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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

SHELLEY'S NEGOTIATION OF METAPHYSICS

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne 19.8.2020

I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prague, date 19 August 2020

Abstrakt:

Cílem této diplomové práce je porozumět Percy Bysshe Shelleyho náhledu na roli básníka ve společnosti jakožto nositele progresivní změny. Aby toho dosáhla, zkoumá jeho metafyziku, hlavně pak kontakt s doktrínami idealismu, které krystalizovali na sklonku jeho života intimním vztahem s pracemi Platóna, jeho spojení s francouzskými materialisty, anglickými filozofy jako Priestley nebo Hume a pozdější s lukreciánským materialismem. Shelleyho hluboké propojení s prvním moderním proponentem anarchismu, Williamem Godwinem, který by mohl být popsán jako perfekcionista nebo utilitarianista. Tím, že se teze bude zajímat o tyto otázky, osvětlí tím, jak tyto doktríny ovlivnily Shelleyho a jak s nimi konverzoval a kritizoval je, odhalujíc komplexitu jeho díla, protože, v Shelleyho filozofii, jednoduchá dichotomie mezi idealismem a materialismem je problematická.

Na začátku diplomová práce prezentuje Shelleyho kontakt s materialistickými doktrínami, jejich rychlé odvržení v čisté formě, odpověď na ně a jejich kritiku v básni „The Cloud“. Shelleyho materialistické vlivy jsou probírány, taktéž pak některé možnosti interpretace Shelleyho básní v tomto stylu. Dále je jeho interakce s revoluční[1] myšlenkou popisována v *Queen Mab*, která v práci slouží jako ukázka pokračovaní Shelleyho deterministických principů a jako příklad jeho utopického impulsu. Vliv Godwinovy doktríny a konceptu Nutnosti je projednáván v této kapitole.

Jakožto poslední bod práce pojednává o Shelleyho vztahu k Platónovi a některé jeho koncepty, které Shelley rozšířil, jako mimésis a role básníka ve společnosti budou diskutovány, aby bylo možné porozumět Shelleyho platónskému pohledu a zároveň básníkovu skepticismu. *A Defence of Poetry* bude považována za znak upevnění Shelleyho metafyzických kořenů a básně jako *Alastor*, “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” “Mont Blanc,” “To a Sky-lark” poslouží k ilustraci jeho vztahu k Ideálu skrz imaginaci a problému básníka, který má inspirovat společenskou změnu.

[1] Slovem revoluční (a příbuznými v práci) se rozumí Shelleyho cíl změnit mysl čtenáře, (s trochou básnické licence můžeme mluvit o změně v srdcích) kterou věřil, že bude následovat změna v materiálním světě.

Abstract:

This thesis aims to understand Percy Bysshe Shelley's attitude towards the role of the poet in society as an usher of progressive change. To do this, it examines his metaphysics, chiefly his contact with the doctrines of idealism, which crystallised at the dawn of his life through his intimate relationship with the works of Plato, the early engagement with French materialists, English philosophers like Priestley and Hume & a later one with Lucretian materialism, and his deep entanglement with the first modern proponent of anarchism, William Godwin – who could be described as a perfectionist by some or as utilitarianist by others. By doing that the thesis seeks to shed light on how these doctrines influenced Shelley and how he conversed with and critiqued them, revealing the intricacies of his work because, in Shelley's philosophy, the nature of differentiation between the two, that is between materialism and idealism, is notoriously problematic.

The beginning of the thesis serves to engage with Shelley's early contact with materialist doctrines, their fast repudiation in their pure form and his later critique in "Cloud" and response to them. The materialist influences of Shelley are pondered, as well as some of the possibilities of interpreting Shelley in a materialist way. Next, Shelley's subsequent engagement with revolutionary[2] thought is going to be investigated; *Queen Mab* is used as a continuation of the determinist principle and the example of utopian impulse. The influence of Godwin's doctrine and the concept of 'Necessity' is investigated.

Lastly, Shelley's relationship to Plato will be mulled over, and some of the important terms and concepts which were expanded upon from Plato by Shelley like mimesis and the role of a poet in society will be discussed to provide an understanding of Shelley's Platonic view and the poet's scepticism. *A Defence of Poetry* will be the considered the marker of a solidifying of Shelley's metaphysical roots and the poems *Alastor*, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Mont Blanc," "To a Sky-lark" will serve to illustrate how he relates to the Ideal via imagination and the problems that poets face when instigating social change.

[2] The word revolutionary (and those related) refers throughout the thesis to Shelley's pursuit of change in people's minds (with poetic license what we call 'change of heart,' too) from which he believed the changes in material world will follow.

0. Introduction
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"Metaphysics may be defined as an inquiry concerning those things belonging to, or connected with, the eternal nature of man."

Percy Bysshe Shelley[3]

[3] As published by Mrs. Shelley in the *Essays, Letters from Abroad*, 1840

0. Introduction

During his twenty-nine years of life, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a polarizing figure: a radical Romantic poet that in his poems tried to wrestle philosophical ideas and societal visions into his art. Those ideas may have been so polarizing since they espoused a view that is based on societal equity which is sought after by Shelley with the help of certain ideologies or metaphysical schools. This thesis picks three that it believes to be essential for Shelley's goals: materialism, Godwinian perfectionism (or simply Godwinism) and idealism. They should not be taken as a continuum that Shelley goes through, but systems of ideas concerning some of the critical metaphysical principles of Shelley's that he mingles with. Mainly this is done through Shelley's engagement with certain philosophers who represent specific groups of thought and concepts in the thesis: first, necessity and possibility, cause and effect, then the problem of relation to an ideal, and the driving force behind and the source of poetry.

Materialism and idealism should not be a scale of progression, a development, but inspiration from a spectrum that Shelley picked up when forming his ideas on certain metaphysical topics. They do not reflect his life's progression as is shown in some of the chapters that offer interpretations from the materialist spectrum applied to works from the end of his life. Given the fact that a thesis is, however, a medium that seems to progress in time on a linear basis, materialism-Godwinism-idealism may seem like a linear progression; it is not so. Shelley blends his influences in a unique way and to think about him as a materialist turned idealist would not suffice. Instead the thesis uses this Marxist dichotomy to excavate terms that transcend it and are present from whatever point of view we may view them: be it Necessity, 'life' after death, or Shelley's pantheistic conception of a higher Power in the stead of a Christian God.

The base of the progression, from the influence of the French materialists to Godwin's return to the Gold Age to Plato and later Shelley's questioning of the philosopher, is taken itself from Ross G. Woodman; these schematics should be the scaffolding for the thesis which deals with the relationship that Shelley's discussion of metaphysics has with the role of the poet and poetry in the society and the importance of the both for it. The thesis believes that there exists a conflict between Shelley's two affinities: someone who is deeply sympathetic to social causes and cares for the good of it, and a poet who moves primarily in the waters of a detached field that does not hold its relation to the corporeal world.

For these purposes, the structure of the thesis can be dissected on more levels. While the former two chapters on a macroscopic level deal with the first two concepts (cause and effect, necessity and possibility,) and their consequences when they are applied in society; the latter two chapters describe the other two (the problem of relation to an ideal, and the driving force behind poetry) discuss Shelley's turn to poetry as the driving force behind societal change and also propose the role that the poet should take. Shelley, by professing these principles throughout the career, shows that the aim to influence society is inextricably linked to his discussion of metaphysical terms. Moreover, each chapter can be thought of as a separate entity that takes up a certain concept or a topic, usually with a focus on one major work, and develops and relates it to other works that are deemed relevant to it. The thesis as a whole therefore follows a certain pseudo-historical trajectory which in relevant places borrows from Shelley's future.

I believe that in order to explore Shelley's metaphysics, we have to understand the goal with which he begins his philosophizing, that is, a social goal. Therefore, the thesis investigates at first the major predicament and impingement on society, that is organized religion, what metaphysical concepts are included in the discussion and what philosophers are they stemming from, by extension what school of thought; in the case of determinism and atheism they are mainly French materialist philosophes and philosophers related to them. It continues with the

vision of the future in the second, and after that, it moves to the blueprint of the ideal and the driving forces behind them in the third and fourth chapter. All of these take the underlying role of poets and poetry in the creation of society and its rules into account; the means, the barriers, the ideals and driving force behind these processes are pondered in relation to metaphysics.

While the scholarly output concerning these topics is extensive, as it should be after two hundred years of attention Shelley was given, concerning the individual strains of Shelley's philosophy, I believe that this thesis shows a more interconnected picture of Shelley's philosophy and poetry, is concerned with the effects that poetry should have on society for which a clear vision of a functional metaphysical world was sought to be discovered, and this thesis follows that process. Moreover, it should show that Shelley's metaphysical poetry is not poetry divided from the phenomenal world and that it continually seeks ways how to relate to it, and, ultimately, how to conceptualize the terms in such a way in which they would affect society for its greater good, via poetry and poets, therefore seeking to affirm poetry's place in the society. It should show how Shelley through the use and discussion of metaphysical concepts critiques society (which happens more in the early stages) and on the other hand how he proposes it to be led in accordance to the eternal nature of man, which he considered the meaning of metaphysics.

The first chapter is united by the term materialism but deals mainly with the influence of determinism and mechanism on Shelley and his atheist and by extension pantheist ideas which dominate the juvenile part of his career marked by his expulsion from university. It should inspect mainly Shelley's beginnings when he in cooperation with Thomas Jefferson Hogg published the pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* and the fact that Christianity became the centre of Shelley's nexus of societal oppression. Apart from the first view of a necessitarian principle, the chapter deals also with the principle of cause and effect that Shelley comments on in the text of the pamphlet, Shelley's scientific influences which influenced how he thinks

analytically, and the germ of determinism. In the end, the chapter investigates the possibility of applying materialist approaches even to works from the later part of Shelley's career such as *The Triumph of Life*, questioning the usual interpretations based around his later philosophical influences, like Plato, and the validity of the split materialism/idealism.

The second chapter deals with what is marked by what I perceive as the second significant event in Shelley's life, his intimate involvement with William Godwin. The major work that copies the creeds of Godwin is *Queen Mab* and the principle of Necessity, now fully evolved by Shelley into a cosmological principle, is at the centre of the chapter, that means that the metaphysical question of necessity set against possibility is pondered, and also that the question of free will has to come into the scope as well. Secondly, Shelley's visionary politics is investigated in connection with Godwin's concept of the Golden Age; *Prometheus Unbound* is split into this chapter too, in order to explicate the continuity of Shelley's Necessity.

Additionally, Necessity has not been adequately considered in terms of its evolution and possible indirect continuity, such is the case with Necessity which was formed by the determinist principle borrowed from Holbach et al., and divides critics into two camps from which one claims that Shelley substituted it for Love and the second that it continued to exist as it was and did not disappear after 1816. The thesis should show that Necessity was transformed and subsumed as a minor principle and was not abandoned but superseded by Love.

The third chapter is dedicated to Shelley's Italian period, which in his life seems to denote a shift, too. It is the chapter that turns to Plato as the primary influence on *Prometheus Unbound* and deals with the underlying idea of mimesis and poets, and the way they work with divine sources in Shelley as contrasted with Plato. It deals with the concept of Demogorgon and with the idea that poets are legislators of the world and that they touch upon divine knowledge.

The last chapter is in close connection with the preceding and should elucidate more the concept of inspiration, i.e. from where and how poets receive their inspiration, how it works and whether the poet has an active part in it, which would be a contrast to Plato. The poems picked for this are those that show the development of inspiration and imagination throughout Shelley's work: *Alastor*, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc* culminating with *To a Sky-lark*, which was published alongside *Prometheus Unbound*. The thesis should close with this discussion of the source of the divine power, or the divine Power itself. The chapter then circles back to Shelley's initial concerns with God and deity, unseen creative power permeating the universe or Christian god; in a sense it reflects the beginning of *The Necessity of Atheism*, where Shelley does not dispute 'creative god,' and how he looks and manifests in the phenomenal world.

1. Notions Inspired by Materialists: Determinism, Atheism & Science in *The Necessity of Atheism*

a. The Early Years: Holbach, Bacon, Priestley

First off, let us discuss French materialism which holds claim as one of the influences on Shelley in the early days and its related branches of philosophy that are materialist and often anti-religious. As to the merits of the former, there exists this opinion presented by Mary Shelley from one of the notes to *Queen Mab*: "His readings were not always well chosen [...] among them were the works of the French philosophers. As far as metaphysical argument went, he temporarily became a convert."[4] The French philosophers which pertain to the category of materialist thinkers that may have exacted influence on Shelley could be Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach; some of the homegrown philosophers will be considered as well, such as Joseph Priestley or Francis Bacon and some others like Newton who held Shelley's sympathies in his early years.

There might be others as Harold Orel notes in connection to *The Necessity of Atheism*; the distinction between an investigative mind and the passive stage of perception is something that Locke probably gave birth to in Shelley's vision; Hume, on the other hand, inspired the idea that before we prove a design, we need to prove the existence of the designer of said design.[5] Philosophers like Holbach, Bacon or Priestley, however, gave form to *The Necessity of Atheism*, its deep concerns are linked with them more that with just individual arguments. Holbach could be said to be the major inspiration, even though probably second hand as it is argued later, to the anti-religious sentiment of the pamphlet; Priestley, in his philosophy, but mainly in his science, was the second major influence. It mainly seems that Shelley sought to unite different

[4] Mary Shelley qtd. by George Spencer Bower, "The Philosophical Element in Shelley," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1880, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/25667826> Accessed 10 Aug. 2020, 430.

[5] Harold Orel, "Another Look at The Necessity of Atheism," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1969, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/24776302>, Accessed 15 May 2020, 27.

strands of intellectual thought, which may be seen also in his attempts to unite natural philosophy and poetry, while tinging it with philosophical questions. He wanted to see poetry somehow incorporated in intellectual life, wanted to make it seem as important as philosophy and to heighten the perception of its importance for daily life.

This thesis at the start adopts the view Shelley clung to materialism as a form of engagement with the material world that would interact more immediately with a world that he wanted to perfect; the influences are also those connected in some way to the French revolution that exerted its influence on Shelley from his early age as it was a movement that in many ways engendered an idea of social progress, however, at the same time offered the dark side of revolution that created a tyranny of its own. As Gerald McNiece argues in his book about the revolutionary side of Shelley, to him the revolution offered a theme involving pictures that were able to instruct mankind.[6] This text, at least in the beginning, presumes that the fact that Shelley became a convert to the materialist doctrine, as Marry Shelley claims, and that he read French philosophers, together with the fact that he need to touch upon the phenomenal world led him to be influenced by materialist philosophers who espoused the primacy of materiality; people in society are, after all, influenced by their material conditions, and some of Shelley's arguments presumed that lives of certain people can only turn out certain way due to the influence.

In terms of Shelley's materialist inspirations, Holbach is going to be considered as the main one, especially in terms of the followed necessitarianism. His *Système de la Nature ou Des Loix du Monde Physique et du Monde Moral* is an example of a "thorough-going and uncompromising materialism"[7]; for Holbach that meant primacy of matter before thought and it, for him and Shelley perhaps alike, led him to become an atheist. Holbach was a proponent of determinism and in *The System of Nature* he espouses a theory that matter is under the subjection of physical

[6] Gerald McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1969) 1.
[7] Everett C. Ladd Jr., "Helvétius and D'Holbach "La moralisation de la politique," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 221.

laws and therefore there is no way that these laws cannot be described in a scientific way to the utmost detail, conceive the movement of every and each one of the particles and then predict it; that means that even the corporeal forms of people, made out of matter, are subject to those laws. Free will would, therefore, be an illusion to a mind that only responds to the impulses of the physical brain in which the very much physical processes make it take the decisions that it is taking, that means that "a materialistic metaphysics is logically implied by a mechanistic psychology."[8] The illusion is fuelled by the fact that these processes and laws (immutable for that matter) are hidden to us or are so complex that it would be near impossible to arrest and comprehend them. As we will see, determinism, sciences and cause and effect are very much in Shelley's scope.

As Shelley's, Holbach's materialism includes deism, but not Christianity. His deism was essentially deistic natural religion which criticised religion based solely on the interpretation of the Bible but espoused other forms of religiosity. Holbach influences Shelley in a way that is connected to his idea that organised religion fails to stand up in the face of reason, and since in Holbach's system, reason is the ultimate judge of sensations that are acquired through experience, where the experience is grounded in the physical world of particles of matter that move, and it is the only place from which the senses can take their material for it to be judged. Organized religion has no proofs as such, but for that matter, the natural deism that Holbach was a proponent of does not have them either, the difference is as Holbach wrote in *The System*, that deism "presupposes a reasonable God who demands nothing of men other than that they are good and sensible, […] no faith, cult, no ceremonies,"[9] unfortunate things for the systems of power surrounding it.

[8] Everett C. Ladd Jr., 223.
[9] Holbach's *Système* quoted by Mark Curran, *Atheism, Religion and Enlightenment in Pre-revolutionary Europe*, (Croydon: The Boydell Press, 2012) 35.

French philosophes championed a movement that appears to be a major inspiration for young, not-yet-a-poet Shelley. The movement was a large part of the French revolution and it did not mean an absolute obliteration of religiosity from life – it tried to change the way in which the people viewed organized religion and tried to shift the balance of power in favour of different things in public life, find different outlets, like the cult of the Supreme Being. Not only that Shelley then acquired the anti-Christian doctrine from the French philosophes but he was also influenced by the idea of Supreme Being, or at least in such a way that made him accept a deism that is outside of the realm of Christianity. That seems to encompass Holbach's idea of god as well, as he is not arguing against worship but about its monopolization by the Christian church and the amassment of power; it speaks more about the political that the spiritual or the deistic aspect of it, and last but not least about the very essence of thinking about the world – metaphysics.

The major work dealing with the issue of religion, belief and deism is *The Necessity of Atheism*; other questions are causality, to a smaller degree science and determinism. It is a text that was written by Shelley with a help, or co-authorship of Thomas Jefferson Hogg who, however, is not explicitly stated as the author but it is commonly acknowledged that he was responsible at least to equal measure of *The Necessity of Atheism* and that he was the person from the two to write the first draft.[10] One of the reasons for this may be that Hogg stopped sharing Shelley's revolutionary fervour in order to become a barrister; Shelley's zest for the then-radical cause preoccupied with religion did not cease. The goals of the tract are laid out in the beginning in these lines, hinting at the ultimate objective:

> As a love of truth is the only motive which actuates the Author of this little tract, he earnestly entreats that those of his readers who may discover any deficiency in his reasoning, or may be in possession of proofs which his mind could never obtain, would

[10] Frederick L .Jones, "Hogg and the Necessity of Atheism," *PMLA*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1937, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/458600> Accessed 29 Apr. 2020, 423.

> offer them, together with their objections to the Public, as briefly, as methodically, as plainly as he has taken the liberty of doing.[11]

It remains the goal on which he always keeps his eyes, he also lays bare the intentions as benign – he only seeks the truth. Of course, the very beginning of the text did not make it easy for a reader to get to that claim: There Is No God are the first words to appear before the eyes of the beholder.

It would be a mistake to take it for a rebellious fruit of the mind of an 18-year-old or a radical who writes for the sake of radicality – foremost, *The Necessity of Atheism* is a philosophical text. The legacy of Holbach may be visible in the opening paragraph, right after the bold claim about the non-existence of a deity, when Shelley states that "this negation must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit co-eternal with the universe remains unshaken."[12] Arguably, this is a claim addressing the idea that d'Holbach voiced about the difference of an organized religion and the need and inclination of a person to believe; there is from the beginning a difference between Spirit and deity. Nevertheless, it is not the difference between organized religion and superstition that Shelley has in mind in this particular case. What is more, Shelley follows Holbach only until the emergence of *Queen Mab* where the Spirit found in deism is substituted for Mab, marking a difference between for example Coleridge or Wordsworth who follow deism and pantheism more closely.

Therefore, the objection is less dramatic than it sounds from the opening words, as the principal argument does not defy God, but it only elaborates on the notion that God's existence as such is impossible to prove. The entire argument postulates that a reflective mind has to always rely on the senses and on its own processes in order to ponder the existence of a Deity or on the reflection of the alleged proof of other people who have encountered a phenomenon that they

[11] Shelley, "The Necessity of Atheism," *Gutenberg*, Available online <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20248/20248-h/20248-h.htm> no pagination.
[12] Shelley, *Necessity*.

thought to be God, but also perceived with their senses. As Orel writes "If we grant that the credibility of a given proof depends on whether it is our own senses, our mental processes […] or the experiences of others that perceive the proof."[13] In that one may see Baconian scepticism, sure, one that says that knowledge comes from sensory experience.

Shelley held Bacon for a poet as well, together with Plato, with that honour bestowed he should hold a prestigious place in Shelley's works. Bacon is described by Bower as higher materialist and can be defined by Bacon's drive to unite the sciences into one which would divide into physics and metaphysics, a unification that is not a foreign endeavour for Shelley. However, the Bacon that Shelley uses is not presenting Bacon's ideas. The words that he quotes in *Necessity* do not align with Bacon's version, cf:

> Lord Bacon says, that "atheism leaves to man reason, philosophy, natural piety, laws, reputation, and every thing that can serve to conduct him to virtue; but superstition destroys all these, and erects itself into a tyranny over the understandings of men: hence atheism never disturbs the government, but renders man more clear-sighted, since he sees nothing beyond the boundaries of the present life[14]

but instead are more reminiscent of the actual version which was written by Holbach

> Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not; but superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men. Therefore atheism did never perturb states; for makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further.[15]

As William O. Scott notes, this passage is even more than just reminiscent of Holbach's.[16] This may be caused by several reasons: either Shelley was reminded of the passage that there is in Holbach and used it as is or he may not have read it before – it may be entirely possible that these words are from a secondary source that Shelley did not hunt for to provide in the original.

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[13] Orel, 28.
[14]William O. Scott, "Shelley's Admiration for Bacon," *PMLA*, vol. 73, no. 3, 1958, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/460240>, Accessed 26 May 2020. 229.
[15] Scott, 229-230.
[16] Scott, 230.

Scott further notes for us an important thing – Bacon was very firmly placed in the materialist and atheist school of thought. In *A Refutation of Deism* in which Shelley writes that

> it is an egregious offence against the first principles of reason, to suppose an immaterial creator of the world, in quo omnia moventur sed sine mutua passione; which is equally a superfluous hypothesis in the mechanical philosophy of Newton, and a useless excrescence on the inductive logic of Bacon.[17]

Later, in *Speculation on Metaphysics* he pits Bacon and Holbach against each other to test the Baconian doctrine:

> Nor have those who are accustomed to profess the greatest veneration for the inductive system of Lord Bacon adhered with sufficient scrupulousness to its regulations... Their promises of deducing all systems from facts has [sic] too often been performed by appealing in favour of these pretended realities to the obstinate preconceptions of the multitude; or by the most preposterous mistake of a name for a thing.[18]

Lastly, Bacon is placed in the materialistic tradition in *A Refutation of Deism* where Shelley claims that it is an offence against the principles of reason to suppose an immaterial creator of the world, especially in the face of the mechanical philosophy of Newton and the inductive logic of Bacon.[19] On these principles, and principles of others, he says, he proved that the existence of God is a chimera.[20] Time and time again, in Shelley's prose we see that the materialist influences point to one goal of his – God and Deity and their proof of existence. The geniuses of these philosophers and their theories themselves work as evidence toward the questioning of the deist system. Shelley also does not shun criticising them in turn.

While there may be other sources of his anti-religious materialist inclined beginnings such as the English Joseph Priestley and his scientific approach to philosophy, Priestley's experiments with electricity were the thing that inspired response in Shelley, and it is safe to say that Priestley's ideas about the fact that "The English hierarchy (if there be anything unsound in its

[17] Scott, 230.
[18] Scott, 230.
[19] Scott, 230, qt. Shelley, *A Refutation of Deism*.
[20] Scott, 230, qt. Shelley, *A Refutation of Deism*.

constitution) has equalled reason to tremble even at an air-pump, or an electrical machine."[21] influenced Shelley probably in the method in which he pursued his interests in philosophy and poetry and in the unrelenting thirst for truth, although it may be said that the pursuit of scientific method was not systemic. Some such as Alfred North Whitehead even claimed that it should be Shelley's "science that is elevated, and that he expressed it tirelessly in his poetry time and time again"[22] and although Shelley continued to take interest in science and chemistry experiments, he never took these up seriously and remained an inspiration for his poetry and prose, up until his death, only; it is, however, one of the notions that is steadfast in his poetry.

For what is worth, Priestley himself was a monist and a materialist. The implication of his metaphysics was that the matter is subject to forces vested in it; brain then, for example, was more sensitive to a certain kind of force, or vibrations, and those formed the basis of thoughts; soul for him was in perfect unity with the body. He, too, worked this into a view where God was the one who determined the laws according to which this automaton of a person operates. This may have been liberal at that age, nevertheless, it made him no atheist, and he still argued for a god that would be the puppeteer of his mechanistic view of the world.

What is more, Shelley's argument making is very scientific in the case of the *Necessity of Atheism*. It is no coincidence that he had taken the very scientific approach to heart, as there was a lot of philosopher in him, and during his lifetime science did not exist as such – instead, it was called natural philosophy; to think is the paramount of his efforts, to get to the core of the problem is of the utmost importance, it can even be said that the essay goes against intellectual dishonesty and laziness. Shelley states that "many falsely imagine that the mind is active in belief"[23] which on the one hand can be interpreted in the lights of the words following

[21] Thomas Edward Thorpe, *Joseph Priestley*, (J.M. Dent: London, 1906) 174.
[22] Gaul, 577.
[23] Shelley, *Necessity*.

that, that which form the argument that belief is not voluntary, therefore disbelief is involuntary as well – therefore should not be punished, but could also be taken as a rebuke of an inactive, lazy mind, idea that Shelley develops further in the text.

Marilyn Gaul notes some of the similarities with the people who studied science and Shelley – they were mainly self-taught, learned from books, experience and discipleship; experimenting was the main source of their knowledge, too, and an important tool for discovery. She notes mainly Priestley's chemistry and physics: "He followed his instincts, experimented with lightning and oxygen, invented carbonated water, wrote a book on electricity and another on English grammar."[24] She notes that it was the method, mainly, that Shelley inherited from science, that he even if we consider him here as a materialist, had a broad range of beliefs in which he was expert, be it materialist or idealist, perhaps even sceptic, he always dealt with conflicting ideas and views that he tried to synthesize, they were always possibilities for him to delve into and inspect, decide which one is the truth. Ted Underwood even notes that "to say that [Shelley's] theory of poetry was modelled on science would understate the connection. It developed out of natural philosophy (and philosophical poetry) in a way that makes it impossible to say where scientific reasoning ends and poetic reasoning begins."[25] Science after all is the sister of poetry.

With these notes in mind, let us consider *The Necessity of Atheism* as the first attempt at serious writing undertaken by Shelley, the first article of his making to contribute to the philosophical debate. As a philosopher and a scientist would, Shelley builds his argument on three pillars that describe the ways in which god can be witnessed/described: firstly, the evidence of the senses is the easiest one, and one that is hard to disprove – if a Deity appears to a person, that person

[24] Marilyn Gaul, *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, (Oxford: OUP, 2012) 80.
[25] Ted Underwood, "The Science in Shelley's Theory of Poetry," *Modern Language Quarterly* 58 (1997), 302.

can no longer doubt his existence. However, that is not possible as "the God of Theologians is incapable of local visibility.[26]"

Reason is the second most feasible source of belief. Shelley gives the example of the universe: "it is urged that man knows that whatever is must either have had a beginning, or have existed from all eternity, he also knows that whatever is not eternal must have had a cause.[27]" With the universe, it is necessary that we first prove that it was created, but before we can do that we may suppose that it was there for all eternity. Causation is only the constant conjunction of objects – an idea that echoes David Hume. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and *A Treatise of Human Nature* Hume argues that the knowledge about the world comes from observing instances of a certain element from which the human mind derives the relationship of causation. Therefore, if we take the simple example of fire that is burning and smoke comes out as a waste product of that burning, we can infer from the observation that this situation is constant, and that when there is a fire, there is smoke, that smoke is caused by fire. If we have a universe, that was supposedly created by a God, where is the fire to the smoke? As Shelley says: "we must prove design before we can infer a designer.[28]"

When we follow Hume's understanding, this leads us to another view into Shelley's metaphysics. If the above-mentioned principle works, we derive our understanding of the world based on custom, or habit. Man, thus, lives only according to expectation learned by experience and it is not enough to establish the connection between the two; we only think that a result is necessary based on experience, not a reasoned link. When we move this reasoning further, no science can be ever exact, apart from those that are abstract: ideas, logic, mathematics. Everything with a connection to the real, material world will always be the matter of probability

[26] Shelley, *Necessity*.
[27] Shelley, *Necessity*.
[28] Shelley, *Necessity*.

– even metaphysics. If Shelley got this idea from Hume, which he very probably did, was he also not, for all his influences from materialist philosophers, a sceptic?

Testimony is the last possible way of witnessing, and is also deemed insufficient, as if the Deity appeared before a man who then conferred this experience, this testimony should not go against reason; it should also be more probable, that the man was not deceived by a false Deity-like experience. However, the testimony cannot be believed if the Deity was irrational, claimed rewards for faith etc., or so Shelley claims. On the basis of those three, he rejects religion, but in a more emotionally charged close of the text, he becomes more specific; in that he maybe channels d'Holbach, first however, Gaul's proposal of Shelley's strong connection with the scientific world of the era comes to fore.

Scientifically, he claims that "God is an hypothesis, and, as such, stands in need of proof.[29]" It is a Newtonian view of the world that Shelley summons, a Newtonian universe, one could even propose. Newton's quote about hypotheses that Shelley uses in Latin could be translated as

> I have not as yet been able to discover the reason for these properties of gravity from phenomena, and I do not feign hypotheses. For whatever is not deduced from the phenomena must be called a hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, or based on occult qualities, or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy. In this philosophy particular propositions are inferred from the phenomena, and afterwards rendered general by induction.[30]

By introducing this, one may ponder if at the time the idea of the universe as a mechanistic one was that held closely by the author, a universe in which everything is explicable by natural laws. The least that can be said is that he was not afraid to use it in his argument. Newtons classical mechanics speculating about the nature of space imply that it is distinct from the body and that for example time would continue to pass independently on anybody being there to perceive it.

[29] Shelley, *Necessity*.
[30] Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, (UCP: California, 1999) 943.

Two kinds of concepts therefore exist – the absolute and the relative. The distinction of the body and the universe, however stands.

The mechanistic universe of Newton, as Shelley describes it, was one of the steps that began to unravel the before unknown processes that held the world, quite literally, and figuratively, too, together. In being interested in those developments in natural philosophy, and in seeing that there are principles and forces unseen that explicate motions shrouded in mystery before, that made fathomable only if explaining them by some force beyond the rational, are existing in complete accordance with the rational, he extrapolated other forces and rules yet unknown, forces that waited to be discovered.

This is to contrast those systems that were in place before, of a world where spirits or angels manipulated and animated it; however, there always has been a certain pullback to the old traditions of magic, occultism or Christianity[31]. In the case of Newton (and it would be hard to tell whether Shelley knew about it, and was able to reconcile with it) he believed that the universe is mechanistic to a degree, because as his occult explorations show us he held it that angels and God still play a role in it, and they sustain those powers.[32] Such notions may probably be possible for Shelley, as he very clearly distinguishes the two versions of deity in the beginning of *Necessity*.

So, even though we cannot claim a perfect alignment with these philosophers, we may seem an inspiration, which is typical for Shelley, an almost scientific way of picking an idea, testing it, experimenting with it, in order to find its usefulness or truthfulness to him and then either refuting or working it into his view of the world, of the issue of the mind and matter. The way in which his own atheism and dissent to the ways in which God was defined in the society, and

[31] Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2017).
[32] Josephson-Storm, 43.

his ultimate refutation of materialism will be dealt with in the following subchapters. It is proposed that the conflict between the materialism of Shelley's politics and the idealism of his poetic thinking play a major role here.

b. *The Critique of Materialism*

As noted before, and as we can see by the multifaceted approach to the philosophers mentioned, their questioning and the leakage from other schools of metaphysics, materialism cannot be the only and definitive view of Shelley, not in the long shot of his career, not ever. Shelley's adherence to pure reason is marked by some by the discovery of Sir William Drummond whom he mentions in his 1815 essay "On Life"; some have put the departure earlier, to his 1811 letter that he composed to Elizabeth Hitchener[33]. Wherever we put the end of his infatuation with materialism, it is important to note that it was probably the strict adherence to reason which he was able to follow in the philosophical tracts and essays he composed and the conflict of his poetry that based itself in feeling.

Later in life, however, Shelley adopted more of an idealist approach that was not only rational, but emotional and aesthetic as well that he calls 'intellectual system' as Drummond did.[34] It seems also that a huge inner turmoil goes on in Shelley as he finally decided to a bit reluctantly accept the idealist doctrine; he expresses it in negatives "I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers, who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived"[35] – the phrase of being unable to refuse assent is a pained admission of guilt of being one of those philosophers. Thomas Holden also writes that this shock has something to

[33] C. E. Pulos, "Discontent with Materialism in Shelley's Letters to Elizabeth Hitchener," *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 66, No. 7 (Nov., 1951), *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2909995> Accessed 26 May 2020, 476.
[34] Thomas Holden, "The Modern Disciple of the Academy: Hume, Shelley, And Sir William Drummond," The Journal of Scottish Philosophy 9.2 (2011), *JSTOR*, Accessed 26 May 2020, 166.
[35] Shelley, "On Life," *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880) Available online <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~djb/shelley/1880onlife.html> Accessed 18 August 2020, no pagination.

do with Shelley's previous statement about 'the shocking absurdities of popular philosophy of mind and matter' as if those were idealists who he is speaking of. Nevertheless, it can be safely assumed that these words mean refutation of materialism.

Again, we note what Bower says: materialism is a system that has its allure for the young minds who want to dispense with thinking and allows them to talk.[36] What is more, materialism is intellectually or emotionally satisfying for its proponents, or at least that is what Holden says[37]. Shelley writes that

> man is a being [. . .] whose 'thoughts that wander through eternity,' disclaiming alliance with transience and decay, incapable of imagining to himself annihilation, existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with change and extinction.[38]

His wanton relationship with eternity, the place where the materiality of man can no longer reach could also be one of the inevitable points of departure from a certain attraction to these intellectual systems. Even if Shelley never openly endorses idealism in a grand gesture, and his relationship with different kinds of metaphysics always contains a certain experimental element, some words can hardly be interpreted otherwise, for example, that

> 'the solid universe of external things is "such stuff as dreams are made of"': that the world of spatially-organised material bodies is only a complex of ideas in mind, and '[t]he difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought, which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects.[39]

Mary Shelley described his husband as a follower of Berkeley, a statement that has little to do with a direct following of the philosopher, or any concrete evidence that Shelley would base some of his stances extensively or exclusively on Berkeley, "but this can only be meant in the loose sense of one who endorses metaphysical idealism, partly, no doubt, for Berkelean

[36] Holden, 166.
[37] Holden, 166.
[38] Shelley, qtd. by Holden, 166-167.
[39] Holden, 167.

reasons"[40]. Mary Shelley also says that her husband arrived at the idealistic and abandoned the initial materialist metaphysics thanks to the writings of Drummond, especially *Academical Questions* which he studies some time between 1815 and 1817 – that is also where the idealist themes start, according to Holden. In all, Mr Frederick L. Jones says that Shelley learned three things from Drummond: "that 'man is a being of high aspirations'," "that Reason alone has marked deficiencies," and "that men are not led to higher and nobler things through Reason, but through their emotions."[41]

Elizabeth Hitchener letters note Shelley's discontent with materialist doctrines, too, namely the one from June 11, 1811, in which Shelley writes about Locke and God. According to him, Locke "overturned all appeals of feeling in favour of Deity,"[42] therefore God can only be defined as "existing power of existence"[43]. This analytical approach to this materialistic conception was held only for a little while, and in a letter from July 15, 1811, Shelley admits that "analytical reasoning deprived him of all pleasure, that he was finding it impossible to enjoy […] Welsh scenery."[44] As a next step, he rejected reason as the only thing against which truth is judged and with that he removed himself considerably from the materialistic point of view which he occupied previously; in a letter from October 18, 1811, he said that "certainly reason can never either account for, or prove the truth of, feeling"[45]. Following that, Shelley defined God according to Hume – as an 'Innate Passion', the development, therefore, can be summarized as: "from an uncompromising adherence to reason alone, and from the conception

[40] Holden, 167.
[41] Pulos, 476.
[42] Pulos, 476.
[43] Pulos, 476.
[44] Pulos, 476.
[45] Pulos, 476.

of God as the "existing power of existence," to the recognition of feeling as the criterion of transcendent truths and to the conception of God as an "Innate Passion" of man.[46]

One of the arguments against believing in a pure materialist universe was for Shelley, the transient nature of man, and even in the letters that he exchanged with Hitchener, he refers to the immortality of the soul and ""congeniality" [his] term for the affinity between Miss Hitchener and him."[47] One could say that this attests to Shelley's knowledge or feeling of transience of life from which the soul lives on and only in that belief can their relationship not be considered finite. The whole argument of these terms that he uses and the previous inspirations as if converges in the poem "The Cloud", which was written in 1820; in it, Shelley's interest in science, his view of deity and the inevitable abandonment of materialist conceptions are discernible.

The poem thematizes cycles, rebirth, transformation and metamorphoses and as it was noted before, it deals with the idea of the last change of the human form – death; as Shelley writes "I change, but I cannot die"[48]. The poem as a whole contains according to Beverly Taylor a worldview, a philosophy, that meshes two strains together decisively: "viewing and interpreting the universe, a perspective that derives its viability from a synthesis between scientific observation and imaginative coloring"[49]. It is after all science that pervades the world, but it does not work against imagination – something Shelley would never allow for his idea was that poetry and science are two sides of the same coin.

[46] Pulos, 476.
[47] Pulos, 476.
[48] Shelley, "The Cloud," line 76, *The Selected Prose and Poetry of Shelley*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Publishing, 2002) 487. All further mentions are from this edition unless stated otherwise.
[49] Beverly Taylor, "Shelley's Philosophical Perspective and Thematic Concerns in 'The Cloud'," *Interpretations*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1980, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/23240551> Accessed 27 May 2020, 70.

Scientifically speaking, the poem is factual, for which it may be praised, and it admits the fact that Shelley was somewhat interested in science for the entirety of his life. It has been emphasized that it indeed is certain kinds of clouds that we are reading about, and in the lines "I sift the snow on the mountains below,/And their great pines groan aghast;/And all the night 'tis my pillow white,/While I sleep in the arms of the blast"[50] we are getting a description of scenery where the cloud hangs at the cap of a mountain and the wind is blowing strongly and carries away the particles in it – which would be scientifically inaccurate – therefore, Shelley according to D.G. King-Hele employs a human metaphor, the cloud is sleeping[51] as if to find and explanation of the unscientific element; in the last verse, the lines "I am the daughter of Earth and Water, /And the nursling of the Sky; / I pass through the pores of the oceans and shores; / I change, but I cannot die"[52] the process of water vapour forming a droplet by condensation on a grain of sand is described. As King-Hele says, to name others would be possible, but they would only obscure the true goal of the poem where its scientific factuality is only something of an embellishment.

Shelley in the poem condemns, however, a way of seeing the world too scientifically, as others already did. Keats writes about Newton's description of the rainbow which leaves it without magic and dull – explained. Tennyson writes in *In Memoriam* about a flower which, once described scientifically, it still would not be able to say anything about God and man. Shelley's take is that of synthesis: ""The Cloud" stands as testimony to the fact that such a dichotomy, external versus internal worlds, can be successfully resolved by exercise of this "poetical faculty""[53], a tool that Shelley employs in poems, making them his battleground of ideas. Here,

[50] Shelley, "The Cloud," line 13-16.
[51] D.G. King-Hele, "Shelley and Science," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1992, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/531637> Accessed 27 May 2020, 262.
[52] Shelley, "The Cloud," line 73-76.
[53] Taylor, 71.

the two points of view, one knowledgeable, the second beautiful clash. It is not Shelley's wish to land on one or the other, he is just letting the reader know that the problem is there.

Shelley is concerned with what effect poetry could and should have on society but the interpretive frame of coming from materialism to idealism is shaky, especially concerning the fact that he never reached any pure form of the latter either. The possibility of interpretation of Shelley's works removed from the binary succession of materialism ending in idealism which is not a framing of the thesis but a fact of the division of Shelley's philosophical influences to which he relates to in his own unique way, and as we discussed in the beginning, a duality that does not work meaningfully in other ways apart from one holding the primacy of matter and the other the primacy of thought. In that regard, it is interesting to see how the theories that try to interpret Shelley as some kind of materialism go about it, what kinds of materialism are employed and to what aspects of Shelley's work and what similar strands we can find in them to those interpretive frames that relate to the more classically accepted ones.

c. Lucretian Materialism: A Note

Lastly, it is vital to note the possibilities of interpreting Shelley's older works in the light of a materialist, to see how the concepts which we will encounter again, usually interpreted in some sort of Platonic way, can be seen in another way, namely in the light of the philosophy of Lucretius who, perhaps not incidentally, was a Roman poet and philosopher, blending the two vocations much like Shelley. *De rerum natura* is his poem that is priced for his description of the motion of what later would become atoms, which are guided by a concept that will also become familiar later in this text in relation to Shelley – chance, or fortuna, which might resemble in parts Shelley's Necessity. Apart from this, we might recall Lucretius when, in the next chapter, we deal with Shelley's system of the ages.

Lucretius is with his atomist theory of the world ranking among materialists and if we took him as one of the major influences, we would find lots of points of contact in some of the concepts that they, Shelley and him, both operate with, which are based in a materialist kind of philosophy; we have, however, done that with texts further away from what one might call 'mature Shelley' so it might seem that materialist influences are a fluke of Shelley's from which he grew out of. Amanda Jo Goldstein, nevertheless, took the last unfinished fragment, *The Triumph of Life* and contemplates it in the light of Lucretius. Lucretius, according to her, offers something more to the interpretation of *The Triumph* because "Lucretian materialism offered romantic-era thinkers a logic, lexicon, and imaginary—a poetics—fit to connect the epochal epistemic problem of biological life to the period's pressing new sense of its own historicity."[54]

More to the point, if we look into some passages of the poem, we might glimpse a discussion of cause and effect, a problem that Shelley discussed in *Necessity*. If we were to take it up in the vogue of Lucretian atomic theory, Goldstein argues that The Triumph plays with the possibility of violation of the cause-effect relationship. The doctrine of equivocal generation of Lucretius holds it that a living being can come about "without parents, without seeds, and without intercourse"[55] which is a possibility later picked up by Erasmus Darwin and opposed by nobody else than Joseph Priestley who points out that such a thing would violate precisely the cause-effect chain of events. Shelley, nevertheless, "seeks to elude the insularity of organic form"[56] in *The Triumph* and, like Lucretius, hopes to produce new forms of life that are not strictly bound by the laws of causality, after all, they are moulded by *casual* not causal air. The status of the 'exfoliations of the living' as Lucretian atoms gives them the ability to form

[54] Amanda Jo Goldstein, "Growing Old Together: Lucretian Materialism in Shelley's 'Poetry of Life,'" *Representations*, vol. 128, no. 1, 2014, *JSTOR*, Available online <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2014.128.1.60.> Accessed 7 Aug. 2020, 62.
[55] Goldstein, 78.
[56] Goldstein, 78.

something new and different from what they were destined to, according to the surroundings that they were born to.

This points to the fact that some of the concerns of Shelley are not in any way intrinsically bound to materialism, Godwinism or Platonism but are more contingent on the concerns that Shelley had: does the soul exist as a configuration of atoms that once dispersed cannot form the same thing again? Does life succumb to the same problem? And what about the universe? Is nature as a whole in fact dead? Do the cause and effect always have to be observed? It seems that Shelley mingles well with many philosophers who pose and try to answer some questions that he is ready to poetically explore in his poems; it also does not mean that at any given point we might assign him a definite status from a specific school of philosophical thought – he is too fluid for that, and also, it could be said, hard to decide whether seriously set at a worldview or just polemizing with it to create something new and previously unimagined.

As a segue to the next topic, determinism and free will can also be contemplated in terms of Lucretianism, who holds it that there exists in the atomic universe something called a swerve, and that without it there would be perfect predictability of the atom's movement. Shelley's Necessity and its chaotic blind nature in *The Triumph* points to the possibility of describing it in Lucretian terms: the unpredictability of the laws that guide the atoms through the void of the universe is based on *clinamen*, the swerve, that influences the atoms and gives their path the chaotic nature of Brownian motion (see science). If this is the philosopher that can describe some of the metaphysical concepts in Shelley's later years, it is clear that the continuum of materialism-idealism is severely fractured. Shelley more than adhering to a system specific to more philosophers seems to like to adopt and test one of them more intensely, to see if there is something that approaches some kind of truth that is acceptable to him.

2. Godwin: Perfectionism, Necessity & Future Change

The ensuing chapter deals with the influence of William Godwin. The influence was mainly political, it is commonly believed, however, philosophical parallels and inspirations are far-reaching; nevertheless, Shelley's relationship with Godwin was more personal than that. He started a correspondence with Godwin as early as 1811 and offered him financial support as an admirer with a small fortune would. His benevolent freethinking ideas about the nature of marriage and love in 1814 resulted in him eloping with Godwin's daughter, Mary, who became a companion to Shelley for the rest of his life. Although estranged by the deed, Godwin still demanded pay from Shelley, nevertheless, after 1820, when Shelley was expecting to inherit the family estate and that not happening, he fell into debt and was no longer able to support Godwin, even if his admiration to his ideas still lasted.

Godwin is considered an influence on Shelley, namely on his so-called political poems, from which *Queen Mab* is arguably indebted most to him. The influences can be considered political, as Godwin may be understood as one of the forming forces behind what now is anarchism, yet at the same time, one cannot omit the philosophical influence as well, because they go hand in hand. With William Godwin and philosophy, or the exact metaphysical outlook he held, there will always be a problem of definition. Still, for the purposes of this thesis, he will be called a perfectionist – however strong is his contribution to the development of utilitarianism.

The chief principle that will be argued to govern to a large degree Shelley's poems is Godwin's ethical and moral theory that there exists a principle of necessity, inheriting that from Holbach, Priestley or Helvetius, for that matter. Politics in his philosophy is largely displaced by personal morality "as truth conquers error and mind subordinates matter;[57]" the moral code is immutable.

[57] Mark Philp, "William Godwin," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017), available online <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/godwin/> Accessed 1 July 2020.

Any form of tyranny, chiefly the government for Godwin, will be rendered powerless by the spread of knowledge and gradual expansion of the human understanding.[58] His philosophy expected total perfectibility of the human mind at the end of which it would manifest in the physical world. The nuance of his thought cast him out of the usual mould like determinist or materialist, and as Peter Marshall notes, "he went beyond Holbach's epiphenomenonism to assert that mind and matter form parallel interactive schemes."[59] He recognized much like Shelley in the *Necessity of Atheism* that determinism cannot work based on the certainty of causation but only high probabilities linking two events.

In metaphysics, Godwin believed that the principles of natural religion have to be settled first, and even though he devoted many an hour to studying metaphysics, was an atheist and believed in the immortality of the soul – elements which we can see in Shelley as well – he never became a materialist and always adhered to what can be called immaterialism. On this topic, he said that "thought is the most important phenomenon. Can it be the accident of a certain arrangement of particles, not one of which separately has the property of thought? This is an argument in favour of immaterialism"[60]. The path that he sets is the path that in many ways Shelley follows. As to the nature of man, Godwin was optimistic – he held it that man if he was freed from all constraints of society would be the ultimate good creature; knowledge would spread and by the power of reason, he would be able to live life fully, cooperate with his kin and evolve into an even more benevolent being.

It all amounted to Godwin's passive view of involvement which was hard to sympathize with for the young Shelley; one might say, nevertheless, Shelley did not give up. At the time of their meeting, after contacting him by letter, Godwin was not fond of Shelley, *The Necessity of*

[58] Philp.
[59] Peter Marshall, *William Godwin: Philosopher, Novelist, Revolutionary*, (PM Press, 2017) no pagination.
[60] Marshall.

Atheism or his poetry that he found too full of "sparkle and glittering"[61]. Even given the nature of their meeting and the de facto misunderstanding that, among others, led to Shelley eloping with Godwin's daughter as an act of free love, Shelley wanted to be a disciple of Godwin.

The poems that are going to be dealt with are political, as it was said already, and one of the crucial points of departure for Shelley and Godwin is the concept of revolution. While Shelley in his younger years, or maybe some would even say up until the last year of his life[62], did not abhor revolution – a violent overturn of tyrants – Godwin's whole philosophy went against it on the grounds of revolution creating its own tyranny (as a person who lived through French revolution would have seen). His understanding of the word revolution is also remarkably modern, coinciding with our understanding of it as an abrupt political change, violent or non-violent; before that revolution revolved around turning, to bringing things back to where they started, and people would not look at it in any political way. In that, he may have influenced Shelley, who sees revolution as an act politically leftist, as the toppling of tyrants and restoring power for the masses.

Shelley, therefore, took Godwin's passive way of instigating change in the world and spliced it on top of his already formed belief of the nature of the change, that is sudden, as Shelley in no way could be considered a reformist. The means of his change seem to be nested largely in contact with materialists and their concepts of deterministic necessity. For *Queen Mab*, which is the poem which analysis ensues, the concept of Necessity as Shelley developed it is crucial and central; what we see there is a journey on which it embarks from its formation, probably

[61] George Watson, "The Reckless Disciple: Godwin's 'Shelley,'" *The Hudson Review*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1986, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/3856809> Accessed 11 June 2020, 213.
[62] Watson, 215.

influenced by Holbach and Hume to the next stage which is Godwin, only to end its way, as some[63] argue in *The Triumph of Life*.

a. Shelley's Concept of Necessity and Godwin's Perfectibility in Queen Mab

There are two groups that describe Shelley as either adhering to the concept of Necessity throughout his career, still holding it central, or leaving it behind for Intellectual Beauty or Love.[64] As stated earlier, Necessity was largely influenced by French materialists, like Holbach, who instilled in Shelley the concept of blindly working will, Spirit of Nature; Amjad also poignantly points out that "[it] was in internal contradiction with his belief in animism and immortality"[65]. Under the influence of Plato and others, Shelley moves away from Holbach in order to pursue a doctrine of freedom of will that is not predicated by necessitarianism. It is in *Queen Mab* where we can see the first move away from materialism, the adoption of the doctrine of freedom and moral will.[66]

The poem first enjoyed special attention, even if Shelley grew to revile it in the end. After the dissemination of the pirated versions by William Clark sought legal action (which he was not entitled to, hence the pirated nature of the edition), mainly because of its revolutionary potential – it was the favourite of the working class, progressively thinking individuals and Chartists. The story follows Queen Mab and Ianthe whose spirit the queen transports to the edge of the universe to present her with a vision of the past, present and the future; in the classic trajectory of the revolutionary spirit, the past and the present are full of oppression that men have to overcome that to be able to live the utopian future. Several points are given special attention: death is not the end which again brings forth Shelley's belief in the immateriality of the spirit

[63] Fazel A. Amjad, "Natural and Ethical Necessity in Shelley's Epistemology," *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 17:1, 98.
[64] Amjad, 98.
[65] Amjad, 101.
[66] Amjad, 101.

that is vested in the corporeal form and the future, and there is the possibility of perfecting the humankind – much like Godwin would have had it.

The poem is divided into those prophetic visions and notes. The topics of these range from Shelley's focus on the necessity of atheism or free love that he inherited from Godwin, again, or vegetarianism. Two of the topics are more important and will be traced here: the concept of Necessity, as Shelley began to develop it, and perfectibility. These two terms seem to be in contradiction of one another – if there is a necessity for something to happen, how does perfectibility figure in it? In perfectibility the free will of a human being should be the driving force of the change, then how is it possible that what is to happen is already known? As the poem has it, Ianthe's spirit is summoned to accomplish deeds that have been predetermined for her – Queen Mab will show her what to do.

About *Queen Mab*, Shelley writes in a letter to Hookham that "[he is] determined to apply [himself] to study that is hateful and disgusting to my very soul, but which is, above all studies, necessary for him who would be listed as a mender of antiquated abuses."[67] It is a text that encompasses his youthful passions to mend wrongs, dreams of reform and the quest for the perfect society – that may be something inherited by Godwin, who was, above all, a social thinker whose concern for metaphysics was perhaps not so central, however, as Grabo argues for Shelley, while trying to allot space and time in the poem to those questions, deeper problems lurked beneath, problems of metaphysics that would become more important to Shelley later on; for that reason "the central questions of ethics and metaphysics [are] written in the somewhat confused thought of the poem"[68].

[67] Carl Grabo, *The Magic Plant*, (New York: University of North Carolina Press, 1932) 102.
[68] Grabo, 102.

The incompetency of one agent to the other is often pinpointed and causes the confusion in Shelley's early major poems, like *Queen Mab*; Grabo in *The Magic Plant* argues that Shelley was converted on the path that he walks as if to Mormonism or Methodism[69] which again gives off the idea that Shelley's first attempts are misguided in some way, doubly so if we look at Shelley's previous rejection of god. In *Queen Mab* god is also rejected, and instead of him, the Spirit of activity is put into his place, a sort of a force that moves the universe: "Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power, / Necessity! Thou mother of the world!"[70] he expletes. Grabo assigns this move as dethronement of the pagan gods and the God, both of which are supplanted with Necessity. Shelley's view could be described as "an unsuccessful emulsion of anti-Christian, pantheistic, deistic, materialistic, and necessitarian principles"[71].

What is this Necessity, and where are its philosophical roots? Frank B. Evans argues that Necessity sprung as a reaction to Godwin's "Of Free Will and Necessity" in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, and goes on to supplant other critics, like H. N. Brailsford who says that "*Queen Mab* is nothing but Godwin in verse, with prose notes which quote and summarise him";[72] Ellsworth Barnard, S. F. Gingerich, W. E. Peck all concur. Godwin himself defines Necessity in the chapter above like this:

> He who affirms that all actions are necessary, means, that, if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not in any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted. According to this assertion there is in the transactions of mind nothing loose, precarious and uncertain.[73]

and

[69] Grabo, 113.
[70] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, VI, line 197-198, 44.
[71] Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1948) 29.
[72] Frank B. Evans, "Shelley, Godwin, Hume, and the Doctrine of Necessity," *Studies in Philology*, Oct., 1940, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct., 1940) available online <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4172506,> Accessed 1 July 2020, 632.
[73] Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, available online <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Godwin/pj45.html> Accessed 1 July 2020, 286.

> It is acknowledged that in the events of the material universe every thing is subjected to this necessity. The tendency of investigation and enquiry relatively to this topic of human knowledge has been, more effectually to exclude chance, as our improvements extended. [74]

He continues to embark on an inquiry of cause and effect that we have seen in the previous chapter, arguing that if a certain phenomenon happens in the cause of another, man has the tendency to see them as cause and effect – the material universe is therefore for him and Shelley alike a succession of events to which we can never really glimpse the cause. Some believe it is God; some believe it may be Necessity. It is very likely that Shelley, not only that he is inspired by Godwin to put these principles into verse now at this point of his career, but he was also already under his influence while writing *The Necessity of Atheism*.

To be completely thorough, it is necessary to note that Godwin did not come up with the theory of necessity out of thin air – the main inspiration to him was David Hume. As well as Godwin, Hume has it that there are certain events that happen in conjunction with other events that people observe in the universe and then by the power of association hold for causes and effects; there are no reasonable grounds for believing that this is so, which Hume concedes and upon which he bases the unreasonable nature of the operation of the human mind, therefore denies the concept of necessary connection; Godwin does not say any such thing, for "we reasonably believe that these events are bound together by a perfect necessity, and exclude from our ideas of matter and motion the supposition of chance or an uncaused event"[75] – which would place some stress on the importance of experience upon which men base their actions and expectations.

Another case to be solved is the agency of those who are involved in such action, as there can be motions of the celestial objects, physical objects, but human actions as well involved in this

[74] William Godwin, 286-287.
[75] Godwin, 290.

theory. History, too, is observed to move on tracks similar to one another, following similar reasonings, similar motives. Both Hume and Godwin, who progressively appears to have modelled his argument on Hume's, argue that social deterrents such as punishments for a crime could not work should the perception of causality fail to be observed by people. Therefore, it is important to know the difference between voluntary and involuntary motions; if we can discern all the causes that led to a result and it is in line with our expected outcome it is voluntary, if it is not the motion is believed to "take place independently of the mind, or to be the result of thought and perception, [and] is so [that is involuntary] called, because the consequences of that motion, either in whole or in part, did not enter into the view of the mind when the motion commenced."[76]

This is where the central paradox on the level of society emerges. As Evans points out, both Hume and Godwin believe that people en masse do not subscribe to the doctrine of necessity and rather believe in free will and liberty although they believe in a firm set causality between action and result; nevertheless,

> in the operation of their minds, however, they perceive no such connection between motive and action. Hence they disbelieve in the presence of any necessary connection in the sphere of human actions, failing to realize that the connection between material causes and effects, according to Hume and Godwin, is in truth equally imperceptible.[77]

In practice, however, in their day to day lives, men expect certain results, be it in trade, where if they offer a good price for their goods, they sell them, or the employee expects their employer to pay fair wages for work; or even more, they do not expect their tools to change their figurative minds and stop working suddenly (all of these are used as examples in Hume and Godwin).

Shelley read both of these authors as Godwin's notes would have sent him to Hume if he had not read him at an earlier time before that; it is, therefore, reasonable to believe that there is a

[76] Godwin, 298.
[77] Evans, 635.

connection between that cause and the poem that Shelley wrote. First, the notes: Shelley is the master of condensation of the ideas that we have discussed so far, he writes:

> The idea of necessity is obtained by our experience of the connection between objects, the uniformity of the operations of nature, the constant conjunction of similar events, and the consequent inference of one from the other. Mankind are therefore agreed in the admission of necessity if they admit that these two circumstances take place in voluntary action.[78]

Shelley very obviously bases his concept of Necessity, that is the mother of all, on Godwin or Hume, respectively. Firstly, he argues that not only physical action is condemned to this basis of operation but the mental processes as well – that is the argument for revealing the science in human affairs; secondly, Shelley uses, funnily enough, word for word, Hume's idea of an aged husbandman, who is more experienced than the young beginner, an ability that he acquired by experience, being able to predict the movement of Necessity, so to speak; other examples that he uses are also traceable to Godwin or Hume. Shelley speaks quite unequivocally about Necessity, it being the only acceptable, and not only that but also accepted metaphysical concept that he is willing to propose:

> None but the few fanatics who are engaged in the herculean task of reconciling the justice of their God with the misery of man, will longer outrage common sense by the supposition of an event without a cause, a voluntary action without a motive. History, politics, morals, criticism, all grounds of reasonings, all principles of science, alike assume the truth of the doctrine of Necessity.[79]

What is this all for, what is the purpose of establishing this very firm concept in the notes? For Shelley, it is mainly moral; from that point on, he leaves onto his path and no longer copies the arguments of Godwin or Hume. While Hume as a sceptic assumes that there is no rational basis to any science; Shelley takes on more Godwinian conclusion, that is, that all actions are necessary and they had to have taken place given their circumstances, in a word "Shelley and

[78] Shelley, "Notes on *Queen Mab*," VI, l. 198, *The Selected Prose and Poetry of Shelley*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Publishing, 2002), 79.
[79] Shelley, "Notes on *Queen Mab*," VI, l. 198, 79.

Godwin mean that the necessity of causation inheres in the structure of reality."[80] The argument of Evans goes on to propose that indeed these are different ends met from the same beginning, a theory of existence that is completely deterministic, which he proposes that Shelley adopted from Godwin but points out that Godwin has his root in Hume; it is also good to remember that this determinism is a legacy of the philosophes, namely Holbach, at least for Shelley.

The morality of Shelley's that he derives from this lies in consideration of reward and punishment, the effect of accepting Christian morality more than its metaphysics[81]; what he also still clings to is the destruction of religion. This hold of anti-religious sentiments persevered up until 1813, while it may be noted again that it was not completely what it seemed. Shelley's idea of a deity was, according to Carlos Baker, mainly pantheist although it may have taken him some time to realize that; to philosophically cement this idea he went to Pope and his idea that all parts are a tremendous whole. In *Queen Mab,* this manifests as a spirit of Nature whose lines throughout it echo Pope and his *Essay on Man*.[82] The spirit exists "alike in every human heart"[83], and it differs from the unnatural tyrants by her "throne of power"[84] which is "unappealable"[85], it is in stark contrast with the rotten human world; though the lines this pantheism of Shelley through:

> Yet not the lightest leaf
> That quivers to the passing breeze
> Is less instinct with thee;
> Yet not the meanest worm
> That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead,

[80] Evans, 639.
[81] Baker, 31.
[82] Baker, 32.
[83] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, III, line 216.
[84] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, III, line 218.
[85] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, III, line 218.

Less shares thy eternal breath![86]

When men are one with the spirit of Nature, they can follow a certain virtuous path to perfectibility, Godwin's concept. For Shelley, this means a Golden Age which is an extension of what Godwin would have had. The Golden Age is a concept that interestingly exists in European thought since *Works and Days* of Hesiod, and it is the highest of the progressively declining ages of men; it is a harmonious place where there is peace, prosperity and ironically stability. A fun little caveat there could be the fact that the Golden Age ended in Hesiod by Prometheus bequeathing fire to men and sending them then to the downward trajectory; Shelley also abandons the concept of a better age waiting for men in the future with *Prometheus Unbound* in which his whole outlook changes. He acknowledges Hesiod in the notes, too.

The description of the paradise takes place in the eight and ninth canto of the poem and paints a picture of a world where there is a mutual synergy of men and the place:

The habitable earth is full of bliss;
Those wastes of frozen billows that were hurled
By everlasting snow-storms round the poles,
Where matter dared not vegetate or live,
But ceaseless frost round the vast solitude
Bound its broad zone of stillness, are unloosed;
And fragrant zephyrs there from spicy isles
Ruffle the placid ocean-deep, that rolls
Its broad, bright surges to the sloping sand,
Whose roar is wakened into echoings sweet
To murmur through the heaven-breathing groves

[86] Shelley, *Queen Mab,* I, line 269-274.

And melodize with man's blest nature there.[87]

The places that were not habitable are reacting to men living in harmony with nature, as Grabo notes "man is in harmony" and "the planetary spheres move to music,"[88] again, an idea that is worked to its full potential later in *Prometheus Unbound*. The hell on Earth is moved by Necessity into this harmonious state where not even lions eat their prey and play with children. What is more, men are moved by seeing this change and react to it as well, creating a feedback loop of constant improvement. Once miserable, they are able to continue this virtuous path, still improving, and "every shape and mode of matter lends its force to the omnipotence of mind"[89] an idea that lends itself directly from Godwin.

Shelley claims that "the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life"[90] and that this is in many religious texts marked in some way; the theory that there is a point in history where man went astray is irrefutable to Shelley at that point. According to him Adam and Eve eating from the tree of evil are a metaphor of people being robbed of their eternal life by a wrong diet – a belief that seems to be a bit far-fetched – however, vegetarianism was a large part of Shelley vision then. It has, nevertheless, roots in Godwin's perfectibility and if it is possible in Shelley's mind to corrupt oneself by action so banal there is the belief that by following a set of rules (one of which is a vegetarian diet) men could aspire to their former heights again; it is a version of Godwin's idea that if men follow a virtuous path through their reform their mental processes begin to manifest physically which leads to their improved lifespan/disease eradication (hence the omnipotence of the mind).

[87] Shelley, *Queen Mab,* VIII, line 58-69.
[88] Grabo, 128.
[89] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, VIII, line 235-236.
[90] Shelley, "Notes on *Queen Mab*," VIII, ll. 211-12, 97.

Baker describes this with a wonderful set of words; according to him, Shelley believed in "a wonderful cessation of bloodthirstiness among the predatory beasts.[91]" His version of the Golden Age is according to the same author also taking from Pope's *Messiah,* and apart from Godwin, he takes notes from Condorcet as well.[92] Shelley, although he proposes the golden age to come in *Queen Mab*, never adopts the Christian outlook of sin and believes that if certain reforms in day to day lives are undertaken the ideal harmony can be reached.

The talk of virtuosity is predicated on the Godwinian concept of moral will, and that it is not entirely corrupt as Christian faith would have it.[93] It also embodies the problem there and the arduous path that it sets the philosophy on: if men are not corrupt at their core and the original sin is a hoax, and at the same time Necessity dictates the actions of every man and woman, anything they do is caused potentially by a force beyond their control. This is reflected in the view of Shelley that he expressed in the review of his wife's Frankenstein: the crimes of the monster are not its own or its "propensity to evil", but they come "irresistibly"[94] from other causes that are beyond knowing. In that view, the world denies us free will and is only a set of causes in which we do not have any say. The contradictions of free will and action are there to stay.

An interesting observation made by Grabo is that a theme from the later *Prometheus Unbound* concerning Christianity is already present in *Queen Mab* in the character of Ahasuerus who is there in the allegory to show the horrors perpetrated by the Christian faith on the Earth, a man who is doomed to walk the Earth in agony as a punishment for his insubordination to God; he is, however, in the face of his punishment stubbornly clinging to his unbreakable will, a heroic

[91] Baker, 33.
[92] Baker, 33.
[93] George Watson, "The Reckless Disciple: Godwin's "Shelley"," *The Hudson Review* , Summer, 1986, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), 224.
[94] Shelley, "On Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus," *Athenaeum*, 10 November 1832, available online <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/PShelley/frankrev.html> Accessed 2 July 2020.

stand against the forces of determination. The journey starts with *Wandering Jew*, continues with Ahasuerus and is finished with Prometheus, whose liver was pecked on by eagles eternally for his gift of fire and therefore knowledge to men. In that, he embodies the ultimate heroism that goes against the idea of determinism – by going against the set principles and breaking them apart. Perhaps this is one of the cracks that later form Shelley.

The unsuccessfulness is debatable in some of the points, and the overwhelming damnation of the text by many authors maybe even surprising, however, there are certain tensions apparent that Shelley becomes to work out throughout his career. The tension between Necessity that is called the Spirit of Nature too, and the blindness of it, the fact that we are never able to prove any causality of events, they are theories hardly reconcilable, the metaphysics of this world would be elaborate indeed if we consider the movement of Ianthe's soul from her body, a division that therefore exists and in the background states their mutually exclusive existence; from this also springs the immateriality of death that is not to be feared because of the eternal nature of spirit. There is a belief in the evolution, perfectibility, of the human mind through the application of reason, and by doing so, conquering the adversities that stand in the way of the eventual perfection. Moreover, without the pained synthesis of these ideas, is there not a system of metaphysics that would fit Shelley's ideas more?

There is a passage in *Queen Mab* that describes the strange state before birth when the "naked soul" has not found its home yet; the birth has not wakened the soul. The proposition made by Grabo how to interpret this belief in the pre-existence of the soul in a realm that is divided from the worldly one is to consider Platonism and the role of it in Shelley's later poetry, a proposition with which it is easy to concur knowing the development. He enumerates Shelley's beliefs at that point as materialist still, and deterministic, evolutionary both in the physical and spiritual sense. He believed in the importance of reason to the achievement of destiny, in the power of

will to resist the hostile forces, and in the possibility of the attainment of heaven of sorts. These beliefs are to be solved by Platonism.[95]

His subsequent effort at a similar thing like he had attempted in *Queen Mab* is *The Masque of Anarchy* which helps us understand his view on how changes should be implemented in the world, the same changes that would lead to the Golden Age in *Queen Mab*. While some[96] would argue that *Queen Mab* is a complex poem, going against our previous analyses that interpreted it as a relatively straight forward moral allegory that was a favourite genre at the time, The *Masque of Anarchy* is a simpler one still. While the former is clad in an esoteric subject matter and tries to discuss a complex metaphysical view, however unsuccessfully, the latter is straight forward and seems as if it tried to reach a yet wider audience with it call for change. The central question here is, if Godwin was a gradualist who saw progress in the small increment that is achieved by reasonably following the trail of Necessity and Shelley followed him, could *The Masque* be interpreted as a violent call for revolution after Peterloo Massacre?

Godwin categorically denies violence any ground in his theory; revolution simply is not the way, a politician should at least postpone it if it cannot be avoided; that is true also even if the belief should be in the absolute peacefulness of the revolution. *Queen Mab* is in line with this, wherever there is talk about change, that change happens passively with the proper education and thinking; *The Masque* is not so clear about that, and that may be the reason why it is believed to be the song of the non-violent revolution by the likes of Paul Foot, and on the other hand, those voices who would question its ending, advocating at least an ambivalent stance, therefore differing from the view of Godwin, who is a gradualist to the very core.

[95] Grabo, 118.
[96] Seth T. Reno, "The Violence of Form in Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy.'" *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 62, 2013, available on *JSTOR*,<www.jstor.org/stable/24396081. Accessed 23 June 2020> 82.

What is important about this is the different view in which we have to see Shelley and his writing. Even if he decided to write a text less ephemeral than *Queen Mab*, Shelley would be a poet first and foremost; his decidedly working-class aim aside, for him it is words that matter and a poem is a place where the battles of uncertain stances can take place. Seth T. Reno found it useful to approach Shelley's method from the point of view of negative dialectics. Negative dialectics is a form of thinking, or a critique of philosophy itself that uses concepts to describe object – which is an unreliable technique since the object is not the concept wholly and even should we find a better concept it still is not the thing itself; we continue to exponentially reach the limit, but the two never touch.

The poem is targeted at the future, its betterment, instilling that golden age, as it is in *Queen Mab*; however, it does not give much in the way of specifics. It is marked by what Marc Redfield calls "radical uncertainty"[97] in which dwells its strength, too; where some see this as an ambiguity that collapses the poem inwards, Redfield sees it as the embodiment of the whole paradox, that is the possibility of reading the poem both ways as violent and non-violent. Those who want to see it as yet another Godwinianism embodied could do that, and we could accept the other solution and see Shelley breaking away from Godwin; however, if we accept that Shelley wants to do none of those above, an interesting view opens up: Shelley is postponing judgement, takes up the role of poetry as a neutral ground, rejecting interpretation. As Borushko argues Shelley is using the property of art which is "non-violent in its inherent resistance to the domination characterizing the historical moment" and uses that move to "substantive reimagining of the social,"[98] a motion similar to the one in *Queen Mab*, one could argue.

[97] Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 151.
[98] Matthew C. Borushko, "Violence and Nonviolence in Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"," Keats-Shelley Journal , 2010, Vol. 59 (2010) available on *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41409533>Accessed 2 July 2020, 98.

However, Reno argues that much like Adorno would have had it, the ability to take one's poetry out of the historical context to "[transcend] the naïve notions of synthesis and reconciliation"[99] is possible to achieve only for the greats of literature. By doing so, Shelley, a great of literature, imagines possibilities, nevertheless, differently from *Queen Mab*; *Mab* is an optimistic engagement with Godwin's ideas that is directed at a different audience than *Masque* that still believes in concrete change that it could instil in politicians of the future[100], while *Masque* is a moment suspended in the air, using "scattered fragments of reality"[101] and no longer dream vision rapt from reality. It can be argued that at the point of conception of the successor of Mab, Shelley rejects Godwin's idea of postponement of revolution, which we might see later in Prometheus and the metaphor of volcanic eruption (the means, however, staying non-violent), and also his gradualist tendencies, possibly therefore even the idea of certain perfectibility of the material world via the mind.

Shelly is believed[102] to be a person who is oriented towards the future in terms of at least political progress, that is, direct action in the present would not occupy his mind too much; if this is a result of the image of the ineffectual angel, it still lives on. There can be not much ado about it as we have just discussed his view of perfecting the human mind to become better in the future, marching towards the Golden Age. However, poetry for him had powers that in his times faded, powers that were creative and possibly transformative.

Queen Mab has set Shelley on a path that discussed Godwin, however, behaved largely on tracts defined by him. In *The Masque of Anarchy*, the points of departure become more prevalent, chiefly in the personification of Hope. She is the Godwinian principle of perfectibility, as Reno

[99] Reno, 87.
[100] Reno, 87.
[101] Reno, 87.
[102] Kir Kuiken, "Shelley's Metaleptic Imagination and the Future of Modern Sovereignty," *Imagined Sovereignties: Toward a New Political Romanticism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) available on *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0411.8> Accessed 26 June 2020, 169.

points out, and represents the non-violent means of resistance against the violent actions of the oppressor. An intriguing reading of one passage is offered by the same person: while the poem is largely accepted as a call for passive resistance, not the action, Reno proposes that "her expectation critiques the soldiery of the Peterloo Massacre as well as, in the persons of the protestors, Godwinianism itself;"[103] it makes sense if we consider the effect that their passive protests achieved. While Godwin would not condone them as he did not believe that protest is a viable means of achieving social change, Shelley did not adhere to that, and the Manchester events set him on a path that he was to crown at the end of his life.

Shelley turned to poetry. He needed poetry that would harness such socio-political power to instigate change that he in his youth craved so much. If there was to be change, what is more, a change for the better, in the direction of perfection, there has to be a predetermined outcome denying the people who are subject to it agency, but also incentive: as Kir Kuiken notes, "what reason would anyone have to risk imprisonment or death for a political cause of nature itself already dictates that a particular change will take place?"[104] That is why we at first see Shelley following Godwin who conceptualizes his Necessity in the same way. However, progressively Shelley sees that it is not good enough, what is more, that it curtails his own goals at the very core of his change-making vehicle; it is built on shaky, contradictory grounds.

The first instance of a break is *The Masque of Anarchy* in which Shelley foreshadows his idea about the prophetic power of poetry. For poets to be the legislators he believed them to be, it is necessary to create poetry as space where imagination is the chief moving force, and it creates a reality for itself that is fractured from the past and present (that may be one of the reasons for the raptures that happen in many Shelley's poems); it is a space where the imagination of the future is possible without the constraints put on it by the past and present. Shelley develops his

[103] Reno, 93.
[104] Kuiken, 170.

theory of the primacy of imagination further, and it will be dealt with in the penultimate chapter in connection with *A Defence of Poetry*; on the following lines we will deal with his severance from the necessitarian principle, and its substitution/succession for different principles, namely Love; whether there can be such a clear cut division is to be discussed.

b. Prometheus Unbound as a Continuation not Cessation of Necessity

Prometheus Unbound is the poem in which Shelley repudiates many of the belief that just have been stated here. The chief one is the necessitarian principle which to a degree denies the free moral agency of men which conflicted with his previous beliefs, mainly the aimless direction in which Necessity directed things which he believed to be only due to its imperceivability by reason. That, however, came into conflict with the nature of poets as prophets, legislators whose job is to awaken people who have become enslaved by the false concepts of things. It is also the poem where his connection to Plato and idealism comes to bloom.

As mentioned earlier, the role of the hero in the poem has some consequences for Shelley's metaphysical views as well. The common conception according to Sperry is that the closet play thematizes man's ability to transform his surroundings according to some ideals[105], and one can see why that is: the beginning of the play sees Prometheus's change of heart, change so profound that he rejects hate to which end he comes thanks to the suffering instilled in him by Jupiter for his crime of stealing the flame; the Curse, at the same time, is lifted; Prometheus, 'eyeless in hate' at the start, proclaims: "I speak in grief, / Not exultation, for I hate no more, / As then ere misery made me wise."[106] and "Though I am changed so that aught evil wish / Is

[105] Sperry, "Necessity and the Role of the Hero in Prometheus Unbound," *PMLA*, vol. 96, no. 2, 1981, available on *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/461991>, Accessed 2 July 2020, 242.
[106] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Selected Prose and Poetry of Shelley*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Publishing, 2002) Act I, line 55-57, 231.
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dead within; although no memory be / Of what is hate, let them not lose it now!"[107] This is the change that Prometheus undergoes, and the change has a profound influence on the world around him.

Baker observes that the change has a deterministic character, while there is very little to no explanation for it, as Sperry adds. The sudden shift of Prometheus from hate to love, however, sets to motion the wheelhouse of other characters who have patiently waited for their sign to go, "the dispatch of Panthea to Asia, the latter's transformation, her descent to the cave of Demogorgon, his ascent to the throne of Jupiter, the tyrant's futile resistance and downfall, the unbinding of Prometheus"[108] all of this instigated by that one change of the hero. It begs the question pertaining to the assumption made earlier: does Shelley indeed shift to different concepts, from Necessity to Love? Or maybe it is so that Love is an important catalyst to the change, but it still runs on the necessitarian/deterministic principles acquired in Shelley's youth?

It would make sense from that point of view that even when following Godwin, neither Godwin nor Hume for that matter or anybody else was able to answer as to the origin of the necessary movements in physical actions or mental ones, too; they were simply beyond reason. Fittingly, we can see Milton Wilson assume that a part of the play has already taken place before the first act even begins, only then we can reconcile it with him being a full-fledged character and not just a cog in the machinery, however integral to the whole motion. There simply is a confusion as to what caused Prometheus to renounce hate at that particular time which brings out the same concerns about free will and whether there exists an active role of men in their lives. For that reason, Sperry argues, Necessity is often written off by many critics as having only transient

[107] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I, line 70-72, 231.
[108] Sperry, 243.

influence of Shelley – it being a mere stepping stone to doctrines more mature that would not conjure "a philosophy of cold, unrelieved gloom"[109].

The question is that of causality which we have seen Shelley deal with as early as in *The Necessity of Atheism*. Sperry takes Georg Henrik von Wright's theory of causality between event to argue that it is not change that is important to consider when we ponder Prometheus' incentive but constancy. He follows Hume's argument about the minuteness of certain effects and their imperceivability, and argues that constancy has to have its role, too, in the whole story of Prometheus, i.e. the condition that Prometheus makes possible is an important moving vehicle of the change. In that, he would again echo the Godwinian observation that people are only vessels influenced by the larger goings-on, which in many instances are unperceivable.

Necessity, therefore, did not vanish from Shelley's thinking. For example, in *The Revolt of Islam,* it is the force that is depicted as the eagle and a snake fighting at a mountaintop, an image that lends something from the Promethean myth as well. It is a story of good and evil, but Necessity is not a power that would guarantee the outcome to be good; while we can be sure that in *Queen Mab* it directs things in such a way that the Golden Age will have come some day in the future, this sureness vanishes somewhere around *The Revolt*. This seems to be in line with what we have said about its philosophical origins. Moreover, a similar conception of Necessity we can still find in *Prometheus*, however, there is more to it.

Demogorgon could be interpreted as a fickle representation of what has become of Necessity, or at least that is close to the interpretation that Sperry offers.[110] In a move from the mother of all, if we accept that Demogorgon represents Necessity in some later form in Shelley, it is no longer omnipotent power and is only partially able to fashion destiny according to the

[109] Sperry, 244.
[110] Sperry, 248.

knowledge available to it; it still is imperceptible to the humans though what the direction is. The hierarchy is different as well since Jupiter is not the supreme monarch of the universe but is still answers to the spirit of Love. It would be just to assume that Necessity only changed form and was given less prominence, nevertheless staying in Shelley's cannon and his metaphysical conception that goes in a direction opposite to Demiurge.

Jupiter is in a strange position in relation to the governing principle of the universe, and it might be because of the enduring split between the delegation of Shelley's forces of Necessity, Love and Demogorgon. In the poem, Demogorgon is coiled underneath Jupiter's throne as if to suggest the closeness of his inevitable doom and dethronement – such is the way of things, the tyrant is destined to fall and whatever he does to cling to power is futile; on the other hand, at the end of the poem, there is a warning that a different tyrant might come in the future if men act in a way that should bring him about. If we still regarded Necessity in the same way as in *Queen Mab,* would it not constantly lead men towards better tomorrows? Would it need to discipline them with a threat of a tyrant's return? In that sense, we might return to a different revolution, an eternal return of the same.

Demogorgon seems to be also only a messenger of some of the changes about to come (in a similar way that a poet is for Shelley which is dealt with in an ensuing chapter). That might be due to the source material of it, which is Demiurge. Demiurge is a concept used by Plato that he borrowed from the vulgar name for public workers, or from even later use which denoted a 'craftsman' or an 'artisan' (which included heralds, soothsayers and physicians, too). In *Timaeus* Plato gives Demiurge the role of arranging chaos into form. It is there to glimpse the

eternal forms and according to what is sees bring them to life out of the chaotic matter that it has at hand; it is sometimes because of this believed to be the personification of reason.[111]

Demogorgon is certainly derived from that, and more on that in the next chapter, but let us not omit another important aspect of it pertaining to the conundrums presented here. If Demogorgon topples Jupiter anyway and we just have to mind that the archetype of him does not come back some day, what does action mean? From the point of view of revolutionary action after the 1790s, it is hard for Shelley to subscribe to either notion, be it Godwinian gradualism through perfectionism or to a violent revolution; the same indecisiveness we might see in the debate between free will and necessitarianism. Both of these can be resolved if we accept poetry a sort of playground on which the ages long battles between these take place.

Concerning a definitive reading, we might adopt multiple, depending on the level of maturity and complexity we want to lend to Shelley and according to the role of the hero[112]: either we would like to lend him some agency in order to see him as a proper hero, someone who can move the natural order in some way, it is his name, after all, in the title of the book; or we might see it as an act of transformation through self-betterment, through renouncing hate bringing in the good that one want to see in the world, as Wilson puts it "casting out hate, self-contempt, and despair, […] returning good for evil, and […] maintaining and independent resolute will in the face of persecution"[113]; or better still as an active indecisiveness of the hero who depicts the perfect balance between acting and not acting, the "ideal balance between the active and passive powers of human nature"[114].

[111] Adam Augustyn et al., "Demiurge," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, April 15, 2013, available online <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Demiurge> Accessed 2 July 2020.
[112] Sperry, 250.
[113] Milton Wilson, Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 299.
[114] Sperry, 252.

In this, a perfect synthesis of the above-mentioned elements can be achieved. The questions of Necessity and free will, the causality of events, the dilemma between violent or non-violent revolution, or better still, a gradual way of making progress, all of these can be answered by *Prometheus Unbound*, or maybe as early as *The Revolt of Islam*, where he already strived to strike a balance between the male and female principle and good and evil. They are discussed often in the context of William Godwin to who Shelley looked up for a long time and was influenced by, however, they are also representative of the points of departure with him and the still-standing influences from other philosophers like James Drummond or even Holbach.

While Necessity, one would concede, is still an important aspect of the later poems after *Queen Mab*, it is no longer the mother of all; it is a mere subordinate principle to the principle of Love which will be dealt with in the next chapter that is concerned with Shelley's Platonic influences. The conundrum of action and non-action is one that Shelley had to solve and in that he severs himself most from Godwin who would not condone suddenness of action and change; nevertheless Shelley still abhorred violence, too. Therefore he had to operate in such a way in which the change comes from within the person and affect the world around him only by that change, chaining the events that ultimately lead to the demise of tyranny. It may not be completely successful, but in believing that poetry can allow for experimental ground for discussion of such ideas, we may observe the motions of Shelley's metaphysical conceptions. That would not be against his claim that poets touch upon the eternal laws of the universe.

3. Plato & Approaching Idealism: Mimesis and the Role of the Poet

Idealism is what some may consider Shelley's last stage in his journey through metaphysical views, some may take other approaches and see him in the close of his life a bit despondent, and that there is "something distinctive about the poems and letters of his last months"[115] which should be a shorthand for the author possibly contemplated suicide. As it is with someone like Shelley, there always will figure a number of interpretations of his works and to settle on a definitive one is impossible; that is why the end of his life and the works written at that period are accompanied by notes from critics who lauded for example *The Triumph of Life* as an example of "mature scepticism"[116], others may see the influence of Plato in Prometheus *Unbound*; the thread that runs throughout his oeuvre and is the volatile and uncertain nature of Shelley's poetry that refuses to cease to question.

a. Shelley's Engagement with Plato and His Ideas

Idealist doctrines, however, influenced him even sooner than at the end of his life. There are accounts of Shelley being interested in Platonic doctrines going as far to his student days from Thomas Jefferson Hogg who notes that Shelley, surprisingly, around the year 1810 talked highly about idealism and spewed idealist philosophy whilst almost overlooking the physical world or regarding it only as an offshoot of the ideal one[117] – one has to question to what degree would Hogg influence *The Necessity of Atheism* which seems to be leaning towards the material, or to what degree was Shelley influenced by him. Interesting to note is also the claim that their knowledge came from a translation of a few lines of Plato's dialogues; in all, up until Italy and Shelley's later life his knowledge of Plato came from French translations, translations

[115] Michael Henry Scrivener, "An Ethical Idealism: (1821-1822)," *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1982), *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zv2ch.11> Accessed 2 June 2020.
[116] Stuart Sperry, Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 19.
[117] Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1906), 72.

of Floyer Sydenham and Thomas Taylor extensively. He was interested in the concept of pre-existence of the soul, in *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus* which dialogue Hogg remembers reading with him.[118]

Shelley had a long-lasting engagement with Plato and platonic ideas in general which he tried to weave into the tapestry of his poetry and philosophy to reconcile his own varying beliefs about the nature of the world that had been brought about from different sources, some of which we have dealt with so far. His knowledge of Plato must have been intimate as he translated a volume of his works: *The Banquet* (or *The Symposium)* in 1818 (which was in the summer when he was low on funds, and it could be surmised that the act of translation was aided by that fact), and *Ion* in 1821; Shelley's translations have been described as "the poetry of a philosopher rendered by the prose of a poet[119]." Be that as it may, the point of contact between Shelley and Plato has been discussed to no end since then. That summer in Italy seems to have ignited a spark that made Shelley more associable with Plato; as a form of a disclaimer, however, poems of earlier dating such as "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" can hardly be ignored and will be dealt with in the following chapter, so if not the first spark, a certain accelerating nature of Shelley's interest in platonic ideas became more apparent since then.

Shelley's attitude to Plato had really been of a changing nature throughout his short-lived life. Ross G. Goodman identifies three phases of Plato's influence in Shelley's work: from 1810 to 1812 when he "considered Plato a mere dreamer lost in a world of fantasy[120];" during this period Shelley was under the influence of materialist philosophers such as D'Holbach and Helvetius. From 1812, in Shelley's career, there is a rising interest in doctrines that spring from Godwin and the Orient. Under that influence – which was based on the idea of cyclical nature of culture,

[118] Hogg, 72.
[119] R. G. Grylls, *Claire Clairmont* (London: J. Murray, 1939), 98.
[120] Ross G. Woodman, "Shelley's Changing Attitude to Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1960), available online <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2708098> 497.

its creation, preservation, destruction and renovation – resulting in the belief that there is a Golden Age of Western culture to be had in the future. Under that impression, Plato became to look much more serious of a thinker for Shelley – "a mythopoetic poet whose use of the Orphic myths prefigured his own idealistic, revolutionary philosophy[121]." Finally, in the last two years of Shelley's life "he reconsidered Plato's rejection of the myth-makers from his Republic and re-examined the role of dialectic in his dialogues[122]" and even accepted poet's inability to provide anything more than a probable account which was provided to him via divine inspiration[123].

What Shelley seems to be more interested in then is being put into a continuum of tradition, it would appear; even though he does not see eye to eye with Plato and does not agree with him on all the points, Shelley, in the genuine Platonic spirit carries a conversation with him and, moreover, is able to lead a dialogue with something as distant, one can imagine, to essentially a socialist as the Malthusian doctrine. For that reason, the likes of Ware put Shelley's interest in Plato into the general context of art as it existed in Western culture for centuries. She claims that

> Shelley writes his [*Defence*] in such a manner as to invite continual consideration of the long literary traditions behind it; the very title constitutes an allusion to Sidney, who, himself, showed consciousness of Plato's arguments and the subsequent tradition throughout his *Defence*. The Platonic tradition is a strong current of continuity in Western thought, of which Shelley is a late voice.[124]

Kathleen Raine says that Shelley's "learning belongs to that old European civilization which has, in the course of a single generation, been all but submerged in the modern tide.[125]" His

[121] Woodman, 497.
[122] Woodman, 497.
[123] Woodman, 497.
[124] Tracy Ware, "Shelley's Platonism in *A Defence of Poetry*," *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, Vol. 23, No. 4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1983), available online <https://www.jstor.org/stable/450262> 550.
[125] Kathleen Raine, *Defending Ancient Springs* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), 139.

efforts, therefore, are consistent more with Plato's approach than to his teachings; even though Plato was not an advocate for art or an artist in his view, he amounted to an artistic tradition with creations that are ranking among and speak of art. He became subsumed under that broad tradition, and so aims Shelley. Ware cements also that "[f]undamentally a skeptic, Shelley refuses to accept any dogmatic formulation of the truths of the imagination[126]" and it was not for the sense of opposition to Christianity that he would find in aligning himself with such a doctrine he did so, yet other's might have done it to meet those ends; it was because that "Shelley found in Platonism support for his conviction that pure imaginative intuitions have priority over philosophical systematizing[127]" that he was willing to mingle with it.

It feels like a needed step, that this introduction should serve as a kind of justification found in the more material basis (translations etc.) for the thoughts and philosophy of Shelley that have been put in comparison with Plato by some critics. The basis of them could be described, as it often is, as Shelley taking up a position based in Platonism to argue against its namesake. There are some problems with that, nevertheless, according to others. While Plato held poets in no great standing in his ideal society, Shelley as a poet himself bases their position as a crucial one – that of contact with the world of ideas; through the use of imagination, the poet is coming into contact with ideas that are reflected in reality. In that poets not only see the world for what it is but in seeing the ideal world they can also extrapolate the way it should be. The crucial difference there is the use of poetry and poets which Shelley sees as instrumental, as legislators of the world, while Plato sees them as the ones who possess a kind of illusory knowledge; even in that one can see the problem that arises from comparing the two, or even calling Shelley Platonist. Thus, the relationship could be disputed by the mere fact that "Shelley differs from Plato in radical ways, as the very fact that he is defending poetry shows.[128]"

[126] Ware, 554.
[127] Ware, 554.
[128] Ware, 550.

Even the most prominent critics of Shelley, Harold Bloom and Earl R. Wasserman, have pointed this fraught relationship out. They "have explicitly denied the relevance of Plato for a proper study of his poetry and prose.[129]" Wasserman says that "it is both unnecessary and misleading in structuring his ontology to introduce Platonism, from which it differs in radical ways[130]" and Bloom argues that there is "the specter [of Platonism] which hangs so heavily over Shelley criticism that one can despair of ever lifting it, even in part.[131]" Richard Harter Fogle sees this conundrum of the present student of Shelley's work and solves it thusly:

> Platonic reference is indeed useful, but only as a point of reference; Shelley is also Neoplatonic, Romantic, and, to agree with Bloom, himself, or we should no longer be reading him. Investigations of Platonic orthodoxy are simply off the subject that should be to hand, while it would be unfortunate to establish a counter-orthodoxy of private myth.[132]

Here, I would like to lend some credence to that claim and not exclude the view that has so apparently come into Shelley's scope just because he worked with it and not according to it. Platonism, is, after all, as Tracy Ware argues, an important point of reference in understanding Shelley's treatise on poetry – *A Defence of Poetry* – which is fraught with Platonic references.

To see where this is stemming from, we go back to Shelley's epistolary affairs. There exists a letter to Thomas Love Peacock (on 15th February 1821, not incidentally) in which he urges him to reconsider *Ion*.[133] More precisely, he recalls and urges his friend to consider Plato in relation to Platonic and Malthusian ideas.[134] Shelley's interest in *Ion* coincidentally appeared at the occasion of his quarrel with Peacock on a topic similarly fuelled by the disregard of poetry (recalling Plato). He writes that "[Peacock's] anathemas against poetry itself excited me to a

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[129] Ware, 550.
[130] Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 147.
[131] Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 185.
[132] Richard Harter Fogle, "Recent Studies in English Romanticism," *SEL 5* (Fall 1965), 744.
[133] Ware, 550.
[134] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To Peacock," *Letters of Shelley*, (London: H. Frowde, 1909), 207.

sacred rage *caloëthes scribendi* of vindicating the insulted Muses[135]" and that, had he not been lazy and/or occupied with reading Plato's *Ion* at the time, he would like to dispute Peacock's claims at poetry's inferiority.

In *A Defence of Poetry*, which is a response to Peacock's "The Four Ages of Poetry" (a response that Shelley was not lazy enough not to write after all) Shelley's views on poetry are laid bare, and thus as a one of a kind of a text for him, it is important to consider it as a standalone piece, but also as a stance on Platonism from which his defence takes arguably the most. Let us take then what poetry is according to Shelley; he says that

> in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody.[136]

Some direct parallels can be drawn with *Ion* straight away as they both deal with the nature and source of poetic inspiration. In *Ion*, these processes are described as "divine influence" and that

> God takes away the mind of these men [the poets] and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits, but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses us through them.[137]

For both authors, there exists a godly influence on the medium that then interprets what had been imparted on it. Plato uses the metaphor with the magnet, Shelley describes this process with the Æolian harp that, emblematic for the Romantics, plays only thanks to the divine wind of inspiration. Shelley, however, goes further than that and recognizes the different nature of man who "produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or

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[135] Shelley, "To Peacock," 207.
[136] Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," *The Selected Prose and Poetry of Shelley*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Publishing, 2002), 635.
[137] Plato, *Ion*, (Gutenberg, 2008) Available online <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1635/1635-h/1635-h.htm> Accessed 13 August 2020.

motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them.[138]" With that, he bequeaths agency to man in his interpretation of what essentially is the world of ideas.

Shelley's Æolian harp is calls forth Romantic pantheism which is Neoplatonic in its roots. Romantics sum the energy that is there in the universe under one – it is the energy that fuels their imagination and their ability to create. While the magnet of Plato forces the poet to communicate the divine realm to the listeners the poet in Shelley's and other Romantics conception no longer is excluded from Nature but its part and parcel.[139] The Romantics accept the natural world as the only reality there is; the belief that there is a spiritual principle that gives nature its vitality and creativity was there.[140] God or a certain form of deity imbues the whole universe. Shelley exist somewhere between Plato and Coleridge: while Shelley is not a anti-Plato Neoplatonist there is no doubt that the arguments that have been made based on it hold ground. Woodman sees the connection fruitfully when he points out the similarities in doctrines that Shelley has with Plato's major works and on which he builds his poetic theory: "divine inspiration in the *Ion*, his doctrine of love in the *Symposium* [both translated by Shelley], [and] his account of the working of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*.[141]" Coleridge's influence of Neoplatonism could be seen in the oneness of the world and the cessation of seeing the personality of the poet as separated from it, reminding us of his concepts of One Life and Plastic Intellectual Breeze.

When we take *Ion* as if one could seemingly see a more Platonic Shelley, who only in his later life became to diverge from Plato's teachings. *Ion* is the one which answers most directly to Shelley's theory of poetry, in some of the passage one cannot help but think of Shelley's idea

[138] Shelley, *A Defence*, 635.
[139] Martin Procházka, *Romantismus a osobnost*, (Klub moderních filologů: Pardubice, 1996), 20-21.
[140] T. K. Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (Lanham: *Lexington Books, 2005*) 293.
[141] Woodman, 497.

of what poetry is. It is in what Socrates tells Ion we can see that; his part of the exchange goes like this:

> The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but, as I was just saying, an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you, like that contained in the stone which Euripides calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. This stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain: and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone.[142]

There we can see that for Plato same as Shelley poetry is conferred to the poet and he acts as an unwitting medium of the message which he cannot control. This is a state of divine madness, which, as Woodman writes, "is comparable to Orphic experience of re-birth. Shelley's in his translation highlights the commonalities when he translates Plato as he talks about "rules of art" and the "beautiful melodies of verse" that poets write "in a state of inspiration, and, as it were, *possessed* by a spirit not their own;" he translates the state as that of a "divine insanity."[143]

Ironically, he conceives Plato to be a poet – in the letter to Peacock he writes that "the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense it is possible to conceive. […] His language has a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the intellect.[144]" So, while maybe not in the content of some other pieces, it is in the content of *Ion* where similar ideas are present; moreover, however, there is the irony of the fact that the style of Plato is very much in agreement with what Shelley considered to be 'poetic'.

Shelley saw Plato be a divinely inspired poet, paradoxically. Paradoxically for, as we discussed, a poet is on the one hand divinely inspired and transmits the message of the gods into the realm of men; on the other he talks about the poet to be a confused person who chooses to be twice

[142] Plato, *Ion*.
[143] Woodman, 502.
[144] Shelley, "To Peacock," 207.

removed from the reality. On the account of this reading of Plato, Shelley composed his take on the workings of the Demiurge in the universe; Woodman describes that universe as "first under the harmonious rule of the Demiurge and then under the tyranny of Necessity[145]". Under the rule of the Demiurge man lived in harmony in Paradise; under Necessity's rule man has fallen from that condition and his fate is to remember the former golden days under the rule of Demiurge. Shelley's description of divinity in man is a close one to this duality; it is poetry that "redeems from decay [Necessity] the visitations of the divinity in man.[146]" However, it is possible and likely that Necessity is not forsaken for Demiurge but only put into a relationship with its other pole, made a lesser cosmic principle to account for its blindness – in fact it is not Necessity alone that leads the universe but a kind of ebb and flow of Necessity and Demiurge working together.

From time to time, Woodman says, people are reminded of those times by the gift they receive from the gods: "fire from Prometheus, arts and crafts from Hephaestus, seeds and plants from other benefactors.[147]" Woodman argues that this is presented in *The Revolt of Islam* [148]– in other words that it follows the narrative structure and its symbolism is accordingly adjusted to match the operation of the Demiurge: the eagle is the symbol of destruction (Necessity's rule) and it is the bird who "Around, around, in ceaseless circles wheeling / With clang of wind and scream, the Eagle sailed […] And casting back its eager head, with beak / And talon unremittingly assailed / The wreathed Serpent; the serpent is the symbol of renewal (Demiurge). The poet, in that case, is the benefactor who brings the gift to man.[149]

Demiurge appears once more in Shelley with *Prometheus Unbound*, and it is Prometheus after all, the prodigal bringer of fire, the one who stole it from the gods and bequeathed it unto man,

[145] Woodman, 502.
[146] Shelley, *A Defence*, 657.
[147] Woodman, 503.
[148] Woodman, 502.
[149] Woodman, 503.

reminding them of the rule of Demiurge. Moreover, when we consider the origin of the word, the etymology brings fort an interesting connection with an actor of the story - Demogorgon. A bit muddy and mysterious as the character itself, the word's origin is not clear, yet, it is believed to be a misreading of the Greek δημιουργόν, an accusative case of δημιουργός, which is demiurge[150]; *dēmiourgos* then originally means a 'craftsman' or 'artisan'. This is the working etymology here, just one of the possibilities that work with the following interpretation, others could give even more opportunities to see other aspects of the story in Shelley's context.

Moreover, Demiurge in Shelley's conception, however, is not a personification as it is in Plato, someone who gives form to universe and from chaos bring it to order but, as we can see in his use of Demiurge as a symbol of renewal, something shifting, a trope, perhaps referring to the unending circulation of life, a force. In the last scene of the poem, Demiurge call back the Æolian harp, an ever-present force, that approximates words to the listeners-by, as Procházka has it, an Orphic song[151]:

PANTHEA

Peace, peace! a mighty Power, which is as darkness,
Is rising out of Earth, and from the sky
Is showered like night, and from within the air
Bursts, like eclipse which had been gathered up
Into the pores of sunlight; the bright visions,
Wherein the singing Spirits rode and shone,
Gleam like pale meteors through a watery night.

IONE

There is a sense of words upon mine ear.

PANTHEA

[150] Jean Seznec, *La Survivance des dieux antiques* [*Survival of the Pagan Gods*], (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972) 221–222.
[151] Procházka, 50.

An universal sound like words: Oh, list![152]

Also, the scene with a forceful eruption of Demogorgon's volcano would serve as a reminder of that – the power that it holds is lava like, creative power that has an uncertain shape before it turns solid. Its eruption could also note the violent nature of Demiurge's toppling of Jupiter; a revolution that brings renewal – a revolution that is necessary in a deterministic sense, that which would Shelley inherit from the 18th century materialists. As Harold Blooms points it out, Shelley's Demogorgon is unallied in morality of their actions, but it is a dialectical force: "[it] is necessitarian and materialistic entity[153]"; he is the god of all those at the turning, at the reversing of the cycles".[154]

Here, in the story of the closet play the character of Demogorgon it is important that he/it is a mysterious primordial power that lurks beneath the surface and is "the supreme Tyrant[155]" of the shadow realm, or "[Prometheus'] own ghost, or the ghost of Jupiter, / Hades, or Typhon or what mightier Gods.[156]" While here Demogorgon is described as the supreme tyrant, further on there are mentions of his/its mighty law and when the scene of the descent into the cave a more ambiguous picture seems to be presented: "a mighty darkness / Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom / Dart round, as light from the meridian sun, / Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb, / Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is / A living Spirit.[157]" In that, it reminds us of the later Gnostic myths that describe how the divine came to resemble the human forms: his/its mother gave birth to something that would escape the divine totality (tyranny perhaps?) and in that created a monster (much like in the description we have at hand). She wrapped him/it in a cloud and put him/it on a throne – the Demiurge then created the physical world. In that, it

[152] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Act IV, line 510-518, 305-306.
[153] Harold Bloom, *Poets and Poems*, (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005) 129.
[154] Bloom, 129.
[155] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I, line 208, 235.
[156] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I, line 211-212, 235.
[157] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II, Scene IV, line 3-8, 266.

would seem that Shelley works not only with Platonism but also with later offshoots of the philosophy.

One, of course, cannot omit the possibility of a revolutionary context which sees Demogorgon, an embodiment of Demiurge, the power that brings the ideal to the actual and restores balance after the rule of Necessity; after seeing the horrors of the French revolution this would explain the ambiguity in the reception of a force that topples the throne of a tyrant. While this line of argument may be contentious for some, to make *Prometheus Unbound* be a directly political work is not entirely out of question. And even though, as Mark Kipperman writes,

> Liberals as much as Conservatives could agree on the "impracticality" of Shelleyan utopianism, emphasizing the "other-worldly" or purely "aesthetic" strain that can certainly be isolated in such "visionary" works as *Queen Mab* or *Prometheus Unbound* […] Shelley's whole notion of political change and the radical possibilities of art remained threatening to most of the poets and critics who lived in the generation of the Reform Bill.[158]

Therefore, if we are to judge his political engagement by his contemporaries' views of him, the possibility evolves into certainty; even if the political aspect of the is not felt so strongly in the criticism of Shelley today, especially concerning the works such like *Prometheus Unbound*, which connects more with the topics of metaphysical orders, it is there in the work and proves a deeper connection of Shelley's metaphysical and political views, both of which depend on each other, expanding on *Timaeus*, which he, anyway, considers "a psychological myth, rather than a cosmology[159]."

Considering the position of the poets, which might be the immediate eyesore in the relationship between Plato and Shelley, it is in *Timaeus* where Plato rejects poets/mythmakers from his ideal

[158] Mark Kipperman, "Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889-1903," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1992, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/2933636>, Accessed 12 Aug. 2020, 190.
[159] Ware, 552.

republic: "[p]oets […] delude their listeners by presenting the "probable account " as if it were the true account.[160]" With *Republic,* therefore, Shelley takes on a more problematic position when he argues against Plato's exclusion of the myth and its makers, albeit implicitly as Ware argues; she introduces two types of reflections in Shelley, two types of mimesis. In *Defence*, according to her, Shelley adopts Plato's mirror image analogy. While Plato in Book X of *Republic* uses the analogy of a mirror to formulate his idea of mimesis, of a process of imitation. He uses a bed as an example; there are three beds according to Plato, as Socrates asks him:

> Beds, then, are of three kinds, and there are three artists who superintend them: God, the maker of the bed, and the painter?[161]

Plato replies:

> Yes, there are three of them. [162]

Shelley focuses on the first and the last bed respectively, as he as an artist is not a carpenter, and same as Plato he asks the question whether the painter of the bed (or a poet) are genuine creators of the objects that they are interpreting. A painter or a poet are not makers in Plato's views, they are mere imitators; with that, they are thrice removed from the truth who are maybe apt enough to deceive children or simple-minded people. Shelley confronts this view with the idea that "a story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful," however, "poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.[163]" With this distortion the poet begins to function as a maker who through distortion makes the tertiary image beautiful. Not only that, but the second part of the claim could be read as a deprecation of realism much ahead of its time – something that later James Joyce would repeat and write against in *Ulysses*.

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[160] Woodman, 507.
[161] Plato, *Republic*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2017) Available online <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/55201/55201-h/55201-h.htm>.
[162] Plato, *Republic*.
[163] Shelley, *A Defence*, 640.

The oft quoted phrase about poets being the unacknowledged legislators of the world is less about them being ignored and more about them being mere conducts of the power of the Ideal, prophets who are not able to tell the why of their poetry.[164] The laws that poets translate are also not so sharply defined. In *Defence* the poet is only described as creating "new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good."[165] Therefore, the law that is laid on them ensures that the products of their creation will follow certain patterns and rhythms that can be though beautiful; even if distorted, the distortion is desirable effect of the rules being reflected in the human prism which adapts them is a representation that is its own.

Shelley works with the image of a mirror more extensively than Plato, takes it up and evolves it. While for Plato if one wants to become a false creator it is enough to take "a mirror round and round" and "you would soon enough make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the, other things of which we were just now speaking, in the mirror[166]" Shelley realizes that the example of a carpenter making a bed and a painter painting that bed does not take into the account the influence that the bed can have on the beholder. The Athenian dramas, for Shelley "employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealism of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind of artists of the most consummate skill[167]". For him it was apparent that the spectators had not had been coming to see the pieces only to critique the artifice of them – they became 'fooled,' suspended their disbelief in order to appreciate the beautiful that the artist was creating; in

[164] Procházka, 49.
[165] Shelley, *A Defence*, 655.
[166] Plato, *Republic*.
[167] Shelley, *A Defence*, 643.

essence, the making is for Shelley not in the reproduction of an object but in the inspiration or the effect produced: "poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance[168]."

The third example of Shelley using mirrors as a metaphor is when he likens Athenian drama to "a prismatic many-sided mirror."[169] This mirror "collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of these elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects,[170]" which highlights the moral side of Shelley's metaphysical doctrine: "the great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.[171]" Ware argues that Shelley's discussion of the moral side that there is to poetry implicitly argues against Plato. She notes that "Shelley is as concerned with poetry's ethical consequences as Plato, but he discriminates those consequences from manifest ethical content.[172]" He does not intend to write didactic verse as this is not the workings through which the morality of man would be influenced; it is only indirectly that those processes take place via the influence of poetry. Together with this one can understand that the ending to *A Defence* should be such grandiose in appeal, again featuring a mirror, to a larger purpose of poets in a society, who – unwittingly – transmit "the influence which is moved not, but moves[173]" – poets, after all, are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. When Plato talks about poets he notes that "who says that you have been a good legislator to them and have done them any good?[174]" (talking to Homer) Shelley's words imply that poets are legislators already, but they do not get the recognition due. They are implicit, though.

[168] Shelley, *A Defence*, 644.
[169] Shelley, *A Defence,* 645.
[170] Shelley, *A Defence,* 645.
[171] Shelley, *A Defence*, 642.
[172] Ware, 559.
[173] Shelley, *A Defence*, 660.
[174] Plato, *Republic*.

The art of poetry is the art of representation, mimesis, in Romanticism, however. The representations that we create should reflect the law, as was already said, nevertheless, this representative power cannot be utilized in society, according to Shelley, he says in *A Defence*:

> We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. […] There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least, what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. […] We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life.[175]

As Procházka elaborates this statement, it is not only the lack of poetry in life that makes it special, it is also its otherness that makes it unusable as such. By the sole fact that it is other it eludes human grasp, it strips people their identity and makes them one with Nature[176] – the poets are those mirrors that distort, but as any mirror, without an object to reflect, there is nothing in them; they also cannot decide for themselves what they are reflecting. This is one of the major powers of poetry whilst it relates the Absolute, according to Shelley.

What we can gather from here is that Shelley, as a poet, of course, holds poetry in much higher standing to Plato, and gives poets more agency than to mere interpreters of interpreters. Elucidating in that aspect is perhaps C.E. Pulos who says that when "Plato ascends progressively from particular beauties to Beauty, Shelley tends to reverse this process and to seek Beauty in its earthly manifestations.[177]" Therefore, lastly, what this also translated into is Shelley's view on what the poets are there to be legislating, apart from the myth. For Shelley the underlying principle that emanates from poetry, and which is the effect that poetry has is Love; it is also one of the diametral differences from Plato's doctrine that had the poets held in a position of no power whatsoever, the fact that the ultimate goal should be such a thing. Ironically also, Shelley sees Plato not only as a poet but also a poet of love, "[l]ove, which

[175] Shelley, *A Defence*, 655.
[176] Procházka, 49.
[177] C.E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), 77.

found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients, has been celebrated by a chorus of the greatest writers of the renovated world.[178]" What is the difference that Shelley and Plato hold to love, and the relationship of the ideal world to the physical world is the direction from which they see the hierarchy – it is the human that is in the centre of it who act as the conductors of the ideal realm that is imprinted in them and they necessarily have to remember it once they are excited in the right way, moving from the state of Necessity into the Demiurge, to which poetry is a great help as it is the hub of power of remembrance of the Ideal. As the famous quote from *Defence* goes "[a] man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own.[179]" Poetry makes man imagine, connecting him with Beauty as it manifests on Earth.

b. Further Traces of Idealism in *The Triumph of Life*

Shelley felt a certain despondency at the end of his life and career, which lead to partial expulsion of Platonic ideas from his thinking, perhaps rooted in the knowledge of transcendency of life and everything earthly or, more tangibly, the fact that his poems did not reach the audience with the same urgency as he had imagined at the time of their conception and writing, let alone the reality of the situation in which the people who knew and read him with hostility; this exacerbated the condition of his seclusion and wistfulness, and he imagined himself to be "Demosthenes [a Greek statesman and orator] who spoke only to the waves"[180]. This went directly against his belief of the great importance of poets in the society. At the same time, it strengthened his ability to imagine and empathize.

[178] Shelley, *A Defence*, 650.
[179] Shelley, *A Defence*, 642.
[180] Scrivener, "An Ethical Idealism: (1821-1822)." *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 282.

While looking at the close of his life and the work that is most intrinsically bound to it, *The Triumph of Life*, a fragment that Shelley did not have the chance to finish (or attempt to finish); one can, again, approach it a plethora of ways. Let one of the suggested possibilities be to look at the work and life of Shelley in the later years as something that Scrivener calls "an ethical idealism"; on the other hand, another possibility which suggests that there indeed is something awry in considering it an idealism could be seen in the ambivalence that is ever-present in Shelley's work; as Madeleine Callaghan puts it, "idealism, though aspired towards, remains from first to last a fraught and questioned goal in Shelley's poetic universe."[181] The question, therefore, is, whether we may even think of it as an expression of this metaphysical school, or is the relationship so fraught that the relation shatters? Has he moved from the path set by *Prometheus Unbound*? Let us suppose that the connection to idealism holds and explore it that way.

The Triumph of Life was on Shelley's mind apparently for almost a year before he started to commit it to paper and finish the composition in 1822.[182] In a letter to Peacock Shelley writes about the poem that, as opposed to 'Epipschydion' [sic] which is a mystery that largely escapes the concerns of the carnal world, he intends to write it in the style of Symposium, an extended poem that has a great scope and deals with human affairs and the earthly flesh. The poem is modelled after Petrarch and Dante's poems *Trionfi* and *Divine Comedy* respectively and operates with the motif of a painted veil that obscures the universal immortal spirit that pervades all life; what is also important the image of a chariot that passes over captive men. The tradition of triumphal chariots is also linked by style as it is Petrarch's *Trionfi* that deals with the image as well. A triumphal car was a procession of victorious generals and emperors in Rome that

[181] Madeleine Callaghan, "Shelley and the Ambivalence of Idealism," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 64, 2015, 92, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/26177875>, Accessed 3 June 2020.
[182] William Cherubini, "Shelley's 'Own Symposium': 'The Triumph of Life,'" *Studies in Philology*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1942, 559, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/4172583>, Accessed 3 June 2020.

later became synonymous with the Early Renaissance extravagant festivals; the tradition also traces back to the Antiquity – it is, therefore, life's procession that Shelley deals with in the *Triumph of Life*. Indeed then, it deals with life as Shelley promised to Peacock.

What also points to the strong influence of Plato on Shelley is the fact that the poem was seen by him as his own *Symposium*. The Italian sources and inspiration of it were studied and considered richly, however, it was William Cherubini who suggested that it is the Platonic or Neoplatonic ideas that served as one of the moving forces behind it and its bony structure.[183] The central vision of the poem comes to the poet (Petrarch) and could be understood to be in the Neoplatonic tradition – of divine initiation. However, while the vision is harmonious, the images of the world outside it that it produces are less so; as Cherubini says "Shelley sets up clearly an opposition between Nature and the fevered, contaminated world of the vision."[184] It highlights the duality of the scenes and things we see – there is a certain sense that while the vision itself is divine, what we see represent an artificiality that is man-made. Cherubini suggests that they wear "foul masks" that are "distorting and wrecking the faces beneath"[185] in some way altering their natural state related to the Ideal, advancing this view.

Life and its relation to the Ideal was for long a source of Shelley's struggle. If we return to *Epipsychidion* and *Alastor*, we may see that Shelley already abandoned attempts to approach the ideal. As Scrivener puts it "to pursue the Ideal as if it were a personalized Absolute, as if it could be possessed by the individual, is to be self-destructive, to lead oneself to despair, false hope, and irresponsible actions."[186] The period of Shelley's life from 1819 brought him these sobering realizations that to pursue an ideal is a certain way of running oneself to the ground

[183] Cherubini, 561.
[184] Cherubini, 562.
[185] Cherubini, 563.
[186] Scrivener, 282.

and burn out, the quest is quixotic in its nature. In a letter to John Gisborne he writes about how hard it is for him to maintain self-awareness in this question:

> all of us who are worth any thing spend our manhood in unlearning the follies, or expiating the mistakes of our youth; we are stuffed full of prejudices, & our natural passions are so managed that if we restrain them we grow intolerant & precise because we restrain them not according to reason but according to error, & if we do not restrain them we do all sorts of mischief to ourselves & others. Our imagination & understanding are alike subjected to rules the most absurd.[187]

Scrivener glosses this excerpt with a note that this is Shelley at his most rational, and indeed, there is some rationality that has to be involved in being able to dissect one's life's condition to be able to reflect on the fact that it is reason that is weighing him down and it has to be error and imagination that lead him and not rules, however, is it not also the opposite? Is Shelley not denouncing to be guided exclusively by reason? While rational in its method, this excerpt from the letter very clearly argues against it.

The change in Shelley occurs according to Donald Reiman when he is confronted with love: he begins at the "narcissistic concept of loves as communion with a self-created Ideal," from which he "tries to find a mortal embodiment" to end up at a "more Platonic concept of love"[188] which centres on "going out of the self and identifying with the beauty existing outside the self"[189]. However, that is not where Shelley ends on with love, as at the close of his career he understands that love can cause as much suffering as hate. If we can derive from *Prometheus* that Love is an underlying principle that emanates from poetry, but it has a number of effects that can bring pleasure but also ruin; there are many outlets for love, not all of them viable. Seeing that it no longer is a safe bet, as Scrivener puts it, "love ceased to be the crucial experience whose

[187] Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, (Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1840), 172.
[188] Donald Reiman, qt. by Scrivener, 283.
[189] Scrivener, 283.

passionate intensity can point toward utopia"[190] meaning the change, the legislation, the ability to imagine, and "the only reliable guide now is a severely chastened ethical idealism."[191]

What is then this ethical idealism that Scrivener talks about? He says that it is an idealism that dedicates itself to creating a vision of a society in which the Ideal can be of use to its citizens in improving them ethically. He contrasts it with the opinion that at the end of Shelley's life, his radicalism waned and his faith in social improvement shattered. It shows the difficulties of living a life that would aim towards the attainment of such Ideal. This could be seen as a specific adaptation and development of one of the main points of friction between Shelley and Plato – poets indeed are there to legislate the world, the legislation, however, should take up a specific form. The form of the protest should be somewhat passive, it takes away from Shelley's previous younger anarchic years, but it still uses idealism as its moving power, and as we already know from the discussion of Plato, the passivity is given by the nature of the rules that are inscribed to the poet.

One of the central figures of *Triumph* is Rousseau. Some, like Cherubini, would interpret Rousseau's figure in the poem as condemned by Shelley, and it is in a sense, but not without empathy. Shelley writes in *Proposal for an Association* that "Rousseau gave license by his writing to passions that only incapacitate and contract the human heart"[192] and in *A Defence* "Rousseau […] celebrated the dominion of love, planting as it were trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory over sensuality and force."[193] Rousseau is depicted as wandering, encountering 'Shape' with a capital S; after meeting it and drinking nepenthe, the Shape disappeared and only a sense of its presence remained. Interpretations differ: they range from Rousseau being corrupted by reason or on the other hand being too close to the Ideal and too

[190] Scrivener, 284-285.
[191] Scrivener, 285.
[192] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley from the original Editions*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906), 209.
[193] Shelley, *A Defence*, 650.

weak to be able to bear it. Cherubini, nevertheless, offers another interpretation that is interesting to us: Rousseau was corrupted by Love, which was wrong in its direction, not degree.[194] In essence, though, this worship of the wrong love could again be linked to the Ideal and believing that one has attained it even though he did not. Therefore it is understandable then to see that it is not only Rousseau that is cast into an unfavourable position in the poem – even Plato is a part of the captives behind the car because he lived in a similar illusion of the possibility of the attainment of the Ideal.

Shelley realizes the problems with the attainment of the Ideal, and he is able to empathize with the problematic positions of the figures he emblematizes in *The Triumph*. Rousseau is portrayed in the poem as a figure of those regrets; a bit of Shelley gets projected into him as much as Rousseau projected himself into Godwin through who, although not exclusively, Rousseau influenced Shelley's writing. Rousseau is depicted as a man enslaved by personalizing the Ideal.

The poem distinguishes between the absolute Ideal (Venus) and the Ideal as it manifests in time and space, the mediated ideal. This goes back to the discussion of the Ideal previously in connection with Plato: while Plato does not believe the poet to be a person to convey this Ideal, the poet being thrice removed from it, Shelley still believes that there is some value in trying to get closer to it, to manifest it – what is important it the act, however, and that is the error of Rousseau, is to keep in mind insufficiency of such act; you are going to fail whilst going this, you just have to try again, and fail better. Scrivener rightly describes this struggle in pointing out Shelley's central realization at the end of his life: the circumstances of life have to be accounted for as the distortion of the Ideal will always be present; life does not deal in absolutes.

This reminds us of Shelley's conception of language, which is discursive in its core – a deviation and something of an innovation from before. Poetry as discourse then includes apart from the

[194] Cherubini, 566-567.

actual text, even the societal, religious, and other habits that influence as Scrivener talks about it. To elaborate on that, Procházka notes that because it is language that figures in that discourse which is in immediate contact with thinking, poetry has a privileged position amongst the arts because it can communicate with the Ideas which in the Neoplatonic tradition are in the human mind.[195]

This imagination of the Ideas also serves a moral purpose: it enables those who commune with the ideal world to be empathetic in relationship with other people.[196] For Scrivener, this means another branch of idealism that he names ethical, however, we can see that the principle which recalls the function is inherited from Godwin and his benevolent impulse. Imagination then can be the organ of this ethical principle, and interestingly, Shelley denies any metaphysical reason for acts of morality. In that Shelley denies rationalistic Enlightenment ethics which calculates deeds of people in an arithmetical way; for Shelley more important is to empathize through imagination, for example, through experiencing tragedy (as a genre) one can learn their own sympathies and antipathies and with their help achieve a certain self-knowledge – the same knowing of the self that Scrivener talks about. More important than that is the aesthetical pleasure derived from it through which imagination can mitigate pain, moral monstrosities, and crimes – function certainly employed in the discussions of the French revolution in *Triumph*.

It is not Shelley's aim in the poem to judge Rousseau or the ideals of the French revolution, however, as they are also mere onlookers in the march of life, as Petrarch is in it. The Janus-faced figure guiding the chariot which is usually interpreted as Necessity or Destiny[197] (or being two-faced, maybe it represents the Demiurge-Necessity dichotomy) is a fitting metaphor for how history or the world, or life, or the world of things, whatever it may be that is not the realm of Ideas, operates. If the interpretation would align with the rest of Shelley's oeuvre it could be

[195] Procházka, 46.
[196] Procházka, 46.
[197] Cherubini, 564.

interpreted as the remains of Shelley's deterministic materialism inherited by the French materialist philosophy as a force that drives the chariot to a definite end, to a goal, to achieve something that a higher power has prepared for mankind. However, as Cherubini points out, if one looks at the poem plainly, the car of the chariot is not lead anywhere – it is chaotic in its movement; "History, the World, are hopelessly without law"[198] as if Shelley would like to say, changing this crucial aspect or his earlier year, nevertheless, confirming what he had articulated in *Prometheus Unbound* and the Demogorgon.

The approach at the end of his life which may seem despondent to some is still Shelley proclaiming his theses about poetry, its power and its relationship to the world. *The Triumph of Life* as the last work of Shelley amplifies the message that he honed, a message that stemmed mainly from the prophetic nature of poetry that he believed in. As Scrivener writes "[Shelley] was committed to and tried to practice something akin to Jürgen Habermas's undistorted communication or the ideal speech situation, a mode of discourse governed not by coercion or merely selfish interests, but by "reason understood in its most emancipatory sense."[199] The problematic nature of the relationship with Idealism also stems from the fact that Shelley progressively did not see the Ideal as a thing that could be reached – be it in poet's function as a prism or a mirror, it always distorted; or as Callaghan says in her analysis of Shelley's ambivalence towards Idealism "Shelley's idealism was always veined with an awareness that heaven remained, and perhaps would always stay, "unascended""[200]; or as Procházka puts it, poetry for Shelley is infinite and by the act of writing one is only making it temporal – nevertheless, there can never be "a revelation of the naked beauty of meaning"[201], that is laying

[198] Cherubini, 564.
[199] Scrivener, 317.
[200] Callaghan, 93.
[201] Procházka, 50.

bare the Ideal, or pinpointing the meaning of a poem. The infinite poetry was described by Shelley as poetry of life.

4. **Inspiration: "Communions with an Unseen Power"**

a. *A Defence of Poetry*: *Formulating Own Metaphysical Views*

The last chapter deals with Shelley's own attempt to create a manifest of the power that poetry in life can have and by what forces it operates. *A Defence of Poetry* was at the time of its publishing perhaps the best-accepted work of Shelley in which he devoted the pages to what has been alluded some times before in this thesis – the fact that the crucial distinction between Shelley as a philosophical poet and philosophers proper is his devotion to language and poetry. Shelley is in the first place defending the relationship of poetry with the outside, physical world and how poetry is through beautiful able to influence the moral faculties of men; in that, his approach is unique for Romanticism. That being the end perception of what *Defence* is, the thesis needs to consider some philosophical sources and influences, the way that it lands on the conclusion of moral agency and how it deals with other relevant topics like the nature of poetry, the role of poets and the relation of them and poetry as a whole to Truth, or the absolute that Shelley found so fraught. To deal with it means to deal with the question of inspiration and to explore Shelley's difference from Plato in more detail as well.

It could be interesting also to think of *A Defence* as influenced by Godwin, which is an approach seldom employed, but advocated by Scrivener[202], who believes that the influence of Godwin reaches further than to *Queen Mab* where it starts, and beyond that creates "a continuum of progressive development from Godwin's *Political Justice* to Shelley's Irish pamphlets, *Queen Mab*, the theological fragment of 1816-1817, *A Philosophical View of Reform*, and finally *A Defence of Poetry*."[203] In work called *Letter of Advice to a Young American* Godwin writes that

[202] Michael Henry Scrivener, "Defending the Imagination: (1820-1821)," *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982), *JSTOR*, Available online <www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zv2ch.10> Accessed 6 July 2020, 247.
[203] Scrivener, 247.

imagination is the primary source of education, that in contrast to learning by dry facts only, one has to be morally stimulated in order to learn. Concerning *A Defence*, Godwin says that:

> Our words are then the images of things, the representatives of visible and audible impressions: after a while, too many of our words become cold and scientific, perfectly suited to topics of reasoning, but unfitted for imagery and passion.[204]

In that, he highlights the difference that Shelley deals with in the essay as well, the division between the faculties of reason and imagination.

Reason and imagination are two faculties that govern the mind. From the opening remarks of Shelley, the most substantial for us (apart from the statement that reason is the faculty that enumerates and analyses, and imagination is an agent colouring perceptions in the light of the mind) is the delineation of their function in relation to one another, that is "reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance."[205] Shelley is dividing these two into lines that are telling to his belief of their operation, and perhaps it even elucidates his conception of metaphysics; while reason is only a tool, imagination is the thing that acts, that brings the actual substance to the debate; while the body is the reason and the tool, the spirit is the core agent; and lastly, in what could be perceived as a nod to the famous Plato's cave, reason is a mere shadow of an object more ideal than that, a reality of the highest order.

Imagination and, by extension, poetry is also not only closer to those, but also to the origins of civilization.[206] That brings about the question of whether language is a separate realm that can contort reality, a separate reality which only creates yet another world for itself, or if it describes what is already there accurately. Shelley would seem to believe in the second definition of language, and if that were so, it would mean that poetry and poetic language create a closer

[204] William Godwin, *Life of Chaucer, I* (New York: AMS Press, 1974) 393.
[205] Shelley, *A Defence,* 635.
[206] Scrivener, 248.

world, at the same time, to one ideal, or Ideal with a capital, world. As Scrivener also points out, there are radical implications that can be derived from this: it means that "if the objective world is ideological, so is its language; and if the words signify falsehoods, whatever "reasoning" is done with them must also be false."[207] A king is a king only now, and the word can come to signify something else in the future, the meaning of the word is distorted, but because Shelley derives this idea from idealism, it does not mean a nihilistic conception of meaning where anything can mean everything; the language is corrupt and distorts the meaning, and it is through poetry that man can glimpse the truth.[208]

What is poetry, according to Shelley? In the most general sense for Shelley, and broad is the operative word in the rest of the essay as well, poetry is "the expression of the imagination"[209]. Poetry at the same time is likened to a series of impressions which are driven though men in order for them to have interacted with those such as the Æolian lyre does, as per the previous chapter. What is adding, however, to those lofty definitions of poetry is the apprehension of language as being mostly poetry, or at least it being able to act as poetry in a context that is not a poem. That has to do with the view of poetry and language as being either far away or close to some sort of source; in the same way that the lyre can transfer the divine wind into the perception of humans, language is transferring that source material, too. A person who is able to write poetically like that, to "apprehend the true and the beautiful,"[210] creates a space in which "the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression"[211] comes into fruition. In that, the creation of a doubly distanced text comes about.

[207] Scrivener, 249.
[208] Scrivener, 250.
[209] Shelley, *A Defence*, 635.
[210] Shelley, *A Defence*, 635.
[211] Shelley, *A Defence*, 637.

A poem is an expression of eternal truths[212] which is in itself a statement that pits the particular and the universal against each other. Shelley puts forward his belief that in contrast with a story that uses particulars; they have no other connection "than time, place, circumstance, cause, and effect;" a poem is ordered according to "unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds."[213] This is an expression of a belief that poetry is the only device that can transmit some metaphysical eternal truths if we compare it with Shelley's definition of metaphysics, which is "an inquiry concerning those things belonging to, or connected with, the eternal nature of man.[214]" In that, a poem and poetry are for Shelley the ultimate philosophical tool, a stark difference from Plato who would not lend much credence to the way poetry produces its effect; chiefly, the effect would not be associated with portraying some philosophical truth.

We have discussed parallels to other philosophical works and how Shelley draws upon them, at times, even verbatim. In the case of particulars and universals, we may find a parallel in Samuel Johnson's "The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia" where the fictional philosopher Imlac who refutes the constraints of his surroundings and calls for judgment to be based on universal qualities. What is more, Johnson also argues for the suddenness of inspiration, the inability of the poets to comprehend the greatness of their words or the precise meaning of the message that they transmit. This is perhaps an indicator in which way Shelley may have worked: coming from philosophy to poetry, not vice versa.

A poet for Shelley creates poetry in a way that is unique to the one that Plato had; it would be wrong to assume that this facet of poetic expression comes from Platonism. While Plato did have a similar concept of divine inspiration, it was likened to madness, during which in a

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[212] Shelley, *A Defence*, 640.
[213] Shelley, *A Defence*, 640.
[214] Shelley, *Speculations on Metaphysics*, available online <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Prose_Works_of_Percy_Bysshe_Shelley/Speculations_on_Metaphysics>, Accessed 27 July 2020, no pagination.

moment of divine rapture a muse would speak to the poet on the tripod and according to the information transmitted he would imitate that which was said; the poet can contradict himself for the act of creation has nothing to do with reason, and he is not able to analyse what he says in the moment of its conception – in that he differs from a lawmaker.[215] The difference between a poet and a person who works based on reason, like the lawmaker is that the lawmaker knows what he is purveying, and the poet does not; also, he cannot take any credit for it. Shelley, famously so, merges the two professions.

In contrast, the magnets mentioned in the previous chapter work differently, as we have already discussed it; they provide a structure to the remote nature of the poetic inspiration. The magnets only transfer their divine power when touched by poets and the rhapsodes and the audience; the magnetism is of the magnet and the rings being metal, touch it to acquire the power for themselves, but only for the duration of the contact. When in contact with the magnet, the poets are mad, a meaning well preserved in Shelley, yet the madness means precisely a removal from reason with Shelley; it could be argued he did not have that in mind as for him the poet is in contact with eternal laws of the universe while enraptured; Socrates in *Ion* strips poets of any agency, they are to bear no credit for what they purveyed during the moments of the divine inspiration.

The contenders of magnets are coals, and although Platonic idea of the mad divine inspiration is often cited as the primary influence in Shelley's *Defence,* there are differences. Pertaining to the creation of the poem, parallel to Plato's idea, is this passage from *A Defence*:

> A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of

[215] Plato, *Laws*, (Gutenberg, 2008), no pagination, available online <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1750/1750-h/1750-h.htm> Accessed 24 July 2020.

> a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.[216]

As with Plato, Shelley composing of the poem is not an act of will, what is more, it is not even an act that would be placed to a specific location like a prophetic stool on which the inspiration simply comes; it comes as quickly and suddenly as it goes. Then again, never in Plato, there is mention of a fading coal to which Shelley likens the mind while it is at work, and it would seem to signify a difference in the perception of the role of a poet. Plato has them as passive media that sit and let themselves be infused by the divine, after which no traces are remaining, and the poet is left dumb (in both senses of the word), not knowing what he had created and unable to continue the flow of words for which he was only a mouthpiece.

Shelley also asks whether the time it takes to compose a certain piece of text, a poem, in this case, means necessarily that the text is going to be better, and whether it is not more faithful to the inspiration of that the poet receives to compose quickly. The "toil and the delay"[217] according to him are only the accommodations for the weaknesses of the human mind which is not able to carry out observation of such magnitude in a fraction of time. In that, he mimics Wordsworth claim that the production of poetry is the outcome of contemplation of the source material, which some primary faculty reveals, in solitude. The greatness or the lesser nature of the poet, therefore, can be recognized in their "unpremeditated verse"[218].

Shelley believes in some latent force to be dwelling in poets in themselves; they are not pure media of the divine message, they can produce with just a little amount of it; however, a stronger gust of the divine wind is able to kindle them more and therefore they are more capable of producing great poetry. The wind cannot be predicted; nevertheless, the power *comes from*

[216] Shelley, *A Defence*, 656.
[217] Shelley, *A Defence*, 656.
[218] Charles Mahoney, *A Companion to Romantic Poet*ry, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011) 328.

within, therefore, is not extrinsic, and poets do not become dumb when there is not the divine will acting through them. In the end he even mentions a division that becomes salient later, the conscious and by extension the unconscious parts of our mind; for Shelley, while we can reason consciously, there is an unconscious counterpart to it that is still there even when we are not aware, and there come times when the wind, similarly to the Æolian harp, blows and sounds or kindles them.

b. *Alastor, or One of the Spirits; Inspiration & Imagination*

The metaphor of kindling was observed to be essential for some of Shelley's significant works, too. Daniel Hughes, in his study, points out the examples from *Prometheus Unbound*, *Adonais* and *Alastor*, from which *Alastor* will be our primary focus further on. From the sixty four instances of the word kindle and its derivatives in Shelley's oeuvre it could be assumed that the majority of them pertain to the idea of kindling the coal that we spoke about earlier; the opposite of the movement to kindling is the dwindling of the coal, and in that it presents the ebb and flow of the inspiration. Often a female figure is connected with the word, and it is not uncommon that the figure is an epitome of poetry; also, the process of the divine inspiration, or kindling, is weaved into the flow of the story of the poem. In *Alastor,* this process is shown in these lines, and as Hughes notes "has a sexual root which then proceeds to the poetic and the metaphysical"[219]:

> Soon the solemn mood
> Of her pure mind kindled through all her frame
> A permeating fire: wild numbers then
> She raised, with voice stifled in tremulous sobs
> Subdued by its own pathos: her fair hands
> Were bare alone, sweeping from some strange harp

[219] Daniel, Hughes, "Kindling and Dwindling: The Poetic Process in Shelley," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 13, 1964, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/30213229> Accessed 24 July 2020, 22.

Strange symphony, and in their branching veins
The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale.[220]

The inspiration comes suddenly as a fire, the hands stroke some strange harp, perhaps as a little bit of a comeback to Æolian lyre, even though that one would not be played by hands but wind; it is then the blood that tells a tale that is not possible to tell, perhaps by other means.

The process of kindling and then waning is repeated ceaselessly. Perhaps this has to do with Harold Bloom's very deconstructionist note that Shelley is interested in "the perpetual struggle of becoming a poet, and then remaining a poet, by continually becoming a poet again." In *Alastor*, there are two poets: the young poet who has a prophetic vision and the narrator. As many have pointed out, one of the main lines of inquiry in the poems of the *Alastor* collection, the problems of "the limitations of human knowledge, questioning the nature of the world, the mind, and poetry itself"[221] are the ones that stand out. Therefore, the lineage of probing these questions is observable from 1816, and Shelley was long questioning the nature of the world around him and how to transfer the poetic message, the ideal world that the poets are in contact with into another, completely different world; the human mind presented a problem in translation as well.

First, there is the issue of trying to comprehend a system that we are ourselves a part of; for that reason, it could be argued, some parts of the poem have to be delegated, for example to the youthful poet. Another reason for doing so is to show the progression that the poet had in the world. At the beginning of his life, there was a time when he was able to sing the choicest songs, and everyone was enamoured by them, even Silence; he received impulses from nature:

[…] Every sight

[220] Shelley, "Alastor or the Spirit of Solitude," *The Selected Prose and Poetry of Shelley*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Publishing, 2002) line 161-168, 105.
[221] Neil Fraistat, "Poetic Quests and Questioning in Shelley's 'Alastor' Collection," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 33, 1984, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/30212933. Accessed 14 July 2020> Accessed 20 July 2020, 162.

And sound from the vast earth and ambient air,
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great,
Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
And knew.[222]

After that, the poet leaves into lands that are undiscovered where he sings to savage men. In Shelley's hierarchy of closeness or distance from acquiring some sort of truth, or being close to the ideal world, savage nations were the equivalent of the youth of the poet as a person. This speaks of his conception of society as mainly a corruptive impulse giver that is contrasted with the pure state of being in youth and savagery.

When staying with the savage men, he communes with Nature; he pursues her like a shadow:

[…] where'er
The red volcano overcanopies
Its fields of snow and pinnacles of ice
With burning smoke, or where bitumen lakes
On black bare pointed islets ever beat
With sluggish surge[223]

An enumeration of places continues, after which he moves to the man-made world, that rightly seems to be given less grandeur than the natural one. Nevertheless, in the ruins of the civilizations of old, in Athens, in Jerusalem and Babylon, he was able to find traces of the world's youth, and as he pored over them "ever gazed / And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind / Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw /The thrilling secrets of the birth of time."[224]

[222] Shelley, *Alastor*, lines 68-75, 103.
[223] Shelley, *Alastor,* lines 83-87, 103.
[224] Shelley, *Alastor*, lines 125-128, 104.

This fascination with the beginning of time is there in Shelley, however, similarly to *Queen Mab*, this points to a more ambitious conception of a kind of mash of past, present, and future. In the primordial past where there was no corruption of man and the state of things already imagined by Shelley in 1813 served for him as a sort of a touchpoint upon which *Mab* could imagine the future that has to recall the unspoiled past and ameliorate the wrongs of the now. While in *Queen,* it is the queen that transports the Alastor uses to communicate these beyond-the-phenomenal-world phenomena, fittingly to its name, alastors, daemons, spirits and ghosts. What changes is the nature of the messengers and the nature of their message: while we may assume the benevolence of the queen who wants to confer the grand message with all its details that have been dealt with in chapter two, a demon is not so benevolent a creature, indeed. However, they are not malevolent either, and instead of occupying some evil realm from which one could deduce right or wrong, we get ambiguity – their ambiguity as messengers and ultimate an ambiguity of the message – the essence of the Nature they communicate becomes shrouded.

Imagination is fickle in *Alastor*, and it betrays those who imagine most vividly.[225] The path of the poet is the path of such a person. If the brilliance defines the beginning of the poem the poet can achieve, inspiration coming to him freely and him being able to transmute that inspiration into brilliant poetry, in the second half comes a change, first, "a gradual change […] Yet ghastly."[226] In comparison with the formative years, as Jean Hall realizes, the poet is no longer able to use the 'primary' imagination, to use Coleridge's terms, and works only as a reflection of the moon on the surface of the ocean. In rejecting nature, the poet loses the ability to imagine. This points to the source of the inspiration, which, if previously defined as divine, is also

[225] Fraistat, 164.
[226] Shelley, *Alastor*, lines 532-533, 115.

sourced in nature, or indeed Nature with the capital letter – a pantheistic gesture. The poet dies unable to achieve what he did in his youth.

The narrator is a different persona from the poet and does not always agree with the actions of the poet and functions in the poem as a commentator upon some of the things the poet does, mainly in the centre of the poem; the focus should be on the encounter of the poet with the Arab maiden who tends to him, yet he does not notice her. Norman Thurston points out that "[the narrator] is horrified to discover, through his sympathetic description of the Poet's adventures, that the Poet is incapable of choosing any human relationship. In the world of the poet, the possibility of human love does not exist."[227] By thematizing this relationship of the three people in the poem, Shelley draws on the questions that pertain to the contact of the two worlds – the ideal world where the poet moves and refuses to leave for the corporeal one with which he rejects contact.

This seems to be one of the critical scenes that await his ultimate doom, the inability to translate the grandiose Nature-inspired poetry into the real world. As many have pointed out, such as Gibson and Wasserman, the lines that talk about "The spirit of sweet human love has sent / A vision to the sleep of him who spurned / Her choicest gifts"[228] do not bring any kind of consolation. They certainly do not invoke Love as a concept that Shelley held later as central (as we have argued) and they do not "inject a new allegorical or metaphysical power into the world of the poem."[229]

The love, interestingly, is a point of contention between the two figures, too. While the poet "has conceived the possibility of going beyond the manifestation of Nature, to reach a different

[227] Norman Thurston, "Author, Narrator, and Hero in Shelley's 'Alastor,'" *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1975, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/25599965>, Accessed 16 July 2020, 121.
[228] Shelley, *Alastor*, lines 203-205, 106.
[229] Thurston, 121.

kind of relationship with reality"[230] the narrator continues to work on the level of the first-generation Romantics. The narrator relates to the world with "natural piety,"[231] the image of the great Mother, perhaps connectable with Necessity as the mother of all, still exists in the view of the commentator of *Alastor*. Thurston likens the feelings towards nature to Wordsworth, like in these passages:

> I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
> May modulate with murmurs of the air,
> And motions of the forests and the sea,
> And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
> Of night and day, and the deep heart of man.[232]

They are in contrast with what the poet has to say about the same topic, and while the narrator's tries to relate in the poem to reality and his efforts ultimately always end in reverence. He has "a brotherly love for the manifestations of Nature, filial love for the "Mother of this unfathomable world.""[233] This, it could be argued, relates to the first layer of poetic expression, or inspiration during which the poet is inspired and composes what Nature bestowed upon him; the source of his inspiration is divine, and he transcribes piously what he is told. The narrator represents what the faculty of reason represent later in Shelley's *Defence*.

On the other hand, the poet goes more in-depth, or perhaps we should say in a different direction from the narrator, from which their principal disagreement in the scene springs: he represents the faculty of imagination. His goal cannot be achieved by reason, "by analysis, or the patient accumulation of detail over time. It cannot be clearly stated in the form of axiom, theorem, proof"[234]. That comments upon how he interacts with the ideal world – he believes that he can transmute what is bestowed on him, not merely reverently catalogue it; at the same time,

[230] Thurston, 122.
[231] Thurston, 122.
[232] Shelley, *Alastor*, lines 45-49, 102.
[233] Thurston, 122.
[234] Thurston, 122.

however, he does not know whether the knowledge he believes to be heavenly sourcing is in any degree true, much in accordance to what he wrote later in *A Defence*.

It is the curse of the poet not to know, only believe that he is in contact with a profundity of a higher degree, but even if he was sure that he is on the right path that path will never lead him to the attainment of such an Ideal; like the limit of a function approaches some value just to skirt it infinitely so does the poet ceaselessly approaches the divine knowledge, never to attain it. This is a kind of a soul's cri de cœur that the poet follows which separates him from the phenomenal world; he dreams only about projecting his ideal onto some earthly vessel that he cannot find which, he ultimately realizes he cannot attain – which is the beginning of his downfall to death. This loss of faith in the vision, however, cannot be taken as constituting Shelley's condition at the time, his ultimate despondency, it is more so an example of a failure that can happen to a poet, a failure to follow through with the vision that he may have held against Wordsworth and Coleridge. [235]

The vision in the poem follows the offered metaphor of the limit function quite nicely with the veil which creates a barrier – impenetrable, yet very thin; in the description we get that she is a poet, too, speaking, therefore, a language that approximates truth as well, and kindling the same faculty. The veil thins progressively throughout the scene; he is able to see her:

> Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil
> Of woven wind, her outspread arms now bare,
> Her dark locks floating in the breath of night,
> Her beamy bending eyes, her parted lips
> Outstretched, and pale, and quivering eagerly.[236]

[235] Arthur E. DuBois, "Alastor: The Spirit of Solitude," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1936, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/27704194> Accessed 17 July 2020, 534.
[236] Shelley, *Alastor*, lines 176-180, 106.

When he wants to meet her in an embrace afterwards, he faints, however, unable to consummate their relationship. This is, presumably, the point where the poet gets close to the absolute Truth, but nevertheless is unable to grasp it fully and the failure poisons his faculty to try again, try to fail better, so to speak, and continue the quest that is in its core doomed, it could be assumed that Shelley means that, because the truth will always be shrouded to a degree.

The two personae in the poem would seem to engender this tension between the two faculties, reason and imagination; two men who function differently concerning the world. While the poet is such as we mentioned, the narrator with his reasoned attitudes is different. In the beginning, we see that there is a certain understanding between them, the narrator reasonably agrees to the education and ideals of the poet when he narrates his story, his aspiration seems to a degree and by some logic in order. There is, it could be argued, even a similarity in their supposed point of departure of such understanding in the scene when the poet meets the vision. The narrator comments upon the inability of the poet to choose the human love that would be attainable, not understanding the plight of the poet towards the ideal vision; the poet, too, is not able to sustain his pursuit because he expects it to have some concrete result, acquisition of sorts at the end. Both of them, therefore, expect to get a reward, or that getting a reward is the ultimate goal.

It is not so, as Bloom's epigraph chosen for this section should foreshadow. Shelley knows this, it would seem, and therefore it is not right to assume that the poet or the narrator should be connected in any way to his persona as the writer of *Alastor*. As another poem in the collection shows, Shelley is perfectly fine with the transience of being. Humans are according to the poem (that seems sincere enough) "clouds that veil the midnight moon," and "forgotten lyres whose dissonant strings / Give various response to each varying blast."[237] In this world, the only enduring quality is the Mutability, written with a capital M.

[237] Shelley, *Mutability* in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Gutenberg, 2003), no pagination.

Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude maybe exists to show that in the quest towards the ideal there is this solitude of the pursuer, solitude meaning that he cannot be understood completely, in the same way in which he cannot deign the complete meaning of the message, or its verity, that is conferred to him by a power that remains unseen.

c. The Unseen Power & Spirits*: Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Mont Blanc, To a Sky-lark*

Alastor introduces the first kind of spirit, that of solitude. *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* continues this spirit-laden tradition of Shelley. The speaker in Hymn talks about Power that floats about and occasionally visits people:

> The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats though unseen among us; visiting
> This various world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower[238]

Now, first of all, to dispel any doubts about the nature of the Power that might not be clear to the contemporary reader: awful, indeed, meant what awesome would mean just decades before it started to morph into a different meaning as well, that is, inspiring awe. It visits, inconstantly and always waxes and wanes in its influence; so far, we are keeping up with the themes that were brought forth by *Alastor,* and it is in these poems that Shelley formulates his central metaphysical problem.

The problem, as defined by Gerald McNiece, is the problem of the relation between power and value[239]. What he brings up as well is a concept that has bearing already on *Queen Mab* the way we discussed it in the second chapter of this thesis, but also other poems, because this is in

[238] Shelley, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Gutenberg, 2003), no pagination.
[239] Gerald McNiece, "The Poet as Ironist in 'Mont Blanc' and 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,'" *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1975, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/25599982> Accessed 18 July 2020, 312.

essence Shelley's method: the writer, a third persona that we have not considered yet in the scheme, is an ironist, weaving a space permeated by Romantic irony[240]. Romantic irony pertains to the fact that as in *Queen*, even here in the poems at hand, Shelley takes up the role of a creator that conjures a space of transcendental make-believe. The term coined by Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel allows Shelley to take up precisely that position that makes it possible to write the narrator and the poet in a way that is distanced from them. Also, it is not a position of a biting critique but more of a realization that "infinite and the absolute and also record his somewhat disillusioning realization that the yearning must forever remain to yearn. Aware of presentiments of infinity, of a fleeting sense of a fundamental unity encompassing both mind and object."[241]

The problem of power and value sits in another gap, the gap between from where the power takes its source. Is it indeed springing from a realm that contains the definite blueprint of what things should be, or does discourse led by people define it? Is truth socially constructed? These questions implied in Shelley's sceptical stance predate much of the discussion that ensued at a later day in philosophy, however, are they exactly what is discussed in the poem, is it what Shelley takes up and relates to the nature of the power? Is the question whether it is benevolent, or whether it has an agenda important to him? This questioning seems to be leading to only one place pretty safely – there can be no doubt that the only lack which the Spirit of Beauty possesses is that it visits men inconstantly; it is its absence. It is ultimately good at its core and can lead to big revelations in the forms of visions – a common aspect that it shares with *Alastor*[242]. Therefore, there is no need to fear the Spirit of Beauty, save for the various wrong interpretations of it.

[240] McNiece, 312.
[241] McNiece, 312.
[242] For a comprehensive divison of those visions see "The Vision Theme in Shelley's "Alastor" and Related Works" by Frederick L. Jones

This gap between the poem and its creator acknowledges the gap there is between imagination and its materialization on paper; it is also a gap between language and consciousness. This gap is implicit in Platonism, with its Ideal being there always as the ultimate reality that, ideally, one reaches, whatever the result may be upon return to the metaphorical cave, be it unbelief or ridicule. McNiece points out this attraction, too, and Shelley's reluctance to fully embrace Platonism, he says that "irony is implicit in the Platonic philosophy to which Shelley was attracted yet never fully converted"[243]; it could be argued that this thought is the main contentious point why Shelley cannot adopt Plato's vision – because Plato ultimately believes that these forms can be reached and have a definite bearing on the physical world, or does not deal with that problem too extensively, which cannot be said about Shelley who is aware of the problems that arise from the contact and transmission done by an agent facing certain inherent restrictions.

Interesting in relation to the theme of inspiration and kindling discussed earlier is the line which likens the power to "darkness to a dying flame!"[244]. It again speaks about the transience of the visiting, awe-inspiring power. We might want to again, such as waxing and waning in the preceding lines, relate it to the image of a coal being kindled and then slowly dying, but with a slight and interesting variation: Shelley uses a metaphor that relates human thought to a dying flame; the flame is slowly dying out without the power visiting, yet, it is not a force that would kindle per se there but an agent that makes the flame, still dying, more visible. It indeed can be, too, a metaphorical sort of nourishment to the flame; nevertheless, it seems that Shelley here gives a more significant role to the luminosity in contrast as opposed to actual kindling and thus making the flame truly more powerful – a variation it would seem that lends more responsibility

[243] McNiece, 312.
[244] Shelley, *Hymn*.

to burn on its own to the flame, by virtue weighing the poet with more responsibility, it would seem.

Nevertheless, again, Shelley thematizes language as the means of transmission. The names of Demon, Ghost and Heaven are mere "records of their vain endeavour,"[245] the endeavour being to capture their essences. The young narrator "call'd on poisonous names with which our youth is fed; / [he] was not heard; [he] saw them not,"[246] and sure, they could serve in the poem as Shelley still present anti-Christian stance in which he tries to claim that the effect the Spirit has on some people has brought humankind organized religion, by merely misinterpreting the contact with the Spirit; it could also thematize in the poem the clear sight that the young poet possesses thanks to which he can perceive something awry with those names. What is thematized more is language, in any case.

Especially questions like whether language is prior to metaphysics, or maybe more simply, what is the relation of concepts to the words they are described by? It would seem that Shelley does not believe so, or at least that this is the stance he is taking up in the poem. Shelley's stance on that is similar to Aristotle's, that is that if man's primary intellectual faculty of perceiving the world is language, "we start with what the world is said to be;[247] what is more, language is influenced by culture, and it is the primary element of personal development.[248] If we are to perceive, interact and reflect the world actively, we have to do it as if it were a discourse.[249]

Lastly, we have to accept that language is not the final means of knowledge, as Shelley knew, apparently, according to his use of poetry as a discursive medium in which he laid out his boundaries and argued a case often from zero, as McNiece also notes.[250] For Shelley, the poem

[245] Shelley, *Hymn*.
[246] Shelley, *Hymn*.
[247] Aristotle, quoted by John Herman Randall, "Metaphysics and Language," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1967, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/20124386> Accessed 21 July 2020, 592.
[248] Randall, 592.
[249] Randall, 592.
[250] McNiece, 312.

is a philosophical playground where language and words are tested. Often they do not work, as many a critic has pointed out, on the other hand, they do not necessarily have to; the quality is in the discourse, in the instrumental nature of the text and is relative. Shelley tests the manifestations of the ideal forms in the phenomenal world as if it were.

Such as the concepts are relative to their manifestations, the human mind is in relationship with nature. The ideal of beauty resides in nature, as it is documented at the beginning of the poem where an extensive simile succession defines the metaphor of Power; it is as "summer winds that creep from flower to flower,"[251] "moonbeams"[252] or like "clouds in starlight widely spread,"[253] to pick and choose just some of the favourites. The young poet goes through natural scenery in order to find the Spirit, once finding it vowing to follow it, as he does, until his later days in life, for which another metaphor of the day which becomes more solemn after noon, and consequently of life, when he can more quietly, actively and less ecstatically muse over the Spirit's nature, which is likened to "the truth of nature" and is contained in every form that exists in the world – a pantheistic outlook, yet again manifested. The person who worships the Spirit manifesting in natural forms of all kind is then bound to fear himself, which, it could be argued, points to the inconstancy of the human subject and the transience of the inspiration that comes with the spirit, but also about the possibility of deriving false prophecies that are divorced from the underlying truth of the Spirit that is immutable.

In *Mont Blanc,* this is status and relationship of the universe, and the mind is more striking from the beginning as "the everlasting universe of things flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves;"[254] nature beats the faculties of the reader with a succession of images, of waters, brooks, wild woods and mountains, waterfalls and rivers with raves, of course, to be expected

[251] Shelley, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, line 4, 129.
[252] Shelley, *Hymn*, line 5, 129.
[253] Shelley, *Hymn*, line, 9, 129.
[254] Shelley, *Mont Blanc* in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Gutenberg, 2003), no pagination.

from the title and the source of inspiration for Shelley. The description is marked with fluidity and the way in which the landscape interacts with the mind: it rolls through it, to some representing "a surface turbulence,"[255] and by the nature of it, therefore, "a turbulence which would enhance, complicate, even perhaps distort reflections."[256] Now, we talked about mirrors and reflections and distortion in the previous chapter, and as we can see these themes can be found in *Prometheus Unbound* as well as in *Mont Blanc* which was composed at an earlier date. Noteworthy is even the fact that the mind interacts with the mountain and by extension nature, even if it would seem from the first stanza that human thought is compared to the somewhat more majestic behemoth-like mountain; this might be the classic setup of the sublime against the feeble little mind of men, and it may be true that the power of nature is immense and that the movement of the glacier that carved the massif which Shelley beheld from the Chamonix Valley inspired him to write under the impression of the severity of that power, however, it is not a one-sided affair. The human has a role, the act of beholding awakens an understanding of the relationship in which the mountain and the man are.

The universe in the first line is seemingly given more prominence, being described as "everlasting," dwarfing the reflecting speaker. The waves that roll through the mind are "now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom," and are dependant on the exciter – the mountain. However, the choice of vocabulary implies that this, arguably, happens as a "modified interchange in the water and sound symbolism, an ambiguous mingling of subject and object, some intermediate stage between sensation and perception."[257] The qualifiers were suggested to represent Lockean secondary qualities; they are only powers the object has to cause us to have ideas of color, smell, taste, sound, and texture; these qualities do not actually exist within

[255] McNiece, 314.
[256] McNiece, 314.
[257] McNiece, 314.

the object,"[258] therefore they are so to speak a projection of the object and the way the object interacts with the subject; they exist only within the mind.

Because of their existence only in one's thoughts, they lend importance to the thinker, and although they exist in mind only, they are in the poem a source of a grandiose schema[259] which weaves ideas into the fabric of nature – which is only what it is, an object of description. In the pursuit of this one has to be careful not to fall prey to thinking that this weaving and describing is in any way objective; the goal of the writer as we have explicated on many examples so far seems to be aware of the gap between his creation, the description that springs from consciousness and the actual reality in which he lives, that is the position of the Romantic ironist. We cannot flat out state that mind holds any sort of primacy, it is an agent on its own; however, it is influenced by a force that is not palpable or visible, it does not know in what way it is being bent or in the end if it indeed is the Spirit and not some phantasm that produces the influences.

Nevertheless, that goes further than to some malevolent lesser spirits in Shelley's mythology making the mind produce false prophecies; it is an inherent property of it which cannot be escaped; the distortion is, after all, a prized element in poetic creation, as it was discussed previously, as it, again, gives the poet the ability to make the material his own. At the same time, one has to be watchful, as Shelley mentions at the end of *Hymn*, "to fear himself, and love all humankind"[260] because people tend to invent their mythologies from the ambiguous scenery ("teaches awful doubt or faith so mild"[261]); at the same time, however, somehow the same scenery can teach something so valuable that can "repeal [large] codes of fraud and woe;[262] and

[258] Charles Kaijo, "Primary and Secondary Qualities," *The California Undergraduate Philosophy Review*, vol. 1, 50.
[259] McNiece, 315.
[260] Shelley, *Hymn*.
[261] Shelley, *Mont Blanc*.
[262] Shelley, *Mont Blanc*.

by that glimpse some transcendental truth; again, a double-edged sword with little to no indication how to use it.

Inspiration seems to be the topic of the second part of *Mont Blanc*, and with the help of which we make a full circle to the themes of *Defence*. Shelley, at the time of its composition, was under the strong influence of the scene, he described it to Peacock as an "undisciplined overflowing of the soul"[263]. McNiece points out about the poem that it seems to him "less a philosophical poem than a poem about the kinds and qualities of experience which ought to precede, correct, perhaps even eliminate the making of metaphysical philosophy as distinct from poetry."[264] The images are not unlike *Kubla Khan* by Coleridge, which sees inspiration as an underground river sometimes bursting in waves of inspiration. Shelley's river is the Arve, and he is explicit that he speaks in metaphors:

> Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
> From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne,
> Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
> Of lightning through the tempest[265]

The power carves its way through the valley as if thought the mind, a metaphor that McNiece takes to its limits while pointing out other natural scenery and aspects of it; the river flowing makes the caverns echo, the mind responds to the power. In contrast to the *Hymn*, the universe of things is manifest in *Mont Blanc* and does not inspire only thoughts under the excitations of the power in the natural scenery but also other wild thoughts, in the moments when there seems to be a trance, the speaker's 'own human mind' passively lets the influencings float through it and thinks its fantasy. The mind therefore not only that is receiving, transforming, but also can be passive, and the poem oscillates, waxes and wanes, in these positions. What is also vital to

[263] Letter to Peacock about *Mont Blanc* in McNiece, 313.
[264] McNiece, 313.
[265] Shelley, *Mont Blanc*.

the excitations is the silence and solitude of nature, but a nature that we create and weave into it our interpretation of it, "the daedal earth,"[266] an earth that can propel men closer to the shining orb illuminating the mysteries of the universe of things; nature communicates them in its own magic language.

The mysteries are the limits of life and death, reality and fantasy, and, simply put, the human ideas and transcendental immutable principles of the universe (all of which cannot be glimpsed by men, but they still believe that there is something beyond the veil). This puts the strain of worry into poetic creation, something that, for example, a non-human creature capable of producing what men consider art does not have to deal with – like a bird. *To a Sky-lark* seems to be an attempt at meditating the ideal case of inspiration by the unseen power. The likeness and differences to Keats' nightingale in *Ode to a Nightingale* need not to be pointed out too extensively, but maybe just cursory pinpointing of the most important ones will do: first, the birds are of the different time of the day – while the skylark occupies the skies in the day, nightingale does so in the night; that is also the time when their song can be heard. Keats' bird is the bird of bitter joy of the night, Shelley is the bird of bombastic surge of abundant joy in the bright light of the day.

The null connection to sadness in an important one, because what Shelley, arguably, wants to achieve in the poem is to imagine poetic expression without the mediator in human form. If we had two views in *Alastor*, slowly shifting in the selection of the poem closer to a (probably faux) proximity to the composer of the poem in *Mont Blanc*, now we are removed from human prisms/mirrors for good; solely for that reason, sadness, contemplation of life and death, what is or is not beyond the veil, is not a topic. By imagining the bird to be the ideal poet, the speaker

[266] Shelley, *Mont Blanc*.

can relate his song to those by humans and ask a question about the role of the poet, the human mind and, yet again, the unseen power that animates the skylarks song.

The spirit in the poem is blithe, now, of course, there is the problem of whether we want to attribute the spirit some negative connotation as the word would have them today, or whether we would see it as a more neutral word, as the kind of blissful indifference, and it could be argued that it was that usage that could be attested in the year 1820 when the poem was published alongside *Prometheus Unbound*. More than that, the bird is not only carefree in its action, it is also able to produce "profuse strains of unpremeditated art;" like the Arve, before the skylark is the medium onto which the pantheistic spirit acts and inspires it to create, still unseen, as if it indeed was the power itself, able to access "Praise of love or wine / That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine."[267]

Whatever this joyous depiction of the bird tries to portray, there is the dark side of it, too – humans cannot fathom the same unmitigated outpour of pure poetry because their humanity continually burdens them. This creates a tension between the lark and the speaker; a certain desire is spoken. Shelley is aware of this tension as it is apparent from this passage from *A Defence* which notes that "from an inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature, the pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior portions of our being" which echoes To a Skylark's "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."[268] William A. Ulmer described this as an awareness of antiphonal pressure on the poem, complicating any affirmations that it seemed to have given.[269] On the surface level,

[267] Shelley, *To a Sky-lark* in in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Gutenberg, 2003), no pagination.
[268] Shelley, *To a Sky-lark*.
[269] William A. Ulmer, "Some Hidden Want: Aspiration in 'To a Sky-Lark,'" *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1984, *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/25600487> Accessed 24 July 2020, 245.

therefore, one may see the bird as the depiction of what human creation could be without the weighs of humanity; however, it also reflects on the inability of it being so.

All of the poems that we have talked about progressively more and more seem to be engendering this desire, the tension between it and its ultimate inability to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, as Ulmer points out, there is no acceptable middle ground "the impossibility of either gratifying infinite desire or renouncing it," and even more than that, this has severe consequences to Shelley's metaphysical views. What we may be able to denounce from this that language and imagination[270] are befallen by the same 'fault' so to speak, continually edging to some Ideal that would speak or glimpse an absolute truth, but it can never be reached. This is not a condition to bemoan, however, and as Bloom noted, "poetry is always imagining its own [divine] origin, or telling a persuasive lie about itself, to itself."[271] The stream of comparisons and similes in these, and many of Shelley's poems, as if try to capture some likeness but remain "both like and unlike every object"[272].

With that note, we can revolve to the beginning: to defend poetry is a difficult enterprise especially for the reasons laid out here – the relationship to 'reality,' 'real-life' or its ability to convey the Ideal is complicated. Peacock's criticism reflects precisely that, the Age of Brass of the English Romantics is ignorant of history, society and nature, seeing it as it is but "only as she was not, converting the land they lived in into a sort of fairy-land, which they peopled with mysticisms and chimaeras"[273], a claim that Shelley does not refute, but merely affirms under the condition that in fact, no one and nothing can be objective about it, as it is a necessary principle that a human subject cannot escape.

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[270] Ulmer, 246.
[271] Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* (New Have: Yale University Press, 1976) 7.
[272] Ulmer, 246.
[273] Thomas Love Peacock, *The Four Ages of Poetry* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921) Available online https://archive.org/stream/peacocksfourage00browgoog/peacocksfourage00browgoog_djvu.txt. Accessed 24 July 2020, 14.

The second objection is that of the influence that poetry has on society. According to Peacock, the Romantics do not try to improve upon the society but are only an embellishment, a useless trinket that divorced itself from it – Shelley argues otherwise. That pertains to the other strain in *A Defence*, the fact that poets are legislators, written about in the thesis to a large extent, however, in connection to the unseen power that we have discussed, one last note may find its place: the process is continuously ongoing by the nature of the contact with the laws of the universe that poets have. In a way, this is an ungratifying position that the poems at hand thematize; not holding the reins of poetic creation but being in contact with an absolute medium which eludes them by a tiny bit, it is in the state of constant flux as it flows through them, making them light up as coals in the times when inspiration strikes, leaving them dim at the others. If men were like skylarks, able to shed their mortal shells and worries, they maybe could capture the laws in words and the world would listen, only if they found the right language, though. To the extent discussed, this is, nevertheless, impossible.

5. Conclusion

We could say that Shelley, falling short of his thirtieth year, was a figure that caused turmoil with his philosophy and poetry, and he has continued to do so. Throughout the ages of his studies, the attitude towards him changed, and from outrageous provocateur and social thinker, we have seen his interpretation to wane to an ineffectual angel, only to be picked up again for the purposes of another unsuccessful revolution to stay at a place where aesthetics is the ultimate effect that Shelley's poetry produces. This thesis aimed to see him as a philosopher who discussed his influences in order to create a metaphysical undergrowth for his poems and philosophy that would be solid, that could support the 'eternal nature of man' and which could try and reach to the truth, however impossible that may be. In that, the polemical nature of Shelley's poetry was shown, making the poems a ground for discussion, not a final deciding place of one definite truth.

The thesis has shown that the scale materialism-idealism rooted in the 19th-century philosophy is not a tool that would describe Percy Bysshe Shelley's thinking in the background of his poems. Shelley blends his influences, which are plentiful, in a way that makes it hard to assign him into one school of thinking – perhaps for some purposes it might be a sceptic. Materialism or idealism, therefore, did not work as a scale of progression from point A to point B but an attempt to sort influences that ultimately serves little purpose. Three main areas of influence were chosen according to their perceived severity of impact – materialists, Godwin and Plato. Moreover, the thesis followed the development of the trajectory of necessity and possibility (determinism and free will), cause and effect, the problem of relation to an idea and the role of a poet in its transmission, and the driving force behind poetry. These terms were set in place in order to discuss Shelley's relation of metaphysics with the role of a poet and poetry in society and the importance of both of these factors.

In the first chapter, the influence of materialism and mainly mechanism was pondered, and the way in which it influenced Shelley was dealt with – mainly that would be in his atheism and more so in a certain pantheist conception of the universe. This marks the period of his expulsion from university when he co-wrote his atheist pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* pointing towards some of the ideas that he later did not abandon – the dual concept of God, one Christian, which he abhorred and saw as one of the principal institutions to oppress man, and one creative, a specific power that unites the universe and is present in all things. Apart from that, the beginnings of a necessitarian principle are nested here and Shelley's dealings with necessitarianism, cause and effect. His idea is that cause can never be fully determined by observation, an idea derived from Hume, and it is only experience that tells people what causes cause certain effects. His determinism is then strongly influenced by Baron d'Holbach; his influences from the realm of early science, or natural philosophy, are causing Shelley to adopt some of the nature themes in his poems, but more importantly, they cause him to take up a certain mindset, a scientific mindset it could be said, that makes him work as a scientist would – taking an idea and testing it, developing it in a poem in order to see if it worked – a poetic experiment.

The chapter's last note makes an important observation derived from secondary literature – materialism is not a metaphysics that is unique for the beginning of Shelley's career. The possibility to take a materialist philosopher – in this case, Lucretius – and apply his theses to *The Triumph of Life* points to the complexity of Shelley's writing, which often eludes the binary materialism-idealism. What it, however, showed is Shelley's constant interest in defining what animates matter, whether the soul exists and if it does, is it just a configuration of atoms or does it exist apart from them? Necessity, determinism and free will would then show throughout Shelley's career a development that slowly moves from a purely mechanistic conception of the universe towards free will, in case of Lucretius a free will derived from the atomic swerve.

The second chapter the thesis explores the theme of Necessity in connection to William Godwin which is perceived as the second major entanglement in Shelley's life and was additionally worked with because Godwin was an important social thinker. The work which bears most resemblance to Godwin and was still composed in a sort of juvenile naivety is *Queen Mab*. In *Queen Mab,* the thesis traced the principle of Necessity and what it owed to Godwin. Necessity that Shelley works with is set against the concept of Godwin's necessity, allowing for the resemblance to be visible, often not only as inspiration but as whole passages adopted from the philosopher and father-in-law. Yet again, like when mentioned in connection with Lucretius, the concept of a Golden Age is revealed in Shelley, and in that the thesis moves from the investigation of an underlying cosmological principle (i.e. Necessity) towards a vision of a future state of things, shaped by Necessity, moving back (cyclically, revolutionary) towards another Golden Age. All of that through the observation of Necessity, still without complication, at least an explicit one. The addition and split of the attention to Prometheus Unbound allowed the thesis to investigate the continuity of Necessity, which was argued to have been superseded by Love. However, the thesis argues for the continuation of Necessity as a minor cohesive force of the universe that Shelley sought to supplant with Love to account for its fickle nature.

In the third chapter that deals with Shelley's Italian period, the influence of Plato was discussed extensively. This chapter turned from the general discussion of metaphysical concepts that are at large in the universe and introduced them to the human sphere: the ideas of mimesis and the role of the poet in society, as well as the sources of poetry were dealt with in relation to Platonism; the philosophy was revealed to be a useful frame of reference, but, continuing the trend, it seems that Shelley is more than that and can be hardly contained in that category. Shelley at this point visibly rids his metaphysics the simple deterministic concept of Necessity and develops a more sophisticated system that appears to unite more concepts into a whole:

Necessity is, as it was argued by some authors, put into the role of a negative cosmological principle working against Demiurge. From *Prometheus Unbound* these two concepts are manifested in Demogorgon who is a Spirit that unifies them and at the same time occupies the space of the creative deity. The universe now works under the triumvirate of inspiration, Love and the opposing forces of Necessity and Demiurge. The role of the poet, as discussed against the Platonic background forefronts in Shelley the desirable distortion through the lens of the poet who with the help of imagination is able to use poetry as a moral agent towards the betterment of the world. Poetry also makes possible to stripping of personal identity, making the person who is under the influence one with Nature; thus, connected to Nature, imagining, man is able to see Beauty as it is manifesting on Earth. The latter part of the chapter complicates this relationship as it showed that in *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley makes the role of Love more problematic and, again, finds an opposing principle to it – hate. The volatility of how one behaves towards some ideal is questioned by this argument.

Lastly, the final chapter of the thesis took up the idea of legislation and discussed it in relation to the source and the way in which this source is excavated; inspiration and its sources, how the poet interacts with them, and whether he has an active or passive part in it (or both) were dealt with. The contrast with Plato was revealed to be of note, and if the previous chapter showed inspiration of Plato as vital in some concepts, the differences are there to stay – in that Shelley again confirmed his unwillingness to bend to a philosophy and his zest for scepticism, experiment and discussion with his sources. The development traced in the poems *Alastor*, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc* culminating with *To a Sky-lark* showed the different approaches and problems with touching upon divine truth, interpreting inspiration through a human medium and the difficult position in relation to the immediacy of the message.

The ambiguity towards the message and the way men act on it was at the centre of the chapter. The movement of kindling and dwindling is like many of the movements in Shelley's poetry:

from the harmonious Demiurge to Necessity, from the Golden Age towards another Tyrant, from closer contact with Truth to a more distant one. This ambiguity was first revealed with the discussion of *The Triumph of Life* in relation to ethical idealism. Shelley, in essence, does not condemn the idea, is not despondent, he does not judge those who failed but constantly brings forth ideas how and in what way can one relate to others his own surge of inspiration. Reason is only a tool towards the goal to present poetry, which in turn creates a new reality that inches closer to the Ideal. Whether this should be done through letting the Spirit of inspiration permeate a person, or by letting it flow just by sheer gravity of the moment witnessed, or would it not be better to be another species altogether? These are the options that Shelley presents; all of them seem to be lacking in some way, the importance of trying seems to be imperative.

Overall, the thesis revealed the stunted nature of seeing Shelley as a linear-developing thinker. To see him as accepting materialism at the start only to, through development, abandon it in favour of some intermediary philosophies which then culminated in idealism inspired by Plato would be false as there are departures, not strict followership of each of the influences. Shelley indeed is inspired by materialist thinkers, maybe to some degree adopts materialism in the beginning, but only because he is appalled by developments in the other camp of popular philosophy, because they do not, according to his view see the world right, they do not reflect the eternal nature of man. Throughout his whole career then, he seeks to reveal that nature and is ready to borrow whatever concept or philosophy that he perceives to further his goal; at the same time, the inspiration that he acquired with some concept or another is one thing, the other aspects of the philosophers' systems are open to debate, ridicule and diversion. In that, it disputes Woodman's version of Shelley's development.

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