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"SHADOWY RECOLLECTIONS": SHELLEY'S IMAGINATIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH WORDSWORTH

In his very fine last reading of poetic encounters between P. B. Shelley and William Wordsworth, Michael O'Neill is sensitively and productively alert to the "dialogic form" (O'Neill 102) of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* and the shaping influence that it exerted on Shelley's early and late poetry. Where we might expect to find Shelley at his most satirical and anti-Wordsworthian, O'Neill, shrewdly, discovers, in *Peter Bell the Third*, "Shelley's wish to portray Wordsworth as a poet of the 'unseen'" and unshackled from an imaginative commitment to the everyday, matter of fact, objects. In the poem's fifth section, O'Neill shows how, through Peter's skyward gazing, Shelley "ascribes to his satirical target a transcendental longing that seems more distinctive of the poem's author" than Wordsworth. There is, as O'Neill acknowledges, on Shelley's part, "an element of conscious projection" to configure "Wordsworth proleptically [as] anticipating the 'unseen'" in Shelley's own work (O'Neill 106-7).

Shelley's fascination with the "unseen" within his own writing and its latent presence in Wordsworth's poetry shape those imaginative encounters with his forebear. This is especially evident in Shelley's responses to Wordsworth's use of imagery in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," [1] and other poems that appeared in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). In terms of those poetic encounters with Shelley and Wordsworth focused on here, I draw upon those works selected by Mary Shelley for inclusion in *Posthumous Poems* (1824). One notable exception is Shelley's "Hymn to

Intellectual Beauty," which is read as a reimagining of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" in conjunction with its companion poem, "Mont Blanc" (included by Mary in her first published selection of her late husband's works). In what follows, I attend to O'Neill's provocative insight that Shelley saw in Wordsworth a proleptic poet of the "unseen" to press further the merits of that claim to see what else it might reveal about Shelley's reflections, refractions, and reconfigurations of Wordsworth's poetic bequest.

"THINGS WHICH YOU CANNOT SEE": WORDSWORTH, SHELLEY, AND OBJECTS

Taking my cue from O'Neill's suggestive formulation, Wordsworth's poetry might be categorized as an assemblage of objects and their semblances, often remarkable for both their ordinariness and incompleteness. An incomplete sheepfold (*Michael* 481), the "useless fragments of a wooden bowl" (*The Ruined Cottage* 91), the innocuous measurements of a "muddy pond" (30-34), for instance, all speak to the matter-of-factness of the unremarkable features of the objects observed.[2] Yet they are also markers of an unseen spiritual or physical loss discernible by Wordsworth's poetic eye which, as Armytage attests in *The Ruined Cottage*, can "'see around me here / Things which you cannot see'" (67-68).[3]

It is not Wordsworth's objects of earthly loss that draw the Shelleyan imagination, but their capacity to register metaphysical losses, as well as possibilities. Possibilities for which Shelley's Peter longs when he makes, as O'Neill notes, "songs on 'the universal sky — / And the wide earth's bosom green'" in the hope that he may learn "'Of what beyond these things may lie / And yet remain unseen' (408-12)" (106).[4] Unsurprisingly, then, Shelley's own poetic eye is often drawn to those images of fleeting intangibility and incorporeal remnants (stars or celestial bodies mirrored in water, evanescent rainbows, or the burnished glow of the sun, for example) that record both metaphysical losses and gains in Wordsworth's poetry.

In Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," a poem to which Shelley frequently returned in his career, the metaphysical stakes are high and what precisely is at stake is traced out through an interchange of what is seen and then unseen in the shifting light and shade of the poem's shadow play.[5] Wordsworth's reckoning of spiritual and psychological costs, in the "Intimations Ode," are traced by the changing quality in the light which reduces an all-expansive glorious light to an irretrievable "visionary gleam" (56): "vision splendid" becomes vision lost and, through a verbal reversal, the blessed light that once illuminated "every common sight" (67) is obliterated into the quotidian "light of common day." (76)

In the metaphysical terms of the "Intimations Ode," all that is left to us in our fallen condition are "those shadowy recollections" (151) of what had once been "the fountain light of all our day" (153) and the "master light of all our seeing" (154). Such faint remnants of a "radiance which once was so bright" (178), for Wordsworth, ought not to be a cause of grief for the "philosophic mind" (189) and instead become a source of "Strength in what remains behind" (183). What "remains behind", like the "sobering colouring" of "the setting sun" (199-200) or the "innocent brightness of a new-born Day" (198), may hint at our mortality, but these remnants are also – as our residual sense of "primal sympathy" (183) – intimations of immortality through their own loveliness and dim relation to that "celestial light" and otherworldly, unseen, source from which it emanates. Wordsworth's final consolatory vision of "those thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" (207) is awakened, in the "Intimations Ode," by the "meanest flower" (206). Like those residual "shadowy recollections" of "celestial light," the profundity of such grief-stricken thoughts, Wordsworth's lines imply, "often" remain unseen but they are not entirely beyond an outward show or sign that might intimate their existence.

"SHADOWY FRAME:" WORDSWORTH AND SHELLEY'S QUEST IN *ALASTOR* AND "TWO SPIRITS – AN ALLEGORY"

Wordsworth's reflections on an imaginative pursuit of a lost vision speak directly to *Alastor; or the Spirit of Solitude*, one of Shelley's earlier romance quest poems.[6] As critic and editor, O'Neill notes that "Wordsworth was clearly in his [Shelley's] thoughts" (96) when the younger poet composed *Alastor*, in the autumn and winter of 1815, and several years later when Shelley drafted "Two Spirits – An Allegory." Shelley concludes the Preface to *Alastor* with a slight misquotation from Wordsworth's *The Excursion*: "The good die first, / And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust / Burn to the socket" (Preface 93) and, subsequently, likely in the spring of 1819, scribbled "the good die first" at the top of a draft of his short lyric. Reading these references to Wordsworth's *The Excursion* in conjunction with Shelley's direct allusion to "a woe 'too deep for tears'" (*Alastor* 713), O'Neill recognizes that Shelley's "central theme" of loss, in *Alastor,* predicated on the "seemingly inevitable destruction of desire through frustrated quest or the limitations of mortality, is one which Wordsworth has addressed in poems such 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality.'" (95)

Shelley's lyric, "Two Spirits – An Allegory," provides a concise dramatization of how Shelley glosses the purpose of *Alastor* as "allegorical of the most interesting situations of the human mind." (Preface 92) Comprised of an exchange between two entities, the First Spirit avows a more idealised view of the universe — who attests my "heart is the lamp of love" (11) — and the second, a dark, more pessimistic, sense of things which insists, fearfully or prophetically, that "Night is coming."[7] The two spirits express themselves through imagery of light and dark that accords with the ideal and sceptical views of the world that they hold. The allegorical situation of Shelley's lyric offers a distilled version of the interplay of sceptical

and ideal perspectives in the psychodrama of *Julian and Maddalo*. In so doing, the poem attests to Shelley's sustained debates both with Byron (O'Neill 97, Robinson 111) and a career-long fascination with the poetic contours of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode."

What transpires during the debate within "Two Spirits – An Allegory," at least, at the level of Shelley's use of dark and light imagery, is that the two spirits are less antitheses to one another than they are symbiotically, perhaps by familial bond, bound to each another. This is especially evident in Shelley's final two stanzas, which both open with a casual "Some say" that recalls phrasing typical of Wordsworth's ballads, characteristic of the narrator of *Lucy Gray* or *The Thorn*, which encourages the interchange of competing versions of stories and multiple perspectives:

> Some say when the nights are dry and clear
> And the death-dews sleep on the morass,
> Sweet whispers are heard by the traveller
> Which make night day – ("Two Spirits – An Allegory," 41-44)

O'Neill detects in Shelley's poem, "a simplicity of diction that recalls the daring experiments of *Lyrical Ballads*" that "seems distantly to recall Wordsworth's 'A Slumber did my spirit seal'" (97). By the close of Shelley's lyric, there is also the possibility that, as O'Neill elaborates, "the intimations-gifted traveller experiences a twinned sense of recovery and discovery" (97). Yet this other third voice speaks from somewhere outside of the debate of the First and Second Spirit and seems to press for a resolution between their apparently opposing views through its commingling of light and dark and by concluding, in the poem's final line, that "night" is found "day." Yet, as in Wordsworth's ballads, Shelley's seemingly

throw away "Some say," in the stanza's first line, suggests that the introduction of this third voice is by no means definitive and authoritative in the poem. By implication there are other voices (and views) that would say otherwise and see things differently from the third voice. More tellingly, if the debate and the imagery of the First and Second Spirit is symbiotic and not antithetical, then, the concluding arbitration of the third voice is, potentially, another "slumberbound" (30) product of the imagination that, like the First Spirit, in the view of the Second Spirit feigns a notion of, according to O'Neill, "an apparently objective reality" when in fact "such a reality is a subjective impression" (97).

By alluding directly and indirectly to Wordsworth, Shelley places Wordsworth's faith in the communion between the "philosophic mind" and nature under imaginative critical pressure. Shelley's poetic attempts to lend shape to his own hopes and doubts are often shaped through, and in response to, a Wordsworthian poetic faith founded upon the belief that the visible world provides spiritual consolation by intimating an unseen metaphysical recompense for loss. This belief of Wordsworth is subjected to subtle scrutiny by Shelley's *Alastor*, which avoids becoming, as O'Neill admonishes, a "crude polemic" (95) against Wordsworth. There are overtures in the Poet-Narrator's framing of the poet-figure's quest of both Wordsworth's sense of the correspondent "gentle breeze" and Coleridge's harmonious image of the mysterious, barely discernible, organic operations of the Æolian harp. Shelley finds, in his later essay "On Love," an analogy for how love unfurls itself and "tends" towards its own "invisible and unattainable point" (632). Shelley seemingly recasts the imagery of Wordsworth's "gentle breeze / That blows from the green fields and from the clouds / And from the sky" (*The Prelude* (1805), 1. 1-3) and Coleridge's lyre to frame the terrible events of *Alastor*.[8] By the conclusion of Shelley's proem (lines 1-49), the Poet Narrator's account of an

unsuccessful quest to discover nature's "deep mysteries" (23) leaves only a profound sense of abandonment and desolation:

> …As a long-forgotten lyre
> Suspended in the solitary dome…
> I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
> May modulate with murmurs of the air,
> And motions of the forest and the sea,
> And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
> Of night and day, and the deep heart of man. (42-9)

Spoken by a narrator in Wordsworthian vein, *Alastor*'s proem outlines the narrator's love of nature and sceptical search, founded on a "dark hope" (32), for a power within the natural world that will "render up the tale / Of what we are." (27-8) Infused with the language of Wordsworth's commitment to nature, the appeal of Shelley's narrator to the "'Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood!'" (1) revises and qualifies Wordsworth's belief in the elemental trinity "Of something far more deeply interfused / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns / And the round ocean and the living air." Hopeful faith in the revelatory power of nature, enabling us, as Wordsworth assures, "to see into the life of things" ("Tintern Abbey," 49), in the hands of Shelley's narrator gives way to a darker realisation that such revelation is merely an "incommunicable dream" (*Alastor*, 39). Especially, when Shelley's Poet-Narrator recasts, in a less certain tone, lines from Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations," in his despairing hope "to still these obstinate questionings / Of thee and thine" (24-5). The Poet-Narrator's sense of failed vision and abandonment by the force of nature is reiterated in the description of the

broken body of the poet-figure which recollects the narrator's image of himself (Rajan 82) who still awaits nature's "breath" as a "long-forgotten lyre:"

> A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings
> The breath of heaven did wander—a bright stream
> Once fed with many-voiced waves—a dream
> Of youth, which night and time have quenched for ever,
> Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered now. (667-71)

This deliberate echoing of the bereft Æolian harp deprived of a Wordsworthian correspondent "gentle breeze," as an earlier image of failed quest and lost inspiration, suggest that Shelley's narrator and poet-figure are inexplicably implicated with one another. Raised by Shelley's imagistic doubling in *Alastor*, questions over the precise nature of the relationship between the narrator and poet-figure have been much debated amongst critics. Focusing on the Greek meaning of *alastor* as "evil genius" and the poem's subtitle, "The Spirit of Solitude," early critics read Shelley as unequivocally condemning Wordsworth's emphasis on the solitary and argued that the poet-figure's actions were morally culpable, as his self-seclusion becomes his own curse in the form of an avenging spirit.[9] But these mirrored sympathies between the narrator's opening dedication and the poem's main narrative enable a self-reflexive interrogation of Shelley's Wordsworthian mode of recollection upon which the retelling of the poet's ill-fated quest in *Alastor* depends. [10]

What is more certain is that Shelley's portrayal of the narrator, as a sceptical or even failed Wordsworthian poet, shares an affinity with the final fate of the questing poet-figure, whose "blood / That ever beat in mystic sympathy / With nature's ebb and flow'"(651-3), life, and

sought for vision, like the narrator's own, must be consigned to an incommunicable "dream / Of youth." Reminiscent of the narrator's solipsistic watching of nature's "shadow, and the darkness of thy steps" (21), Shelley's poet-figure pursues "the bright shadow of that lovely dream" (233) at the perilous exclusion of all else. Both the narrator and the poet-figure exemplify an ardent inward drive for an "antitype" which, as Shelley identifies in "On Love," "urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow' (632) or trace of this elusive, unseen, other wherever its presence is manifest in the visible world. Neither Shelley's Preface nor the unfolding romance quest of the poet-figure resolve whether we should commend or condemn that figure. Nor are we sure whether the poet-figure's ill-fated journey is a result of capricious and indifferent universal forces or the judgement of a moral universe.

The end of Shelley's *Alastor* suggests otherwise through its bleak tallying of the cost of the poet-figure's pursuit to regain sight of a lost vision. There is less apparent cosmic or natural equilibrium in Shelley's final tragic scene of the poet-figure's death in *Alastor* dominated by the sinking crescent moon whose "two lessening points of light alone / Gleamed through the darkness" (654-5). These fading "points of light" are a reminder of the poet-figure's tendency to perceive the universe as a perpetual stream of self-projected and ever-changing fictions and recall his "intense pensiveness" (489) required to find "Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought" (490), even amidst the "evening gloom / Now deepening the dark shades" (485-6), as he "images to himself the Being whom he loves" (Preface, 92). The physical deterioration of the poet-figure, whose body is reduced to a "shadowy frame" (416), is bemoaned by the Poet Narrator without providing any consolation. The Poet Narrator does, however, acknowledge that the universe is irrefutably changed by the poet-figure's absence for "Nature's vast frame, the web of human things, / Birth and the grave, that are not as they were" (715-20). In response to the poet-figure's death, Shelley's narrator produces his own

fiction of negation, forbidding tears through their evocation and prohibiting the authoring of elegiac "high verse" (707) in the act of initiating his own elegy. Closely echoing the poet-figure, the Poet-Narrator's elegy rehearses a negatively charged poetics shaped in answer to his earlier failed expectations of transcendence:

> Art and eloquence,
> And all the shows o' the world are frail and vain
> To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade.
> It is a woe too "deep for tears," when all
> Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
> Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
> Those who remain behind… (*Alastor*, 710-16)

"Art and eloquence" can no longer sustain those abandoned in a world made darker by the poet-figure's demise because, for all their grace and beauty, they only point up how much darker existence has become. On two levels, the narrator's elegy is a complex negation of itself. First, the grief originating from the poet-figure's death is voiced through the trope of absent tears, albeit at the level of "thought" (703), and, secondly, this figure triggers a series of negative tropes that form precisely the kind of "high verse" (707) that it warns against. Shelley's lines register the full force of the tragedy of the poet-figure's death which has, irrecoverably, changed the fabric of the universe. This significance of this change is registered through Shelley's direct allusion to, and deliberate alteration of, the close of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," which claims that "The meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do *often* lie too deep for tears." (emphasis added 205-6) For Shelley's Poet-Narrator, all thoughts of the loss of the poet-figure are (and will always be) too profoundly

"deep for tears," as he can derive no comfort from "Strength in what remains behind" finding himself, through Shelley's verbal reimagining of Wordsworth's phrase, as one of "Those who remain behind" bereft amidst "pale despair and cold tranquillity" (716-18). The fabric of the universe is irrevocably altered and any confidence in Wordsworth's "primal sympathy" now so severely shaken that the prospect of any regained vision of a nurturing, consolatory, power in nature remains forever questionable and in question.

"OBSTINATE QUESTIONINGS:" WORDSWORTH AND SHELLEY'S "HYMN TO INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY" AND "MONT BLANC"

Recalling Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations" in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (written 1816, published 1817),[11] Shelley offers a more personalised account of his own romance quest to seek out some guarantee that the hoped-for, typically heterodox, transcendental, or divine Power exists within the universe. Although questioning Wordsworthian faith in a nature that is divine, Shelley's poem shares in and explores Wordsworth's haunting sense, in the "Intimations Ode," "That there hath passed away a glory from the earth" (18). In the opening stanzas of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," a rapid heaping of similes see Shelley improvise around images of rainbow, the rose, the moon, and starlight that, in the "Intimations Ode," anticipate Wordsworth's haunted sense of loss. Evanescent similes are precariously stacked up one after another, approximating the delicate and fleeting seen objects and elements that they seek to capture, and which, like the fleeting Power whose existence their presences represent, evaporate before our eyes.

Shelley summons an unknown transcendent force and turns on the paradox that this "Power" is absently omnipresent:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power

Floats though unseen among us, — visiting

This various world with an inconstant wing

As summer winds that creep from flower to flower —

Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,

It visits with inconstant glance

Each human heart and countenance;

Like hues and harmonies of evening,—

Like clouds in starlight widely spread,—

Like memory of music fled,—

Like aught that for its grace may be

Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery. (Stanza 1)

Comprised of "this various world" of phenomenal experience, the human and the natural spheres are, fleetingly, touched by an "inconstant wing" or "glance" (6) of the "awful shadow of some unseen Power" (1). This "unseen Power" enigmatically casts a shadow over the experiential world. Human consciousness can only know of the Power's effects in the phenomenal world. The Power's force is perceived at work behind the invisible puppeteer of the rising and falling "summer winds" (4), manipulating the nodding heads of the flowers. Shelley's repeated use of simile elaborates upon the ways in which the Spirit or Power participates in, but is never identical with, the phenomenal world. Shelley's shadowy "unseen Power" (1) haunts the world concealed "like moonbeams…behind some piny mountain shower' (5), or dark 'clouds in starlight widely spread" (9). These partial representations of the Spirit signpost its absence from the world, pinpointing the fact that this act of poetic devotion — like recollecting "memory of music fled;" (10) — can only evoke and assert a

belief in such an unseen presence (2005; Sandy 69-70). This realisation does not stall the movement of Shelley's poem, as he turns the mysterious absent presence of the Power into a further reason to prize it all the more dearly.

If Shelley response to Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" is imaginatively reworked to trace the modulations of hope and doubt at the start of "Hymn to Intellectual," then Wordsworth's imaginative elemental credo "Of something far more deeply interfused," are inverted in the startling and questioning realisation at the close of *Mont Blanc*. Throughout his address to the Power of the mountain, Shelley's wrestles with the meaningful nature of mind and things (woven through the repeated rhymes of "things," "springs," and "brings" which find their culminating rhyme with "imaginings"). Eventually, Shelley seizes upon negation and vacancy as an opportunity to exercise his own imaginative powers to produce a consoling and supplementary fiction, whereby Shelley's self-doubt is transformed into a positive assertion of his creative capacity:

> In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
>
> In the lone glare of day, the snows descend,
>
> Upon the Mountain; none beholds them there,
>
> Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
>
> Or the star-beams dart through them:—Winds contend
>
> Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
>
> Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
>
> The voiceless lightning in these solitudes

Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods

Over the snow. The secret strength of things

Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome

Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!

And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,

If to the human mind's imaginings

Silence and solitude were vacancy? (*Mont Blanc*, 130-144)

Shelley recreates the phenomena of the "earth, and stars, and sea" — another reworking of Wordsworth's holy trinity of earth, light, and ocean in "Tintern Abbey"— and the ravine of Arve, so that their "silence and solitude" (144) are meaningful in human terms. The "still and solemn power of many sights" of the mountain and within the ravine, consisting of "moonless nights" and "voiceless lightnings" (130, 137), are undetected by human eyes (132) and yet imagined into a negative state of presence through the mind's eye. An unwitnessed scene is rendered imaginatively from the negative images of "darkness" (130) and silence (135-6) to voice the landscape's "solemn power." As a poem, "Mont Blanc" is aware, as was the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," of its own fictional status, knowing that its own "human mind's imaginings" and poetic consolation may, finally, be as "vacant" as the absent "power" of the mountain (127, 128). In "Mont Blanc," at least, these vacancies motivate Shelley's innovative imagination to wrest order and meaning from the "everlasting universe of things" (1) which initially, threaten to drown out the mind with "its rapid waves / now dark — now glittering — now reflecting gloom — / now lending splendour" (2-4). If the "human mind" has any potency at all, these threatening tumultuous waters of the ravine are just another figment of its "imaginings." Shelley's double sense of "vacancy" in this doubly conditional

conclusion (in the form of a question predicted on an 'If') both permits a bleak revelation about the provisional and fictional nature of any perceived correspondence between the mind and a Power in nature, as well as serves as a positive ground clearing that opens the possibility for future "imaginings" and re-imaginings of the human mind.

Something similar occurs in Shelley's conclusion to the stanzas of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," which as we have seen, track a semi-autobiographical account of its speaker, whose oscillating mind both asserts and doubts the presence of an "unseen Power" within nature's universe. Finally, the speaker's mind retreats into a self-consciously imagined "solemn and serene" landscape, where "there is harmony / In autumn, and lustre in its sky / Which through the summer is not heard or seen" (1, 73-76). Without any reassurances of a revelatory Wordsworthian nature, Shelley seizes upon such an unresponsive vacancy as an imaginative opportunity to create an autumnal "harmony" from the absence of that which is "not heard or seen in summer."

"BURNED ON THE WATERS OF THE WELL:" WORDSWORTH'S "INTIMATIONS ODE" AND SHELLEY'S *THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE*

In Shelley's unfinished *The Triumph of Life*, the light of day and night become indistinguishable and the ability to distinguish between different temporal and spatial modes becomes impossible as does the possibility of illuminating the visionary experiences the fragment relates. From the outset, Shelley's dreamer-poet, who is subjected to a "waking dream" (42), hovers between conscious and unconscious modes of thought and is temporally and spatially suspended between the "cone of night" and "the freshness of that dawn" (22, 34). This seemingly benign and celestial "birth / Of light" (6-7) promises new life and "transparent" (31) vision. Simultaneously, this "birth of light" gives rise to the dreamer-

poet's "strange trance" (29) and the "strange distortion" (183), which transpires to be the figure of Rousseau irrecoverably disturbed by his own encounter with a visionary light.

Shelley's grief-stricken Rousseau provides a tragic retrospective on the latter's career and quest for philosophical enlightenment which depicts, as does Wordsworth, a journey away from the brilliance of "celestial light" towards the mundane "light of common day" ("Intimations Ode," 2, 4, 76); a career that begins with the promise of uncertain vision and ends with its apparent loss in the "orient cavern" (*Triumph*, 344). Rousseau recollects:

> 'And, as I looked, the bright omnipresence
> Of morning through the orient cavern flowed,
> And the sun's image radiantly intense
>
> 'Burned on the waters of the well that glowed
> Like gold, and threaded all the forest's maze
> With winding paths of emerald fire; there stood
>
> 'Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze
> Of his own glory, on the vibrating
> Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing rays,
>
> 'A Shape all light, which with one hand did fling
> Dew on the earth, as if she were the dawn…. (*The Triumph of Life*, 343-53)

Like the trajectory of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," Rousseau's youthful encounter with, and vision of, a "shape all light" (*Triumph*, 353) treacherously abandons him to a present haunted by 'The ghost of a forgotten form' (*Triumph*, 428) and the garish light of 'the sick day in which we wake to weep' (*Triumph*, 430).14 This "light's severe excess" (425) is rendered by Shelley, recalling Wordsworth, as a heavenly "half-extinguished beam" (429) whose presence "Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost" (431) in this wakeful "harsh world" (334).

Rehearsing the tragically failed quest of the poet-figure in Shelley's *Alastor*, Rousseau's abandonment by a bright vision of youth causes him to embark upon a fraught venture to track "glimmers" of the "fair shape" (412) in the harsh reality of the waking world. Rousseau's revelatory moment in the "deep cavern" (361) is equally one of lost vision and tragic loss. The youthful promise and tragic realisation of Rousseau's experience is pointed up again by Shelley's deliberate allusions to the poetic imagery of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode." Shelley frames Rousseau's elegiac regret for a fled vision as akin to Wordsworth's own. Tellingly, Shelley's description of the birth of Rousseau's "shape all light," adorned with "Iris her many coloured scarf had drawn" from "the bright omnipresence / of morning," which 'Burned upon the waters of the well' (*The Triumph of Life*, 357, 343, 346), is infused with those tantalising "Waters on a starry night," the transient presence of the "Rainbow," and the sunshine's "glorious birth" that chart Wordsworth's own mourning for the passing of "a glory from the earth" ("Intimations Ode," 10, 14, 16, 18).

That Shelley invites parallels between the figure of Rousseau and Wordsworth, as well as the poetic diction of *The Triumph of Life* and Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," is testament to Shelley's desire to draw out the scepticism within Wordsworth's poetry and the level of his

depth of engagement with Wordsworthian poetics. Such an encounter with Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" in *The Triumph of Life* that Shelley uses, as O'Neill observes, "to haunting effect" (106) in the figuration of "the shape all light". If Rousseau's encounter with "the shape all light" offers any form of enlightenment, it is not, ironically, through her revelatory incandescence, after all she is "As Day upon the threshold of the east" and capable of a darkness which "reillumines even the least / of heaven's living eyes" (*The Triumph of Life*, 389, 391-2). This action of re-illumination operates through intense contrast rather than actual nourishment and can be compared with, as Shelley writes in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," the effect of "darkness to a dying flame" (45). Even at its most intense, Rousseau's "bright omnipresence" of vision is one of destructive apocalypse that made "All that was seemed as if it had been not" (385) through its extinguishing of "the lamps of night" and the "embers" of the "gazer's mind" by trampling out each "thought by thought" (*The Triumph of Life*, 390, 386-7). By implication, Rousseau's "shape all light" is the product of his own wilful desire to order, according to a metaphysical and unifying ideal, the chaos of life. A desire to see through the objects of a visibly chaotic life to an unseen metaphysical and idealised order of reality results, arguably, in the self-destruction of Rousseau's mind "thought by thought." Rousseau is both the origin of his own bright vision and its destructive, dark, counterpart.

Shelley's fascination with Wordsworth's poetic imagery and vision persists even in what might be considered his most fatalistic, final, fragment, *The Triumph of Life*. Shelley recasts Wordsworth's image of those "waters on a starry night" (14) to speak back to Rousseau's strangely conflated experience of revelation and disillusion in the "orient cavern." By imaginatively fusing Wordsworth's "celestial light" with that of "common day," Shelley's last poetic fragment avows a "darkness [that] reillumines" and threatens to obliterate reality but stops short of such an annihilation.

Perhaps, the figure of Rousseau could be read as an admonishment to Wordsworth's over idealising of nature or a Shelleyan self-reprimand about the potential dangers and frustrations of the poetic quest for the unseen in the universe. It is difficult to extrapolate any exact moral frame for Shelley's final poem given its incomplete textual state. If the latter were the case, Shelley had already found the lesson of frustrated desire and thwarted aspiration for the unseen (or unknown) charted out in Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" as an unquenchable longing for those "waters on a starry night [that] / Are beautiful and fair" (14-15), which makes those (indirectly) seen stars even more achingly distant because of the proximity afforded by their reflection.

From the romance quest of *Alastor* to the fragment of *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley's poetic quests both test and experiment with Wordsworthian poetic fictions about the redemptive power of nature by deliberately recalling, questioning, and subtly expanding elements of Wordsworth's vision. Shelley's poetry presses beyond the visible world of objects, simultaneously, regarding an obsession with the physical things as one of Wordsworth's greatest imaginative weaknesses and strengths. Wordsworth's objects and their capacity to "see into the life of things" intimate to Shelley the imaginative possibilities of the unseen. Even when at his most sceptical, Shelley discovers a constant imaginative resource and spur in the complex fabric of Wordsworth's poetic language and vision of light, loss, spirituality, nature, and the power of things seen and unseen.

NOTES

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[1] Respectively, Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" subsequently referred to as "Intimations Ode" and "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" referred to as "Tintern Abbey."

[2] On the unremarkable in Wordsworth's poetry see Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*. Foreword Donald G. Marshall. U of Minnesota P, 1987. For the importance of objects or "things" in Wordsworth see Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud* (U of Chicago P, 2012), esp. chapters 6 and 7.

[3] All subsequent quotations from Wordsworth's poetry are taken from *William Wordsworth*: *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford UP, 2000).

[4] All subsequent quotations to Shelley's poetry and prose are taken from *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford UP, 2003).

[5] For a discussion of light imagery in Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley see Mark Sandy, "'Lines of Light:' Poetic Variations Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley," *Romanticism* 22.3 (2016): 260-68.

[6] On Shelley's quest poetry see Mark Sandy, "Quest Poetry," *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds, Michael and Antony Howe with the assist. Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford, 2013), 272-88.

[7] See Madeleine Callaghan's fine reading of these lines in her contribution to this special issue. Callaghan, "How Poetry Knows," XX-XX.

[8] On the lyre imagery as transgressive see Timothy Morton, "Nature and Culture," *Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. Timothy Morton (Cambridge UP, 2006), 190, 185-207.

[9] For these earlier readings see Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Verse; The Fabric of a Vision* (Oxford UP, 1948), 41-60

[10] Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter* (Cornell UP, 1980). 76-8. Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution* (Clarendon, 1989), 137-42. See Vincent Newey, 'Shelley's "Dream of Youth"': *Alastor*, "'Selving' and the Psychic Realm," *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Readings*, ed. Kelvin Everest. (Brewer, 1992), 1-23. Michael O'Neill, *The Human Mind's Imaginings*, (Clarendon, 1989), 11-29. See also Mark Sandy, *Poetics of Self and Form in Keats and Shelley* (Ashgate, 2005), 34.

[11] Throughout this section I refer to Versions A of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc" (*Major Works*). For a detailed account of Versions A and B of these poems and their respective publication histories, see Michael O'Neill's editing of the texts of the Scrope Davies Notebook in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Vol. 3. Eds. Neil Fraistat and Nora Crook. Gen eds. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook (Johns Hopkins UP, 2012), 69-79.

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