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*Recadrage dans les ekphraseis de P.B. Shelley*

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# Percy Bysshe Shelley's Reframing Ekphrases

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- 1 As Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) wrote about the Ancient Greeks in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), he was “not bound to adhere to received interpretations” of a myth or poetic subject when rewriting former works, be they literary or visual. Changes of viewpoints, even transgressions, may be necessary to offer a new vision of these forms and ideas, and regenerate old metaphors (*A Defence of Poetry*, 1821). In his ekphrases or transaesthetic rewriting of painting, sculpture, architecture and picturesque landscapes, framing, unframing and reframing are particularly apt notions, due to the visual implication of frames.<sup>1</sup> This paper will show how Shelley's shifts of viewpoints and emphases enable him to give a new vision of, and reframe, a visual work of art, while he himself often enters its new frame. However, since unframing is another characteristic of his ekphrases, particularly when the frame dissolves in order to allow him into the painting or sculpture, it is important to be careful when considering the apparent textual framing of the description. After a brief overview of frames and transaesthetic rewriting in Shelley's poetry and prose, this paper will focus on two of Shelley's longest notes on sculpture, in which several shifting points of view can be noticed, and then on the ekphrases of two paintings, whose painted subjects seem to go out of their frames.

## The art of ekphrasis and frames in Shelley's poetry

- 2 If reframing in Shelley's ekphrases results from a change of viewpoints, the first question is whether they necessarily entail a correction that unframes and then reframes the pictures and sculptures already described by art critics and travellers. Shelley was definitely “afraid of stumbling on” the clichés of “tourists” (1964, 2: 85, 23 March 1819, to Thomas Love Peacock), like John Chetwode Eustace in his at once popular and much decried *Classical Tour through Italy* (1813), and of “connoisseurs”, like

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose *History of Ancient Art (Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums, 1764)*, which Shelley read in a 1801-1803 French translation, “framed” his aesthetic discourse. The poet was not so much anxious about writing better than tourists did as “afraid of” writing as badly as they did. Yet he did not consider himself as a specialist of sculpture or painting, although he did learn and use certain technical terms. Apart from his poem “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery” (1819) and the aborted prose piece “The Coliseum” (1818), his ekphrases were mostly circumscribed by his notes and letters, although the latter admittedly implied a reader and he had already published some of them in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817). As Mary Shelley puts it, the poet “had not studied pictures or statues before, [in Italy] he now did so with the eye of taste, that referred not to the rules of schools, but to those of nature and truth” (“Note on Poems of 1818”, in Shelley 1839, 229). About the Roman ruins, he himself insists on describing as he felt: “I have said what I feel without entering into any critical discussions [...]” (1964, 2: 89). His “transaesthetic” rewriting (Genette 435-445) may entail a change of viewpoints, but this reframing does not necessarily stem from a desire to correct what his predecessors wrote about works of art, in which case Shelley’s “ekphrasis” would only be a piece of transtextual rewriting, or what the artist himself attempted to represent, which has more to do with transaesthetic rewriting. Emotional response is primordial here, even when there is a trace of what Harold Bloom calls *clinamen* and *tessera* in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), a necessary misreading of the predecessor, like Byron below, in order to correct the previous text. Shelley’s ekphrases are usually a combination of transaesthetic rewriting and transtextuality, as he always uses a discourse that appeared in previous texts, including his own poems.

- 3 From a lexical point of view (Ellis 265), the poet does not usually refer to frames and framing in his poetry as something other than invention, creation, structure or body, which is not surprising from a Romantic who refused limits and boundaries, and sought to cross or transgress them. Indeed, bounds always encourage the poet to look beyond them and seek boundlessness, and if the circumference is not always oppressive and can be reassuring, the poet keeps urging his readers to go beyond it in order to merge with the Other, as in *Epipsychidion* (1821): “[...] we shall be one / Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?” (573-574, *The Poems*, 4: 168). It is therefore important for Shelley to unframe things, be they bodies or paintings, and to remove or transcend boundaries and limits, like the frame that divide subject and object, as this article will show.
- 4 It is when he describes landscapes in his poems that the verb “frame” may mean something other than “create” or “form”, as in “Alastor” (1815), where “[...] The pyramids / Of the tall cedar overarching, frame / Most solemn domes within [the forest...]” (433-435, *The Poems*, 1: 479). This both echoes and transcends the picturesque natural framing of Joseph Addison, for instance, in the quotation from the *OED* in note 1 above, or of Uvedale Price in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794):
 

But trees, detaching themselves at once from the surface, and rising boldly into the air, have a more lively and immediate effect on the eye. They alone, form a canopy over us, and a varied frame to all other objects which they admit, exclude, and group with, almost at the will of the improver. (1: 285-286)<sup>2</sup>
- 5 About the passage from “Alastor”, Benjamin Colbert writes that, “Despite the flowing movements of the vegetation that carry the eye in intricate paths, the Narrator constructs a series of frames around increasingly self-contained, harmonious natural

scenes" (76-77). This series of frames symbolises the diegetic Poet's greater and greater seclusion as he walks deeper and deeper into the forest in his quest for Ideal Love. In the middle of that fractal-like picture, it is not surprising that the Poet should end up looking at himself in a pond, like Narcissus, since his Ideal Love, "Herself a poet" (162, *The Poems*, 470), was in fact a projection of his self. The real picture is his own mind or soul, to which the scenery, the journey of his life even, serves as a frame. At any rate, this is a first instance of the poet entering the frame of the picture he is describing.

- 6 That "series of frames" is also found in *Rosalind and Helen* (1818), where the idea of greater and greater seclusion is less narcissistic and rather suggests a sacred place in the heart of nature: "O'er which the columned wood did frame / A roofless temple [...]" (107-108, *The Poems*, 2: 273). The verb "frame" is polysemous, as it describes a natural temple at once *formed* and *surrounded* by the column-like trees, a naturally wooden frame, and itself framing what stands in its middle, "a spring." The adjective "roofless" however removes the top part of the frame and suggests a Greek *upaithric* temple, as Shelley describes it in his letters, i.e. open onto and penetrated by nature, so that this half-architectural, half-natural wooden frame is porous. There are at once a suggestion and a rejection of the frame and its limitations. The same idea of seclusion, protection and communion with nature is found in the "Dedication" poem in *Laon and Cythna* (1818), in which the verb is again polysemous: "No longer where the woods to frame a bower / With interlacèd branches mix and meet [...]" (12-13, *The Poems*, 2: 49). Perhaps it is significant that trees were what Shelley liked to draw most, especially when they were islanded, as in "Waterfalls leap among wild islands green, / Which framed for my lone boat a lone retreat," in the same poem (15-16, *The Poems*, 50).
- 7 The natural frame is even more picturesque in "Song: To - [Ah! sweet is the moonbeam that sleeps on yon fountain]" (1810), a much earlier poem: "And sweet is the glimpse of yon dimly-seen mountain, / 'Neath the verdant arcades of yon shadowy trees" (3-4, *The Poems*, 1: 102). Although he does not use the verb "frame" here, the picturesque dimension of the passage is made explicit by the distant background seen beyond the arcade formed by the branches of the trees. This is reminiscent of Gothic descriptions, in which arches often serve as frames, firstly to emphasise the picturesqueness of the "scene" and secondly, to let the character, usually a woman, escape through it, as in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790): "An arch of singular magnificence remained almost entire, beyond which appeared wild cliffs retiring in grand perspective. The sun, which was now setting, threw a trembling lustre upon the ruins, and gave a finishing effect to the scene" (125). Perhaps Shelley's indebtedness to Gothic literature for shaping his aesthetic taste and early style has not been sufficiently emphasised, for he imbibed contemporary ideas on the picturesque through Radcliffe's romances, like, for instance, William Gilpin's "distant views" through window frames:
- Distant views*, if there is a good foreground, are generally the most pleasing; as they contain the greatest variety, both in themselves, and in their accidental variations. But if you have before your windows, a beautiful lake retiring among mountains into remote distance, [...] adorned with woody banks, and tufted islands; [...] it is all one would wish for in a situation. (1: 159)
- 8 These natural frames are less problematic for Shelley than the sometimes bulky frames of real paintings, because, far from circumscribing a view, they enable the viewer to escape through it and go deeper and deeper into the sacred heart of nature.

## Reframing sculpture

### The *Laocoön* Group in the Uffizi Gallery: reframing as shifting the emphasis

- 9 It is relevant to talk about the frame of a statue, considering that, although he felt more at ease with sculpture than with painting (1964, 2: 112, 20 August 1819, to Leigh Hunt), he barely made any distinctions between the two aesthetic fields, using the same discourse in his ekphrases. In *A Defence of Poetry*, he also defined painting and sculpture as poetry in the “general sense” (1977, 480-483), and he rather followed Horace’s *Ut pictura poesis* (*Epistles*) than G.E. Lessing’s *Limits of Painting and Literature* (1766), hence the value of ekphrasis. His immaterialistic, even monistic, view of the universe (see “On Life”, 1819) led him to develop a more comprehensive than discriminating view of art, as when he praises the union of the various arts on the Athenian stage in *A Defence of Poetry* (1977, 489). Of course, he had also seen more or less framed engravings of statues, including *The Laocoön*.
- 10 Shelley wrote his note on the group not only after seeing Baccio Bandinelli’s 1525 copy in Florence (Murray 169)—the original (30-40 B.C.) was in the Vatican—but also after reading Winckelmann’s account of it in *L’Histoire de l’art chez les anciens* (1801-1803, 2: 288-293 mainly), so that his ekphrasis is both a transaesthetic response to the marble group and a rewriting of it *as described* in his hypotext. Winckelmann already gives it a frame of reference, when he reintroduces the idea that, like all the great artists of the Beautiful style, the authors of the original statue, Agesandros and his sons, represented the Trojan priest’s pain of being devoured by giant snakes, as “contained” or “chastened”: “Dans la représentation de la nature souffrante, la plus grande douleur reste concentrée [*verschlossen*], comme dans la figure de Laocoon” (2: 33). Not only is pain “contained” within the body, but it is also tempered by what he calls, in his *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755, trans. 1765), where he also refers to the statue, “noble simplicity and sedate [or serene] greatness” (1972, 30, 34 [*eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Grösse*]). Shelley uses Winckelmann’s frame of reference,<sup>3</sup> although he begins his note by criticising yet another account of the group, Byron’s stanza in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1818):

Or, turning to the Vatican, go see  
 Laocoön’s torture dignifying pain—  
 A father’s love and mortal’s agony  
 With an immortal’s patience blending: Vain  
 The struggle; vain, against the coiling strain  
 And gripe, and deepening of the dragon’s grasp,  
 The old man’s clench; the long envenom’d chain  
 Rivets the living links,—the enormous asp  
 Enforces pang on pang, and stifles gasp on gasp. (IV, clx, 1432-1440, Byron 117)

Byron thinks that Laocoön’s anguish is absorbed in that of his children, that a mortal’s agony is blending with an immortal’s patience. Not so. Intense physical suffering, against which he pleads with an upraised countenance of despair, and appeals with a sense of its injustice, seems the predominant and overwhelming emotion, and yet there is a nobleness in the expression and a majesty that dignifies torture. (Shelley, *Shelley’s Prose*, 343)

- 11 In Shelley’s last sentence, the “nobleness in the expression” or “majesty”<sup>4</sup> counterbalances and even frames “Intense physical suffering”, thus making “torture”

aesthetically valid. This is not different from Winckelmann's "great soul" (1972, 30) or "serenity" struggling with and tempering "anguish" and "pain", a balance syntactically expressed by the conjunction "Tandis que" in the French translation: "Tandis que l'excès de la souffrance enfle ses muscles et tire violemment tous ses nerfs, on voit la sérénité de son esprit briller sur son front gonflé" (1801-1803, 2: 293).

- 12 However, the verb of "a majesty that dignifies torture" directly echoes Byron's ambiguous "torture dignifying pain". It is ambiguous, firstly, from a syntactic point of view: without a hyphen between "torture" and "dignifying", it means that "torture dignifies pain"—as in Roger Martin's translation, "La torture de Laocoon qui ennoblit la douleur" (317) and Amédée Pichot's, "la douleur ennoblie par les tortures" (211)—, a reading reinforced by the verb "see" in the previous line, which could as well have been followed by the infinitive "dignify": "see torture dignify pain". Yet it is almost impossible to read the lines without reconstructing the hyphen and compound adjective to mean that "pain dignifies torture" or in other terms, that the way pain is represented makes torture an acceptable aesthetic subject. Shelley's possible misprision—provided the French translators themselves did not misread Byron's line—and rewriting, in which "torture" is definitely the object of the verb "dignifies," shows that this is what he understood.
- 13 The ambiguity is also lexical, since "torture" and "pain" refer to the same paradigm, an all dark, even sadistic, reframing of Winckelmann's opposition between nobleness or serenity on the one hand, and pain on the other. Shelley not only "corrects" the syntax but also reverts to Winckelmann's frame of reference, by substituting "nobleness" or "majesty" for "pain". Admittedly, Shelley's "intense physical suffering" and "torture" still recall Byron's "pain" and "torture", yet the notions on either side of the verb "dignifies" are now again opposite ones. For a poet who rejected the death sentence, the religious dogma of everlasting torture and violence in general, it was natural that this reading of Byron's line should be corrected.
- 14 Byron's darker, more Gothic frame of reference can also be seen in his moving away from "old" Laocoön's heroism and his zooming in on the priest's failure to contain pain. It is no longer Laocoön who "smothers" his pain and anguish ("étouffer [*einhalten und unterdrücken*] les angoisses de la douleur", Winckelmann 1801-1803, 1: 425), but the "enormous asp"'s "gripe" which "stifles gasp on gasp" in the last line. Admittedly, Winckelmann himself had transferred the snake's oppressive grasp ("sa poitrine, opprimée par la respiration et gênée par la contrainte cruelle") to Laocoön's ability to smother his pain ("renfermer et concentrer le tourment qui l'agite", 2: 293), a subjective transvaluation of what the group more objectively represents, yet Byron reframes the group by revaluing the power of the enormous asp and substituting a pessimistic, even cynical, point of view to Winckelmann's more idealised picture.
- 15 Shelley actually claims that Byron meant the contrary, another instance of misprision, a greater one even than the possible syntactic misreading of "pain dignifying torture", in which the two nouns, after all, are almost synonymous. Ironically, although it had led him to revert to Winckelmann's frame of reference, he now questions Byron's Winckelmannian balance in "A father's love and mortal's agony / With an immortal's patience blending", which also refers to the definition of the Beautiful style as a "blending" of divine and human characteristics. By downplaying Byron's "intense physical suffering", Shelley claims to depart from his friend's Winckelmannian frame of reference, whereas, in fact, he is himself closer to it at the end of his introductory

paragraph (“a majesty that dignifies torture”). This betrays some contradictory sentiments, which corroborates Thomas Medwin’s remarks that the notes “were thrown off in the gallery, in a burst of enthusiasm” (222), and were never revised. Indeed, while “Not so” contradicts Byron’s alleged Winckelmannian balance, “and yet” then mitigates Shelley’s more Gothic assertion that “Intense physical suffering [...] seems the predominant and overwhelming emotion”. Both Romantic poets seem to waver between fidelity to their illustrious predecessor and a desire, perhaps inspired by Fuseli’s later criticism of the German author (“frigid reveries”, quoted in Wallace 151-152), for aesthetic independence. However, there is a difference: whereas Byron concedes only two lines to Winckelmann’s aesthetics and manages to go out of the “classical” frame of reference to enter a more Gothic one, Shelley envisages a similar Gothic approach only to go back to Winckelmann’s balance. The rest of the note shows that, even though he also emulates Byron’s Gothic stance at the end of it, when he focuses on the “enormous asp”—another phrase borrowed from Byron—devouring Laocoön. In other words, there is a consensus on the necessary aesthetic balance between the two extremes, but Byron is more inclined than Shelley to transcend that consensus. Shelley’s note can therefore be seen as a middle-way between Winckelmann’s ideal balance and Byron’s Gothic pessimism.

- 16 Shelley’s rejection of Byron’s balance between “a mortal’s agony” and “an immortal’s patience” is rooted in his humanism and former atheism, a refusal that a mortal’s pain should be minimised or that humanity should be contaminated by divinity, which, after all, is the cause of Laocoön’s sufferings. “Not so” also refutes the significance of “a father’s love,” which Byron borrows from Winckelmann: “[...] ses propres souffrances paroissent moins l’affecter que celle de ses enfants [...]. La tendresse paternelle de Laocoon se manifeste dans ses regards languissans [sic]; et la compassion semble nager dans ses yeux comme une vapeur sombre” (1801-1803, 2: 293). Byron only devotes one half-line to the father’s love, yet, like the balance between mortality and immortality, it seems to stand out for Shelley in so short an ekphrasis as this stanza. Indeed, it is only through that noun phrase that Byron alludes to the two sons, who are otherwise out of the frame or off stage. Still, he only juxtaposes “a father’s love” with “a mortal’s agony” and never wrote—he might have “said” it, though—that “Laocoön’s anguish is absorbed in that of his children”. This third instance of misreading leads Shelley to criticise the idea that the father’s empathy should overshadow his own sufferings, although it is quite natural for a parent to forget themselves in their love for their children. Again, the poet emphasises the individual by refusing to minimise Laocoön’s personal anguish. However, Shelley’s refutation above all refers to Winckelmann’s remark, just as the verb “absorb” recalls the verbs “renfermer” and “concentrer” used in the French translation.
- 17 Sarah Wootton indeed remarks that Shelley concentrates on “the subtle emotions conveyed by the younger son” (563-564), the child whom, curiously, Shelley also describes in similar terms in the shorter fragmentary note n° 59, “Copy of the Laocoön” (*Shelley’s Prose* 352). The poet in fact concentrates on the two sons, even though the repetition of note 59 suggests that the younger son’s “subtle emotions,” more unbalanced like his father’s “overwhelming emotion,” were still of great interest to him. The poet, however, devotes more space to the elder son in the longer note, and this is where he really reframes Winckelmann’s and Byron’s ekphrases—and the group itself in the process.

- 18 Indeed, to Byron's "father's love" and Winckelmann's "tendresse paternelle", Shelley opposes "the excess of filial love and devotion [...] [that] swallows up all other feelings," in which the verb "swallows up" echoes the previous "absorbed" and the French verbs "étouffer," "renfermer" and "concentrer" used for Laocoön by the translator (*verschlossen, einhalten und unterdrücken* in Winckelmann's German). Even the adjective "vain", also borrowed from Byron, is transferred from father to sons, first as an adverb ("His [the elder son's] right foot, which he is vainly and impotently attempting to extricate from the grasp of the mighty folds") and then as the same adjective: "the vain and fruitless attempt he [the younger son] is making to disengage it" (*Shelley's Prose* 344). This description of the elder son's right foot actually corrects Winckelmann, who obviously confused father and son when he wrote about the former, "Ses jambes semblent faire un mouvement pour le soustraire à ses maux" (1801-1803, 2: 294); this is truer of the son's legs in both versions of the group. Likewise, the phrase "not uttering any unbecoming complaint, or prayer or lamentation, which he [the elder son] is conscious are alike useless" betrays "a great soul" that does not indulge in the "loudness" which Winckelmann condemns in *Reflections*: "He pierces not heaven, like the Laocoön of *Virgil*; his mouth is rather opened to discharge an anxious overloaded groan" (1972, 30-31). Shelley's phrase also echoes "Les soupirs qu'il n'ose exhaler, et son haleine qu'il retient" and "sa physionomie exprime les plaintes et non pas les cris" in the French translation (2: 293). Consequently, Winckelmann's focus on Laocoön's lips in "Sa bouche est pleine d'anxiété, et la lèvre inférieure, qui descend, semble fatiguée par la contrainte qu'il se fait; tandis que la lèvre supérieure, qui est tirée en haut, paroît obéir au sentiment de la douleur [...]" gives way to a close up of the elder son's parted lips: "Nothing can be more exquisite than the contour of his form and face and the moulding of his lips that are half open [...]". The poet thus transfers several motifs from the father to the elder son, which results in a reframing of the visual work of art towards the right.
- 19 Shelley also transvalues "ses enfans [*sic*], qui ont les yeux fixés sur leur père, et qui implorent son secours" into "Their attitudes indicate the excess of filial love and devotion" and, more specifically about the elder son, "His arm is extended towards him [Laocoön], not for protection, but from a wish as if instinctively to afford it". It is now the son who "instinctively" wishes to protect his father, an idea probably suggested by the hand in Bandinelli's copy. Winckelmann could not have described it if he only saw the original in the Vatican, because, like the lifted arms, the hand there was either missing, as is the case today, or restored in another attitude, as in the engraving added by Carlo Fea in the 1783 Italian edition, *Storia delle Arti*, and reprinted at the end of the first volume of *Histoire de l'ar* (Plate XXIII).<sup>5</sup> The attitude of the elder son's hand in the engraving expresses more astonishment than empathy for his father, as is the case in the Uffizi, in which he seems to say, "Don't cry for us," as in Shelley's ekphrasis: "addressing words of consolatory tenderness to his unfortunate parent". While this tends to show that the poet is really describing the Uffizi group, the engraving may have completed his vision of the younger son, whose right arm is not bent toward his father as in the Uffizi, as though seeking for help, but extended upwards, as though to extricate himself from the snake's coils, as Shelley writes about his left hand grasping the snake.
- 20 While Laocoön "pleads with an upraised countenance of despair, and appeals with a sense of injustice", which echoes what Winckelmann writes ("ses yeux dirigés vers le



ciel, implorent l'assistance supreme [sic]," "l'ensemble de l'ouverture de la bouche forme un mouvement qui exprime l'ataraxie jointe à l'indignation excitée par la pensée d'une souffrance qu'il n'a point méritée," 2: 293), the son does not even "utter[ing] any unbecoming complaint, or prayer or lamentation". Yet the son becomes the new seat of pain, since "the intensity of his bodily torments" not only translates Winkelmann's "la violence des tourmens [sic]" but also replaces Laocoön's "Intense physical suffering" referred to earlier in the note. Just as Byron devalues Laocoön's heroism, the son becomes more heroic than the father in Shelley's ekphrasis, which is reinforced by his greater empathy ("his whole soul is [...] part of that of his father" correcting "Laocoön's anguish is absorbed in that of his children"). Selflessness is a paramount idea in Shelley's poetry and prose; it is not so much the father's pain that is evoked as his elder son's sufferings.

- 21 Since Christian La Cassagnère (46) notices the resurgence of Shelley's personal life in his description of "Leonardo's" *Head of Medusa*, is it not also possible to see the poet in Laocoön and his elder son? In this case, who is the father, Timothy Shelley or Percy Bysshe himself? We know that he did not get on well with his father, whom he found too conservative and whom he ridiculed in his letters. Not only did Timothy stop sustaining him financially after he was expelled from Oxford for publishing *The Necessity of Atheism* (1810) and eloped with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin in 1814, while he was still married to Harriet Westbrook, but he also prevented Mary from publishing her late husband's radical poems and prose as long as he lived. Laocoön's self-centredness and his son's unanswered comforting gesture may express a certain regret towards that relationship or the indictment of a father who failed to protect his son. However, Shelley was also a father, and more significantly, he had already lost three children, as Nancy Goslee recalls (12), when he saw the group in October 1819 (1964, 2:126, 13 or 14 October 1819, to Maria Gisborne),<sup>6</sup> especially his elder son by Mary, three-year old William, who died in June 1819. There may be some self-reproach, in this reframing of the work of art, or self-pity, since Laocoön actually becomes the focus of his elder son's gaze and comforting attempt. Shelley may also have thought about his other two children by Harriet, whose custody he had lost, but the death scene of the group, which is repeated in *The Niobe*, rather suggests a resurgence of both guilt and self-pity in the tragedies the Shelleys experienced. The reframing of the picture thus results from an emotional response, be it unconscious or not.
- 22 Finally, framing can also be textual, and indeed the paragraph on the elder son is framed by the two others describing his father and younger brother. However, it would be a little risky to grant too much relevance to the structure of the text, since there is no manuscript left and E.B. Murray has warned us against H.B. Forman's unreliable editorial practice, even if, here, he only reproduces Medwin's first edition of the note, without any significant textual variations. Forman himself is surprised at the curious start of the second paragraph, "We now come to his children" (Shelley 1879, 13, n. 1), while the poet has only introduced the father in the first paragraph and goes back to him at the end of the last. Similarly, the frame formed by the second and last but one notes in Forman's collection, "2. The Laocoön" and "59. Copy of the Laocoön", is strange, considering that Shelley (or a transcriber?) only repeats his description of the younger son in slightly different terms, and that Murray suggests that the poet already

describes Bandinelli's copy, and not the Roman original, in note 2, which this analysis corroborates.

- 23 Still, Shelley's introduction—"The subject of the Laocoön is a disagreeable one, but whether we consider the grouping, or the execution, nothing that remains to us of antiquity can surpass it"—echoes Winckelmann's introductory remark, "Regardé comme la production la plus accomplie de l'art par l'antiquité même, ce fameux groupe mérite d'autant plus l'attention et l'admiration de la postérité, qu'elle ne produira jamais rien qui puisse être comparé à ce chef-d'œuvre" (2: 292).<sup>7</sup> The difference is that the poet does not say that the moderns will never surpass this work, and indeed, he is actually describing a modern copy and refers to Byron's textual version. Shelley really believed in the latter's poetic genius, and this reference to his friend also replaces Winckelmann's reference to Agesandros and his sons.
- 24 Likewise, the three authors end their ekphrases with the impressive effect of the snake coiling round Laocoön and penetrating his flesh: "the mouth of the enormous asp, and his terrible fangs widely displayed, in a moment to penetrate and meet with the victim's heart" echoes, although in more Gothic terms, "Le côté gauche, où le serpent, par sa morsure, a répandu son venin, est la partie qui doit le plus souffrir par la proximité du cœur et l'action du poison". Both Winckelmann and Shelley also refer to the chisel, "les coups même du ciseau augmentent l'expression de la peau ridée par le tiraillement universel de tous les muscles et de tous les nerfs" (2: 294) and "No chisel has ever displayed with such anatomical fidelity and force the projecting muscles of the arm". The ekphrases are framed in the beginning by the introductory passage, but less so in the end, since the last descriptions are not conclusions. Perhaps this open-endedness suggests the snake's endless "tangling sinuosities" that "are too numerous and complicated to be followed." Yet, Shelley adds a remark at the very end that may conclude the ekphrasis—provided it really is the end and that "We now come to his children" was not originally meant to come after the description of the father. In the last sentence describing the snake, he indeed moves away from the object to focus on the subject: "the spectator of this miracle of sculpture turn[s] away with shuddering and awe, and doubt[s] the reality of what he sees". The third person is clearly a first person, Shelley himself, who enters the frame and becomes part of the "spectacle", as in "On the Medusa of Leonardo" (Scott 317). Shelley thus substitutes a more intimate frame for Winckelmann's more learned one, a desire to root the description in a personal emotional response. The poet's identification with the tragic subject constitutes yet another frame of reference for his ekphrasis than Winckelmann's classical, idealistic and patriarchal model and Byron's more Gothic and pessimistic stance, between which Shelley appears to mediate, while revaluing Laocoön's humanity and the elder son's selflessness and empathy. The most significant reframing of the group indeed remains the greater focus on the elder son towards the right, but it is linked with the removal, as it were, of the fourth wall, the distancing frame of the picture, since by identifying with his object, the poet enters the ekphrasis he gives of the group.

## **The Niobe Group in the Uffizi Gallery: reframing as changing physical viewpoints**

- 25 The thematic similarity between “2. The Laocoön” and “60. The Niobe”, at both ends of Shelley’s *Notes on Sculptures*, has led Nancy C. Goslee to suggest that they frame the entire collection: “Two of these notes demonstrate these contraries not only within themselves but in relation to each other and to the arrangement of the notes as a whole. The first work [...] in his actual notes in the galleries, [...] is balanced by the sixtieth and final note [...]” (13). Yet the same qualms about the order of the three paragraphs in the second note and the legitimacy of the “Copy of the Laocoön” fragment warn us against basing the analysis on such a “striking arrangement”, which is only to be seen in Harry Buxton Forman’s edition. Indeed, his collection of Shelley’s notes is partly derived from previous publications by Thomas Medwin, partly from a Florentine manuscript (Shelley 1879, v-vi), which nobody else has ever seen, so that the so-called “framing” of the series by “2. The Laocoön” and “60. The Niobe”, by “2. The Laocoön” and “59. Copy of the Laocoön” or by the more picturesque “1. The Arch of Titus” and “10. View from the Boboli Gardens” (Goslee 9, 16) only results from Forman’s assembling the more or less heterogeneous notes and not from Shelley’s intent. Besides E.B. Murray’s criticism of Forman’s unreliable editorial practice, Frederic S. Colwell, who identifies most of the sculptures in the Florentine Gallery, even those that Forman claimed to be Roman, concludes that “Shelley made no attempt at classification or arrangement, the notes are his raw observations as he sketched them in the gallery, generally in the sequence in which the work were found in the Uffizi in that year” (1979, 64).
- 26 As to the frame of reference of “60. The Niobe,” it is still formed by Winckelmann’s aesthetics, since “terror” is softened into “grief”. As in the *Laocoön*, however, this sorrow remains overwhelming: “Everything is swallowed up in sorrow”, which again recalls the sentimental excess in Gothic novels,<sup>8</sup> “[...] the joy and the poetry of sorrow, making grief beautiful” (*Shelley’s Prose* 353). Shelley again seems to hesitate between Byron’s excess and Winckelmann’s temperance, which already combines pain and loveliness: “Secondé par cette même Grâce, l’auteur de la Niobé osa s’élancer dans la région des idées intellectuelles, et trouva le secret de combiner l’anxiété de la mort à la plus sublime beauté [...]” (1801-1803, 32). The difference with “2. The Laocoön” is that there is not the same shifting of the frame towards the child. Even though Shelley describes “the last, we will imagine, of her surviving children”, while the other children disseminated in the hall (Landi 89-92) vanish from the frame, he spends more time on the mother’s sorrow: “There is no terror in the countenance— only grief—deep grief. There is no anger [...]. There is no selfish shrinking from personal pain; there is no adverting to herself as herself—the calamity is mightier than to leave scope for such emotion” (*Shelley’s Prose*, 352-353). There may be some “selfish shrinking from personal pain” in *Laocoön*, but not in *Niobe*, because, this time, Shelley may be sympathising with his wife’s loss.
- 27 Like “2. The Laocoön,” “60. The Niobe” is somewhat framed, in the beginning, by a superlative generic introduction, which recalls Winckelmann’s introduction to the *Laocoön* and goes out of the frame, as when Shelley mentioned Byron, to refer to another work, another statue this time: “This figure is probably the most consummate personification of loveliness with regard to its countenance as that of the Apollo of the

Vatican is with regard to its entire form that remains to us of Greek Antiquity” (352).<sup>9</sup> It is similarly framed in the end by a more subjective conclusion focusing on the spectator's emotions: “[...] which shakes with astonishment my most superficial faculties” (353). Nancy Goslee sees yet another frame: “Shelley's formal analysis begins and ends the note, acting as a distancing frame for its more intense, emotional center. Both at the beginning and end, he stations the group in relation to the viewer” (15). She actually refers to the most interesting instance of reframing in the note, the change of viewpoints, first, in the parenthesis following his superlative introduction and, then, at the end of his ekphrasis, following the viewer's emotional response:

It is a colossal figure—the size of a work of art rather adds to its beauty, because it allows the spectator the choice of a greater number of points of view in which to catch a greater number of the infinite modes of expression of which a form approaching ideal beauty is necessarily composed—[...].

Compare for this effect the countenance as seen in front and as seen from under the left arm, moving to the right and towards the statue, until the line of the forehead shall coincide with that of the wrist. (352-353)

- 28 The end part of the “formal analysis,” however, does not appear in Medwin's version of the note in issue 255 of *The Athenaeum Journal* for September 1832 (602) nor in his *Shelley Papers* (1833, 138-142), reproduced in Mary Shelley's *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (2: 263-266), so that the framing, again, only appears in Forman's edition. Nevertheless, what matters here is Shelley's remark on multiple viewpoints.
- 29 In his commentary on the *Laocoön* plate translated in *Histoire de l'art* (Winckelmann 1801-1803, 3: 268), Carlo Fea accounts for his choice of point view for the drawing—level with the statue, so that more details should be seen. Shelley not only experiments this physically in the museum but also gives at least two vantage points that shift the frame of Niobe's face from the “front” to “under the left arm”, and then “moving to the right and towards the statue”. As her left arm is indeed raised, we understand why the poet can stand “under” it. Thus, the note represents the face from the front, then its profile from Niobe's left-hand side, in which the line of the brow is unified with the line of the wrist. This union of the brow, seat of the brain, and the wrist, close to the seat of bodily strength, the hand, is not only a proof of aesthetic unity, but also a suggestion of the importance of the will, as in Shelley's poetry, *Prometheus Unbound* especially. Goslee, for her part, sees in this unification of multiple viewpoints another illustration of Shelley's romantic unification of contraries (16).
- 30 In fact, more than two different points of view, Shelley suggests “infinite” perspectives, all the more so since he is not static, but “moves” around and “toward the statues”. The frame is more suggestive of a cinematic panoramic shot. As a result, the statue becomes animate, and it is indeed one of the characteristics of his sculptural ekphrasis: Shelley often looks for the living energy that seems to animate those statues, turning them into real human beings with whom it is all the easier to identify.
- 31 Indeed, by moving under “colossal” Niobe's arm, Shelley, who had already entered the frame of the group by using first personal pronouns (“we will imagine”, “we may conceive”, “we feel”), like Winckelmann before him (“nous”, “je remarquerai”, etc.), now stands among her children. If this is deliberate, then he may be seen as seeking the protection of a mother. However, this is unlikely a reference to his own mother, whom he also despised; he more likely sought to move closer to the mother of his children, to comfort her and be reunited with her after some estrangement following the death of

their daughter Clara (Holmes 464, 474, 537).<sup>10</sup> Still, the subjective ending, in which the singular “my” replaces, in Forman’s edition, Medwin’s plural “our”, above all focuses on the viewer’s feelings.

## Unframing painting

- 32 Shelley is not so much interested in the frames of the paintings he saw in Bologna, Florence and Rome, as in what they represent. The work, however, may itself turn into a frame for one of its elements catching the poet’s eye, what Roland Barthes calls “punctum” in photography, like the parted lips of Antonio da Correggio’s “Christ beatified” or Marc Antonio Franceschini’s “winged children” in Shelley’s letter on Bologna (1964, 2: 49, 51, 9 November 1818, to T.L. Peacock). As with sculpture, he also enters the frame of the picture when he identifies with the figures or sympathises with them, especially in his ekphrastic poem “On the Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery” (1819).<sup>11</sup> There are a couple of ekphrases, however, that may give greater importance to the idea of framing, like Antonio da Correggio’s *Christ* and Guido Reni’s *Samson*, in which the figures seem to go out of the frame.

### Guido’s *Sansone Vittorioso*

- 33 Shelley saw Guido’s *Sansone Vittorioso* (1614-1616, oil on canvas, 260 x 223 cm, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna) in what became the Pinacoteca Nazionale:

I saw many more of Guido—one a Samson drinking water out of an ass’s jaw bone in the midst of the slaughtered Philistines. Why he is supposed to do this God who gave him this jawbone alone knows, but certain it is that the painting is a very fine one. The figure of Samson stands in strong relief in the foreground, coloured as it were in the hues of human life, & full of strength & elegance. Round him lie the Philistines in all the attitudes of death. One prone with the slight convulsions of pain just passing from his forehead, whilst on his lips and chin death lies as heavy as sleep. Another leaning on his arm with his hand white and motionless hanging out beyond. In the distance more dead bodies. And still further beyond, the blue sea & the blue mountains and one white and tranquil sail. (2: 50)

- 34 While Samson stands “in the midst” of the Philistines, who form an intradiegetic frame “[r]ound him”, even more so, perhaps, in the ekphrasis than in the painting, what is really striking is the idea of “relief”. Not only do the last two sentences plunge deeper, as it were, into the painting to reach “the distance” and “further beyond”, Gilpin’s “distant views”, but “The figure of Samson stands” out so much against the rest (“in strong relief in the foreground”) that he seems to bulge out from the frame of the picture.<sup>12</sup> There is indeed a “strong” contrast between the dark, deepening background and the lighter, bulging figure. It is all the more striking since the poet ignores the ostentatious, even cumbersome, gilded frame of the painting—provided today’s is the same as in his time—which adds another dimension to the picture.
- 35 There are apparently two reasons for unframing Samson, firstly a desire to show how lifelike he is (“coloured as it were in the hues of human life”). Just as Shelley animates the statues in the Uffizi, he feels as though the painted figure were a real man with whom he could converse, like Pygmalion with his statue. Secondly, there seems to be a deliberate transformation of the painting into sculpture. Turning the painting into an “alto-relievo” or “bold relief,” like those on the Arch of Titus (1964, 2: 89, 86, 23 March

1819, to T.L. Peacock), enables him to place the modern painting among the works of Antiquity. His ekphrasis of Raphael's *St. Cecilia* (1516-1517) showed just that: "You forget that it is a picture as you look at it [...]. [It] seems to have been conceived & executed in a similar state of feeling to that which produced among the antients those perfect specimens of poetry & sculpture which are the baffling models of succeeding generations" (2:51).

- 36 Shelley's response to the painting, however, was already planned by the artist. Colwell (1979, 70) writes that the figures of Guido "prepared" Shelley for the ancient sculptures in Florence and partly accounted for his "enthusiasm" for the *Niobe*, as the painter was known to have drawn inspiration from the statue for his own representations of women. As to Samson, the Pinacoteca Nazionale's notice identifies the *Belvedere Apollo*, another favourite of Shelley's, as Guido's model. Thus, in Bologna and a year before his visit to the Uffizi, Shelley had already made the connection between Italian painting, from the Renaissance (Raphael, Correggio) to the early Baroque (Reni, Franceschini), and ancient sculpture. Of course, this allowed him to break through the frames of time and space, since his ultimate goal in Italy was to travel in ancient Greece, as we can see in his letters on Pompeii and Pesto, which he turned into "Greek cit[ies]" (2: 73, 78). The impression of depth and relief was also prepared by Guido's *chiaroscuro*.

### Correggio's *Il Redentore*

- 37 Shelley's "Christ beatified" in the same letter refers to Correggio's *Il Redentore* or *Cristo in Gloria tra Cherubi* (1520-30, oil on canvas, 105 x 98 cm, Pinacoteca Vaticana), the third painting he describes in the Marescalchi palace:<sup>13</sup>

It is a half figure rising from a mass of clouds tinged with an ethereal rose-like lustre, the arms are expanded, the whole figure seems dilated with expression, the countenance is heavy as it were with the weight of the rapture of the spirit, the lips parted but scarcely parted with the breath of intense but regulated passion, the eyes are calm and benignant, the whole features harmonized in majesty & sweetness. The hair is parted on the forehead, and falls in heavy locks on each side. It is motionless, but seems as if the faintest breath would move it. The colouring, I suppose must be very good if I can remark & understand it. The sky is a pale and aerial orange like the tints of latest sunset; it does not seem painted around & beyond the figure, but every thing seems to have absorbed, & to have been penetrated by its hues. (2: 49-50)

- 38 Among the features of Christ, the familiar punctum of "the lips parted but scarcely parted with the breath of intense but regulated passion" could be described as its "emotional centre", with the rest of the elements framing it. Some of Shelley's expressions or details are also the same as those used by Winckelmann and him to describe sculpture, like "The hair is parted on the forehead" and, indeed, the "parted lips". Yet, again, what is really striking is the impression that the figure and even the light impregnating it and the sky transcend the two-dimensional canvas. First, Shelley insists on the idea of expansion: "the arms are expanded", which, admittedly, is Christ's attitude in the painting, and "the whole figure [or "frame" in Peacock's edition of the letter (143)] seems dilated". This is reinforced by the syntax of the first sentence or the first series of sentences, which are juxtaposed and only divided by commas, so that it is impossible to resist that continuing expansion, until the hair "falls in heavy locks" like a heavy mass of cloud or smoke. Even the repetition of the participle "parted" suggests

that expansion. The various shades of “rose” and “orange” account for that effect of relief and the impression that Christ goes out of the picture.

- 39 The other salient element is the sky, which “does not seem painted around & beyond the figure, but” to have diffused itself in “everything,” a description that, as A.M.D Hughes (192) had already suggested, announces the interpenetration of Prometheus’s and Panthea’s essences in the second act of *Prometheus Unbound*:

I lifted them [my eyes]: the overpowering light  
Of that immortal shape was shadowed o'er  
By love; which, from his soft and flowing limbs,  
And passion-parted lips, and keen, faint eyes,  
Steamed forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere  
Which wrapped me in its all-dissolving power,  
As the warm ether of the morning sun  
Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew.  
I saw not, heard not, moved not, only felt  
His presence flow and mingle through my blood  
Till it became his life, and his grew mine,  
And I was thus absorbed. [...] (II, i, 62-82, *The Poems* 2: 530-531)

- 40 In the letter, the limits suggested by the prepositions “around & beyond” are abolished, while the noun phrase “every thing” is generic and indefinite enough to include the viewer, like Panthea in the poem. This is another instance of unframing the painting; bodily frames are eventually “dissolved”, even after being turned into tangible statues, and “every thing” is one, even contraries, like the “mass” and “lustre,” heaviness and lightness, main figure and background, object and subject, whose eyes may be “dilated” in wonder.
- 41 Shelley’s abolition of frames and limits may not be exceptional, though, if we consider a similar ekphrasis written a little more than a year later by Marianne Colston, whose comment on the gilded frame might be applied to that of *Sansone*:

Myriads of cherubim hover round, but are faintly discerned through the effulgence of glory which environs the Saviour of mankind, who has just resumed the unveiled participation of godhead. The very gold of the frame looks dull, compared with the resplendent atmosphere which it surrounds; the air of the Redeemer is majesty, his countenance benignity, and so powerful is the illusion, that the awestruck beholder forgets the other mimic forms that glow around him, forgets even the living companions who admire with him, and feels as if alone in the gallery with the awful, but delightful vision. (1:80)

- 42 We now understand that “every thing” especially refers to the “[m]yriads of cherubim”; still, everything, everyone seems to vanish, starting with the “dull” frame in Shelley’s ekphrasis. Even the frame within the frame formed by the secondary figures is absent. What remains is the “awestruck” poet’s eye and the ethereal light that diffuses itself in it.

## Conclusion

- 43 Although Shelley deliberately uses framing trees in his picturesque poetry, the editorial dimension of his prose and verse ekphrases of visual art warns the critics against basing their analyses on a supposed textual framing, be it of the series in his “Notes on Sculptures” or of the stanzas in “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci”. His emotional response transcends the desire to frame the works of art, and the order of the

description(s) is either incidental or due to the flow of inspiration. Shelley indeed ignores the physical frame of paintings, whose gilding he must have found “dull”, just as he usually condemns modern restoration in sculpture. Shelley is a poet who wishes to break through boundaries and limits, so it is only natural for him to unframe rather than frame visual works of art, and that the line that separates object and subject should vanish.

- 44 Therefore, framing in his ekphrases can only be understood as a change of viewpoints and as a resort to, or negotiation with, previous frames of reference, Winckelmann's classical balance on the one hand, Byron's Gothic excess on the other, which help him to express his emotional response, but which should not constrain it too much. Since he is “not bound to adhere to received interpretations,” he sometimes shifts the habitual frame or point of view towards a peripheral figure or element, the “punctum” or “emotional centre”, and thus reframes the work of art. Yet he does not necessarily do this to correct the vision of a predecessor. It is because a visual work of art causes something intimate to resurface within him that he feels compelled to analyse it. As a result, he often penetrates the frame of the picture, of the sculptured group even, so that it is often the poet we see represented in the ekphrasis. Indeed, unframing works of art is also a means for him to cross over to another world, in which he can converse with the heroes and heroines represented and become part of the picture.

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## NOTES

1. Frame (v.): "set something in a frame," "enclose [it] in or as in a frame" or "serve as a frame for," e.g., "1705 J. ADDISON *Remarks Italy* 7 The winding Rocks a spacious Harbour frame," *OED* definition 10a, at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74152>, accessed 20 April 2022; Frame (n.): "A

surrounding structure such as a border or case in which something, esp. a picture, pane of glass, etc., is set or let in", e.g., "1609 W. Shakespeare Sonnets xxiv. sig. Cv Mine eye hath play'd the painter and hath steeld, Thy beauties forme in table of my heart, My body is the frame wherein ti's held," *OED* definition 8, at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74151#eid3634171>, accessed 20 April 2022.

2. Shelley refers disparagingly to Uvedale Price's *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) and Richard Payne Knight's *The Landscape, a Didactic Poem. In Three Books. Addressed to Uvedale Price, Esq.* (1794) in a late letter to T.L. Peacock (1964, 2: 275, 21 March 1821), which does not mean that he was not influenced by them.

3. "Winckelmann's theories of Greek beauty and the Elgin marbles were being instituted as exemplary models of taste [...]" (Wallace 154).

4. The verb "dignifies" is in the singular, so "majesty" may be its only subject, but Shelley here appears to be rephrasing the more moral and less visual "nobleness."

5. The Uffizi copy had been destroyed in a fire in 1762, two years before the publication of the *History of Ancient Art* in Germany, but Winckelmann might have seen it before.

6. He had already passed through Florence in August 1818, but had probably not had the time to visit the galleries.

7. For Sarah Wootton (563), Shelley rather remembers G.E. Lessing's contrast between "a disagreeable [subject]" with "a miracle of sculpture," but in the extract published in *L'Histoire de l'art*, Lessing does not use the word "miracle," and the word "désagréable" refers to Laocoön's wide-open mouth in Virgil's "*clamosos horrendos ad sidera tollit*" quoted by him (Winckelmann 1801-1803, 1: 606). However, the adjective "disagreeable" does transvalue the adjective "intéressant" in Winckelmann's "Laocoon nous offre l'intéressant spectacle de la nature humaine livrée à la plus grande douleur dont elle soit susceptible" (2: 293).

8. See for instance "Yet revenge, thirsting revenge, was the predominant sensation of her soul, swallowing up every other!" in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (196), whom Shelley imitates in *Zastrozzi* (1810), showing that the verb "swallow up" is not necessarily a rendition of Winckelmann's "concentrer" or "contenir" in the French translation: "Revenge, direst revenge, swallowed up every other feeling" (1986, 88).

9. "[...] as that of the Venus of the Tribune" in Medwin's version (1833, 138).

10. Richard Holmes actually connects *Niobe* with "the figure of the mother and child at [the] Peterloo [massacre] which had developed into a dominating poetic motif" (567). I recently came across another modern Niobe, the unfortunate Gabrielle in Charlotte Dacre's *Libertine* (1807), which Shelley must have read in his youth: "Now gazing on her features from various points of view, reason would resume her empire. He [Angelo] saw neither reproach, nor smile, but the freezing fixedness of death alone, participating no longer in mortal agitations" (4: 3).

11. For want of space, I omit this emblematic poem, in which Shelley identifies with the snaky Gorgon (Desset 2011). As in the painting, there is a frame formed by the animals surrounding Medusa, which makes the poet's gaze even more intricate, and critics, like Christian La Cassagnère (56) and Christine Berthin (168), have seen a "frame" in the arrangement of the stanzas, which is again debatable.

12. In editing this paper, one of the reviewers suggested that the particular form of the gilded frame, which seems to follow Samson's figure, and its bulk were designed to counterbalance that saliency.

13. Colwell 1980, 56, fig. 2. It is actually a copy of the original and is now in the Vatican. The painting, plus two other lateral ones, were supposed to frame a fourth painting, representing the Virgin. See <http://www.correggioarthome.it/SchedaOpera.jsp?idDocumentoArchivio=3151>, accessed 06 October 2021.

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## ABSTRACTS

For a Romantic poet like Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), who refused limits and limitations, the notion of framing in his ekphrases of visual works of art is particularly problematic. Even though the poet resorts to a certain frame of reference to develop his aesthetic discourse, the notions of reframing and unframing may be more useful, the first taking the form of a change of viewpoints, and the second of a dissolution of the boundary between object and subject, both resulting from an emotional response to the sculpture or painting. This paper analyses these phenomena in two sculpted groups, *The Niobe* and *The Laocoön*, and two paintings, Guido Reni's *Sansone vittorioso* and Correggio's *Il Redentore*, after briefly surveying the notion of framing in Shelley's poetry and considering intertextuality and transaesthetic rewriting. The edition of these ekphrases is also briefly considered, in order to avoid granting too much importance to textual framing, which may not be due to the author.

Pour Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), poète romantique se défiant des limites et des limitations, la question de cadre dans ses ekphrases de statues et de peintures est pour le moins problématique. Même si le poète puise son discours esthétique dans un certain cadre de référence, les notions de recadrage ou de décadage seront peut-être plus opérantes, la première prenant la forme d'un changement de point de vue et la seconde d'un effacement de la frontière entre objet et sujet, tous deux résultant d'une réaction émotionnelle face à l'œuvre. Cet article propose d'étudier ces phénomènes à travers deux groupes sculpturaux, *Niobé* et *Laocoon*, et deux peintures, *Sanson victorieux* du Guide et *Le Rédempteur* du Corrège, après un passage par la notion de cadre dans la poésie de Shelley et la prise en compte de l'importance de l'intertextualité et de la réécriture transesthétique. Il est également brièvement question de l'édition des ekphrases, afin de ne pas donner trop d'importance à un encadrement textuel pas forcément voulu par l'auteur.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** ekphrasis, painting, romanticism, rewriting, sculpture

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