replace each other briefly through self-projection but that projection eventually must return to the rightful owner, the one projecting, in cyclic fashion. As with Shelley’s evocation of a speaker who seeks in vain what he cannot fully realize due to boundaries of language, the embodiment of an ideal prototype in another being often arises out of an actual “love” for women he could not possess due to his marriage to Mary Shelley. Driven by ego and imagination, Shelley instead invents a world in which his wants can be realized through the poetic subject’s mastery over the feminine and passive object of his desire. The poems to Jane Williams typify this method of projecting self onto real women who are creatively re-imagined in fiction to suit the poet’s self-involved ends.

Shelley’s philosophy toward love in general consisted of a belief in the “visionary reordering of human relationship” so that free love reigned, in stark contrast to what he called a desire and jealousy base in origin, based only on “sensation...’self-centered self devoted self-interested” (Brown 104). He called patriarchal society “narrow and unenlightened’...preventing the ‘fit and natural arrangement of sexual connection”

(104). In similar fashion, Shelley wrote to Southey, saying, “if happiness be the object of morality, of all human unions and disunions, then the connection of the sexes is so long sacred as it contributes to the comfort of the parties, and is naturally dissolved when its evils are greater than its benefits” (Brown 109). When Shelley’s first wife, Harriet, was no longer capable of fulfilling the range of his sympathies intellectually and sensitively, Shelley foresaw the breakdown of their bond to one another and took up residence with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. According to Shelley, “wife and friend were ‘unmeaning distinctions’” and, just as objects and subjects lose their separate quality in his poetry, so too did that distinction between “friends” and “lovers” cease to exist. However, to Shelley, this was all a higher philosophical impulse and not suggestive of any rampant self-centred desire or libertinism. If the union of love was based on a multitude of qualities including the sensual, intellectual, and creative, then those components would give the physical quality “a ‘strength not its own’ . . . which lends it a permanency and excellence that set it off from the transient, repetitive, and ultimately joyless couplings of the libertine” (Brown 83). A connection of shared sentiments would stimulate the senses, in stark contrast to what he considered Byron’s “sickening vice” and interest only in the body (79). The problem arises, however, when one tries to determine to what extent Shelley really could convey a higher plateau of love and desire devoid of selfishness, especially as his one true means of conveying his conscious wishes came through writing poetry. When it comes to fulfilling his fantasies with women through the creative powers of poetry-making, is it easier for Shelley’s speaker-subject to denounce the power struggle and ultimate domination of subject over object or is this power relation just as inescapable as the power dichotomies asserted in the previous chapters?

If “interpenetrating...the material world is a unifying power or spirit of love” then this is the same spirit contained within the term intellectual beauty. The visitation of this Spirit brings with it “Love, Hope, and Self-Esteem” (“Hymn,” ll. 36). Therefore, a merging of separate identities, all the while reflecting like mirrors those ideals of purity and the “Spirit,” would alleviate the barriers of sexual distinction and cause lovers and poets alike to “participate in a transcendent unity, whose nature is love” (Brown 228). However “sensitive” or “liberating” the ideas seem in theory, society was quick to attack such radical notions. As Brown states, Shelley was “vilified on all sides as the personification of the very thing he most detested, the habitual libertine and seducer, and...[took on] the archetypal role of ‘villain’ in the popular mind” (97). The argument here is not intended to attack his personal philosophy as it applied to his private life, however. In other words, this chapter is not so much concerned with society’s reactions against Shelley’s actions as it is with the notion that critics might have been right to call him out on the disparities in his theory. Likewise, many incongruities appear in these poems which result from Shelley’s denial of an overt egoism that pervades his poems to particular women. This chapter thus divides into two discussions based on the “To Jane” poems and *Epipsychidion* respectively.

“TO JANE”: A FOURSOME

Jane Williams, common law wife of Shelley’s friend Edward Williams, though lacking “literary refinement” according to Shelley, was a soothing companion for him in his later years when the “growth of domestic friction” between him and Mary was

increasing (Brown 66). Shelley indeed found her enchanting in much the same light as Emilia Viviani, the Italian woman whom he wanted to save from the “bleak fate of marriage” and who became the primary object of *Epipsychidion* (65). In “To Jane. The Recollection” and its companion, “To Jane: The Invitation,” Shelley uses description to correlate the beauty of the day with Jane. In fact, as opposed to Wordsworth, “Shelley does not write about winds and waters, he writes by means of them” (Campbell 228). Here, the landscape and the object of his affections are so entwined within each stanza that one is left in the end unknowing whether the whole poem is meant to be about Jane or nature. In this way, object and subject are again confused so that the object may take on characteristics of the spirit of all things, thereby harmonizing both Jane with the speaker and Jane with nature. For instance, in “The Invitation,” Shelley situates the season of Spring as a beautifying force that smiles on what winter has left behind, much like Jane’s smiles brighten the lives of those around her (l. 20). Therefore, when Shelley later commands to this “Radiant Sister of the Day, / Awake! arise! and come away! / To the wild woods and the plains” (ll. 47-49), the reader could dually assume he is inviting his beloved friend, Jane, to join him in gazing upon the beauty of the world, as the title implies, or inviting a personified Spring to hurry forth and spread its warmth and beauty like a “sweet food” the poet has enjoyed his entire life (l. 43). Spring is compared to Jane, who “to those in sorrow / Comes to bid a sweet good-morrow” (ll. 3-4), and ever after is propelled by human activity through verbs such as “kissed,” “waked,” and “breathed” which harmonize with Shelley’s final statement that “...all things seem only one / In the universal sun” (ll. 68-9). Indeed, all things have been made as one through Shelley’s ambiguous terms of reference. While the use of “we” and “us” to assign

relationships finally enters the poem in line 64, Shelley's imagery has given way to a full account of earth and ocean meeting as the seasons mingle and, perhaps, as two people escape the towns to feast upon the scene, though the uniting of all these themes makes it unclear which specific relationship is more favored.

In "To Jane: The Recollection," regarded by most scholars as a remembrance of the expedition proposed in "To Jane: The Invitation," Shelley more specifically uses the term "we" to designate the relationship between Jane and the poet-speaker from the start. The importance of self-fulfillment is made more clear here as well, as the third line reveals the true signifying agent to be the speaker's memory. Here, as the poet goes on to glamorize the setting and the couple's relation to it, the reader is made aware that Shelley has already subjugated Jane to silence. She is an entity that suggests both presence and absence, much as the spirit of things is revealed through the lack of its presence in "Mont Blanc." Jane is obviously one-half of the partnership, that "we" who stops beneath the pines and gazes upon reflections in the pools. However, while one might assume this gives Jane a power all her own to speak and interact, Shelley's placement of the whole activity within his memory allows him to dominate what he recalls and ultimately to disclaim her as an active agent amidst the scene.

Because Jane is never considered as separate from the speaker, her actions are bound to those of the speaker's and her voice is mute--there is nothing recalled of the moment outside the speaker's self-aggrandized perception. Furthermore, the relationship is so overtly idealized that Jane is not only drawn up into a union with the speaker but she becomes one with the spirit of the world. Jane is "bound" to the speaker and, in stanza

four, “bound” to the “magic circle” the speaker envisions as a harmonious connection of humanity with the beauty of the world:

How calm it was! -- the silence there
By such a chain was bound
The breath of peace we drew
With its soft motion made not less
The calm that round us grew.
There seemed from the remotest seat,
Of the white mountain waste,
To the soft flower beneath our feet,
A magic circle traced, --
A spirit interfused around,
A thrilling, silent life. --
To momentary peace it bound
Our mortal nature's strife;
And still I felt the center of
The magic circle there
Was one fair form that filled with love
The lifeless atmosphere. (ll. 33-4, 38-52)

The idea that even silence is “bound” and, later, mortal strife becomes “bound” to the peace stemming from that silence shows the perplexing degree to which Shelley tries to negotiate traditional power relations and finds himself equally bound in the process, so much so that verbs of dominance are repeated throughout the poem.

This binding gives way to more threatening terms throughout the latter half of the poem, causing Shelley to acquiesce to his own ego in the end. Shelley's poet-speaker goes from being happily bound in peaceful unity with nature and his beloved to separating himself momentarily once again in order to affirm a spirit inherent in all things, a spirit similar to Intellectual Beauty in that it takes on “one fair form that filled with love / The lifeless atmosphere” (ll. 51-2). With Shelley's collective return to “we” in stanza five, verbs such as “gulfed in” (l. 56) and “blotted out” (l. 84) raise the negative connotations to being bound, almost as though the speaker seeks a way out of his own

self-entrapment. At the conclusion of the poem, the poet-speaker confesses to an “unwelcome thought” as his self-aggrandizement gives way to “blotting out” the favored image, because his mind is suddenly fraught with self-consciousness that overwhelms the scene, resulting in a hasty end. Although the speaker seems to become passive to nature and its effects on him, his active desires lie at the heart of the poem. It is almost as though Shelley, realizing that his desires and ego penetrate the entire scene and create an illusory sweetness not found in reality, attempts one last denial of ego by cutting himself off from the creation itself and the memory altogether.

“To Jane: ‘The Keen Stars Were Twinkling’” and “With a Guitar, To Jane” appear to offer objects that elicit a key advantage over their counterparts written within the same year: the female object’s possession of a voice. Here, Shelley imparts that his beloved Jane, or Jane re-imagined as Miranda from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, does indeed hold a foundation outside himself through the significance of voice. In “To Jane: ‘The Keen Stars Were Twinkling,’” the shortest of the four poems, Shelley allows Jane an uncharacteristic power through her ability to sing. Although one might assume that the tables have turned and that Jane now wields power over the speaker through the seduction of her voice, the end reveals once again that we are at the mercy of his thoughts. Shelley sets the scene as though he is both recollecting and looking forward to hearing Jane’s singing once again. Past tense verbs in the first two stanzas hint that we are caught up in the poet’s memory, one that gives sweeter meaning to an event just at the moment when Shelley insists Jane’s voice affects the moment with meaning:

The keen stars were twinkling,
And the fair moon was rising among them,
Dear Jane!
The guitar was tinkling,

But the notes were not sweet till you sung them
Again. (ll. 1-6)

Here Jane appears as an active agent who illuminates the entire scene with her music, and she is compared with the moon that blankets light upon the “faint cold” and unfathomable Heavens above (l. 8).^{viii} However, her soul merges with the guitar, suggesting that Shelley, in his want to make all things one, gives away her power of voice, if not her whole being, by allowing her song to be dispossessed or handed over to the guitar in order to permeate his created scene with more unifying sweetness.

Furthermore, stanzas three and four consist not of a possible memory but of a looking ahead as future tense verbs take over in stanza three and continue to the end of the poem, as though the poet can foresee the future. Even better, the poet beckons Jane’s song. He renders her incapacitated, especially if she is associated with a moon that oversleeps but lends its power to the newly awakened stars in stanza three. It is as though the poet-speaker^{ix} merges Jane’s power with that of the world: she will be able to sing only when he calls her forth to do so, and the song is not so much hers as it is a means by which the poet can feel the spirit inhabiting all things. In this way, Jane typifies the Aeolian harp that passively receives nature’s sound: it creates beautiful music only because nature flows through it and gives it possibility. Here, both Shelley and nature lend Jane the possibility of harmonizing with the world. Shelley becomes like the stars that “awaken” (l. 13) and “delight” (l. 18) at the prospect of being drawn into the “melody” (l. 17) of life. In the midst of creating, Shelley holds a power that he then

^{viii} The moon’s splendor “is thrown” about Heaven like a blanket, which imparts an ability to encompass all within itself, another possible “binding” effect.

^{ix} It becomes increasingly difficult, especially in the “To Jane” poems to separate Shelley’s voice from that of the poet-speaker. Most scholars do not separate the two. However, I prefer to remain consistent within this text, especially considering that I separate the speaker from Shelley (to the best of my ability) in many earlier poems, which still others do not attempt so readily.

attempts to disavow by allowing his poet-speaker to become one with the vision itself. However, as the poem here holds, the truth of that vision can never be realized; it is “...some world far from ours, / Where music and moonlight and feeling / Are one” (ll. 22-24). The passage reveals both the hope that the imagined world could exist and a cynicism that it is still elusive. He is unable to escape his own role as possessor of the vision in the end and, thus, we are left with only the poet’s contradictory feelings toward that vision.

“With a Guitar, To Jane” once again incorporates the themes of dominance and Jane’s relation to music in order to create ambiguous meaning and deny the poet’s significance as the true driving force of the poem. Shelley even attempts to circumvent tradition by providing a new scenario to a borrowed and well-known drama, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Shelley clearly insists on an understanding of Shakespeare’s work, though it could be argued that the poem provides enough meaning to be analyzed on its own merit alone. As Barry Weller argues, Shelley establishes this particular poem as a supplement that insists on the literary context of Shakespeare’s works but maneuvers beyond it as well:

The fact that the poet must write in a language which he has not created and which he is not the first to inhabit is no doubt always experienced as a constraint....Through allusion he [Shelley] thus reconciles the ties of a particular literary tradition and of a particular historical moment with his own access to poetic freedom. (913)

However, it is the extent to which Shelley truly finds poetic freedom that is worth considering here.

The poem clearly delineates a conversation in which Ariel appeals to Miranda, regardless of the fact that Shakespeare's play discourages such interaction between these two particular characters.^x This appeal of Shelley to Jane, re-imagined through Shakespearean characters and plot, nonetheless is strategic to the issues of servitude and ego pervasive in most of Shelley's poetry. From the very start, Ariel applies to Miranda as though he is her slave, although it is ambiguous as to whether he is truly willing to be such. Shelley's writing implies a dualistic wish to be bound to this female character and a sense of destitution at being commanded, either by outside forces or his own desires, to just such a role:

For by permission and command
Of thine own Prince Ferdinand,
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken;
Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who,
From life to life, must still pursue
Your happiness; --for thus alone
Can Ariel ever find his own. (ll. 9-16)

In this way, "love and art are both presented as forms of subjection" (Weller 915) as Ariel is supposedly double bound by music and a joy fulfilled only through Miranda's happiness. If Ariel is bound to the medium through which music is made, and here the

^x For a more in-depth outline of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in relation to Shelley's poem, see Weller's "Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric" for a quick summary and ample evidence of many Shakespearean facets in Shelley's poems. For analysis of "With a Guitar, To Jane," Weller points out: "Ariel to Miranda" is not among the play's possible stage directions. Prospero lays Miranda asleep during his first conference with Ariel, and instructs his familiar spirit in the preparation of the masque while Miranda is distracted by conversation, if not dalliance, with Ferdinand. In the final scene Ariel speaks only to Prospero, and editors since the eighteenth century have generally marked their exchanges as dramatic asides. These are the only three occasions on which Ariel and Miranda are on stage together...." Furthermore, Prospero here is replaced with the husband-rival Ferdinand, which provides Shelley a necessary modicum of restraint in discussing his "love" for someone who, in all good conduct, has given her heart to his friend. 914

offertory guitar as “the slave of music” is finally made clear in line fifty-eight of the poem, then Shelley consistently must be bound by the form and language of his particular creation. Therefore, “this slave of music” refers to Shelley’s poem, “with each line let out on the short leash of its tetrameter and tugged home by the end-rhyme or, more generally, with its form determined by the needs of verbal melody...” (Weller 915). That the guitar represents the poem suggests that Shelley allows Miranda/Jane to give the instrument its “highest holiest tone” (l. 89) through recitation of the poem, his offering to her. Weller convincingly determines that we can treat the guitar as the primary object on a superficial level, regardless of the possibilities attributed to its meaning:

Whether one chooses to see Ariel presenting his token of
homage to Miranda, while Ferdinand looks on graciously
from a distance, or Shelley making his offering to Jane Williams,
with Edward Williams’ tacit approval, the guitar, as stage prop
or as actual gift, dominates the scene, organizing all human
relationships around it. (916)

However, the relationship associated with the guitar, Ariel’s gift to Miranda, may involve more.

Interestingly enough, the guitar as object also mirrors the same attributes of Jane as an embedded object. The guitar remains mute until the artist draws it from speechlessness, thereby dualistically insisting on its autonomy while making the object dependent on the subject, Ariel/Shelley, for its release. Though Weller does not explicitly relate the guitar to Jane, he nonetheless proposes that “the slave of music is no less the slave of silence” (916). Miranda/Jane is here, as elsewhere in the “To Jane”

poems, upheld as an entity devoid of her own authority and of any characteristics lying outside the relationships the poet assigns to her. She rarely has a voice; when she does, her song is never of her making but something insisted upon by the speaker. Just as other objects often only exist as ghosts or representations of that which they lack, as nature in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and “Mont Blanc” stands in for a sublime spirit that has fled, so too Jane’s supposed agency to sing or play the guitar or even read the poem exists only as a stand-in for Shelley’s insistent spirit to work through her and imagine her as something of his possession, known only to him. Her song is not so much a product of her agency and self-expression as it is a reinforcement of the speaker’s.

If we perceive the guitar to be an intended association, not only with the poem but with Jane as well, “With a Guitar, To Jane” suddenly implies ulterior ways of seeing Shelley’s unavoidable entrapment in subject-object dichotomies. Shelley, as Ariel, sets himself up in lines thirty-five through forty as “the poor spirit... / Imprisoned, for some fault of his” (37-8) and suggests his own escape from the despair of his own captivity lies through finding joy in her to whom he is bound. Though Ariel and his desires appear to be the objects Miranda uses at her whim, later intricacies suggest alternate meanings, especially if the guitar is associated not only with its maker, Ariel, but with Miranda, to whom it is beholden for its greatest triumphs. If perceived in such a light, “the artist who this idol wrought, / To echo all harmonious thought” (ll. 43-4) holds a double meaning. Ariel/Shelley is obviously the artist in reference here, but the “idol” could mean the guitar, or it could apply to Shelley’s imagining of Jane as a double for himself, a Doppelgänger who will hold those same thoughts and values he holds, like the veiled maid in “Alastor.” In this case, Jane would be the “echo” of everything he holds dear.

This would leave little wonder as to why the instrument is capitalized and personified, much as Music and the Spirit are personifications Shelley creates to insinuate that the spirit of love's universe allows all things to unite willingly and of an accord not solely of Shelley's own making. If the "idol" is one with Miranda/Jane, then lines 58-78 suggest Shelley (as Ariel) "taught... / ... / In language gentle as thine own" (ll. 59-61) Jane all that he knows or longs to know of the world around them so that she is his equal. If the guitar holds "its highest holiest tone / For our beloved Jane alone" (ll. 89-90) and yet "talks according to the wit / Of its companions" (ll. 82-3), then it stands to reason that Miranda is doubly subjected to stand in accordance with the language of others and subjected to playing for those people who own her and call her "our beloved Jane." These lines also indicate that she is little more than a creation of Ariel's wishes to find a companion similar to himself. In other words, Shelley not only wishes for Jane to exist as someone mirrored in himself and of an equal mind, but also consciously attempts to dominate her by suggesting that those held in less esteem "who cannot question well" (l. 80) will be sweetly flattered but nothing more. He wills her to submissiveness in his mind by making her disregard all others. Miranda is Ariel's true companion in his eyes, as the gift of the guitar represents, and as his ceaseless devotion to her implies. Similarly, Jane is re-imagined as the true companion for Shelley, even if she too belongs to another.

Even if we perceive the guitar as only the "idol" and not as representative of Miranda explicitly, it is still clear that Miranda is "the object of Ariel's idolatry, which enslaves him to his passions" (Weller 918) and which enslaves Miranda to his passions in the process. Ariel is captive to his own passions, but he is not imprisoned in any fashion that limits his voice or his art. It is Miranda/Jane who is removed from the poem even as

Ariel/Shelley commands her to accept the art he created out of an egotistical wish to share with her his great masterpiece. Jane is like the guitar and like art itself, according to Weller:

[It] must be seized, appropriated, to have activity or force in human commerce, even if that seizure is necessarily a betrayal of its condition or meaning. Its human imaginings have no design on human agents, yet they exist for their sake....Only through this duplicity is art allowed to preserve the illusion of its own autonomy while acknowledging its fate as it enters the history-bound lives of its auditors, spectators and readers.

(922)

Jane is renegotiated into a more personal relationship with Shelley, through the guardian relationship of Ariel to Miranda, in order to provide Shelley a medium through which he can seize and command an intimacy more ideal than real life allows. Shelley simultaneously implies biographical and historical contexts while ultimately destabilizing those contexts in favor of an illusion that unites lover and beloved object, even if that unity is a controlled construct of the poet's making. Shelley may be bound to Jane, as Ariel is to Miranda, but it is secondary to being imprisoned by his own desires, and these desires, paired with an egocentric privilege of poetic agency, are what motivate and direct the poem. Jane, like the guitar, is relegated to little more than a "silent token" (l. 11) in Shelley's attempts to shape her into a being not her own and into a relationship prescribed solely by his wants alone, a relationship unthinkable outside his imaginative ability to conjure it. Therefore, Shelley's "To Jane" poems clearly execute two motifs

important to Shelley's consideration of mind over matter and struggle with self-reverence: (1) that of being bound, whether by language and the art of poetry or through the power dynamic of subject-object relationships and (2) the necessary recognition that poetry incorporates conscious self-making and that this creation, by its very essence, is personal and prescribes a sense of dominance over characters, action, and meaning.

EPIPSYCHIDION: A "SOUL OUT OF MY SOUL"

Though written a year before the "To Jane" poems, *Epipsychidion* is a reasonable poem to examine one last time the latent subject-object struggle and Shelley's inability to defy a kind of egocentrism in his work. As Laura Claridge assumes of Shelley in her book *Romantic Potency: The Paradox of Desire*:

...as...a poet he cannot free [female characters such as *The Cenci's* Beatrice or *Epipsychidion's*] Emilia...from prisons of silence because in offering...liberation, he subordinates them, masters them, by removing the terrifying solitude of their secrets.... (141)

Claridge asserts that Shelley's reluctance to liberate his female counterparts within his art is due to a wish to keep their mysteries unknown. This notion is similar to Shelley's evocation of a spirit in all things that lies beyond total comprehension and, therefore, lies outside complete domination, even though as I have already claimed, nature as a representative of that spirit is capable of succumbing to the poet's "mastery." Because Shelley's "other" is set in his own image and the poem "negotiates...[his] potential

salvation through a love-ideal” (Claridge 150), he is caught in a trap of his own making, unable to liberate his female prototypes and unable to free himself from his mastery over them in the process. In other words, Shelley’s self-love found in an object outside the self (and, more emphatically here, found in female objects), cannot free Shelley from the subordinating relationships he so wishes to dispossess himself of.

It is impossible not to remember themes of “Alastor” when one considers the female other in relation to the poet. *Epipsychidion* indeed continues to tie the double themes of a quest for knowledge, of identifying the Spirit or Intellectual Beauty, with that search for an ideal other outside ourselves but similar to ourselves. Shelley infiltrates a “region of woman-love...idealized” (Rogers 73) by creating a poet who seeks a double of himself in the female form, that of Emilia Viviani. However, the quest of the speaker in this latter poem does not result in death (though it could be argued that Shelley implies that a complete union with something outside the self is destructive) but, instead, culminates in a wish fulfillment of escape to a utopia where two bodies can truly unite and harmonize through their bodily desires. Once again, Shelley attempts to defy association with the poet-speaker by offering an advertisement that suggests something other than a personal narrative. He employs the technique of divulging to readers the fictional unfinished writings of an “unfortunate friend” (advertisement), just as the Preface to “Alastor” implies the possibility that Shelley wishes to outwit his readers by creating a fictional biography rendering the suffering of some unidentified tragic Poet led to ruin by his ego. This Preface for *Epipsychidion*, as Neville Rogers presumes, relies on:

...an impersonal setting: so anxious was he [Shelley] about

this that before writing the preface he finally published he wrote and rejected three other prefaces^{xi}...[that] seem to reveal, when we know our Shelley, most of what...[he] intended to cover up. (73)

The main difference between “Alastor” and *Epipsychidion* lies in Shelley’s portrayal of the poet’s possibilities for fulfillment through a bond with his beloved. Instead of a man doomed to an untimely death by a wish to seek and grasp the female vision representative of a sublime power, *Epipsychidion* employs the possibility of achieving it all: the poet imagines that the spirit of all things, or Intellectual Beauty, stands revealed to his gaze alongside Emilia, the spirit’s “mortal embodiment” (Rogers 127). This suggestion of a possible wish fulfillment wholly granted oddly occurs at the beginning of the poem:

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light, and love, and immortality! (ll. 21-4)

She is the representational object stand-in for the more sought-after philosophical ideals of love and beauty.

Not only is Emilia associated with the ideals of the poet, but she is conceived as a long-wished for “twin” (l. 45) of the poet. She is represented as a “double” of the poet and simultaneously exists as a manifestation created out of the poet’s mind. In lines 13-

^{xi} *The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* provides these three prefaces as supplements or fragments to *Epipsychidion* (477-9). Neville Rogers cites the first of these three rejected prefaces as most exemplary of Shelley’s own theories and a close reworking of similar ideas in “Alastor”:

The following Poem was found amongst other papers in the Portfolio of a young Englishman...[and]the Catastrophe by which it terminated one of the most painful events of his life....He had framed to himself certain opinions, founded no doubt upon the truth of things, but built up to a Babel height; they fell by their own weight and the thoughts that were his architects became unintelligible one to the other, as men upon whom confusion of tongues has fallen. (*Complete Poems* 477-8; Rogers 73-4)

20, “Emily” is first identified as someone with whom the poet would gladly exchange his life, as the poet suggests a willingness to replace his tears and blood for hers. By line 53, lover and beloved mingle and separate at the whim of the poet: she is a memory of his “youth’s vision” (l. 42), a soul drawn up into his soul or vice versa, noticeable as the poet exclaims being a “part of thee” (l. 52) and eventually turns into his “Muse” (l. 53) through whom he can perceive the world in a more innocent and pure way. As Michael O’Neill states, the objectified woman of Shelley’s poem is:

...in danger of dissolving into a shadowy, transcendental ideal or a dream-projection. In the long passage, lines 190-216, the language suggests that the ‘Being’ whom Shelley was haunted by in his youth was created by subjective need....Shelley swings throughout between seeing her as an embodiment of an ideal and admitting that the significance she possesses is bestowed upon her by his imagination. (161)

The consideration of Emilia and their relationship gives way to the poet’s musings on his own quest for “that soul out of my soul” (l. 238), that dream-like phantom of some “veiled Divinity” (l. 244) as well as what might seem philosophical stream-of-conscious deliberations on love in general. Both, however, routinely lead the poet full-circle back to contemplation of Emily and a unifying tendency brought about by desire. With line 383 framing the beginning of the poet’s demands for escape to a secluded isle, the poet visibly feels entitled to possession of Emilia and responsible for her future. Seduced by his own longings for a mutual dream escape to a secluded isle, the poet refers to Emilia as a “vestal” sister-bride as though she were created by the universe solely for him. His

implores her to join with him in a frenzied and cataclysmic union in the end speaks entirely of his own agency and needs for that “lady mine” (l. 383) who would, in turn, merely escape one prison for a new, secluded binding of the poet’s making (ll. 388-95).

The other concern with this poem is that it is so self-absorbed as to acknowledge or “concede the presence of fictionalizing” (O’Neill 175) and that the “poet’s compulsive reliving of his own experience” (O’Neill 170) makes of the poem a kind of fantasy retreat into the mind, much like the poet’s longing for an escape into paradise with his beloved. D.J. Hughes testifies that Shelley’s best poetry acknowledges “the almost self-defeating difficulty of Shelley’s attempt to measure the flux and reflux of consciousness and to finally organize it in aesthetic form” (263). Nowhere is this creation of a poem that mirrors the processes of thought more characteristic than in *Epipsychidion*. In places where it “fails to overcome knotty autobiographical material” (264), in the invocation of the ultimate vision of Emilia and with the escape to paradise and culminating erotic union, Shelley is swept up in the power of re-creation and self-discovery, revealing in the process embedded connections between poetry and thought and a complicated transference of terms like “ego” and “love.”

At the very heart of the lyrical narrative lies the quest motif as it applies to the speaker’s thoughts seeking out its object and searching for expression through the speaker’s relation to that object. The poem itself splits into three parts of similar length: the invocation to Emilia (the poet’s primary object), the history of the poet’s quest and his eclipsing vision of Emilia, and his invitational escape into paradise.^{xii} Even the motto

^{xii} For more discussion of how these parts all fit and work together as a metaphor for how the mind works, see D.J. Hughes’ article “Coherence and Collapse in Shelley.” I incorporate his strategic separation of the poem into distinct parts for the sake of clarity: the invocation to Emilia (ll. 1-189), the history of the poet’s

to *Epipsychidion* implies an over-abundance of self-love that projects itself outward in (unfeasible) attempts to dissolve ego boundaries: “The loving soul launches beyond creation, and creates for itself in the infinite a world all its own, far different from this dark and terrifying gulf” (motto). That Shelley attributes this statement to Emilia^{xiii} already sets the stage for understanding the extremes of Emilia’s total subjugation. The first lines of the poem relate Emilia to a “Poor captive bird! who from thy narrow cage, / Pourest such music...” (ll. 5-6) and tie her to her biographical context as a woman imprisoned in a convent. Furthermore, Shelley forces the poet’s soul into a sympathetic union with Emilia’s world so that his poetry and her music are seen as one. The “narrow cage” then resembles Emilia’s physical captivity on the surface but, more importantly, it is a conflation of the same binding that keeps Shelley’s high philosophies from successfully breaking free of the conventional medium of his lyrical and narrative form.

Shelley may feel imprisoned by language and use his art and the poet-speaker as a means to outmaneuver language, but it is still this language to which he is indebted for his great art. No matter how much Shelley seeks to absolve his own identity toward the end of the poem through the union of two souls, the poet’s with that of Emilia’s, and a subsequent “annihilation” (l. 587), his epilogue dispatches an egotistical wish to return to prior agency. Shelley’s union of the poet with his vision of Emilia, though imprisoned in heroic couplet form, seems to insist on a kind of self-cancellation:

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

quest and final “vision” of Emilia (ll. 190-387), the invitation of escape (ll. 388-591) and a brief epilogue (ll. 592-604).

^{xiii} This is actually a statement from an essay on love by Emilia Viviani and printed by Medwin. Shelley’s absorption of her expression into his prefatory “advertisement” could imply its own type of domination over Emilia’s “voice” for his own advancement.

With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound. (ll. 560-4)

This union of the poet with his perception of Emilia is perhaps the closest Shelley comes to truly casting off an ego-centered subject-object dichotomy. By devaluing even his own poetic voice, the poet can “harmonize” or unite with both Emilia and a silence that resists poetic domination. The poet “inscribes his own silence” (Claridge 157) in an erotic union in which he seems to “expire” (l. 591) to the ecstasy and power of uniting with the object of his desires:

One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation.... (ll. 584-7)

Ironically, this “expiration” does not completely annihilate self, but transforms the self into an “...expanding flame” that is “Burning, yet ever inconsumable” (ll. 576, 579); it will transcend death and the ages. The conventional closing also reinstates the poet’s ego as the poet reveals this continued wish for his “weak verses” to survive and speak to “the hearts of men” (l. 600):

‘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.... (ll. 596-9)

It is as though Shelley seeks to deny any poet’s loss of agency and poetic capacity by envisioning a voice that can continue on through posterity. In envisioning such an ideal, he insinuates that his own poetic reward comes with the possibility that his poems may defy death and speak the blessings of love to people who will receive his philosophy openly. This final imploring in the epilogue, in turn, fully illustrates how the ego of the

poet has transcended and merged into the process of his poem. As D.J. Hughes rightfully explains:

It [*Epipsychidion*] may or may not be about Shelley's secret wish to have an affair with Emilia Viviani, about his theories of Platonic love, about his quest for Intellectual Beauty, etc.... For, finally, the poem is more self-reflexive than referential... and being about itself, it is, inevitably in Shelley, about the processes of mind and the limits of poetry and the limits of thought. (279)

CONCLUSION

Percy Bysshe Shelley attempts a progression out of the early Romantics' egocentric isolationist tendencies and conventional forms in favor of poetry that defies the familiar traditions and terms that otherwise obscure the true beauty of our perceptions. His pessimism toward a kind of egoism prevalent in early Romantic poetry, and most often associated with Wordsworth, results in a tragic end for his Wordsworthian poet-wanderer in "Alastor." Shelley asserts that communion with the spirit inherent in and flowing through all things can lead us away from the stoic, selfish existence that his protagonist represents, an existence that results in a tragic and untimely end. His subject, the poet-wanderer, reminds us of characters in Wordsworth's or Coleridge's writings who are bound by independent and solitary aims and often seek to escape into private worlds away from society. Shelley uses this "type" for his own aims; he breaks from the earlier Wordsworthian positive insistence on an independent life and reinvents the quest motif

by portraying it as an unfulfilling endeavor that only reaches toward enlightenment but never fully achieves answers to end self-doubt or obstinate questionings. The quest, for Shelley, essentially reinforces his stance that humans fulfill a rightful place among society and community and that relationships are the means through which love and beauty may begin to be understood. The poem reinforces the notion that going beyond one's bounds is a vain endeavor; like Icarus in mythology, humans who fly too close to the sun in order to satisfy their selfish desires or endless questionings about the mysteries of the universe tragically fail to find the knowledge they seek. Furthermore, "Alastor" consists of Shelley's first foray into projecting the traits of his subject, the poet-speaker, onto idolized female objects so that they exist as mirrors of each other, creating a double vision of the poet and his egoistic wish to find all that he finds good and beautiful in himself in the reflections of others. This foray results in nothing more than a superficial communion with society.

Whereas "Alastor" consists of Shelley's idealistic proposal that egocentric goals only lead to desolation and destruction and sets the stage for his later portrayals of women as objects in his poetry, his lyrical odes "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc" more characteristically map the battle Shelley wages against ego and show the extent to which he is incapable of fully winning the war and moving out of ego-driven poetry. Once again, as in "Alastor," objects are filtered through the mind and subjected to the perceptions of the poet. Objects come to represent an awareness of the creative forces of the mind--they are merely stand-ins for a higher spirit that links all things, such as Intellectual Beauty or an ambiguous, unnamed power. As a representation, these objects gazed upon reveal the presence of that power while consequently allowing the poet to

acknowledge the lack of that power and its inability to be labeled or comprehended fully. Simultaneously, the act of gazing and creating relationships between ourselves and other objects gazed upon reveals both the creative forces of and the barriers to imagination. As Shelley states in his *Defence of Poetry*:

...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....Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the Poet.

(Ingpen and Peck 135)

Objects, therefore, exist in Shelley's poetry to reinforce the barriers of language and one's inability to traverse out of the bounds to which humans are subjected when discussing the world. While Shelley attempts the best he can to defy the strictures of language and provide a purer vision by creating ambiguous "I" and "thou" relationships between subject and objects, these relationship constructs are still inferior to the power and conception of the poet's inspired image because the creation of poetry ciphers out the transient brightness and purity of Intellectual Beauty and relegates it to artificial language.

Shelley's final works, especially those poems like the "To Jane" set and *Epipsychidion* which are devoted to particular women, magnify Shelley's problem: he

becomes trapped by his own desires to unite with the object of his idolatry and, thus, ego and imagination incite flagrant themes of slavery to and mastery over both female objects and the object of poetry as creation itself. No longer are these motifs embedded; they are now central to the subject's goal of bonding with those female figures he feels aligned with or who share a mutual sympathy with him. Instead of defiantly objecting to Wordsworthian ego and creating didactic poems like "Alastor" that hint at denying ego in order to improve the self and create more meaningful bonds with one's community, Shelley eventually nurtures the role ego plays upon his subject and objects as a way to negotiate the relationship between lover and beloved as an unbreakable, binding force. Shelley's language here, as in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc," insists on defining relationships through new metaphors, but these metaphors still bind the female object to the poet's own vision of himself and to his dominating agency as a manipulator primarily working toward his own wish-fulfillment. In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley even goes so far as to seek escape from the world in a utopia where he can merge and become one sexually with his female prototype. This stands in direct violation to Shelley's earlier correlation between the isolation of subjects and the prevalence of ego in the creations of those subjects, as illustrated in "Alastor." Furthermore, though *Epipsychidion* transcends the constricting formalities of a poetic structure like the lyric, Shelley is still unable to resolve completely the problem of ego as an active agent and embedded motif in the majority of his works.

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VITA

(1)

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