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Post-Romantic Relations: Percy Bysshe Shelley and Emily Brontë

Abstract: Across a series of essays and articles published between 2007 and 2012, Michael O'Neill placed Emily Brontë in "productive commerce" with her Romantic forebears, spotlighting Percy Bysshe Shelley (2010; O'Neill 636). The argument that follows profits from O'Neill's reading of Brontë's post-Romantic individualism as enmeshed in and emerging from divided perspectives and doubleness of feeling. This essay also considers the possibilities that arise from and the implications of regarding Brontë as a close, if at times circumspect, co-partner of the Romantic project. How can we reconcile Brontë as a "proximate" Romantic writer who wrote in Shelley's slipstream with O'Neill's observation that her "post-Shelleyan vision" renders her an "unplaceable poet, who resists our categorizing endeavours" (2011; O'Neill 59)? Seen within a broader context, how might Brontë's resurrected Shelley move the dial on debates about Romantic receptions, refocusing attention from post-Romantic corrective to creative continuation?

Exploring Shelley's "many-mingled influence" (*Epipsychidion* 358) on Brontë recalibrates our approach to this understudied subject and, in doing so, sheds new light on Shelley's reception among early Victorian writers and Brontë's immersive interactions with a Romantic bequest that was both a recent literary past and an ever-living present. The spectral Shelley that takes up residence in and roams Brontë's writing is a presence so persistent, if also unpredictable, that he need not be named. That his phantom spirit is courted, scorned, mourned, and beseeched by Brontë threads an interwoven tracery, at once intimate and ideological, through her work, her equivocality a refracted expression of his. Brontë is drawn

to Shelley precisely because of the enigmatic impermanency that forms the bedrock of his poems. In other words, Brontë sees Shelley through the bifurcating lens he bestows.

INTRODUCTION

Much of Michael O'Neill's academic writing is concerned with exploring the tendrils of Romantic poetry in the poetry of later periods. O'Neill makes a compelling case for the dialectic relationships between Romantic poets and their heirs, extending beyond poets for whom the Romantics served as benefactors to poets who employed defensive strategies to combat the lure of such potent antecedents. While O'Neill's defining work on Romantic legacies is wide ranging in scope and significance for how we read Romantic poetry and its post-Romantic manifestations, it is invariably rooted in and revolves around the study of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Of the myriad recipients of his bequest, this essay focuses on a writer who does not feature in O'Neill's seminal book, *Shelleyan Reimaginings and Influence: New Relations* (2019), but on whom he wrote elsewhere and returned to numerous times. His first essay on the topic appeared in *The Wordsworth Circle* (2007) and situates Emily Brontë as an honorary Romantic alongside Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Blake. Brontë's pivotal place within the nexus of Romantic inheritors is made clear: "There will always be an aspect of Romantic poetry that answers to Emily Brontë's formula in her poem 'To Imagination,' which might as well have been subtitled "The Romantic Ideology – do you know of a better?"' (2007; O'Neill 92). Immediately evident is O'Neill's understanding of poetic influence as a series of interlacing voicings and manoeuvres through which the Romantics speak back to those who would speak to them. Hence, this essay approaches the Romantics – principally Shelley – as agile proponents of their own afterlives. This essay also considers the

possibilities that arise from and the implications of regarding Brontë as a close, if at times circumspect, co-partner of the Romantic project. How can we reconcile Brontë as a "proximate" Romantic who wrote in Shelley's slipstream with O'Neill's observation that her "post-Shelleyan vision" renders her an "unplaceable poet, who resists our categorizing endeavours" (2011; O'Neill 59)? Seen within a broader context, how might Brontë's resurrected Shelley move the dial on debates about Romantic receptions, refocusing attention from post-Romantic corrective to creative continuation?

READING SHELLEY

The literary coupling of Emily Brontë and Percy Bysshe Shelley has not received the same degree of critical attention as Brontë and Byron or indeed Brontë and Wordsworth. Records of Byron's life and editions of his poems, owned by Patrick Brontë, formed the Romantic bedrock of the Brontës' writings. No such evidence of the Brontës' access to Shelley exists in their father's library or in other places where they had access to books. What the Brontës knew of Shelley's life and works, when, and from what source is open to conjecture. As a result, scholars have been slower and more cautious in exploring Shelley's influence on Brontë than Byron on Brontë. That said, the importance of the Romantics to the Brontës, including if not foregrounding Shelley, is now generally accepted where previously it had been rejected, sidelined, or overlooked. It is curious to think that, for Leslie Stephen, writing about Emily Brontë in the *Cornhill Magazine* (1877), Shelley, Byron, and Keats "would probably have made no impression on a nature only susceptible to kindred influences" (cited in Allott 437). It is perhaps even more curious that Byron would only be mentioned in passing (with no mention of Shelley or any other Romantic poet) in Tom Winnifrith's chapter on "The Brontës and their Books" a century later.[1] Where the 1976 Clarendon edition of

Wuthering Heights makes no mention of Shelley, more recent editorial matter remedies the omission. According to Helen Small, in her introduction to the 2009 Oxford World's Classics edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Shelley's poetry offered Brontë metaphors of love and loss uncoupled from Christian doctrine. Scholarly editions of Brontë's poems that appeared in the 1990s similarly cite Shelley as a source, with Janet Gezari making a strong case for Brontë's immersion in Romantic writing.

This essay proceeds from the standpoint that the Brontës read and revered Shelley. It is very likely that they first encountered the Shelley "story" as an adjunct to Byron's, a view supported by Emily's watercolor of "The North Wind," which she revised, to striking effect, from an engraving by William Finden in Thomas Moore's *Life of Byron*. While Finden's copy of Richard Westall's "Ianthe" illustrates Byron's dedication to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the figure of Ianthe may have held special interest for Emily given the character's prominence in *Queen Mab*.[2] The Brontës also had the opportunity to read a lengthy article, "The Poetry of Shelley," in *Fraser's Magazine* of June 1838, which quotes substantial passages from his works – *Queen Mab*, *Hellas*, and *The Cenci* among them – with a sustained focus on *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound*. The article in *Fraser's* anticipates the appearance of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* in 1839, the four-volume edition Mary Shelley prepared for publication following the suppressed circulation of *Posthumous Poems* (1824). Although the Brontës' exposure to Shelley almost certainly pre-dates 1839, as I argue in this essay, his importance to them intensified rapidly with access to an extensive collection of his poems in full.

Although not as steeped in Shelley as her siblings, some of Anne Brontë's poems, including "The Captive Dove" and "Fluctuations" ("What though the sun had left my sky"), imitate

phrases and themes (specifically the neglected captive) from *Epipsychidion*, a poem which she and Emily seem to have known from an early age. The style of certain titles and stanza forms in Anne's poems correspond with those used by Shelley, as Edward Chitham has noted, and she adopts his views on occasion.[3] Charlotte Brontë makes a direct reference to the poet and *Prometheus Unbound* in "Caroline Vernon," her final foray into the Angrian saga; advancing hours are, Charlotte writes, "those 'wild-eyed charioteers' as Shelley calls them" (*Tales of Glass Town* p. 267).[4] Along with further allusions to *Prometheus Unbound* (as well as to "The Question" and "Ode to the West Wind") in her penultimate novel *Shirley*, Beverly Taylor suggests that Charlotte's portrait of the eponymous heroine casts Emily in a Shelleyan mould, highlighting her rebelliousness, idealism, and social conscience (2018; Taylor 460). Charlotte's pairing of her sister and Shelley in the figure of Shirley is fitting given his profound impact on her.

Chitham bemoans the paucity of sustained criticism on Percy Bysshe Shelley and Emily Brontë, pressing the need for "deep excavation" in an essay of 2016 (Chitham 411). Shelley was not only a Romantic mentor for Brontë, according to Chitham; he was a hero out of whom she fashioned a personal cult. For Winifred Gérin, Brontë is Shelley's equal in character, philosophy, spirit, and style – "she thought and wrote at times like Shelley … out of a natural sympathy" (Gérin 153) – while, for Irene Tayler, "Shelley was the poet with whom Emily had the closest affinity" (1990; Tayler 20). Brontë has more recently been placed in "productive commerce" with her Romantic forebears by O'Neill as he explores the "intricate play of affinity and difference" that vitalized and troubled her writing (2010; O'Neill 636). The argument that follows profits from O'Neill's reading of Brontë's post-Romantic individualism as enmeshed in and emerging from divided perspectives and doubleness of feeling. The next part of this essay focuses on Brontë's poems, particularly (but

not exclusively) those that engage with poems by Shelley published in *Posthumous Poems*, before the final part considers the Shelleyan contours of her novel, *Wuthering Heights*. The latter stages of the essay seek to shift the debate on Brontë and Shelley away from echoic conversations to the less direct but arguably more fundamental legacy of form.

"A CHAIN OF VISIONS WEAVING:"[5] SHELLEY'S PRESENCE IN BRONTË'S POEMS

Shelley ripples through Brontë's poems, often in subtler yet ever accumulating and arguably more resonant ways than Byron. "The more closely one examines Emily's poetry from 1844 to 1846," writes F. B. Pinion, "the more impregnated it appears with Shelleyan thought," (Pinion 201) the result, for Chitham, of a "major reawakening" of her interest in the poet following the publication of *Poetical Works* (1978; Chitham 196). That Emily encountered and was inspired by Shelley years before the 1839 edition appeared is evident, I argue, in the early poem "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending." Written on 13 December 1836, the drama of nature liberating "Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon" betokens Byron (*Complete Poems* 5), as do many of Brontë's poems that dwell on forms of imprisonment. Yet the lyrically exhilarating "High waving heather" breaks through the Byronic despair that pervades her poems of this period. Out of the poem's hypnotic pulsing rears a landscape riven by cataracts that recalls "Mont Blanc," where the "rushing torrents' restless gleam" wells up and pours forth from "secret chasms" (*Major Works* 121, 122). The "perpetual stream" in Shelley's poem of 1816 leaves behind "remotest waste" as in Brontë's poem, written almost exactly twenty years later ("Mont Blanc" 109, 112); in both poems, the "reckless course" of rivers burst their banks, ever widening and deepening the water course, while "desolate desert" is left in their wake ("High waving heather" 10, 12).

There are signal differences between the poems. Brontë's vision of sublime majesty is sparked by and swiftly hurtles away from the heather of the title. In addition, the forced spatial dynamics of her opening stanza – where vegetation quails beneath "stormy blasts," and heaven and earth are locked in a horizon "rising" and "descending" – gives way to a plummeting descent, "All down the mountain sides" (1, 4, 7). Such quickening compressions diverge from Shelley's perambulation through the Alpine environs of the River Arve before ascending to Mont Blanc, the pinnacle that "gleams on high" (127). Brontë, in this way, distils and even outdoes the "undisciplined overflowing of the soul" with which Mary and P. B. Shelley set out, as recorded in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, to "imitate the untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity from which those feelings sprang" (*Major Works* p. 721). Although the dizzying speed with which we are propelled over a precipice in the second stanza of Brontë's poem dissipates to a degree in the final stanza, there is no let-up in momentum; the present participle with which eight out of twelve lines end in the opening two stanzas begins nearly all of the six lines that comprise the third stanza (numerous words in the final stanza end with the suffix "ing"). Where Shelley adopted the irregular rhyme-scheme of Milton's *Lycidas* to mimic the pursuit of finding verbal form for feeling in "Mont Blanc," Brontë's breathlessly unpunctuated poem finally dilates, as it dances, with Shelleyan evanescence:

> Shining and lowering and swelling and dying
> Changing forever from midnight to noon
> Roaring like thunder like soft music sighing
> Shadows on shadows advancing and flying
> Lightning bright flashes the deep gloom defying
> Coming as swiftly and fading as soon

("High waving heather" 13-18)

Nature's grandeur is, for Brontë, as it was for the Romantics, eternal and ineffable. More specifically Shelleyan, I would argue, is how "her poem's verbal unfolding," as O'Neill observes of another Brontë poem (2011; O'Neill 60), seems to incarnate the famous formulation: "the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness" ("A Defence of Poetry" pp. 696-7). While Brontë could not have known Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" (the essay was not published until 1840) when she wrote "High waving heather," the closing lines on poetic inspiration as instantaneous light dividing the dark channel, in Brontë's poem as in Shelley's before her, "a sound but half its own ("Mont Blanc" 6). The to-and-fro of Brontë's conversation with Shelley, like Shelley's with Coleridge and Wordsworth, is played out in the poem's inter-mixture of outpouring and fading away.

The concluding stanza of "High waving heather" recalls the opening of "Mont Blanc," in which "fast influencings" of the "human mind" flow like "rapid waves, / Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom— / Now lending splendour" (38, 37, 2-4), revolving words and effects imitating a restive imagination. Shelley's poetic mind in "ceaseless motion" (32) resurfaces, once more, as nonconformist religion in Brontë's "No coward soul is mine." Casting off church dogma admits for Brontë, as it did for her predecessor, "interpenetration [with] a diviner nature" ("Defence of Poetry" p. 697), an undying and undimmed pantheistic spirit that "Pervades and broods above, / Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears" ("No coward soul" 19-20). Such endlessly creative energy, coexisting with as it simultaneously animates and denies its expiration, reworks Coleridge's account of the secondary imagination in *Biographia Literaria* as a force which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate,"

as noted by Gezari (*Complete Poems* p. 279). But the manifold agency of Brontë's "waken[ing] doubt" ("No coward soul" 13) is unmistakably Shelleyan. The speaker of "No coward soul" most closely resembles Shelley, somewhat paradoxically, when affirming her absolute and autonomous difference; poetry, for both writers, is "at once the centre and circumference of knowledge" ("Defence of Poetry" p. 696), with the poetic mind as a gyre, host to ever-changing and ever-present inflection and renewal.

Brontë's poetic career is bookended by Shelley: from "High waving heather," written when she was only eighteen years old, to "No coward soul is mine," one of the last poems she wrote almost a decade later. Both poems, while formally and tonally distinct, reincarnate the "unremitting interchange" of the "human mind's imaginings" in Shelley's "Mont Blanc," and delve into "The secret strength of things / Which governs thought" (39, 143, 139-40). Both poems remain steadfastly and unrepentantly Romantic. That said, Brontë is as searching and, at times, equivocal about Romantic expansiveness as Shelley was before her, a point to which this essay shall return. Yet her devotion to the "secret strength" of imaginative thought empowers her poetry with an awareness of its own defiance, not simply in the atheistic overtones of questioning "if there be a God above" ("Written in the Gaaldine Prison Caves to A. G. A." 74), but in the trenchant resolve of an "inward faith" (51) that is preserved at great personal cost in "Honour's Martyr." While Brontë's poems often protest at "the world's disdain" – with scorn directed not only at false friends but those who adopt a Byronic posture of haughtiness and "boundless pride" as in "Strong I stand though I have borne" (10, 13) – it is the Shelleyan drive towards a soul un-anchored from convention that becomes the sole purpose of life as death approaches in "The Old Stoic." The self-determining faith that evangelizes a metamorphic "wide-embracing love" (17) in "No coward soul" takes courage from Shelley the religious doubter while her last surviving poems, "Why ask to know the date

– the clime?" and its subsequent reworking, pivot towards Shelley the political revolutionary and an equally Romantic "disenchantment with the failure of violent revolutions" (Davies 241).[6] Brontë's move to point up and deliberate the consequences of her poems' daring visionary inwardness brings both Shelley's radicalism and his scepticism into view.

The interplay between hope and despair proves to be, for both Shelley and Brontë, their "Flood subject," as death and immortality were for Emily Dickinson.[7] In "Hope," despair descends as hope's "false guard" (9) shies away from the speaker with an "unrelenting" cruelty (13) whereas, in "Death," the speaker reinvests in hope, receptive to the murmurings of spring amid sorrow. "Death" looks through and beyond a final state; the "mouldering corpse" at the poem's close is reabsorbed, like the decomposing Keats in *Adonais*, within "Life's restoring tide" (31, 12). The Shelleyan mutability of moods in "Death" multiply across Brontë's poems. Gezari (p. 262) notes a similarity in subject and syntax between Shelley's "Mutability" and Brontë's "The wind was rough which tore":

> We rest.—A dream has power to poison sleep;
> We rise—One wandering thought pollutes the day;
> […]
> It is the same!
>
> (Shelley, "Mutability" 9-10, 13)

> We wander on we have no rest
> It is a dreary way
>
> (Brontë, "The wind was rough" 5-6)

Capricious dreams or thoughts, as captured in the lines above by Shelley, seep into and structure Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë's poem, on the other hand, is concerned more with the relentlessness of life confronted by death than with ruminations on enduring impermanence.

The desolate tones of "The wind was rough" has more in common with another poem published alongside "Mutability" in *Posthumous Poems*: the "gloomy world" (13) conjured in Shelley's sonnet, "Lift not the painted veil." The closing stanza of Brontë's poem inhabits Shelley's macabre shadowlands populated by "unreal shapes" ("Lift not the painted veil" 2):

> What shadow is it
> That ever moves before [my] eyes
> It has a brow of ghostly whiteness
>
> ("The wind was rough" 7-9)

Brontë's imagination, like Shelley's, is haunted by persistent spectral presences – the "ever-present, phantom thing" (24) of mature poems like "Plead for Me," with origins in some of her earliest poems. The speaker of "The night of storms has passed," written in 1837, does not heed the warning of "Lift not the painted veil." Where Shelley's sonnet glimpses the "chasm" (6) beyond our affectation of life, Brontë's poem plunges into the "gulf" (39), with a speaker transfixed by the "shadowy thing[s]" (18) that stalk Shelley's poem and "ever weave / Their shadows" (5-6). Where the octave of "Lift not the painted veil" swerves away from the sestet's direct encounter with the abyss (the inverted form of the sonnet safeguarding against exposure), "The night of storms" unflinchingly "tracks the boundless blue" that leads to "the sea of death's eternity" (35, 38). In contrast to the epiphanic journey through "worlds

of light" (4) in "I'm happiest when most away," where a Shelleyan spirit is transported beyond an earthbound existence, "The night of storms" wrestles with the survival of the self; the silence that binds – "My words died in a voiceless moan" – is shattered only by "forms [that] have troubled me," i.e. the revenant's "dreary singing" (29, 8, 58). The horror lurking on the periphery of Shelley's sonnet – vision endlessly arrested by spectres "sightless and drear" (6) – is realized in Brontë's "The wind was rough" as the shadow's "brow of ghostly whiteness" (9) perpetually flits before the speaker's eyes.

The wind as a catalyst in Brontë's psychodramas of visionary transcendence and loss comes directly from Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," a poem Lyn Pykett claims Brontë "seems constantly to have been rewriting" (Pykett 29). Brontë's poems are saturated with the Ode's imagery and ideas. In "The wind was rough," for instance, Shelley's autumn winds gust in "ghostly" requiem while a leaf is orphaned as it is ripped from the "parent tree" and cast before the speaker like a "withering corpse" (9, 2, 4). It is the transformative power of "Ode to the West Wind" that takes hold of and drives Brontë's imagination in "Aye there it is! It wakes tonight." While Wordsworth's presence is palpable in the poem's philosophy of "universal influence" – "A principle of life intense / Lost to mortality" (17, 19-20) – it is Shelley's poetic "Ashes and sparks" ("Ode to the West Wind" 67), scattered by the west wind, that catch fire with reanimating brightness in Brontë's poem. The Ode's fearsome spirit transmigrates into a Romantic heir who addresses the antecedent with stirring directness and actuates his "prophecy" (69). But Brontë not only transmits Shelley's "words among mankind" (67). The "glorious wind" (9) in "Aye there it is!" sweeps aside memory of the world outside and a "new birth" is quickened ("Ode to the West Wind" 64), akin to the regenerative "glorious birth" (50) envisaged by Iernë in "Faith and Despondency." The father, in "Faith and Despondency," predicts that this emancipatory tempest will strengthen

his daughter's resolve and steer her to the shores of immortality, Brontë's "eternal home" (69) a version of "the abode where the Eternal are" at the close of *Adonais* (495). As Keats "doth bear / His part" (380-1) within the pantheistic "oneness" of Shelley's elegy, so the Shelleyan subject of "Aye there it is!" is liberated from life held captive by death. And yet Brontë is not a vessel for Romantic re-voicings in any straightforward sense. The surging uplift of "Thy prisoned soul shall rise" (22) unsettles the poem's structural prison house and surpasses Shelley's Platonic promise.

Where the apotheosis at the close of "Aye there it is!" releases Shelley from an existence bound by the body in a poem that tests its own verbal incasements, his spirit returns to offer the nightly hope of "eternal liberty" (36) to Brontë's prisoner in the poem of that name. Although a wandering presence in "The Prisoner (A Fragment)" is reminiscent of Wordsworth, as critics have noted (see Gezari p. 278), I argue that the poem's dialogic exchange between the anticipated transport from and the fearful arrest back to a consciousness of captivity is undeniably Shelleyan. The Shelleyan "messenger," carried on "western winds," is a deliverer from the tyranny of "outward sense" and a defender of the imagination's "inward essence" (35, 37, 50).

> "He comes with western winds, with evening's wandering airs,
> With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars.
> Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,
> And visions rise, and change, that kill me with desire." (37-40)

A night sky, aglow with moonbeams and stars, signifies creative freedom for Brontë and Shelley. Equally, both writers dread re-imprisonment within the mental bounds of daytime reality when nocturnal realms fade.

"Stars" recollects revelling in the "cool radiance" of nightfall when enduring "dazzling" daylight and the "fierce" glare of the sun (20, 1, 22). The night sky is illuminated by a panoply of Romantic precursors, including Coleridge, Keats, and Hemans, as well as Shelley. Yet the stars that make up this poetic constellation remind us that enchantment cedes to disenchantment. The ballad metre sustaining the "spell" (18) of a Romantic dreamworld in "Stars" simultaneously commits the poem to a cycle of narrative uncertainty that entraps Coleridge's mariner in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Keats's knight-at-arms in "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Brontë's speaker is swept up in and suffers the counterforce of an imagination separated from its source. Such disaffection is reflective of a broader anxiety, moreover, with "Stars" occupying a poetic netherworld in the wake of this creative wellspring. Brontë's interregnal position subjects the Romantic "spell" of "Stars" to the scourging light of early Victorianism, the dawn blazing through and eviscerating the "veil" of Romantic opacity, however much the speaker shuts her eyes to the advent of a fearful "arrow-straight" era (25, 21).

Brontë doubles down on the divided perspectives of her poem's parentage. The "starry-eyed" supplicant of "Stars" exposes how susceptible Romantic influence is to an "eye severe" (Keats, *Lamia* II: 157), her iridescent imagination unspooling under steadfast scrutiny. Of the Romantic poems that populate "Stars," Shelley's "To Night" notable among them, Brontë adapts the symbolic narrative of *The Triumph of Life*, a poem prepared by Mary Shelley for publication in 1824. The poet-speaker's "strange trance" (*Triumph of Life* 29), occasioned by

withdrawal from an alienating daytime order, stimulates, in Brontë, the Shelleyan desire to inhabit a "world far from ours, / Where music and moonlight and feeling / Are one" ("To Jane ('The keen stars were twinkling')," 22-4). Yet while Brontë is propelled through Shelley's "boundless regions," the rush of "Thought followed thought, star followed star" stalls with the self-chastising "It would not do" ("Stars" 14, 13, 33). A sense of disconnect deepens towards the end of "Stars" when the speaker's Shelleyan resolve to shun sunshine labors and keep "wakeful" (*Triumph of Life* 22) for the night casts the morning glow and birdsong as intruders in a sanctuary under siege. Where the speaker of Shelley's "To Night" observes the dulling effects of daytime, as "noon lay heavy on flower and tree" (18), Brontë's speaker is beset by the sights and sounds of the natural world. Shelleyan nonconformity comes at a cost in "Stars;" what is for the speaker a refuge is, for the flies trapped in her bedroom, an internment: "Imprisoned there, till I should rise, / And give them leave to roam" (39-40). The "murmuring" (38) of awakened life plagues the speaker with a collective call for liberty. By the closing stanza, when Brontë's speaker castigates the hostile environment of paternalistic servitude from which she recoils, the poem simultaneously passes sentence on the mental theater of the poet-visionary.

The post-Romantic predicament of "Stars" recalls visionary desire from a conflicted and estranging present. And yet Brontë's bifocal poetics is remarkably Romantic. Brontë's equivocality invests in and underlines Shelley's equivocality. The sensuous yearning for a self immersed in a sea of "changeful dreams" (11) chimes with the lines quoted above from "The Prisoner," whereby incendiary winds "take a pensive tone," their inwardness concentrating tender feeling into thrilling present-tense sensation. Such euphoric introspection apprehends its own loss in both "The Prisoner" and "Stars," the "agonised recoil" from ecstasy, according to O'Neill, intensifying the "bliss of self-transcendence"

(2008; O'Neill 182). Waning vision, conveyed through the stellar imagery of "Stars" and "To Night," intensifies the poems' erotic charge. Where Shelley's speaker coaxes the "beloved" into a tactile defence against the light – "Blind with thine hair the eyes of day, / Kiss her until she be wearied out" ("To Night" 33, 10-11) – Brontë's speaker implores the night to renew their physical union – "Throb with my heart, and me!" ("Stars" 32) – turning to her bed with frantic abandon. Engaging with Shelley in these poems becomes indivisible from intoxicating imaginative states that are craved, mourned, and entreated like a lover.

Pre-echoes of such intimate longings can be found in a series of poems, written by Brontë in late 1839 and early 1840, which revolve around a shadowy figure, shade, or wanderer, associated with the wind.[8] "The Night-Wind" is a poem of seduction played out through sound and touch, the "soft wind [that] waved my hair" in the opening lines becoming more ardent as the poem progresses: "Its kiss grew warmer still" (6, 26). While the speaker of "The Night-Wind" tries to resist the "wooing voice" (18) they arouse, the wind gains in strength and gives voice to a former fealty:

> "Have we not been from childhood friends?
> Have I not loved thee long?
> As long as thou hast loved the night
> Whose silence wakes my song?" (29-32)

Shelley is brought before our eyes as the wind takes the form of a "Wanderer," a forsaken lover, who is heard when the wind "whispered lowly" (25, 11):

> "The thick leaves in my murmur

Are rustling like a dream,

And all their myriad voices

Instinct with spirit seem" (13-16)

In "The Night-Wind," Brontë enters into a passionate and personal dialogue with Shelley, intoning impressions of poetic spirit through the "mighty harmonies" of autumn's falling leaves ("Ode to the West Wind" 59).

The opening line of Shelley's Ode – "O, wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being" (1) – sounds across Brontë's poems. Effusion interleaved with despondency is funnelled through the multifarious winds that blow in Brontë's poetry. For instance, a Shelleyan hope at the start of "The wind I hear it sighing," where the "withered leaves" of "Autumn's saddest sound" foreshadow "spring-flowers" (3, 2, 4), gives way to sorrow. At first glance, the poem seems to conform to what Andrew Elfenbein identifies as the "master narrative" (89) of nineteenth-century literature, in which Victorian maturity outgrows the "fancies wild" (16) of youthful Romanticism. "Old feelings" stirred by nocturnal wanderings "prey" upon Brontë's speaker and harden a spirit that is, recalling Keats's knight-at-arms, "cold and cheerless now" (7, 8, 10). However, while the light of Romanticism has dimmed to "lingering shades," the poem moves into more negatively capable territory in the closing stanzas; "past pleasures" are offered up to appease the "deadliest pains" of the present, yet the resulting "oblivion" is secured only by shoring up what previously brought happiness (11, 17, 20, 18). It is unclear, at the end of the poem, whether "another love" (24) describes an alternative to or a renewed fixation with the past. The dejected "sighing" which seeks protection from recollections of Romanticism segue-ways into "sighing" for its return, a deep-rooted hunger for Romantic intensity outweighing the "after-storm of pain" (4) detailed in "It is too late to call thee now."

Shelleyan succor has all but dried up in “It is too late,” a poem bound to a stoic sense of belatedness, with the speaker resigned to a loss of “golden visions” (8). But, as in “The wind I hear it sighing,” the poem pivots, on the modifier “Yet” (9), from renouncing to reaffirming Romanticism. The opacity of Shelleyan “mist” only ever remains tentatively “half withdrawn,” and the speaker’s devotion to “Thy darling shade” is redoubled (5, 10).

Pivoting perspectives also feature in poems where Brontë meditates on Shelley as a forsaken figure. Mood swiftly supplants mood in “Stanzas to —,” not solely in the *volte-face* between stanzas, where rejection of the subject is curbed by repentance, but between and within lines. “One word” stems tears at “that wretch’s woe;” and, with “altered eye,” the speaker scrutinizes a posthumous reputation that has elicited either negative reactions or no reaction at all (7, 6, 8). Resentment, tinged with regret, transitions through self-reproof, pity, and reconciliation. In contrast to the resolved conflict Derek Roper (247) detects in the poem, “Stanzas to —” compacts near-antithetical emotions, a technique that also gives structure to “Shed no tears o’er that tomb.” “Shed no tears” cautions against mourning for a soul shut out of heaven’s grace. The opening of the poem is concerned with the souls of “good *men*” while the close despairs at the damnation of the “accursed *man*,” a possible allusion to Shelley’s atheism (9, 15, 30; added emphases). The turn from speculating on a collective fate to singling out Shelley is signalled in the following stanza:

> But he who slumbers there:
> His bark will strive no more
> Across the waters of despair
> To reach that glorious shore (17-20)

The peril faced by Shelley's soul is formulated through biographical detail (his death in a boating accident) and his own back catalogue. But these lines effectively terminate the intrepid voyage at the close of *Adonais*; what is envisaged by Shelley as a soul unmoored – "my spirit's bark is driven / Far from the shore" (488-9) – is end stopped by Brontë's "His bark will strive no more." Where Brontë emulates and is emboldened by Shelley elsewhere in her poems, here he enrages and is consigned to "Revenge eternally –" (32). Trapping Shelley in this form of purgatory is especially cruel given that he sought to free his own heroic protagonist from such a fate in *Prometheus Unbound*, a lyric drama Brontë references, less than six months after she wrote "Shed no tears," in the opening line of "Written in the Gaaldine Prison Caves to A. G. A."[9]

A transformative restlessness resurfaces in "Far, far away is mirth withdrawn." The identity of the subject is withheld – "I will not name thy blighted name" – save for references to a burial "long ago" and a reputation faded into anonymity: "Deserted one! thy corpse lies cold / And mingled with a foreign mould" (9, 36, 5-6). That the "shade" (4) of "Far, far away" is Shelley can be inferred from the allusion to committal overseas and a dishonor associated with irreligious beliefs. Yet, in this poem, the subject's "unforgotten shame" is not dealt with severely; the verdict of "Shed no tears" is overturned: "Vengeance will never torture thee / Nor hunt thy soul eternally" (10, 27-8). Rather than forecasting a fated Shelleyan afterlife, the speaker of "Far, far away" allies herself with the subject to defend against "Our mutual foes" (21). Cultivating an attitude of companionable conspiracy, trusting in God rather than a disapproving religion, anticipates the appeal for "oneness" already noted in "Stars." And yet the final stanza of "Far, far away" prevaricates as the speaker insists on their separate states: the poem's recourse to divisive pronouns – while "*He*" is at peace in death, "*I*" must "endure the woe" of what is irrevocably lost (35; original emphases) – reframes the distinction in

Adonais between a collective "*We*," who "decay / Like corpses in a charnel," and a "He," the dead subject, who is now "secure" from the "contagion of the world's slow stain" (348-9, 357, 356; original emphasis). That the successive rebounds of Brontë's poem ultimately come to rest on a lament for the living channels Shelley's anguished cognizance of mortal decline.

Laments by and for the living in Brontë's writing also form parallels with Shelley's narrative poem "The Sensitive Plant." Despite an absence of critical interest in Brontë and the poem, its primary concerns reverberate through her writing: an unfolding or unveiling of dreamlike subjectivities that are "interpenetrated" – to use Shelley's term for the synesthetic interdependency of the garden – by winds that gather force from "blithe" and "light" to a "northern whirlwind" (I: 66, 62, 78; III: 110). More specifically, the "shade" of "Far, far away" can be seen to reconfigure the plight of the sensitive plant; the tears that harden with the ravages of frost in Shelley's poem "have left ghastly traces" on "Thy phantom face" in Brontë's poem (14, 13). Brontë captures the macrobiotic end of Shelley's "leafless wreck;" the decomposing "corpse" submerged beneath "monstrous undergrowth" ("The Sensitive Plant" III: 115, 18, 59) in his poem is reimagined in her depiction of the poet "mingled with a foreign mould" ("Far, far away" 6). But the Shelley that pervades Brontë's poems is not fragile or "sensitive," as he would later be characterized in the Victorian period. Rather, Brontë's Shelley is subtly yet substantively ephemeral in ways that speak to the philosophical undercurrents and formal preoccupations of her work.

Brontë's repeated figuration of Shelley as a shadowy figure or shade, as in "Far, far away," shares similarities with his own figuration of the garden's soul, a ministering spirit with the short-lived seasonal power to amplify and amalgamate dreamlike sensation into what would

appear to be a holistic vision. Summoning summer's evanescence in "The Sensitive Plant" encapsulates Brontë's longing in "Stars" to be immersed in a Shelleyan presence:

> As if some bright Spirit for her sweet sake
> Had deserted heaven while the stars were awake,
> As if yet around her he lingering were,
> Though the veil of daylight concealed him from her.
>
> ("The Sensitive Plant" II: 17-20)

A deeper connection between Brontë and Shelley is signalled here. "As if" raises the possibility of something it is not entirely possible to believe, a summoning of and resistance to scepticism courted elsewhere in "The Sensitive Plant" by Shelley's use of the phrase "I doubt not" (II: 29, 31).[10] Conjunctions such as "and" and "like" interseed the allegory with a fretwork of imaginative doubt. The techniques employed to conjure the hyperreal elysian ideal of "The Sensitive Plant," a fall-prone Paradise flipped as a "leafless net-work of parasite bowers / Massed into ruin" (III: 48-9), are borrowed by Brontë to conjure the hallucinogenic after-effects of Shelley's "spell" in "Stars."

A Shelleyan subjectivity divided against itself provides a blueprint for Brontë. The short question with which Brontë's "Far, far away" concludes – "What have I dreamt?" (33) – is suggestive of Shelley's arresting turn back on the mode of perception in the concluding part of "The Sensitive Plant" (as well as echoing the poised irresolution of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale:" "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music – Do I wake or sleep?" 79-80). In addition to "Far, far away" performing a Shelleyan swerve into the "shadows of the dream" (Conclusion: 12), pressure is brought to bear on what we might

"endure" in the penultimate line of both poems (emphasis in Brontë's poem is placed on the enervating persistence of sensation whereas Shelley decries the deficiencies of our senses). The narrative hesitancy that alerts the reader to the smokescreen shrouding human understanding in Shelley's Conclusion – "I cannot say" (Conclusion: 4) – is revoiced elsewhere in Brontë's poems: the exact phrase is used in "The night was dark yet winter breathed," a poem concerned, like "The Sensitive Plant," with the elemental nature and ministrations of "a shadowy spirit" (24), while a similar tactic to Shelley's prevaricating "I dare not guess" (Conclusion: 9) is deployed in the "none can tell" (6) of Brontë's "Why do I hate that lone green dell?"

The self-subverting subjectivities of Shelley's "The Sensitive Plant" are explored in Brontë's "A Day Dream" along with the Romantic ballads considered above in relation to "Stars." The "frozen" (30) bird song that foreshadows a "famished" (32) winter and the mistrustful questioning of dreamlike states to which the speaker has no adequate response set astir associations with Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci." "A Day Dream" works even more openly in the shadow of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," with Brontë's speaker, a wedding guest, singled out and shunned for their cynical worldview. The poem's colloquy with these Romantic ballads is both conscious and artful. While Brontë's speaker, like Coleridge's mariner and Keats's knight-at-arms, struggles to make sense of their disaffected state, the former admits to an ignorance of what has led to this predicament, stating frankly: "I did not know" (18). In some respects, then, Brontë inverts the ballad tradition she engages with; the foreknowledge of death with which "The Day Dream" begins submits to an uplifting faith in the afterlife, dejection conceding to hope.

"A Day Dream" hedges allusions to Coleridge with Shelleyan equivocation: "A thousand thousand gleaming fires / Seemed kindling in the air"; "The little glittering spirits sung, / Or seemed to sing, to me" (41-2, 51-2). Brontë's speaker appears to grasp the disabusing wisdom of "The Sensitive Plant" – "Where nothing is, but all things seem" (Conclusion: 11) – when querying the positivist logic of mortality predicated on seasonal cycles: "Now, whether it were really so, / I never could be sure" (37-8). In short, embracing contraries liberates the mind from what our bodily senses take to be truth. The poem presses home this point in its closing curveball, "But Fancy, still, will sometimes deem / Her fond creation true" (71-2): the habitual doubt which singles the speaker out for sorrow is capable of withstanding unending permutations. Brontë's poem progresses from Coleridge and Keats – or, more specifically, from their protagonists' nightmarish dependence on empirical knowledge – to allusive Shelleyan vistas that "overflow the sky / With universal joy" (55-6). Although the spirits entice with proofs of the beyond as the poem draws to a close – "And could we lift the veil, and give / One brief glimpse to thine eye" (65-6) – "A Day Dream" resists the promise of certainties and spins gossamer webs of speculative thought.

"UNENTANGLED INTERMIXTURE:" SHELLEYAN CONTOURS IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

The final part of this essay draws to light the Shelleyan contouring that shapes *Wuthering Heights*. Among other areas to be analyzed, Brontë's treatment of love in the novel – love that endures and is transmogrified through memory – has origins in Shelley. While critics (e.g., Stoneman) have commented on the "unentangled intermixture" (*Epipsychidion* 93) of the speaker and Emily in *Epipsychidion* as a model for the transgressive twinship of Cathy and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, it is equally important to recognize the parallel between

the pained consequences of Brontë's Platonic union and the darkening shades that cluster around Shelley's pursuit of an existence permeated by the epipsyche. Cathy concedes that there is "little visible delight" in her "necessary" bond and Heathcliff suffers an imprisoning limbo after her death (I: pp. 101-2). Shelley analogously intimates that worship of everlasting love, while not without rewards, tethers the supplicant to a purgatorial netherworld, "Continuously prolonged, and ending never" (101). Brontë's most profound debt to *Epipsychidion* is not Cathy summoning Shelley's sentiment, "I am not thine: I am a part of *thee*" (52; original emphasis), and neither is it the novel's experiment with "reversing the genders of Shelley's free love" (Stoneman 130). It is rather the poem's ceaseless process of self-critical reflection and qualification that underpins Brontë's novel. As the concluding part of Shelley's poem rhapsodizes a transfiguring union with "wingèd words" undone by retarding "chains of lead" (588, 590), so Cathy's Shelley-inspired speech places insupportable pressure on the "ideal" she is moved to articulate, hastening Heathcliff's departure and their mutual destruction.

Shelley's presence in *Wuthering Heights*, as with the preceding discussion of Brontë's poems, goes deeper and wider than verbal borrowings and shared concepts. "Ozymandias," for instance, published during Shelley's lifetime in the *Examiner* and then in *Poetical Works*, shares similarities with the multiform structure of Brontë's novel, with Lockwood, like Shelley's speaker, at double remove from the tale he tells. Equally pertinent are the anxieties over audience and posterity concentrated in Shelley's sonnet; the creep of time half halted and compounded by vestiges of the past resonates with Heathcliff's story in *Wuthering Heights*. The sole marker of his existence is, Nelly Dean informs us, a repurposed name on a headstone, echoing the fate of Shelley's Pharaoh: "Nothing beside remains" (12). When Lockwood records his visit to the graves of Cathy, Heathcliff, and Edgar Linton at the close

of Brontë's novel, he, like Shelley's sculptor, endeavors to "read" "those passions… / Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things" (6-7). But as Lockwood pauses on the outskirts of the moor to take in the staggered naturalisation of their final resting places, his benign conclusion can only un-imagine the "unquiet slumbers" he has experienced first-hand (II: p. 414). The site is, as with the report of ruins in "Ozymandias," symbolically resonant partly because of the speaker's resistance to unearth what lies barely hidden. While the concealed allusion to *Adonais* ("Pale Ocean in unquiet slumber lay" 125) in the closing sentence of *Wuthering Heights* submerges Shelley within Lockwood's regressively disabling incredulity, a note of elegiac poignancy persists. Brontë's novel contests the post-Romantic corrective it contemplates. Romanticism is, in fact, replayed on a continual if occasionally distorting loop, with echoes reverberating in a chokehold of near-comic conjecture and ironic denial.

Endeavoring to "read" *Wuthering Heights* through the lens of "Ozymandias" gives an indication of Shelley's impact on Brontë's novel, specifically on the interrelationship between interpreting a fragmentary past and the transmission and traction of language. Regis is surely right to contend that what endures in "Ozymandias" are words – the inscription on the pedestal – adding that this, too, is "doubly subject to the degradations of memory as re-told by traveller and speaker alike" (Regis 178-9).[11] *Wuthering Heights* begins and ends by contemplating names – on (what is then) Heathcliff's house and on his grave – from which meaning is inferred and deferred. It is the name and date above the door of the Heights that initially piques Lockwood's curiosity; he looks for an opening into the "history of the place" (I: p. 5) which is immediately closed by its owner. Inscription itself is not as enduring as might first appear, however: as the pedestal in "Ozymandias" is vulnerable to the decay that dismembers and defaces the "colossal Wreck" (13) to which it refers, so Lockwood discerns "'1500'" and "'Hareton Earnshaw'" among innumerable crumbling carvings (I: p. 5). While

the Heights is built to withstand environmental extremes, the stunted firs and slanted thorns that punctuate the surrounding landscape speak to an aspect as corrosive as the desert sands. As Brontë's house, like Shelley's antique statuary, is locked in a semantic death match with its setting, so *Wuthering Heights*, as a novel, counterfactually inscribes histories whose open-endedness magnifies as their veracity decreases.

"[T]rue love" (397) may be embedded in Brontë's novel, a love that, as Shelley submits in *Epipsychidion*, illuminates understanding. But that light is dimmed as our fallible narrators set out to fix, or certainly narrow, that which was fluid. Brontë's novel would seem to be conversant with Shelley's lines on the imagination in *Epipsychidion*, with the figure of Heathcliff emanating "…from earth and sky, / And from the depths of human fantasy, / As from a thousand prisms and mirrors" (164-6). And yet the "single word, 'Heathcliff'…only that, and the date of his death" (II: p. 403) that Nelly supplies for his headstone towards the end of the novel countermands Lockwood's request for a chronicle at the start, our talkative narrators troubled by the disruptive harshness Heathcliff represents. That his monument is stark and symbolically textured forms an interpretative crux; his "bareness" is simultaneously elliptical, in that it radiates meaning, and cryptic, in that the search to make sense of mediated meaning constricts that which is contemplated. The novel's polyphonous yet partial viewpoints forge a Blakean crucible, a "Hell in Heavens despite" ("The Clod and the Pebble" 12). Put another way, the post-Romantic horizon of *Wuthering Heights* is, in Shelleyan terms, "boundless and bare" ("Ozymandias" 13), unfurling infinite possibilities from which finite understanding recedes. Brontë's prose generates new prospects for Shelley's self-undermining poetics.

CONCLUSION

This essay has not only argued for and interrogated the significance of Percy Bysshe Shelley to Emily Brontë. Exploring Shelley's "many-mingled influence" (*Epipsychidion* 358) on Brontë recalibrates our approach to this understudied subject and, in doing so, sheds new light on Shelley's reception among early Victorian writers and Brontë's immersive interactions with a Romantic bequest that was both a recent literary past and an ever-living present. If, as Small claims, Brontë's writing "take[s] on the aspect of a stylistic graveyard" (Small xi), then Shelley is perpetually brought back from the dead. What has previously been regarded as a controversial or "tenuous link" (Hewish 147) is rather, as I hope to have established, a spectral presence so persistent, if also unpredictable, that he need not be named.[12] It is when Shelley is most shadowlike – "Undefined, without a name" (10) to quote a line from Brontë's "Loud without the wind was roaring" – that he is most at home in her work. That Shelley's phantom spirit is courted, scorned, mourned, and beseeched by Brontë threads an interwoven tracery, at once intimate and ideological, through her writing, her equivocality a refracted expression of his.

Shelley takes deep root in Brontë's writing. It is tempting, considering the argument presented in this essay, to venture that Shelley was for Brontë, as Heathcliff was for Cathy, the "eternal rocks beneath" (I: p. 101), an impermeable if weathered poetic foundation. And yet, as Brontë orchestrates Shelley's visionary poetics through the changeful chords of seasonal winds, she allows for a Shelley that is like the "foliage in the woods" which "Time will change." Brontë is drawn to Shelley precisely because of the enigmatic impermanency that undergirds his poems. In other words, Brontë sees Shelley through the bifurcating lens he bestows. Shelley's "singular" opacities not only fissure Brontë's fictional world; they

dovetail, within her writing, to form interstitial post-Romantic spaces of hermeneutic heterodoxy.[13]

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[1] Winnifrith's chapter focuses almost exclusively on the novels that may have served as models for the Brontës' fiction (*Brontës and their Background* 84-109).

[2] Alexander and Sellars reference Shelley's *Queen Mab* in their catalogue of the Brontës' artwork (116-7, 385-7), an association expanded upon by Chitham (2016; 411-12).

[3] Chitham notes possible allusions to and borrowings from Shelley in *The Poems of Anne Brontë* (39-42).

[4] The reference to "wild-eyed charioteer," "urging [the] flight" of the "immortal Hours," comes from a speech by Asia in Act II, scene iv of *Prometheus Unbound* (*Major Works* 132, 140). That Charlotte's late Angrian escapade was most probably written in the latter part of 1839 is further evidence that the Brontës had swift access to *Poetical Works*. The relevant line does not appear in *Fraser's Magazine* and nor was the work included in *Posthumous Poems*.

[5] Brontë, "O mother I am not regretting" 71.

[6] Davies (239, 241) is alert to the influence of *The Triumph of Life* and *Prometheus Unbound* on Brontë's depiction of the bloody aftermath of civil war. Hewish (95) suggests echoes of *The Mask of Anarchy* and Tayler (290) locates "Lines Written among the Euganean Hills" as a likely source.

[7] Letter from Emily Dickinson to Thomas Higginson, dated 9 June 1866. See the *Emily Dickinson Archive*, https://www.edickinson.org.

[8] Chitham claims that these poems amount to "an idolisation of Shelley" (1983; Chitham and Winnifrith 69).

[9] "Thy sun is near meridian height" echoes "as light from the meridian sun" in Act II, scene iv of *Prometheus Unbound*. Roper (247) also lists possible allusions to *Queen Mab*.

[10] The seeds of imaginative doubt that germinate in "The Sensitive Plant" also structure, through the repeated phrase "It is as if" (5, 9), the central stanzas of "For him who struck thy foreign string," a poem whose Shelleyan character is signalled by the title Charlotte Brontë gave to her sister's poem, "The Lady to Her Guitar," when it was published in 1850.

[11] Regis observes Shelleyan echoes in Charlotte Brontë's preface to the 1850 edition of her sister's novel.

[12] Mason has argued against the "tenuous charges which deem her a mystic, a Shelleyan heretic…" (2), setting out to rescue Brontë from too close an association with male Romantic poets.

[13] See Shelley's Advertisement to *Epipsychidion* in which the writer is described as "singular" (p. 512). The "distressing sense of paradox and heterogeneousness" (p. 653) that *Fraser's Magazine* of June 1838 cautioned against in Shelley's poems seeps into the style and structures of Brontë's writing. Brontë's novel seems to satirize the reviewer's righteous aim "not only to make Shelley's poetry safe, but beneficial reading" (p. 666). Their hope that the "pious reader" can "explain … apparent contradiction" and "out of its solution extract wholesome though bitter medicine" (p. 666) is heard in Lockwood's sanctimonious attempt at sanitizing Nelly's story – "I'll extract wholesome medicines from Mrs. Dean's bitter herbs" (I: p. 188) – further evidence that Brontë had Shelley in mind when conceiving her novel's complex narrative interactions.