

Fall 2000

Shelley and the nature of nonviolence

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SHELLEY AND THE NATURE OF NONVIOLENCE

BY

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B.A. The University of Michigan, 1990

M.A. Kent State University, 1994

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

September, 2000

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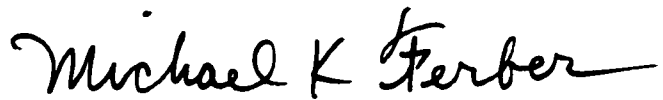
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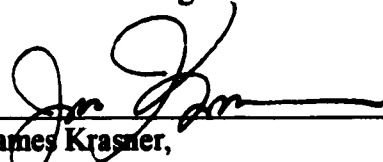
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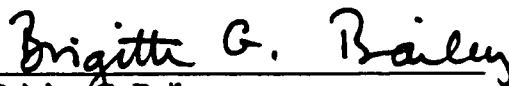
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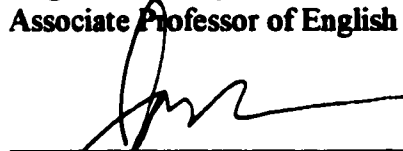
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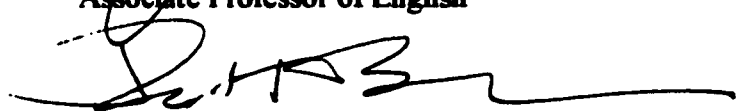
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To Amy McIntyre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Graduate School of the University of New Hampshire for a Dissertation Fellowship which allowed me to complete this project. Much of the research for Chapter Four was done at the Cambridge University Libraries, and I thank the Cambridge Summer Program at UNH for a Graduate Research Fellowship which made this work possible. To Michael Ferber I owe a great personal thanks; as Director of this dissertation he has sharpened my thinking immeasurably, and made himself available to look at drafts and to talk about Shelley since I came to UNH. I wish to thank the rest of my committee--James Krasner, Brigitte Bailey, John Archer, and Paul Brockelman--for their substantial contributions and support of my work as well. I would also like to thank Janet Aikins, Susan Schibanoff, Regina Hewitt, and James McKusick for timely advice and professional encouragement. I have been fortunate in my graduate student colleagues, and wish to thank everyone from our ongoing dissertation workshop for their patience, friendship, and critical acumen. Any overstatements or errors which remain despite such a wealth of expert advice are entirely my own.

My parents, James and Eva Stroup, have been tireless in their support of my education, for which I am ever thankful. My other parents, John and Susan McIntyre, have lived with this project for some time as well, and their love of knowledge has also made a difference. I thank Christopher Measzros for first making me aware of ecology and animal rights, and for a lifetime of challenging, sweet friendship. The person to whom this work is dedicated read every draft, and this project is as much hers as it is mine.

A NOTE ON TEXTS

Shelley's poetry is cited, whenever possible, from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (Norton Critical Edition, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, 1977). This work, intended as a student edition, has become standard for scholars as well, for a variety of complex reasons mentioned in this study where appropriate. It includes all of the major poems discussed here except for Shelley's longest work, *Laon and Cythna* (1818), which is represented by only a few lines. For this poem only, I have used Neville Rogers's edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume II* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975). Rogers is the only modern editor to present the poem in its original version and not in its re-issue as *The Revolt of Islam*. I join Jerrold Hogle in finding Rogers's otherwise problematic edition the best source for *Laon & Cythna* until its long-awaited appearance in the Johns Hopkins edition of *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley* being edited by Reiman and Neil Fraistat (see Hogle in O'Neill, 120). Only the first volume of this edition is available at this writing; unfortunately, one cannot expect to see *Laon and Cythna* until Volume Four. Many other editions have been useful--especially Thomas Hutchinson's Oxford edition, which reprints Mary Shelley's notes--and these are cited in the notes and bibliography.

For prose citations not in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* I have used *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume I* (ed. E. B. Murray, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), unless otherwise noted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
A NOTE ON TEXTS.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. THE "GREAT HUMANITARIAN TRILOGY": <i>QUEEN MAB, LAON AND CYTHNA, PROMETHEUS UNBOUND</i>	
I. Editions and the Shelley Canon.....	21
II. Bloodless Victory and Bloodless Feast.....	25
III. Nonviolence and Natural Diet in <i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	45
2. NATURAL VIOLENCE CONFRONTED: SHELLEY ON MONT BLANC.....	64
3. SHELLEY AND GANDHI: A CONNECTION REVALUED	
I. Making the Connection: Diet and Imperial Culture.....	91
II. Nonviolent Resistance and <i>The Mask of Anarchy</i>	106
III. Atheism, Holiness, and the Problem of Literary Influence.....	122
4. HENRY SALT ON SHELLEY: ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY AND LITERARY CRITICISM.....	128
Appendix to Chapter Four: "We Must Tell the Truth About Somebody": G.B.S. on P.B.S.....	150
5. DID SHELLEY ABANDON HOPE? <i>THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE AND THE CYCLES OF DESPAIR</i>	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	176
APPENDIX: Selected Bibliography of Henry Stephens Salt.....	189

ABSTRACT

SHELLEY AND THE NATURE OF NONVIOLENCE

by

William James Stroup

University of New Hampshire, September, 2000

This is a study of the English Romantic poet and essayist Percy Bysshe Shelley's conception of the role and function of humans in the natural world, and of his influence on later reformers. Shelley's long poems *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *Prometheus Unbound* are discussed as a trilogy where his themes of political nonviolence and proto-ecological awareness became integrated; also discussed at length are *Mont Blanc*, *The Mask of Anarchy*, and *The Triumph of Life*. The legacy of Shelley's poetry and ideas is discussed through two key figures who met in the 1880s: the now obscure Shelleyan and animal rights activist Henry S. Salt--who is championed as a forerunner of contemporary ecocriticism--and Mohandas Gandhi, who first came in contact with Shelley's works while in London as a law student. This study seeks to be both a contribution to the study of Romanticism as a cultural movement and an exploration of the historical development of environmental ethics. I take the term "nonviolence" to refer not only to the strategy of some political movements to refuse the use of violent tactics, but also to any philosophy which seeks to do as little harm as possible to the earth and its creatures. Shelley vigorously questioned the anthropocentric assumptions of his age, and thus continues to engage us with the possibilities of ethical nonviolence, both at the individual and social levels.

INTRODUCTION

Almost any use of the word “nature” demands further explanation, and its appearance in the title of this study is no exception. In one sense, likely to be the first thought of many readers, the phrase “the nature of” indicates that what is to follow will have its essential characteristics identified, as in “the nature of the beast,” or Alice Walker’s “The Nature of This Flower is to Bloom.” Understood in this way, *Shelley and the Nature of Nonviolence* indicates the attention in this study to what Percy Bysshe Shelley has to say about the moral basis and practical concerns of a belief in nonviolent forms of resistance. These themes, and their legacy for later practitioners of nonviolent strategies, form a crucial part of this study. But another common sense of “nature” is at play here as well, the one we usually mean when we say Nature: the outside world, not created by humans, thick with wood, rock, water, and blood. *Shelley and the Nature of Nonviolence*, read with this second meaning, invites questions about what “nature” meant to Shelley, and what the implications of these beliefs might be for his understanding of the prevalence of violence in the world. Shelley believed that much of the cruelty and misery experienced by humans--and by other forms of life at the hands of humans--did not exist as part of a natural order, but were due to deviations from a healthy way of life that had calcified over time into accepted customs, such as religion and monarchy. Even this brief definition raises serious questions: can there be a “nature” in which nonviolence is an active principle? What then of cobras, avalanches, vultures and earthquakes? Also in question is the threat of reductiveness: does this conception reinscribe the false duality

between nature and culture, where one of these terms becomes the site of all virtue and the other a constant threat? Whatever one means by “nature,” its coherence as a concept, as with all words, depends upon contrasting it with competing terms: “culture,” “art,” and even “wilderness,” a non-synonymous term with its own problematic uses. Several studies have explored the shifting usage and ideological implications of these concepts, drawing their examples not from one primary author but from a representative range of writings.¹ As much as I have learned from these studies, and as much as these questions remain active concerns, I have decided to focus my discussion around a writer whose engagement with these themes prefigures many of the most complex problems still faced by writers on issues of ecology and social justice.

The last decade has seen an extraordinary rise in the interdisciplinary study of environmental history and environmental ethics, emerging out of many scholars’ recognition that our global ecological crisis demands to be understood and addressed in a variety of ways. In a growing number of university programs across the United States, faculty from departments as seemingly various as Marine Biology, Philosophy, Chemistry, History, Civil Engineering, and English have made it possible for students to integrate their program of study with the goal of working towards a sustainable future.² I welcome

¹ The best place to start is with Raymond Williams’s entry for “Nature” in *Keywords* (219-24), a concise introduction to these complexities; followed by the selection of representative quotations from the Western literary tradition in Michael Ferber’s *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (133-5). M.H. Abrams, in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, distills centuries of the uses of “nature” in literary theory, see especially Chapter VIII. Two recent books make subtle, extended arguments about the dangers attendant upon the misuse of the words that try to describe the natural world: Max Oelschlaeger’s *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (1991), and Kate Soper’s *What is Nature?* (1995). The latter is an especially balanced, skeptical account of claims made in the name of “nature” by both progressives and reactionaries in a wide range of circumstances.

² A useful current resource regarding such programs, frequently updated, is provided on the website of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, available on the World Wide Web at www.asle.umn.edu.

these developments, and believe that the humanities have an irreplaceable role in such programs. For example, students in Forestry or Wildlife Management need to be familiar with the fantasies and expectations projected onto wild places and animals in the collective, historical imagination, and teachers who can explain the cultural importance of, say, Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" or O'Keeffe's desert landscapes are in the best position to do this. The danger, for me, in making my efforts at environmentalist commitments a central aspect of my literary studies is that they at times threaten to overwhelm other aesthetic concerns. Poems are neither instruction manuals nor cookbooks, and clearly it is possible for an important poem to include sentiments with which one disagrees. I say much against T. S. Eliot's criticism and beliefs as they pertain to Shelley in the later chapters of this study, though this does not diminish my appreciation of *The Waste Land*. But at times, because I agree passionately with some of Shelley's central themes--the moral and environmental advantages of a meatless diet; the socially destructive effects of the rage for vengeance--I may come close to saying that a poem achieves greatness partly because it endorses Green values, or other positions with which I agree. But I can also think of hundreds of earth-friendly, animal-loving poems (not to mention articles, books, songs, movies, posters, and websites) where I sympathize with the message but which aesthetically leave me cold, even dismayed. All readers know this reaction; it is a necessary evaluative skill. Yet I think that literary critics as a whole have been far more thorough in developing a minutely calibrated system of fault-finding than in creating a language of careful praise, and that this is a serious problem. In the end, though, the reading and study of Shelley's poetry continues with perhaps more energy

than ever because of the aesthetic richness and profound complexities of the poems through which he developed his ideas.

My work participates in the larger project of Ecocriticism, which locates questions about the role and function of “nature” at the heart of the discussion of any literary text, including those which do not seem to be explicitly about the natural world. In practice, I think that Ecocriticism is less a distinct theoretical approach, like deconstruction or psychoanalysis, than a useful set of thematic questions, and uses the techniques developed by feminist, New Historicist, formalist, dialogic, Marxist, reader-response, and comparativist critics, depending on the work under study.³ Because of the historical emphasis in nineteenth-century American culture on the need to define “self” and “nation” against the challenges of the continent’s vast wildernesses, contemporary Ecocriticism developed earlier and more readily in American studies, a subsequent development to the path-clearing work of F. O. Matthieson, R. W. B. Lewis, Henry Nash Smith, and Leo Marx. But in the study of British Romanticism by the late 1980s, “nature” was associated with such unfashionable “old historicist” critics as Basil Willey, and “wilderness” did not seem to have the same cultural claim on the imagination as in America.⁴ Jonathan Bate’s

³ Cheryll Glotfelty, in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, provides a useful overview of these critical traditions and does argue for Ecocriticism’s theoretical distinction (xv-xxvii). This *Reader* includes fine examples of work shaped by all of the methods listed here; see especially SueEllen Campbell’s synthetic “The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet” (124-136). Of particular importance to Shelley studies is the contentious relation between Marxism and ecology, discussed in the section on *Queen Mab* in Chapter One. P.M.S. Dawson uses a Marxist critique to explain why, in his view, “Shelley certainly fails to be green” in “‘The Empire of Man’: Shelley and Ecology” (238). A more flexible model for Ecocritics is Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*, a work built upon the principles of Marxist cultural studies but which in its humane understanding defies simple categorization.

⁴ The title of Willey’s influential study *The Eighteenth Century Background* (1940) suggests the non-ecological conception of nature as the “setting” for human events. Yet those who argue for the innovative status of Ecocriticism would do well to reassess the history of the idea of nature in works like Willey’s; though he does not write from a perspective of ecological crisis, his concern with the changing role of nature in concepts of the self and the soul remains timely.

Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition (1991) has become a contemporary Ecocritical classic, and commenced by defining two crucial points which both New Historicists and the formalists who preceded them had left out: a way of talking about the natural world which acknowledges that all human activities, including “discourse,” depend entirely on the ongoing habitability of our biosphere; and the power of poetry to inspire action or to foster actual health, as Wordsworth’s poetry did for John Stuart Mill. This book, along with an earlier article by Karl Kroeber, began a movement within Romantic studies which again paid serious attention to these crucial matters, and the studies that have already followed incorporate knowledge from all of the disciplines listed above as part of environmental studies.⁵

This brief attempt to locate Ecocriticism within the currents of contemporary literary studies is necessary because of the emphasis I have placed in *Shelley and the Nature of Nonviolence* on the history of Shelley criticism. I have a point of view, often at variance with frequently cited authorities, and I welcome any productive disagreements that might emerge from this. Shelley’s writings have inspired passionate responses since his first productions as a student, and for all his present fame and canonicity, the majority of these responses have been marked with loathing, misunderstanding, and disdain. Another point of view, which can be traced back to his lifetime, speaks of the poet as angelic, “not one of us,” the doomed arch-Romantic. These two views, each reductive

⁵ The term *ecology* was introduced to Romantic criticism in Karl Kroeber’s 1974 article “‘Home at Grasmere’: Ecological Holiness.” Kroeber’s *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994) is a delightful read but nowhere near as comprehensive as its title suggests. *The Ecocriticism Reader*, except for its useful bibliography, is implicitly geared for students of American literature. In British Romantic criticism, the field has been subsequently defined by special issues of *Studies in Romanticism* (Fall 1996), *The Wordsworth Circle* (Summer 1997), and the on-line *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (forthcoming) devoted to the theme of Romantic Ecology.

and reactionary, battled for dominance into the twentieth century. Attacks leveled by Eliot, Leavis, and the New Critics in the decades before World War II asserted that Shelley was merely a poet of lyrical ecstasies and not an important (let alone coherent) thinker. These accusations provided a generation of brilliant scholars with a mission to correct this misconception. The idea of Shelley as anything but intellectually complex became insupportable, thanks to Newman Ivey White's stately 1940 biography (one of the only attempts to write Shelley's life that tried to stick to the facts, avoiding melodrama), the analysis of Shelley's social and political thought in the works of Kenneth Neill Cameron, and the erudite formalism of Earl Wasserman's decades of work on Shelley (collected in one volume in 1971). In widely-used textbooks on the history of criticism edited by Walter Jackson Bate (1952) and Hazard Adams (1971), Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* featured prominently, and Shelley became an important figure in discussions of the post-Enlightenment theoretical condition. By no means did all critics of Shelley agree with one another--for example, influential studies located Shelley in seemingly the incompatible traditions of philosophical skepticism as well as neo-Platonism--but their composite effect was to grant Shelley membership in several important historical conversations.⁶

Unfortunately, what this work also did rather too well was to contain what was genuinely radical in Shelley's work, and to obscure certain earlier readers and critics who recognized Shelley's peculiar power. Between the factions who saw Shelley as either

⁶ See C. E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism* (1954) and James Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (1949) for the extent of this contrast. In Chapter VI of *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), Abrams also discusses Shelley in terms of "Romantic Platonism."

angel or devil were the “humanitarians” who saw him as a voice of inspiration and a pioneer in thought for a variety of movements. Several members of the Shelley Society (active in London between 1886 and 1892) chose not to follow the norm in discussions of Shelley, conversations which made his tumultuous life--for which he was both forgiven and condemned--the most important object of attention. They instead focused on the full range of his then-available texts to locate his work as a crucial precursor to later developments in animal rights, in workers’ rights, and in various forms of nonviolent protest. The present study attempts to put the Shelleyans of this stripe at the heart of the conversation about Shelley’s complexity of thought and his effective legacy. As G.B. Shaw put it in his 1892 article “Shaming the Devil About Shelley,”

He made and still is making men and women join political societies, Secular societies, Vegetarian societies, societies for the loosening of the marriage contract, and Humanitarian societies of all sorts. There is at every election a Shelleyan vote, though there is no means of counting it. (321)

The Shelleyans of this group included Shaw, W.E.A. Axon, Edward Carpenter, Howard Williams, and several others whose work continued into the twentieth century. The most representative and prolific of this group was Henry Stephens Salt (1851-1939). The importance of Salt to my understanding of Shelley’s legacy is perhaps the most obvious difference between this study and the majority of books written about Shelley. The full matter of the length and depth of his engagement with Shelley is discussed in Chapter Four; readers must decide whether or not they agree that Salt’s relative obscurity as a

Shelleyan and as an important cultural figure in general is a mistake long overdue for correction.⁷

More than one way of being “for” Shelley has always existed. What Salt and the rest of what I will call the “practical reformist” generation did, which provided an essential foundation for the “intellectual historians” of the post-World War II generation, was to bring Shelley’s longest poems into the center of any discussion of his importance. This may seem like an obvious point, yet as Mark Kipperman and others have pointed out, to the extent that Shelley became a “canonical” poet in the late nineteenth century, it was not *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, or *The Mask of Anarchy* which were widely reprinted and celebrated, but his less explicitly political lyrics, such as “To a Skylark,” “The Cloud,” “The Invitation,” or “When the Lamp Is Shattered.”⁸ As we will see in Chapter One, *Prometheus Unbound*, with its Aeschylean magnitude, would for this later generation become the central text of the Shelley canon, as Shelley himself predicted. Salt loved *Prometheus Unbound*, certainly, but wrote of it as the third section of a “Great Humanitarian Trilogy,” following *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*. This phrase of Salt’s is the title of Chapter One of this study, and there I explore its implications for rethinking the shape of Shelley’s career. So central was *Prometheus Unbound* to the generation of “intellectual historians” that a Variorum edition of *Prometheus Unbound* was published in 1959, at a time when *Laon and Cythna* was not even available in any

⁷ See Roderick Nash’s brief, suggestive discussion of Salt in *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (27-32).

⁸ See Kipperman’s essay “Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889-1903.” The one very popular lyric poem which remained uncontainably revolutionary was the “Ode to the West Wind.” The reason that this poem does not receive a line-by-line reading in the present study is that, in my opinion, it has been more thoughtfully, thoroughly, and convincingly explicated by extant criticism than any of the major poems I reapproach here. See especially Cherniak 90-97; Wasserman 245-251; Ferber *Poetry* 93-107; Holmes 546-550; Keach 162-4; and Roberts 424-434.

modern edition, except in its reissued version as *The Revolt of Islam*.⁹ Earl Wasserman's comprehensive book on Shelley includes a handful of references to *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*, covered in a few pages, whereas his astonishingly detailed reading of *Prometheus Unbound* fills four entire chapters. At issue, then, is not the importance of *Prometheus Unbound*, but the resulting tendency to underestimate the achievement, importance, and poetic risk involved in the earlier poems. As these poems include explicit instances of the themes of vegetarianism, nonviolent action, and undefeated hope, they merit particular attention in this study. All of these themes, as I will argue in the section on "Nonviolence and Natural Diet in *Prometheus Unbound*," are present in that poem as well, though perhaps in a subtext which might not catch the attention of a critic who did not think they were deserving of serious attention. Imagining natural diet would become an inextricable part of Shelley's mythopoetic imagination as his career progressed.

When Shelley finished a poem, and sometimes even before it was finished, he began the next one. Even if the previous poem concluded with nothing less than a scene of the world's regeneration, the sense that more work needed to be done remained. How to relate a particular poem and its professed views to the overall body of a poet's work is a crucial interpretive issue in the study of any author. This topic bears on the selection of major poems from Shelley's career--a surprisingly rich, varied, and voluminous one for a writer who drowned a month before his thirtieth birthday--that are discussed in this study. Shelley continually revisited favorite themes, but they never looked the same way twice

⁹ Lawrence John Zillman, *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum Edition*. *The Revolt of Islam* only differs from *Laon and Cythna* in a few stanzas and several smaller details (detailed by Rogers 360-395), and most of the original sheets were used in the reprinting. The point is to contrast the scholarly detail enjoyed by *Prometheus Unbound* in the decades after World War II with the relative neglect of *Laon and Cythna*.

because of his imperative towards new formal challenges. The cyclic, accidental nature of a writer's career--which looks chronological only to the historian--recalls a remark made by Wislawa Szymborska in her acceptance speech for the 1996 Nobel Prize:

Poets, if they're genuine, must also [as did Marie Sklodowska-Curie according to Szymborska] keep repeating, 'I don't know.' Each poem marks an effort to answer this statement, but as soon as the final period hits the page, the poet begins to hesitate, starts to realise that this particular answer was pure makeshift, absolutely inadequate. So poets keep on trying, and sooner or later the consecutive results of their self-dissatisfaction are clipped together with a giant paperclip by literary historians and called their "oeuvres." (qtd in Firla 51)

For Shelley, sometimes the final period did not even reach the page before self-dissatisfaction stepped in mid-phrase, as in *The Triumph of Life* manuscript: "Happy those for whom the fold / Of" (lines 547-8). Of what? Nothing beside remains. For all of the recurring themes, questions, and commitments of Shelley's career, he is "genuine" by Szymborska's standard in his patterns of reinvention. Szymborska lives in an age when poets often have the opportunity to deliberate over which of their works belong in a *Selected Poems*, as she has done herself, and yet she recognizes that even this effort can only have a limited effect. Literary historians have brought an array of "paperclips" to Shelley's *oeuvre*; some large ones try to contain everything; many smaller paperclips seek to guide the reader's attention to what is most important in Shelley; both enterprises usually leave this and other readers unsatisfied, hopeful for more. In selecting which

major works to feature in this study, I have tried to create the most protean paperclip that I can, with *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound* (Chapter One) representing Shelley's most ecstatic and optimistic view of nature, without ignoring the terror at natural violence anatomized in *Mont Blanc* (Chapter Two). Similarly, *Laon and Cythna* (also Chapter One) and *The Mask of Anarchy* (Chapter Three) feature Shelley's attempt to imagine large crowds of people organizing themselves around principles of nonviolent resistance, while *The Triumph of Life* (Chapter Five) registers the agoraphobic threat of chaos.

Like Salt and Shaw, I believe that Shelley's claims on our attention emerge from the prescience of his writings, and not from the moral failings or individual circumstances of his life. Shelley was not always consistent, in writing as in life, and one must speak carefully when generalizing about his beliefs. The love of virtue is not a proof against causing damage, even if unintentional, and Shelley certainly bears some responsibility for Harriet Westbrook's suicide, much of the trauma suffered by Mary, and for his own difficulties with his father.¹⁰ But a core set of beliefs did stay with him throughout his career, though constantly interrogated by his fierce intelligence and threatened by his depths of melancholy. As Virginia Woolf wrote, "Shelley loved humanity if he did not love this Harriet or that Mary. A sense of the wretchedness of human beings burnt in him as brightly and as persistently as his sense of the divine beauty of nature" (24). In this comment, Woolf provides a model not only for allowing Shelley's ideas to have a

¹⁰ The most influential recent critique of Percy Shelley's behavior, including his literary goals for both himself and Mary, is Anne Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988). Mellor argues that Percy intervened in the manuscript of Mary's *Frankenstein* at precisely those moments which later critics found fault with in terms of affected style. The move by what I have called the "angelic" school of Shelley worshippers to fully excuse his interpersonal behavior because, in their view, Shelley cannot be judged by worldly standards, received its first and best renunciation at the hands of Mark Twain. "In Defense of Harriet Shelley" was Twain's detailed and (for him) earnest response to the attacks on Shelley's first wife's intelligence in Edward Dowden's popular 1886 biography of the poet.

somewhat independent existence from his life (a distance still badly-needed in 1927), but also for seeing Shelley's "burning senses" about the natural world and about the human condition as inextricably related. This "persistence" was in place while still at Eton (before 1810) and he had it until he drowned, though when it began Shelley did not yet have the poetic language through which he could express and refine his views. In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," and in the dedicatory poem to Mary (quoted below) that prefaces *Laon and Cythna*, the poet spoke of the moment of his conversion to revolutionary principles. Whether or not it happened in exactly this way matters less than the imaginative structure which this repeated narrative provided for his conception of his life's work:

Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear Friend, when first
 The clouds which wrap this world from youth did pass.
 I do remember well the hour which burst
 My spirit's sleep: a fresh May-dawn it was,
 When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
 And wept, I knew not why; until there rose
 From the near school-room, voices, that, alas!
 Were but one echo from a world of woes--
 The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

 And then I clasped my hands and looked around--
 --But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,

Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground--
 So without shame, I spake:-- "I will be wise,
 And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
 Such power, for I grow weary to behold
 The selfish and the strong still tyrannise
 Without reproach or check." I then controuled
 My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold.

And from that hour did I with earnest thought
 Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,
 Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
 I cared to learn, but from that secret store
 Wrought linked armor for my soul, before
 It might walk forth to war among mankind;
 Thus power and hope were strengthened more and more
 Within me, till there came upon my mind

A sense of loneliness, a thirst with which I pined. ("Dedication," ll. 19-45)

The problem of characterizing Shelley's attitudes toward violence are concentrated in the figurative language through which he frames this memory, for the "meek and bold" student, sworn to mildness, also wears armor to "war among mankind." Though the armor is created by knowledge, and the soul is what goes forth to war, the vehicle of Shelley's metaphor reveals his imaginative engagement with the language of military

strategy. In Canto VI of the poem following this dedication, Shelley conceives of how the revolutionary forces led by Laon and Cythna can defend themselves against the Sultan's army while still aspiring to a "bloodless victory" in the conflict, and this tension is explored in Chapter One. This type of tactical quandary emerges in even more compelling form in *The Mask of Anarchy*, a poem which was read and cited by Mahatma Gandhi, as discussed at length in Chapter Three. The tremulous sensitivity of the stanzas quoted above indicates a double movement in Shelley's emotions: "thoughts of great deeds were mine" suggests that he is talking about his own deeds and accomplishments, a centripetal pull towards egotism and self-referentiality. But this inward movement is not the major one; it becomes subsumed in the outward move into quarrels with larger tyrants than the headmaster. This movement into widening circles of sympathy and compassion is repeated in his mature work, and became the ground of inspiration for Gandhi and other readers.

In a comment intended as a mark against Shelley, T. S. Eliot spoke a vital truth about Shelley's multivalent way of thinking, one which need not be taken as derisive:

Shelley seems to have had to a high degree the unusual faculty of passionate apprehension of abstract ideas. Whether he was not sometimes confused about his own feelings . . . is another matter. I do not mean that Shelley had a metaphysical or philosophical mind; his mind was in some ways a very confused one: he was able to be at once and with the same enthusiasm an eighteenth-century rationalist and a cloudy Platonist. But abstractions could excite in him strong emotion. (89-90)

The stanzas about the schoolyard conversion experience clearly demonstrate the accuracy of this statement. The version of that event in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” has the descent of the “Spirit of Beauty” causing the boy to “shriek,” which in turn caused Eliot to wince. But an understanding of how Platonic idealism (cloudy or not) coexisted with Enlightenment rationalism in Shelley’s mind is crucial for tracing the contours of his efforts at reform. These two ways of thinking are mutually exclusive only in the abstract, or in the practice of someone far more orthodox than Shelley: most people have to blend idealism with skepticism all the time. Precisely this kind of strict division can monopolize one’s entire attention to Shelley, and Wasserman’s reading of Shelley is an extended account of the abstract war between skepticism and idealism in his thought. I do not wish to rehearse all of these complexities here precisely because of how they can detract attention away from Shelley’s practical legacy for later reformers. Though I often disagree with Wasserman, especially regarding *Mont Blanc*, his work continues to perform an essential duty. I bring up Eliot’s comment for what it can suggest about Shelley’s way of talking about nature. The concept of “natural rights” underlies Shelley’s writings about vegetarianism (known at the time as either “the Pythagorean diet,” or, “natural diet”) as well as the fundamental right of citizens to revolt against a tyrannical government.¹¹ As Keith Thomas has written, any discussion of the “rights of nature,” including those about

¹¹ The first documented use of “vegetarian” came with the founding of the Vegetarian Society at Ramsgate in 1847, by which time the word must have been in circulation. Perhaps “natural diet” fell out of favor because it invited debates about the significance of diet to rest on the matter of whether humans were “intended” to eat meat. Shelley agreed with many late eighteenth-century doctors, including Thomas Trotter and George Cheyne, that comparing the digestive systems of carnivorous and herbivorous animals suggested otherwise. Though “vegetarian” has remained frustratingly vague to many later practitioners, requiring the addition of ungainly variations like “lacto-ovo” or “vegan,” it does at least make it possible to present claims for such a diet’s environmental and health benefits without immediately launching one into unresolvable debates about human nature.

diet, would have been associated with the revolutionary politics of Paine.¹² Shelley has recourse to both idealism and rationalism, as Eliot points out, and he uses both as the basis for the claims that he makes in the name of “nature.”

Most statements about how nature was meant to be--how humans in a natural state should govern ourselves, where we should live, what we should eat--are based upon implicit assumptions about a Golden Age. For Shelley, the thought of a Golden Age not just forever in recession but inevitably returning fueled his hope. The effort to bring about a new Golden Age, or somehow return to the old one, remains part of the discourse of environmentalism and the poetics of nature writing. The contemporary environmental historian Evan Eisenberg has built upon earlier studies of the idea of the Golden Age in an ambitious study of *The Ecology of Eden* (1998).¹³ Eisenberg divides operative assumptions about Eden into two categories, and though Shelley does not play a significant part in Eisenberg’s book, this division can help us to see how Shelley at times belongs in both camps. Eisenberg goes on to refine his thesis, of course, but begins with a useful structure for explaining this division:

if you insert a probe into any body of environmental thought, you will find, somewhere near its heart, a firm if amorphous idea about Eden. Consider two schools of thought conspicuous in the present debate, I will call them

¹² *Man and the Natural World* (1983) is Thomas’s study of “changing attitudes in England” about the role and function of nature; he ends his survey in 1800, at the heart of the revolutionary period. See especially Section VI for the radical associations of avoiding meat.

¹³ The two most influential and thorough books on this idea are Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* (1973), especially Chapters I-V; and Clarence Glacken’s *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought From Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967). Though the influence of Simon Schama’s *Landscape and Memory* (1995) is still in question, this prismatic *tour de force* contains hundreds of vivid examples of the worldwide topographical impact of the many forms of fantasies about the Golden Age.

the Planet Managers and the Planet Fetishers. The Fetishers dream of returning to Eden, restoring a state of harmony in which wilderness reclaims the planet and man is lost in the foliage, a smart but self-effacing ape. The Managers dream of a man-made paradise, an earth managed by wise humans in its own best interest and, by happy chance, humankind's as well. The Fetishers want to get past the fiery sword that guards Eden by crawling humbly under; the Managers, by vaulting over. (xv)

Such aversive terms as "Managers" and "Fetishers" make Eisenberg sound potentially dismissive of the common good--such as wilderness protection and legislation against toxins--that have followed from the work of environmentalists in each camp. But his concern is more that "[b]oth these dreams grow from confusions about our role in nature," and that being aware of the assumptions behind one's argument may prevent a number of unnecessary mistakes. For example, a "Fetisher" might reject technological advances like synthetic fibers for clothing even if they have great advantages simply because they are not "natural," while a "Manager" might overestimate how much human desires, say for a variety of foods, can be overseen by rational arguments. When Shelley mentions the similarity in number and size of human teeth to the "oran-gutan" as an attempt to argue rationally for a plant-based diet, he performs like a Planet Manager; when he imagines the spread of nonviolence to extend even to previously carnivorous animals who become berry-eaters, he is like Eisenberg's Fetishists. Eliot interpreted these two aspects of Shelley's thought to indicate the "confusion" of a non-philosophical mind, but the opposite is apt: they represent the confusion of a very philosophical mind confronting the

capacities in nature and in humans for both glorious creation and terrifying destruction. I find Eisenberg's divisions useful for conceiving of the ways in which Shelley's intense, persistent questioning of assumptions about the rights and responsibilities of humans--to each other and to the non-human world--participate in the ongoing dynamics of environmental literature. I do not use Eisenberg's terms to punctuate this study; my interest in them is not so that I can label moments as either managerial or fetishistic, but to show how the dream of a returning Golden Age was a vivid part of Shelley's literary imagination. He participated in the early stages of the ongoing counter-cultural movement of a reverence for wildness, questioning the imperatives of human progress. This makes his works, with all their attendant challenges, continually important for those who try to write about their perceptions of the natural world, especially for anyone who responds to the world's beauties and mysteries with a sense of ethical obligation.

Though no work exactly like this has been done in Shelley studies, two books provide partial precedents for this study. The first is *Shelley and Nonviolence* by Art Young, published in 1975 and since then often cited by critics when dealing with passages relating to political action. Young's book is a helpful compendium of quotations from Shelley's poetry and prose, with brief commentary on how each passage reveals his commitment to nonviolence, but the book is hardly exhaustive and is badly in need of an update.¹⁴ The other major book with which my work is in dialogue is Timothy Morton's *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (1994). This

¹⁴ For further discussion of Young's book and its limitations, see Chapter Three. An outstanding recent article by Onno Oerlemans, "Shelley's Ideal Body: Vegetarianism and Nature," though much shorter than the books of Young or Morton, does mention Salt, but does not extend into issues of political nonviolence.

recent work attempts to bring themes of diet and consumption, and the relation of the human body to the natural world, to the forefront of Shelley studies. In this sense, Morton's book is the most important example of an Ecocritical approach to Shelley, practiced in the hope that such scholarly work can move beyond the interests of Shelleyans, Romanticists, and of literary studies generally into a wider understanding of how the history of ideas develops in the context of ecological impact. Morton's book features the first serious appraisal of Shelley's vegetarian essays since Cameron's in 1950; he also looks carefully at some of the immediate sources for Shelley's conversion to this way of eating, including the writings of such now-obscure figures as John Oswald, Joseph Ritson, and John Frank Newton. These aspects of Morton's book are especially strong, and have made it possible for me to concentrate on some of Shelley's later writings. The crucial years for Morton's discussion are early in Shelley's life, between 1810 and 1814; I have tried to use Shelley's writings on nonviolence and natural diet as a lens onto later periods, long after his death. Morton does not include anything in his study about the generation of the Shelley Society: he lists works by Howard Williams and W.E.A. Axon in his bibliography but they are never cited, Henry Salt is not mentioned at all, and Shaw is ignored. I believe the historical importance of this group is great and that their story should be retold. My work seeks to combine the subject matter of Young's book and Morton's book, out of the conviction that they belong together as complementary aspects of Shelley's thought, which is how Salt saw them. In the course of reading Shelley's poetry for his meditations on nature, violence, and how humans might best organize ourselves to live well, we will also read over the shoulders of several figures who admired

Shelley precisely because he could not keep these topics separated. By revisiting a rich and neglected part of history, we can learn more about the ways to critique and renew a society which remains too dependent upon naturalized forms of violence.

CHAPTER ONE

THE "GREAT HUMANITARIAN TRILOGY":

QUEEN MAB, LAON AND CYTHNA, PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

Part One: Editions and the Shelley Canon

My favorite edition of Shelley cannot be defended on scholarly grounds.

It does not contain all of the poetry, lacks all annotations, and its texts of some poems (especially *The Triumph of Life*) is so corrupt as to be downright deceptive, requiring one to have a critical edition open next to it at all times. Yet this version of *Shelley's Poetical Works*--published in America by Little, Brown in 1857 and reprinted by James Miller of New York in 1875--presents a version of the Shelley canon in such radical contrast to both earlier and later editions that it occupies a place of honor on my bookshelf. Its distinction has to do with the featured position given to *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam* and its entire exclusion of *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci*. It is a beautiful book, featuring gilt edges, generous borders, green binding stamped in gold, an introductory memoir by James Russell Lowell, and fanciful engravings by John Andrew. This elegant surface exists in a degree of tension with the table of contents, for the radical *Queen Mab*, dismissively tucked back with the Juvenalia in previous and subsequent collected editions, here is right up front and features the most illustrations.¹ And though

¹ The arrangement devised by Mary Shelley for her four-volume, 1839 edition of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* was retained by Thomas Hutchinson for his 1904 Oxford edition. All of the longer poems appear first in order of composition (except, as noted here, for his first long poem *Queen Mab*), filling two-thirds of the collection, followed by lyrics and then Juvenalia. As the Oxford edition remains,

the next two poems in the table of contents, the 720-lined *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam* at a sweeping 4,818 lines, were included near the beginning of other collections, here they are the only other long poems to precede the chronological arrangement of the shorter lyrics. In effect, *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam* (as *Laon and Cythna* was titled after Shelley made the necessary changes, at his publisher's insistence, to change the relationship of the heroic lovers of the poem's title so they were no longer sister and brother) are positioned, in this edition only, as Shelley's two most prominent poems. For one who argues, as I do, that the first two poems in Shelley's "great humanitarian trilogy" have received inadequate critical attention compared to that afforded *Prometheus Unbound*, even such anomalous prominence is rewarding.

Did Shelley consider these three long poems a trilogy? Do they have recurring characters, settings, or intertextual references to each other? Have they ever appeared in an edition of Shelley's poems as a trilogy? Is the phrase "great humanitarian trilogy" a commonplace in Shelley criticism? The answer to all of these questions is no. What can be gained, then, by speaking of these poems in this way? This phrase was first used by Henry Salt in his 1902 pamphlet "Shelley as a Pioneer of Humanitarianism," where he wrote that these poems "form one great humanitarian 'trilogy,' each part of which represents a certain phase in Shelley's career" (12). *Queen Mab* (1813) represents the formative years before friendship with radical publishers like Leigh Hunt and the already infamous literary celebrity of Byron; *Laon and Cythna* (written 1817, published 1818) is from the time in England after his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin; and

a century later, the most complete one-volume edition of the poetry available, this interpretive editorial structure continues to influence the criticism of Shelley's early poetry.

Prometheus Unbound (written 1819, published 1820) from his final years in Italy, from which Shelley would never return. Henry Salt used the word “humanitarian” in a way that Shelley would not have recognized, so a clarification will be necessary in order for its potential as an interpretive guide to be understood. “Human” was an important word to Shelley, and appears more often in these three poems than any of his others, but he did not use the variations on “human” that refer to a distinctive quality of appreciation or kindness, such as “humane” or “humanitarian.” Until late in the nineteenth century, the meaning of “humanitarian” was specifically theological, marking a position which affirmed the humanity but denied the divinity of Christ. Salt and his circle did not refer to this meaning of the word at all, though it was the only one current during Shelley’s career. “Humane” had been an acceptable spelling of “human” until around 1700, though evidence of its use as a separate term for dignified treatment can be found in Shakespeare.² Salt was one of the leaders of the Humanitarian League, founded in 1893, and several of the reforms which this group wished to pursue regarded the protection of animals--wild, domestic, and livestock--from abuses at the hands of humans. For Salt, “humanitarian” meant the effort to prevent unnecessary harm in all forms, whether towards humans, other animals, or the environment, and it was the “humanitarian imagination” of Shelley which made him appear, to Salt and others in his like-minded minority, as a pioneer in the critique of a triumphalist, anthropocentric worldview. Today, Humane Societies in the United States care for neglected animals and work to expose and prevent wanton acts of

² In *Coriolanus*, the First Citizen uses “humanely” in its modern meaning: “We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they reliev’d us humanely; but they think we are too dear” (1.i.12-16).

cruelty; the first Humane Society in England, however, was organized to assist in the rescue of drowning persons in rivers, lakes, and in coastal waters. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the distinction between “human” and “animal” was famously contested in light of geological discoveries and developments in evolutionary theory.³ These historical developments parallel that of “humane” and “inhumane” as distinct categories within human behavior. A humanitarian trilogy, then, can be defined as one which artfully imagines that the capacities within humans for sympathetic, nonviolent, cooperative actions will be victorious over our self-destructive, unenlightened, violent, basest selves. Salt wrote that Shelley’s subject in *Prometheus Unbound* was “in the main the same as that of *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*--the struggle of humanity against its oppressors; but it is treated in a more ideal and less polemical manner” (Primer 62). Before Shelley could combine all of his characteristic themes in *Prometheus Unbound*, he had to first address the essential problem of his system: the assurance that he felt, perhaps naively in parts of his first long poem, that his appeal to “the irresistible instincts of nature”--that is, to a shared basis of human life--would bring about the sympathetic results he desired. As his career progressed, Shelley’s confidence in the positive moral valence of nature would become tempered, but he would never cease to believe that inhumane behavior was not an inevitable aspect of human life. The final section of this chapter traces the development of this idea into *Prometheus Unbound*, finding continuities between that dramatic poem and his two earlier attempts to explore this topic at length. Of the voluminous criticism on

³ For more on Salt’s appeal to “science” as evidence for his beliefs about animal rights, and how these beliefs emerged from his engagement with Shelley, see Chapter Four. On the emergence of geology in the Romantic period and its importance for the literary imagination, see John Wyatt’s *Wordsworth and the Geologists* (1995).

Prometheus Unbound, a fair amount seeks to distance itself from these earlier, more “naively optimistic” (Wasserman 5) poems, in part because *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna* include the explicit endorsement of vegetarianism as an important reform, and an unembarrassed hope in the nonviolent regeneration of society. These themes are present in *Prometheus Unbound* as well, where their centrality to Shelley’s thought, and inextricability from each other, can, I think, be demonstrated. To speak of these three long poems as a “humanitarian trilogy” allows us to see how a range of ideas as seemingly disparate as natural diet and political nonviolence steadily coalesced in Shelley’s thinking into a dynamic view of the nature of nonviolence.

Part Two: Bloodless Victory and Bloodless Feast

One would not want to read a “bloodless” book. As an adjective, it connotes a lack of vitality, of urgency, which is anathema to good writing. Yet Shelley uses “bloodless” in three different senses, all of them urgently related to his central themes. Only one of his uses of “bloodless” is negative; that is, when applied literally to corpses. As we will see, this use is most prevalent in the horrifying instances of massacre and plague in Cantos X and XI of *Laon and Cythna*. The flow of blood, which leaves behind a bloodless corpse, is what Shelley seeks to avoid, and so the other two uses of “bloodless” are positive. A bloodless feast is one which includes no animal flesh as food, and a bloodless victory is one accomplished without resorting to the methods of conventional war. In *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley presents vegetarianism and political nonviolence as causally related, charging different forms of “bloodless” action

with ambitious levels of vitality. The “Preface” to *Laon and Cythna* reveals this ambition, as well as the claims for “natural sympathy” which animate both of these poems:

The Poem is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind; . . . the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission; . . . the temporary triumph of oppression, that secure earnest of its final and inevitable fall; the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue. Such is the series of delineations of which the poem consists. And if the lofty passions with which it has been my scope to distinguish this story shall not excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence, an interest profound and strong such as belong to no meaner desires, let not the failure be imputed to a natural unfitness for human sympathy in these sublime and animating themes. (Preface, paragraph 2)

Shelley here urges his readers to distinguish between the limits of his narrative control in *Laon and Cythna* and the efficacy of his themes, perhaps in recognition that the power of his poem’s early cantos was not evenly sustained in its second half. The point about “the transient nature of ignorance and error” is anticipated in one of the Fairy Mab’s most concise statements:

Yes! crime and misery are in yonder earth,

Falsehood, mistake, and lust;

But the eternal world

Contains at once the evil and the cure.

Some eminent in virtue shall start up,

Even in perversest time. (Mab VI.24-34)

This is the conviction that sustained Shelley through all of his poetic efforts. He believed that error and falsehood, ubiquitous and multifaceted as they may be at any particular moment, were subject to the cycles of natural regeneration and therefore bound to fail. The problem befalling at least the first two poems of this trilogy, as his own remark indicates, is that holding a conviction and transforming it into poetry are two very different things. In each case, he sought a narrative structure that would provide the widest possible canvas for his epic battles between truth and falsehood. Like his contemporary Keats, and his slightly older model Wordsworth, he aspired to the creation of an epic poem to belong alongside, and moreover to argue against parts of the towering achievements of Homer, Dante, and Milton. When he set about to reclaim the figure of Prometheus from Aeschylus' version in *Prometheus Unbound*, he found a scale that was at once epic and manageable; the parts of *Queen Mab* and especially *Laon and Cythna* which disappoint are the moments when the heights of his ambition partially topple. This fault, if it is one, is characteristic of Romanticism in general, and the retreat from epic ambition in later generations because of this difficulty in scope added to Shelley's legend. By the time he was at work on *The Triumph of Life*, he was able to create dramatic tension in a few lines, and this skill was not yet in line with his ambition while writing *Queen Mab*. Yeats wrote of the shape of Shelley's career in this way, and noted that:

Even in *Queen Mab*, which was written before he had found his deepest thought, or rather perhaps before he had found words to utter it, for I do not think men change much in their deepest thought, he is less anxious to change men's beliefs, as I think, than to cry out against that serpent more subtle than any beast of the field, 'the cause and the effect of tyranny.'

(69-70)

This "crying out" took the form, in *Queen Mab*, of the visitation to the sleeping mortal Ianthe by the Queen of the Fairies.⁴ Mab has the power to carry Ianthe on a dream-journey through time and space, thus affording Shelley the opportunity to include in his poem a complete canvassing of the existing ills of the world, the ruins of past tyrannies, and the glorious vision of the days to come. The poem concludes, nine cantos later, with Ianthe's return and awakening.

There is in *Queen Mab*, as there is not in *Mont Blanc*, a primary concern with the return of the Golden Age, and this idea determines much of the conception of nature in the poem. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, Shelley grew to distinguish between the mythic language used to talk about the natural world and the world "out there" which exists independently of human intervention. The "Spirit of Nature" invoked near the beginning of *Queen Mab*, however, already includes a key element of the "biocentric" view of the world towards which Shelley was moving:

Spirit of Nature! here!

⁴ The origin of the name Queen Mab is unclear, it may have been original with Shakespeare (see *Romeo and Juliet* I.iv.49ff). See also Kelvin Everest's headnote to the poem in *The Poems of Shelley* (1989), 265-269. *Queen Mab* will appear in the second volume of Reiman and Fraistat's edition, not yet published.

**In this interminable wilderness
 Of worlds, at whose immensity
 Even soaring fancy staggers,
 Here is thy fitting temple.
 Yet not the lightest leaf
 That quivers to the passing breeze
 Is less instinct with thee:
 Yet not the meanest worm
 That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead
 Less shares thy eternal breath.
 Spirit of Nature! Thou!
 Imperishable as this scene,
 Here is thy fitting temple. (Mab I.264-77)**

“Wildernesses” are subsets of the “Spirit of Nature” in this conception. Shelley’s awareness of the idea of wilderness as a matter of perception anticipates many developments much later in the nineteenth century; for the time being, wilderness was a condition in one place at one time past which one needed to see in order to apprehend the eternal. Paradoxically like the neo-classical preference for cultivation over wildness, Shelley concerns himself with creating a “fitting temple” for nature; although most neo-classicists would not encourage the membership of worms at the worship service, as Shelley does here. To enter the temple of nature, for Shelley, is to move towards greater health; this view underlies the passage and note on vegetarianism later in the poem.

“Health” is a very important word in *Queen Mab*, functioning simultaneously in the physical sense of bodily fitness, and metaphysically as indicative of the awareness of eternal principles. Vice emerges from alienation with nature, “whilst from the soil / Shall spring all virtue” (V. 18-19). This view makes it possible for Shelley to denounce the groundless claims of religion and monarchy, and to make their bloodless dethronement seem as readily available as soil. As Mab shows Ianthe the present world from a great height, she speaks some of the words which made *Queen Mab* Shelley’s most popular and influential poem among working class readers for the first thirty years after his death:

**Whence, thinkest thou, kings and parasites arose?
 Whence that unnatural line of drones, who heap
 Toil and unvanquishable penury
 On those who build their palaces, and bring
 Their daily bread?--From vice, black loathsome vice;
 From rapine, madness, treachery, and wrong;
 From all that genders misery, and makes
 Of earth this thorny wilderness; from lust,
 Revenge, and murder. . . . And when reason’s voice,
 Loud as the voice of nature, shall have waked
 The nations; and mankind perceive that vice
 Is discord, war, and misery; that virtue
 Is peace, and happiness and harmony;
 When man’s maturer nature shall disdain**

The playthings of its childhood;--kingly glare

Will lose its power to dazzle[.] (Mab III.118-133)

This passionate appeal to “reason” and “maturity” is the defining characteristic of *Queen Mab*. Shelley wants his readers to look as directly as possible at nature, where he is certain that class hierarchies, undignified treatment, and pompous displays of power do not exist. Such a passage is more directly accessible to a range of readers than, say, the emergence of Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound*, and this explains why radical publishers like Richard Carlile found an eager readership for pirated editions of *Queen Mab*. Shelley’s original 1813 edition sold few copies, but by the time William Clark’s edition of the poem appeared, without Shelley’s authorization, in 1821, the poem began a career as classic of the Chartist, Owenite, and other working class movements.⁵ In 1812 when Shelley began writing the poem, the Regency had just been established because of George III’s debilitating illness; to refer to “an unnatural line of drones” at such a moment is a bold assertion of Shelley’s disdain for monarchy. The key word is “unnatural,” for it indicates the center of Shelley’s concern as not the individual policies--liberal or reactionary--of particular monarchs, but the artificial status of monarchy itself. To be “unnatural,” in Shelley’s conception, is to deny to self and others the common birthright of health.

⁵ The copy of William Clark’s edition in the University Library at Cambridge closely resembles Shelley’s first edition, and even excises the dedication poem “To Harriet” which Shelley would have clearly not wanted to see in 1821, years after Harriet’s suicide and Shelley’s remarriage to Mary. Carlile makes translations available of all of Shelley’s classical sources, but his edition, the most popular of the pirates, contains several additional errors. By the time of Mary Shelley’s decision to place the poem among Shelley’s “Juvenalia” in 1839, additional pirated copies were selling consistently among radical circles, and many readers would have only known Shelley by this poem. For more on this “unauthorized” afterlife, see Paul Foot’s *Red Shelley* (222-241) and Holmes’s biography (199-211).

A state of nature in which health is omnipresent is incompatible with the postlapsarian world, and Shelley draws inspiration from ancient descriptions of the Golden Age, before the ascent of unnatural vice. The two chief sources of his imagery contain prominently within them the peaceful companionship of predator and prey. The description of the forthcoming “peaceable kingdom” in Isaiah reappears in many forms whenever Shelley imagines natural nonviolence:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

(Isaiah 11:6-9)

No source of imagery offers more comforting associations than food, as eating provides both nourishment for the individual as well as the core of most social rituals. When Shelley makes his arguments for vegetarianism, he does not idealize nature to the point of chastising lions for eating antelopes instead of straw, but appeals to humans who have the choice to make their diurnal life more like this vision. “The knowledge of the Lord” is the authority to which the prophet Isaiah has recourse; for Shelley it is the knowledge of nature. From Isaiah he found the means to combine the apocalyptic cycles of Judeo-

Christian history with the comparable vision of the cycle of the ages in classical literature, especially the promise of a returning Golden Age in Virgil's Fourth *Eclogue*:

Free-roaming ivy, foxgloves in every dell, and smiling acanthus mingled with Egyptian lilies--these, little one, are the first modest gifts that earth, unprompted by the hoe, will lavish on you. The goats, unshepherded, will make for home with udders full of milk, and the ox will not be frightened of the lion, for all his might. Your very cradle will adorn itself with blossoms to caress you. The snake will come to grief, and poison lurk no more in the weed. Perfumes of Assyria will breathe from every hedge. (Eclogues IV.18-25)

Shelley responded to such lush description with both a desire for poetic imitation (as in the depiction in *Queen Mab* VIII.107-123 of renovated nature, and in the festival at the heart of *Laon and Cythna*, discussed below), and with an intellectual imperative to revise this vision to include a greater recognition of all creatures' status as part of eternal nature to begin with, extending even to the loathed snake.

Canto VIII of *Queen Mab* contains Shelley's dream of the Golden Age's return in its most developed form, and contains the lines which occasioned his long note on vegetarianism.⁶ Their journey mostly behind them, Mab turns to Ianthe:

The present and the past thou hast beheld:

It was a desolate sight. Now, Spirit, learn

⁶ The differences between Shelley's note 17 to *Queen Mab* and the text of the pamphlet *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1812) are slight, having mostly to do with long quotations from Plutarch and Porphyry that appear in one version and not the other. For the history of these texts, and conjecture regarding their dates of composition and revision, see Everest's notes in *The Poems of Shelley* (1989), 406-424; and E. B. Murray's splendid edition of the *Vindication* in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. 1 (1993).

The secrets of the future.

.....

Joy to the Spirit came.

Through the wide rent in Time's eternal veil,

Hope was seen beaming through the mists of fear:

Earth was no longer hell;

Love, freedom, health, had given

Their ripeness to the manhood of its prime[.]

(Mab VIII.1-3;11-16)

What had made Earth "hell" in the first place? Partially, this was due the present moment's location in an "iron age" in the cycles of mythic history from which Shelley draws both his inspiration and his imagery. But "hell" is also in our perceptions as well, and as the Canto progresses the argument becomes clear--as Shelley would claim many times later on in his poetry--that this regeneration was available through the cultivation of the collective will. A vegetarian paradise, adding humans to the lions that stay away from meat in Isaiah and Virgil, appears in all three poems in the humanitarian trilogy. In *Queen Mab* VIII, Shelley includes as part of his vision a wholesale restatement of his precedents:

All things are recreated, and the flame

Of consentaneous love inspires all life:

.....

The lion now forgets to thirst for blood:

There might you see him sporting in the sun

**Beside the dreadless kid; his claws are sheathed,
 His teeth are harmless, custom's force has made
 His nature as the nature of a lamb.
 Like passion's fruit, the nightshade's tempting bane
 Poisons no more the pleasure it bestows[.]**

(Mab VIII. 107-8;124-130)

**This could all belong in Virgil and Isaiah, but Shelley soon extends this mythic revisioning
 to include a radical change in the "terrible prerogative" of anthropocentric imperatives.
 Shifting attention from lions to "Man," he has Mab point out this future change in the
 human condition to Ianthe:**

**. . . no longer now
 He slays the lamb that looks him in the face,
 And horribly devours his mangled flesh,
 Which still avenging nature's broken law,
 Kindled all putrid humours in his frame,
 All evil passions, and all vain belief,
 hatred, despair, and loathing in his mind,
 The germs of misery, death, disease, and crime.

 All things are void of terror: man has lost
 His terrible prerogative, and stands
 An equal amidst equals: happiness**

**And science dawn though late upon the earth;
 Peace cheers the mind, health renovates the frame;
 Disease and pleasure cease to mingle here,
 Reason and passion cease to combat there [.]**

(Mab VIII.211-218; 225-231)

Natural diet becomes a site where “reason and passion cease to combat,” and work together for two separate and, to Shelley, equally convincing arguments. Such a conception of the human species as “an equal amidst equals” was extremely rare in Shelley’s time, and remains less than commonplace even today, long after the reformulation of species theory demanded in the wake of Darwin. These lines occasioned Shelley’s long note on vegetarianism, where the science of comparative anatomy is invoked to argue for the existence of natural sympathy. Shelley’s note begins with his most concise statement of his view of nature:

I hold that the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life The language spoken . . . by the mythology of nearly all religions seems to prove, that at some distant period man forsook the path of nature, and sacrificed the purity and happiness of his being to unnatural appetites. (*Vindication*, in Prose 77)

Over the course of this note, Shelley uses “passion” in a direct appeal to his readers’ powers of sympathy with suffering animals, and “reason” to argue for the harm caused to human health, and to the environment, by a dependence on a meat-based diet. This shift from one form of argument to another is rarely announced, and proceeds with the gusto

and impatience characteristic of Shelley's prose. Here, for example is a passage where Shelley follows a passionate appeal for the natural unfitness of humans for flesh-eating (based on Plutarch) with a startling return to scientific observation:⁷

It is only by softening and disguising dead flesh by culinary preparation, that it is rendered susceptible of mastication or digestion; and that the sight of its bloody juices and raw horror, does not excite intolerable loathing and disgust. Let the advocate of animal food, force himself to a decisive experiment on its fitness, and as Plutarch recommends, tear a living lamb with his teeth, and plunging his head into its vitals, slake his thirst with the steaming blood; when fresh from the deed of horror let him revert to the irresistible instincts of nature that would rise in judgment against it, and say, Nature formed me for such work as this. Then, and then only, would he be consistent.

Man resembles no carnivorous animal. There is no exception, except man be one, to the rule of herbivorous animals having cellulated colons. (Vindication 80)

To read Shelley's vegetarian prose straight through is to risk whiplash. Subsequent vegetarian writers generally try to stay firmly within scientific, reasoned argument, precisely because of the deeply-rooted passions against which they seek to argue. As Cameron, Morton, and Oerlemans have documented, Shelley's vegetarian essays also have this fragmentary quality because he borrows heavily from his primary sources, the

⁷ T.S. Eliot hated this passage; see Chapter Four for a discussion of his criticism of Shelley in terms of ecological criticism.

momentum of his conviction overruling any irritable reaching after calm agreement.

Where Shelley is original, and compellingly prescient, is in foreseeing the ecological effects of a growing population which chooses to be dependent upon meat. Shelley anticipated the environmental effects of a global economy with more accuracy and outrage than any writer of his generation:

The quantity of nutritious vegetable matter, consumed in fattening the carcass of an ox, would afford ten times the sustenance, undepraving indeed, and incapable of generating disease, if gathered immediately from the bosom of the earth. The most fertile districts of the globe are now actually cultivated by men for animals, at a delay and waste of aliment absolutely incapable of calculation. (Vindication 85)

This argument would not become current until awareness about rainforest depletion began to grow in recent years, and it still needs to be heard. Onno Oerlemans's essay on the importance of Shelley's vegetarianism argues for the role it plays in making Shelley's appeals for the worldwide reign of nonviolence and sympathy realizable in the scope of any individual's life. Oerlemans points out that the note to *Queen Mab*, and a later fragmentary essay "On the Vegetable System of Diet" (1814) "are explicitly speculative rather than overwhelmingly conclusive; they are a call to experimentation, to see if diet *can* reduce the prevalence of disease and create a people and a nation of a different character" (Ideal 545). It is easy to lose sight of this fact when confronted by descriptions of cellulated colons, but I think Oerlemans is correct to emphasize that *Queen Mab* and these essays:

aim to convince . . . by impressing the imagination of their readers that the possibility of radical change is reasonable, accessible and relatively simple. Both essays make the central case that an awareness of diet leads to an awareness of the interconnectedness of nature and consciousness, which, while not overcoming our alienation, will at least create in us an ecological imagination. (Ideal 545)

This desire to “impress the imagination” of his readers perhaps moved Shelley to overstate his arguments in ways that would shock and anger a variety of potential readers. But he also responded to what he saw as “a slow, gradual, silent change,” in his contemporaries, and he consistently addressed his works to this potential.

The phrase “slow, gradual, silent change” is from the “Preface” to the second poem of his humanitarian trilogy, *Laon and Cythna*, and refers to how “gloom and misanthropy have become characteristics of the age in which we live” because of disappointment over the French Revolution. “If the Revolution had been in every respect prosperous,” he argues, “then misrule and superstition would lose half their claims to our abhorrence, as fetters which the captive can unlock with the slightest motion of his fingers, and which do not eat with poisonous rust into the soul.” The Golden Age of Queen Mab returned presumably to stay; in his next poem Shelley imagined how humanitarian sympathy would cope when the wheel keeps turning.

The twelve-canto structure of *Laon and Cythna* falls sharply into two parts. After an introductory canto we hear the story, from a variety of speakers, of how the title

characters (brother and sister in the original, cousins in *The Revolt of Islam*) lead a revolution for the “bloodless dethronement” of the tyrannical Sultan of the Golden City. The setting is a version of Byzantium; the plot can be best described as “Byzantine” as well. The revolution seems to be a success, and at the middle of the poem, after more than 2000 lines, the eloquent Cythna gathers everyone together for a celebration.⁸ The speeches delivered at this time, and the further narration of this feast, are far more expansive than the demands of the plot require. Once the Sultan counter-attacks and the melodrama of Laon and Cythna’s separation is punctuated with scenes of plague and famine more grotesque than anything else in Shelley’s works, the moment of this feast clearly emerges as the highest point of the revolution. Shelley sends Laon and Cythna to a “Temple of the Spirit” at the end of the poem, a sort of atheistic heaven for the virtuous where they can be reunited and tell their stories, but the nonviolent model at the heart of this poem is not martyrdom but the virtues extolled at the celebratory feast. Explicitly included in this is vegetarianism, as emphasized in Cythna’s triumphant address to the assembled crowd:

‘My brethren, we are free! The fruits are glowing
 Beneath the stars, and the night winds are flowing
 O’er the ripe corn, the birds and beasts are dreaming--
 Never again may blood of bird or beast
 Stain with its venomous stream a human feast,
 To the pure skies in accusation steaming;

⁸ For an argument for Cythna as an example of Shelley’s incipient feminism, directly inspired by the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, see Nathaniel Brown’s *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*.

Avenging poisons shall have ceased
To feed disease and fear and madness;
The dwellers of the earth and air
Shall throng around our steps in gladness
Seeking their food or refuge there.
Our toil from thought all glorious forms shall cull,
To make this Earth, our home, more beautiful,
And Science, and her sister Poesy,
Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free!

(Laon V.li.5; lines 2242-2256)

As we saw in *Queen Mab*, the appeal of this scene is simultaneously to reason and to feeling. One would not find “blood . . . in accusation steaming” in a scientific description, yet Cythna also posits “Science” as contributing to the beautification of the Earth. What science promises, for Shelley, is enlightenment which will take away both superstitious religious beliefs (part of the Sultan’s hold over his people), as well as long-held but also superstitious beliefs in an ontological division between humans and other blood-filled animals. The appeal to feeling deepens with the connection between such diet and the “fields and cities of the free,” who are made more free by further removing from their practice institutions of violence which are seen as necessary, such as the slaughterhouse. The glowing fruit and the night-wind over the corn reveal Shelley at his nocturnal best, and even with the “accusation” of the following lines, his vegetarian writings are heading

towards the nonprohibitive context they will embody in *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Mask of Anarchy*.

This lush description of the feast continues even after the narrative resumes following Cythna's direct address. The entire poem is in Spenserian stanzas, except for the six fifteen-line stanzas of her speech. This interruption in the pattern, along with the temporary stasis of this moment in the plot, adds to the sense that this speech is the fulcrum for the whole poem. Two aspects of Shelley's vegetarianism enumerated in this further description are the acceptance of animals--again, both wild and domestic--as members of the larger community, and the rejection of wine as part of an "unnatural diet":

Their feast was such as Earth, the general mother,
 Pours from her fairest bosom, when she smiles
 In the embrace of Autumn;--to each other
 As when some parent fondly reconciles
 Her warring children, she their wrath beguiles
 With her own sustenance; they relenting weep--
 Such was this festival, which from her isles
 And continents, and winds, and oceans deep,
 All shapes might throng to share, that fly, or walk, or creep,--
 Might share in peace and innocence, for gore
 Or poison none this festal did pollute,
 But piled on high, an overflowing store

**Of pomegranates, and citrons, fairest fruit,
 Melons, and dates, and figs, and many a root
 Sweet and sustaining, and bright grapes ere yet
 Accursed fire their mild juice could transmute
 Into a mortal bane, and brown corn set
 In baskets; with pure streams their thirsting lips they wet.**

(Laon V.lv; 2299-2316)

All are invited to fly, walk, or creep up to the cornucopia gathered together for this feast. As with many vegetarian writers, Shelley often tries to create revulsion in the reader through references to steaming entrails, spilled blood, or even the heart disease that may ensue from such consumption, but his case goes farther as poetry with the pomegranates and figs. This glorious scene, and the importance of Cythna's speech at it, was made possible by the influence of her words on preventing a violent revolution in the first place. In other words, this description of the melons and corn would still be beautiful but far less meaningful in terms of Shelley's poetics were not the occasion for this feast the celebration of a specifically "bloodless" form of revolt. As Cythna said to her fellow citizens earlier: "If blood be shed, 'tis but a change and choice / Of bonds,--from slavery to cowardice: / A wretched fall! (IV.xxviii, 1657-60). The festival shows them at their most free, and Shelley insists that such a feast could only be bloodless.

Food remains an important theme in the later cantos, though the mouth-watering grapes and corn are gone as famine takes over in the wake of the Sultan's counterattack. "There was no corn," Laon observes, once separated from Cythna and near starvation: "in

the wide market-place / All loathliest things, even human flesh, was sold; / They weighed it in small scales” (X.xix.3955-57). When Shelley uses “loathliest,” his poetry slouches, but “They weighed it in small scales” delicately captures the banality of evil. The poet’s beliefs about the nearness of animal relations and the damage (to humans as well) of a meat-based diet helped him to imagine a particular horror less likely to haunt other writers. The last cantos of *Laon and Cythna* are difficult to read because of Shelley’s terror at the power of the enraged Sultan’s army--a power that almost overwhelms his imagination--and for the anti-festival that are the scenes of starvation. The Sultan’s war he imagines in these cantos caused, as all actual wars do, massive environmental damage, and in describing these effects Shelley reverses the bloodless, unpolluted bounty of the feast:

The fish were poisoned in the streams; the birds
 In the green woods perished; the insect race
 Was withered up; the scattered flocks and herds
 Who had survived the wild beasts’ hungry chase
 Died moaning, each upon the other’s face
 In helpless agony gazing; round the City
 All night, the lean hyenas their sad case
 Like starving infants wailed[.] (X.xv.3919-3926)

The wrenching pain of this stanza is itself an argument for the coextensive concerns of animal rights and human rights. All wars transform innocent humans into corpses, refugees, or reduce their concerns to the most basic matters of survival. Animals lose

whatever limited protections they may have enjoyed in wartime; even a domestic companion cannot compete with the immediate needs of a human or a family. What happens to animals during wartime is an infrequent subject in poetry, and in Shelley's time it would have been considered beneath the notice of a strategic mind. Out of his humanitarian imagination, "lean hyenas" came to wail their fate. The long process of writing *Laon and Cythna* tested Shelley's powers, much like Keats's writing of *Endymion* did over the same months of 1817. The strain of his vast project betrays itself a little in the later cantos, yet he was able to embody in his heroes his own sense of how such seemingly disparate elements as plants, beasts, stars, and thoughts all correspond with each other in the sympathetic imagination. In Canto IX, Cythna remarks wonderingly:

'These are blind fancies--reason cannot know

What sense can neither feel, nor thought conceive;

There is delusion in the world--and woe,

And fear and pain--we know not whence we live,

Or why, or how, or what mute Power may give

Their being to each plant, and star and beast,

Or even these thoughts.--Come near me! I do weave

A chain I cannot break--I am possessed

With thoughts too swift and strong for one lone human breast.

(*Laon IX*.xxxiii.3757-3765)

Part III: Nonviolence and the Natural Diet in *Prometheus Unbound*

Henry Salt identified the distinctive strength of *Prometheus Unbound*, relative to the two earlier long poems, as its move away from prohibitive statements: “The mind is directed to the worship of ideal beauty, rather than to the denunciation of existing wrongs” (Primer 64). Salt clearly agreed with Shelley that the world was filled with many “existing wrongs,” and that human consumption of meat was one of them, symptomatic of a world where the abuse of power had become naturalized. As he had already done in *Queen Mab* and its notes, and in the “bloodless feast” at the center of *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley presented a shift away from a meat-based diet as both a necessary reform towards larger cultural changes, and an inevitable result of these changes. The problem is that advocacy of a vegetarian diet remains, at many levels, a discourse of prohibition: though it may proceed from many affirmatives (yes, I am responsible for what I eat; yes, my love for animals as wildlife or as pets should carry over to my whole life; yes, O luscious fruit) its communication is negative (no, you mustn’t eat that, you selfish rogue!). Shelley himself seems to have become increasingly aware of this problem. Though he never renounced the central tenets of *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813), by the time of writing *Prometheus Unbound* in 1819 his vegetarian sensibility had become so enmeshed in his way of seeing that it could no longer be considered an extricable subject. For clarity of discussion, I have separated the return of the Golden Age as a theme in these poems from the multivalent functions of natural diet, but their superimposition becomes clearest in *Prometheus Unbound*’s vision of a double reversal of dietary changes. As the Spirit of the Earth speaks to Asia of the changes that followed Jupiter’s fall, it reports that:

. . . when the dawn
 Came--wouldst thou think that toads and snakes and efts
 Could e'er be beautiful?--yet so they were
 And that with little change of shape or hue:
 All things had put their evil nature off.
 I cannot tell my joy, when o'er a lake,
 Upon a drooping bough with nightshade twined,
 I saw two azure halcyons clinging downward
 and thinning one bright bunch of amber berries
 With quick, long beaks, and in the deep there lay
 Those lovely forms imaged as in a sky. (III.iv.73-83)

This picture of "evil nature" falling away is wonderfully complex, for the change is registered in both poisonous plants and carnivorous animals. Poisonous *belladonna* becomes bright and edible berries, and these are eaten by the halcyon (kingfisher) who now uses his long beak to pluck berries rather than to catch prey. As these birds "cling downward" the Spirit looks at their reflection in the sea, where "those lovely forms" would appear to be right-side up, thus spinning the auditor joyously around. The sea only reflects like the sky when it is calm, however, and this explains the choice of "halcyon" as opposed to other carnivorous birds, for the fabled halcyon can calm the seas.

A further level of significance may be at work with the choice of *two* halcyons when the demands of the plot could be satisfied with any number. Shelley may be echoing the myth of Ceyx and Alcyone, told by Ovid in Book XI of the *Metamorphoses*. The tale

is of a married couple who stay devoted to each other even after Ceyx' absence at sea, a suggestive parallel for the long separation of Prometheus and Asia which has finally, at this point in Shelley's play, come to an end after much suffering. Alcyone sees a shipwrecked body moving towards her on the shore, and finally recognizes it as her husband Ceyx, and as she rushes out towards his body she sprouts wings. As their tale concludes we find another example of a vision of peace, like those which Shelley studied and absorbed in the Bible and in classical literature, and reconfigured throughout his visionary poems. Allen Mandelbaum's translation of the scene is masterful:

And when [Alcyone] reached the silent, lifeless body
 she threw her newfound wings round his dear limbs;
 she tried to warm him with her kisses, but
 in vain--her beak was hard, her kisses cold.

Did Ceyx feel the kisses that she gave?

Or was it just the motion of the waves
 that made the drowned man seem to lift his face?
 Men were unsure. But this must be the truth:
 he felt those kisses. For the gods were moved
 to pity, changing both of them to birds--
 at last. Their love remained; they shared one fate.
 Once wed, they still were wed: they kept their bond.
 They mate; they rear their young; when winter comes,
 for seven peaceful days Alcyone--

upon a cliff that overlooks the sea--
 broods on her nest. The surge is quiet then,
 for Aeolus won't let his winds run free:
 he keeps them under guard, so that the sea
 maintain the peace his fledgling grandsons need.

(Latin XI. 735-48; Mandelbaum 390)

That Shelley may have been subtly invoking this passage is furthered by the lines which follow the Spirit of the Earth's description quoted above and which conclude its long speech to Asia: "So with my thoughts full of these happy changes / We meet again, the happiest change of all" (III.iv.84-5). Several reunions are happening at once--between the Spirit of the Earth and Asia, between Asia and Prometheus, and indeed between all things formerly unreconciled. The metamorphosis of Alcyone and Ceyx into halcyons takes place because the gods have pity for Alcyone in her grief, and "pity" is, of course, the crucial term on which turns Prometheus' change of status: the pity of magnanimity, of acknowledging shared suffering, gives of wings and freedom. Shelley does not directly name Alcyone and Ceyx, I think, because marriage itself, so dignified in this myth, never gets a good word in Shelley's work; yet as a myth of peaceful reunification it enriches his purpose. These kingfishers have no kingly throne, nor do they any longer fish: in Shelley's re-visioning of the myth they become more beautiful for these changes.

The other myth which has implications for the uses of natural diet in *Prometheus Unbound*--especially as these uses differ from *A Vindication of Natural Diet* and the notes to *Queen Mab*--is that of Prometheus himself. The passage mentioned in the section on

Queen Mab is worth quoting in full here, as it is Shelley's first use of the myth which would become resonant in many additional ways for him as his career developed. Shelley says himself that "I have borrowed this interpretation of the fable of Prometheus . . . from Mr. Newton's Defence of Vegetable Regimen" (Vindication 78). This was the subtitle of John Frank Newton's *The Return to Nature* (1811), from which Shelley "borrowed" a fair amount of the *Vindication*.⁹ An index of Shelley's growth as a mythographer can be found in comparing his direct address to Aeschylus (as well as Milton) in the "Preface" to *Prometheus Unbound* to the manner in which he allows himself to be led by Newton below. Nonetheless, the uses of Hesiod and Horace in this section--and Pliny, Plutarch, and Pythagoras (via Ovid) elsewhere in the *Vindication*--indicate that Shelley's engagement with classical Greek and Latin writers has two functions: they lend the authority of historical precedence to his arguments, and they move his thought and work into re-visioning a canon of literature understood as inherently about stories of reinvention and reinterpretation. At the time of the *Vindication* he was already engaging with the myth of Prometheus on this level:

The story of Prometheus, is one likewise which, although universally admitted to be allegorical, has never been satisfactorily explained.

Prometheus stole fire from heaven, and was chained for this crime to mount Caucasus, where a vulture continually devoured his liver, that grew to meet its hunger.--Hesiod says, that before the time of Prometheus,

⁹For the sources of *A Vindication of Natural Diet* see E.B. Murray's commentary in his edition of *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford, 1993): 359-364. See also Matthews and Everest's commentary on the *Queen Mab* notes 406-423, and Morton's *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste* (Cambridge, 1994), chaps. 3-4.

mankind were exempt from suffering; that they enjoyed a vigorous youth, and that death, when at length it came, approached like sleep, and gently closed their eyes.--Again, so general was this opinion, that Horace, a poet of the Augustan age, writes--

Audax omnia perpeti,
Gems humana ruit per vetitum nefas
Audax Iapeti genus,
Ignem fraude mala gentibus intulit,
Post ignem aetheria domo,
Subductum, macies er nova bebrum,
Terris inclubuit cohors
Semotique prius tarda necessitas,
Lethi corripuit gradum.--¹⁰

How plain a language is spoken by all this.--Prometheus (who represents the human race) effected some great change in the condition of his nature, and applied fire to culinary purposes; thus inventing an expedient for screening from his disgust the horrors of the shambles. From this moment his vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease. It consumed his being in every shape of its loathesome and infinite variety. (Vindication 78)

¹⁰ "Bold to endure all things, mankind rushes even through forbidden wrong. Iapetus' daring son [Prometheus] by impious craft brought fire to the tribes of men. After fire was stolen from its home in heaven, wasting disease and a new throng of fevers fell upon the earth, and the doom of death, that before had been slow and distant, quickened its pace" (*Odes*, 1.3.25-33).

Prometheus, in this reading, does the work of Jupiter; his fire is a false gift, for it creates not science, agriculture, and enlightenment, but rather bad digestion and heart disease. There are some grounds for this claim, especially in Horace's version, but Newton's interpretation of Hesiod, which Shelley repeats in this passage, is flawed in claiming that the human race's exemption from suffering ended with Prometheus' gift of fire. In the *Works and Days*, it is not the cunning gift of fire that is itself "a great calamity for both yourself [Prometheus] and for men to come," but rather the additional *punishment* Zeus conceives in response to this theft. Zeus orders Hephaestus "at once to mix earth with water, to add in a human voice and strength, and to model upon the immortal goddesses' aspect the fair lovely form of a maiden."¹¹ This is Pandora, whom Zeus introduces to the world as a gift to Epimetheus ("afterthought"), who "gave no thought to what Prometheus ("forethought") had told him, never to accept a gift from Olympian Zeus but to send it back lest some affliction befall mortals." It is, perhaps, a fortunate oversight on Newton's and Shelley's part to have allowed their own interpretation to override this misogynist myth, for Hesiod makes it clear that "the woman . . . brought grim cares upon mankind." Though several myths provide the means for Shelley's investigations into the origins of evil the story of Pandora is not directly one of them, and he never uses her name. Yet it may further explain this connection to note that in the passage where Hesiod presents the change from ease to dis-ease that the most Shelleyan word of all, Hope, plays an important role:

¹¹Citations from Hesiod are from M.L. West's translation of *Theogony & Works and Days* (Oxford, 1988); the story of Prometheus' tricking of Zeus is told in *Theogony* 535-7; the section discussed here about Prometheus' punishment are from *Works and Days* 40-105.

For formerly the tribes of men on earth lived remote from ills, without harsh toil and the grievous sicknesses that are deadly to men. But the woman unstopped the jar and let it all out, and brought grim cares upon mankind. Only Hope remained there inside in her secure dwelling, under the lip of the jar, and did not fly out, because the woman put the lid back in time by the providence of Zeus the cloud-gatherer who bears the aegis. But for the rest, countless troubles roam among men: full of ills is the earth, and full the sea. Sicknesses visit men by day, and others by night, uninvited, bring ill to mortals, silently, because Zeus the resourceful deprived them of voice. (Greek 90-105; West 39-40)

Evil has to be introduced to mortals in this myth, as it is in the myth of Eden; for Shelley, the need for people to create explanations for evil's presence becomes grounds for hope, because it provides the possibility that evil is not an intrinsic part of human nature. This also bears on the claims made by Shelley and others for natural diet, because arguments against these beliefs assume either the necessity of meat for human nutriment or a "natural" disposition of human towards a meat-based diet, and many people still believe in both. The depths of antagonism which often erupt in debates about vegetarianism and animal rights have everything to do with what it means to be human. Diet becomes a site where our similarities and differences to animals are each brought into focus: we are similar in flesh, as breasts, ribs, thighs and other animal parts correspond to our own however we dress them; yet different in that humans can choose what to eat in a way no other animal can. To realize that one has the power to inflict damage and then decide not

to use that power is a specifically human capacity (as far as we know), to which we give the word “humane.” What makes Prometheus the “Champion of mankind” (as Shelley calls him in the “Preface”) is his decision not to hate and fear Jupiter but to pity him; he represents what humans can do at their best. In Shelley’s beliefs, evil does not come from the inside, but is put on over time through custom and intimidation: thus after Jupiter is dethroned “veil by veil evil and error fall” (III.iii.62).

A hint of skepticism enters into Mary Shelley’s note about *Prometheus Unbound* over this view of evil; she seems at once to see its problems and to feel that the ambition of Shelley’s work had been misrepresented.¹² She writes that

Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none. It is not my part in these Notes to notice the arguments that have been urged against this opinion, but to mention the fact that he entertained it, and was indeed attached to it with fervent enthusiasm. That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. And the subject he loved best to dwell on was the image of One warring with the Evil Principle, oppressed not only by it,

¹²For her 1839 edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* Mary wrote notes about the composition and inspiration for each of the long poems as well as a note for the lyrics of each year from 1815 (when their lives together began) until Percy’s death. Although these notes contain some factual errors and lead to some thorny textual matters (see prefaces to Everest (1989) and Reiman & Fraistat (2000)) together they form one of the most important documents on Percy’s work and his years with Mary. She was forbidden by Sir Timothy Shelley from writing his atheist son’s biography, and she wrote as much of it as she could here under the guise of notes; she also faced the bitter paradox of championing her husband’s reputation as an original poet and thinker while needing to present him as respectably as possible. For an insightful reading of Mary’s own engagement with the poetics of natural diet, see Carol J. Adams’s chapter on “Frankenstein’s Vegetarian Monster” in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 108-119.

but by all--even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity[.] (qtd in Hutchinson 267-8)

Clearly for Percy Shelley becoming “perfectionized” would have included a shift away from a meat-based diet. One of the most suggestive aspects of Mary’s note is how “the good” find themselves in league with the Evil Principle (Jupiter, but also any belief in humanity’s disposition towards violence and meat), for this connects to the complex reasons why the use of animal food is difficult to talk about. Many good people eat meat. Perhaps some of them do so because they consider meat a “necessary portion” on their plates. It is a part of Nature, in this view, and also a part of ideology since it passes for invisible within certain cultural expectations. It would be easy to talk about vegetarianism or human nature if these topics did not have deep associations, as deep as religious worship. What interests me in Shelley’s poetry is his attempt to question all that humans think of as inevitable--religion, monarchy, violence, subjugation of animals--and to artfully suggest alternatives. On many of these subjects (the power of a state-controlled church, the sovereignty of kings) his work has an historical and aesthetic interest; with animals it has these and more. This awareness of Shelley’s weaves itself into his work--sometimes roughly, where certain passages in *Queen Mab* feel like rope and satin worked on the same loom--and other times more subtly, as in Asia’s speech on love where she overturns the hierarchy between gods, mortals, and beasts:

. . . all love is sweet,

Given or returned; common as light is love

And its familiar voice wearies not ever.

Like the wide Heaven, the all-sustaining air,

It makes the reptile equal to the God[.] (II.v.39-43)

One might have expected “it makes the peasant equal to a king” or some other intra-human formulation to end the stanza, and it still would have been a good speech; but as he did with the “good serpent” in Canto I of *Laon and Cythna* Shelley raises the stakes and attempts to reclaim that which has been cursed and devalued.

Several years of thinking about animals and nature had made Shelley attentive to the conventions surrounding animals in a manner different even from so sensitive a poet as Keats. The difference is not necessarily qualitative, but it does provide another index of how bewildering Shelley’s thoughts on these matters seemed to even the best of his contemporaries. Keats’s poetry teems with animals, and in a famous letter to Benjamin Bailey of 22 November, 1817, he wrote of the power of the sympathetic imagination, saying that “if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel.” Keats, in many ways, developed into a more empathic poet than Shelley, yet could also write tranquilly about the death of animals as an occasion for distant meanings:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?

To what green altar, O mysterious priest,

Lead’st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,

And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

What little town by river or sea shore,

Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,

Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?

("Ode on a Grecian Urn," 31-37)

Though it risks banality to say so, the attention here is entirely on humans, specifically on human consciousness of time and loss. Heifers can suffer, which should be grounds enough for dignified treatment, but they are unlikely to remember kisses, long for them, or find themselves moved to poetic expression by the experience of beauty. This final matter, of self-expression in language, is one we know for sure. What this famous passage from Keats puts into relief in Shelley's work is how animal subjects can become part of the rich imagery of Keats's ode but do not bear the same burden of meaning as Shelley puts on them. A creature being led to slaughter and a military compound could not appear in a Shelley poem without insisting themselves on his imagination as aberrant and dangerous. For example, here is Prometheus using the metaphor of ritual sacrifice with a grotesque immediacy well distinct from Keats's purposes. Where the heifer in Keats's ode is "with garlands dressed," in Shelley the ugly absence of garlands becomes a distinguishing feature. Prometheus considers the dynamic when gods of vengeance demand to be worshipped:

**And those foul shapes, abhorred by God and man--
Which under many a name and many a form
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world;
And which the nations panic-stricken served
With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love**

Dragg'd to his altars soiled and garlandless,
 And slain amid men's unreclaiming tears,
 Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate--
 Frown, mouldering fast, o'er their abandoned shrines. (III.iv.180-189)

Shelley's repulsion at the wasteful treatment of meat energizes this passage, whether the carcass is metaphorically that of love, as here, or whether it is of some mortal animal. He sees sacrifices to the gods for what they are: a way of inspiring the fear of vengeance. With rare exceptions, selecting passages from *Prometheus Unbound* where natural diet is at the fore of Shelley's attention is difficult to do, because it had become inseparable for him from any imagining of nonviolent change or of a reconciliation of humans and external nature, a new understanding which celebrates our being one species among many.

Shelley's interpretation of the myth of Prometheus underwent a radical change between 1813 and 1819, largely in the difference between Prometheus as "representing" the human race--which brings attention to his oppression and physical suffering--and Prometheus as "Champion" of the human race, as Shelley proclaims him in the "Preface" to *Prometheus Unbound*. A champion has earned that title, yet promises a gift for a dynamic future, whereas a "representative" is trapped in a static present. As Michael Ferber points out:

Shelley eventually came to see the Prometheus legend as the mythical form of his own most cherished beliefs about the power of enlightenment over superstition, of stoic patience and hope over tyrannical violence, of the human over the divine, and he was to fold into it something not found in

the original, his faith in the power of love and forgiveness over hatred and revenge. (64)

I would agree with all of this, and to a degree I would agree with Ferber's point that Shelley "abandon[ed] the vegetarian allegory [of the *Queen Mab* note] as too feeble to impose on the Aeschylean struggle between the king of the gods and the benefactor of humankind, and there is no trace of it in Shelley's play" (64). As I have been arguing, more than a trace of vegetarian sensibility informs this play, although Ferber is absolutely correct to say that the anti-Prometheus allegory has been abandoned. Yet while Ferber's main point is to explain and defend the ambition and promise of *Prometheus Unbound*, the vegetarian allegory has more relevance than might at first be apparent. The main point of the allegory is that the introduction of meat-eating brought diseases and misery to which people have since become accustomed. Those who dismiss Shelley's vegetarianism as adolescent or accidental--such as Richard Holmes, who opined that Shelley had to outgrow the idea that "political injustice and oppression were caused by indigestion" (220)--do not see this as a key site in Shelley's imagination, one where he tries to differentiate between what is absolutely necessary for a healthy life and that which appears to be "natural" only by the force of convention. The associations of meat-eating with Western affluence persist to this day with very destructive potential. In contemporary China the demand for beef has grown commensurably with the expansion of trade with the United States, Australia, and other cultures where meat is the default diet. If six billion people start demanding steak and eggs in the British style which Shelley recognized 180 years ago as short-sighted, acquisitive, and against nature, we will witness topsoil

depletion and expensive health care concerns unlike anything yet witnessed. In Chapter Three, the significance of meat in terms of cultural imperialism will be further discussed. As a part of the nonviolent vision of Shelley's Humanitarian Trilogy, one which looks towards the regeneration of the world, it remains an arena of practical reform.

There remains a central interpretive problem for Shelley's revolutionary model. Are we to take the overthrow of Jupiter enacted in *Prometheus Unbound*, and the subsequent regeneration of the world, as an immediate change, or is this to be understood as an allegory for a more gradual change? Violent revolution seems to deliver instant results, although generations, even centuries may be necessary to deal with the attrition created in the process. Anyone involved in a struggle for nonviolent change, in any era including our own, knows that such changes are not brought about instantly or finally. Yet this is exactly what *Prometheus Unbound* seems to present to us. This transformation of the human condition, including the utter removal of tyrannical rule, seems to occur in the "Hour" that it takes Demogorgon to haul Jupiter away. Though it is true that certain stages must be endured by Prometheus and by Asia between the ascendance of pity for Prometheus (I.53) and the summoning and arresting grasp of Demogorgon, there yet remains a sense of instantaneousness about this change, as indeed about the whole play. What is time and travel to a god? As soon as Act Three, Scene One ends with Jupiter's cry and disappearance, the next scene finds Ocean and Apollo aware of the great change to their worlds, as when Ocean says that

Henceforth the fields of Heaven-reflecting sea

**Which are my realm, will heave, unstain'd with blood
 Beneath the uplifting winds--like plains of corn
 Swayed by the summer air; my streams will flow
 Round many-peopled continents and round
 Fortunate isles[.] (III.ii.18-23)**

As glorious a prospect as this may be, it does raise a question for practical reformers whose efforts are measured not by Apollo but by mortals; that is, if the change isn't instantaneous, does that mean that the effort was a failure? Commentators on Shelley's politics have long debated whether or not he is a gradualist in terms of his hopes for reform of political, social, and environmental practices. As P. M. S. Dawson reminds us, "the most important task that faces the student of Shelley's politics is to trace the connection between his practical proposals for reform and his adherence to the millenarian dream" (Unacknowledged 5). One moment in *Prometheus Unbound* that offers some intra-textual evidence for a gradual effect of Jupiter's overthrow on human affairs is the Spirit of the Hour's account of what it saw when it went to "the haunts and dwellings of mankind" after Jupiter's fall:

**As I have said, I floated to the Earth:
 It was, as it is still, the pain of bliss
 To move, to breathe, to be; I wandering went
 Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind
 And first was disappointed not to see
 Such mighty change as I had felt within**

Expressed in outward things; but soon I looked,
 And behold! thrones were kingless, and men walked
 One with the other even as the spirits do,
 None fawned, none trampled[.] (III.iv.124-133)

That “[a]nd first was disappointed” allows a dash of gradualism to complement the total overhaul imagined everywhere else, and helps us to see the consistent link between *Prometheus Unbound*'s vision and the more calibrated (though still totalizing) reforms recommended in *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*. This may, of course, be a too-literal counter-reading to arguments made against *Prometheus Unbound*'s effectiveness and importance by those who bring to it the expectations that it will function as a rational, non-allegorical narrative. This leads to the larger question of what poetry can accomplish, a matter which is discussed in the cases of specific readers of Shelley in later chapters.

Some works of art show a possible future, others hold a mirror to events as they are to outrage and alert its readers, but still others exist only to inspire, standing as ideal models that could not exist as such in a world of dust and grime, but which play in the world all the same. Our tyrants have names that are not Jupiter, and the ones I could list today--Slobodan Milosovic, Saddam Hussein, Mobil-Exxon, Inc.--seem proof against pity. Yet this list of thugs and tyrants will be dated by the time this book goes to press, which is exactly the point. Such assurances of evil's self-consuming nature are not meant to--and indeed cannot--distract our attention from the suffering of many innocent people or from other forms of lasting devastation. We live in an age when songs of hope are viewed with

more skepticism, are seen as more dangerous, than fables of disillusion and self-promotion. To put it less dramatically, *Prometheus Unbound* is to hope what Cole Porter's "From This Moment On" is to love: no experience of love between two humans, no matter how advantageous the circumstances, has ever been an undifferentiated series of "hoop-de-do songs" proceeding from a particular moment, but the song still does its work in the world. Imagine asking Ella Fitzgerald not to sing her version because other evidence says that love is not so simple, or because her own experiences belie the lyric; this example risks bathos, but what is music for? There is, I think, a fidelity to the regenerative feeling of falling in love which that song transforms into art, and that feeling remains a possible experience for other people despite whatever sorrow or decay may come to one set of lovers. Like this song, *Prometheus Unbound* is all about possibility and dares to imagine people at their most luminous. I certainly do not think that Shelley and Porter are similar as artists (save for quality), but subsequent generations have struggled with the prettiness and hopefulness of their work. Many have pondered the coldness of a world without love, in songs less skilled than those of Porter. Rarer, though, is to imagine the loss of hope, its prevention, its atrophy, and this is what Shelley challenges himself to do in the humanitarian trilogy. Losing hope is equivalent to admitting that tyranny's empire is coexistent with the world, and always will be. Vengeance may be a recurring thought among all people, but it is all about the past. Shelley's poetry is for the future still, the place where hope gets its nourishment.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURAL VIOLENCE CONFRONTED: SHELLEY ON MONT BLANC

Of all the words used to describe Shelley and his works “idealism” is by far the most popular. As far as it goes, this is accurate in two senses: Shelley was a serious student of idealistic philosophy and translated Plato; moreover, he was “idealistic” in the way we still use the word to describe people with “a passion for reforming the world.”¹ Whether one takes this use of idealistic to mean “unembittered” or “impractical” is a fair barometer of one’s general response to Shelley. Yet this preponderance of attention to his idealism, shared by both his defenders and detractors, makes Shelley’s poetry seem even more abstract than it often is, its physicality too quickly absorbed, as if symptomatic of a particular philosophical system. Of course I would agree that Shelley is a deeply symbolic poet, but there wouldn’t be as many pine trees, snakes, stars, or boats in his work if he was not in intense physical contact with each of these. Whatever else pine trees may represent in Shelley’s work, they are present as pine trees first, which Shelley looked at, heard, smelled, and was impressed by. For all of the demands Shelley makes of his readers in terms of labyrinthine syntax or allusive diction, our own encounters with pine trees, ice, and sunlight should not be forgotten as interpretive guides. Though it risks banality to point out that Shelley’s poetry can make for demanding and difficult reading, this requisite

¹The finest study of Shelley’s engagement with neoplatonic idealism is still James Notopoulos’s *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (1949). The phrase “passion . . . world” is from the “Preface” to *Prometheus Unbound*, in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 135.

effort must become a topic in the history of Shelley's popular reception and his role in shaping emerging discourses on vegetarianism and ecological thought. The question is whether the level of obscurity in Shelley's poetry proceeds from the inherent complexity of his chosen themes, or if such syntax, diction, and density of allusion constitute a supererogation upon fairly simple stories and images? A brief answer is that it is some of each, depending upon the poem. His most successful poems might be defined as those in which the demands of his subject find an answerable style. When that subject is as elusive as the apprehension of external nature, how could its expression not proceed in winding, mossy ways?

It is in such a poem as "Mont Blanc" where this tension between clarity and obscurity gets developed at its most complex and rewarding levels. "Mont Blanc" is, among other things, a record of the tension between confident statements about what Nature means in a philosophical sense and the elusive physical reality which foils such reductive labels. As many critics have discussed, the poem is a profound meditation on the limits of the human mind, but such epistemological problems arise precisely because of Shelley's imperative to look at the mountain without the expectations set by predetermined beliefs.² The poem, like the mountain, cannot be seen and heard all at

²Charles Vivian's influential "The One 'Mont Blanc'" (1955) argued that earlier attempts to see the poem as an expression of Godwin's Doctrine of Necessity failed to account for the poem's inward turns and complexities. Wasserman (1971) expands this view into a detailed study of the poem as an epistemological problem. In this received reading the poem becomes centrally about the mind's remoteness from the material world. Timothy Morton mentions the poem in terms of the larger trajectory of Shelley criticism: "Shelley's enthusiastic configuration of the mental (consider *Mont Blanc* or the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*) has been overdetermined, elaborated and developed by critics, especially those concerned to present him as a coherent thinker. Moreover, these critics form part of literary history which privileges what is taken to be 'the mental', in their continued use of concepts like genius, intentionality, and the canon as a colloquium of geniuses" (Revolution 9-10). This analysis seems accurate to me; Morton does not, however, go on to offer an alternate reading of the poem.

once, a fundamental difficulty. The poet creates in language the illusion of disorientation, even vertigo, to a degree not yet present in the longer lyrics of Wordsworth and Coleridge. As John Reider and others have shown, the title “Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamounix” would have been associated in his contemporary readers’ minds with orthodox outpourings of revealed religion, the valley having become a destination for Christian travelers since the “discovery” of sublime mountain scenery in the eighteenth century.³ Shelley’s atheism at times seems like a willful rebellion--as in the thumb-nosing flourish of signing himself as “Atheist” in the hotel register at Chamounix--but at its core is Shelley’s dismay at how the experience of mystery can so often be preempted by the internalization of organized religion. In this context, Shelley’s rejection of the religious and philosophical terms and metaphors available to him represent an urgent need to find language commensurate to his total experience on the mountain⁴.

From the beginning the poem introduces abstractions even before it commences its central work of showing how these concepts are always embodied. Critics who treat the poem as centrally about “the mind” have a solid grounding (as it were) for such claims, and the rush of the poem’s opening leaves a reader clutching for familiar concepts on which to find purchase:

The everlasting universe of things

Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,

³John Reider, “Shelley’s ‘Mont Blanc’: Landscape and the Ideology of the Sacred Text.” See also Stuart Peterfreund, “Two Romantic Poets and Two Romantic Scientists ‘On’ Mont Blanc.” For the emergence of pleasure tourism to wild places, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* 254-269, and Marjorie Hope Nicolson’s *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*.

⁴For a biographical account of the poem’s composition see Holmes 338-342, and Mary Shelley’s *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour* (1817), *passim*. “Mont Blanc” was first published as the final section of that volume.

Now dark--now glittering--now reflecting gloom--
 Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
 The source of human thought its tribute brings
 Of waters,--with a sound but half its own.
 Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
 In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
 Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
 Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
 Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves. (1-11)

That the poem does not open with an attempt to orient the reader in a recognizable landscape is itself surprising. Instead of moving from an external to an internal description and then back out to a world seen differently, the poem begins in self-conscious awareness of the mind's function as a conduit for sensations.⁵ Whether "the mind" is Shelley's own or a universal Mind remains a matter of long-standing debate among interpreters of the poem; it seems to be both.⁶ The poem seeks to create an illusion of immediacy about the experience of both physical sensations and mental states; to create this sublime sense of

⁵This out-in-out pattern is what M.H. Abrams describes as the characteristic pattern of the "greater Romantic lyric," building upon the irregular odal structure of "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" which Shelley's subtitle echoes. Abrams considers Shelley's "Stanzas Written in Dejection" and "Ode to the West Wind" to be the clearest examples of this tradition. See "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," reprinted in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom, 1970: 201-229.

⁶The most sustained reading of the poem is Earl R. Wasserman's in *The Subtler Language* (1959), later included in *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (1971). Wasserman distinguishes between the Universal Mind (the Ravine addressed as "Thou" in Part II of the poem) and the individual mind which is the "feeble brook" of line seven. All subsequent readers, myself included, are indebted to Wasserman's careful orientations of Shelley's thought in terms of Berkeley, Locke, Rousseau, and other Enlightenment philosopher's views of the human mind. My reading diverges from Wasserman because I see no evidence for concluding, as Wasserman does, that the "One Mind" creates not only Universal and individual Mind, but Nature itself.

intellectual vertigo Shelley begins the poem in the inner rapids that this experience washed through him. He could have commenced with a description of the bridge on which he stood, with an attack on the personal God of Christianity, or in another personal direction, but instead opens with the “everlasting universe of things” and then quickly seizes upon the image of a “feeble brook” (line 7) surrounded by larger, louder things. The mind has both active and passive capabilities: the “universe of things” may present “dark” or “glittering” waters to the eye, depending on the time of day, but it is the perceiving mind which adds “gloom” or “splendour” to the sight. It is never possible to discern the mind directly apart from the universe it thinks about and perceives, and this is the problem Shelley confronts from the beginning. To hear his poem, the ear must be trained as it must be to hear a brook when the sound of a nearby cataract and the wind in the trees create an already overwhelming noise. It is like tuning a high key on the same piano where someone plays a thundering bass line.

In Part II, the attempt to inscribe figurative language adequate to the dynamics of the scene leads Shelley to one of his particular strengths as a poet, an acute awareness of the difference between metaphors drawn from human culture and those drawn from that-- call it “wilderness”--which precedes and subsumes human efforts. He certainly partakes in what Ruskin would later call the “pathetic fallacy,” as when he posits that winds are driven to visit pines by “devotion,” but demonstrates his awareness of the limits of such language when he reminds himself that the rocks behind the waterfall are an “unsculptured image”⁷:

⁷For the coinage of “pathetic fallacy” see Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* (vol. 3, part 4, chap. 12). Ruskin’s point was to defend “nature” against claims made about its intentionality, including its malevolence. Whether this should be thought of as a fault in poetry is another matter, and some ecologists insist that what critics are taught to deride as examples of the pathetic fallacy might instead be understood as the rejection of subject/object duality, acknowledging the interdependency of humans with other forms of life.

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve--dark, deep Ravine--
 Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
 Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
 Fast cloud shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
 Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
 From the ice gulphs that gird his secret throne,
 Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
 Of lightning through the tempest;--thou dost lie,
 Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
 Children of elder time, in whose devotion
 The chainless winds still come and ever came
 To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging
 To hear--an old and solemn harmony;
 Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
 Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil
 Robes some unsculptured image[.] (12-27)

Even as Shelley creates a mythological narrative out of the scene he speeds towards the realization that it is beyond the control and shaping of humans. Mythologizing is itself a kind of shaping, and its claims to authority are also temporary. The repetition of "likeness" and "like"--which in two lines bring Power, Arve, and flame together--signals how self-consciously aware Shelley is of his own use of simile. Yet his figurative language

See Neil Evernden, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy" in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 92-104.

is surprising, since secret thrones on top of mountains have been available to the poetic imagination from the beginning of the Western tradition: Jehovah on Sinai or Horeb, the Greek gods on Olympus.⁸ It is not God's throne Shelley apprehends here but Power's, a significant matter in terms of the poem's attack on the piety of Coleridge, Tom Moore, and others who made the Alps in general, and Mont Blanc especially, a destination for pious travelers, a place where God's magnificence was felt to be especially revealed.⁹ The word "Power" has become a familiar one in critical discussions, but it was not so in the Enlightenment rhetoric out of which the poem proceeds, and Shelley needed to find a word for what drives ice, water, cloud, rock, and wood besides God. Exactly this sort of "naming" problem divides contemporary writers who make the environment a central concern in their work. For many writers "God," however expansively configured, is too deeply rooted in anthropocentric cultural values and abuses to remain a possibility in their meditations; other believers seek to make our stewardship of the environment, enjoined by the Bible, a central aspect of religious practice. These issues remain challenging for contemporary writers engaged with ethics and the natural world; Shelley confronts them in this poem without the comfort of a like-minded community that one might find today to

⁸For a concise discussion of the symbolic use of mountains in literature, see Michael Ferber's *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, 129-131.

⁹Coleridge's lines from "Hymn Before Sunrise" seem remarkably unconcerned with originality of thought or expression, and Shelley's repugnance could have been aesthetic as well as philosophical. Borrowing from the German poet Friederika Brun, Coleridge asks the mountain

Who bade the sun
 Clothe you with rainbows? Who, with living flowers
 Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at our feet?--
 God! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,
 Answer! and let the ice-plains echo, God!
 God! sing ye meadow-streams with gladsome voice!
 Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!
 And they too have a voice, yon piles of snow,
 And in their perilous fall shall thunder, God! (Coleridge 118; lines 55-63)

encourage the invention of his ecological imagination.¹⁰ The image of a “throne” (line 17) brings human invention into the scene, as does “robing” something with a “veil” (line 27), but Shelley begins his move away from this available source of imagery by choosing adjectives that only signify by negation: “chainless” (line 22) and “unsculptured” (line 27). This pattern will repeat with even greater force, as we will see, in Part IV, when his insistence upon unprepossessing observation forces him to abandon the horrifically persuasive description of the upper mountain as a “city of death.”

What I am arguing is not that the poem is unconcerned with epistemological questions--that would be to ignore large sections of the text--but that these questions are consistently abandoned by the poet as partial and unsatisfactory when confronted by the recurring *fact* of the mountain, the awareness of which is expressed in terse statements. The lines following the exclamation “Dizzy Ravine!” (line 34) show the poet looking for an understanding of how the mind at once “renders and receives,” yet Part II ends with the simple yet insistent “thou art there” which demands that the poem continue:

Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
 I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
 To muse on my own separate phantasy,
 My own, my human mind, which passively
 Now renders and receives fast influencings,
 Holding an unremitting interchange
 With the clear universe of things around;

¹⁰For a recent collection of perspectives on the possibilities of combining ecology and religion see John Carroll, Paul Brockelman, and Mary Westfall, eds., *The Greening of Faith: God, The Environment, and the Good Life* (1997).

**One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
 Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
 Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
 In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
 Seeking among the shadows that pass by
 Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
 Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
 From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (34-48).**

The shift within this passage from “my own, my human mind” to the “one legion of wild thoughts” which fly up to the cave of Poesy and back indicates how the poet is “seeking among the shadows” for poetic language. “Wild,” a frequent and multivalent word in Shelley’s lexicon, here modifies the winged thoughts which float above the ravine’s darkness.¹¹ The poet is at least testing the possibility that the need for the “human mind” and “breast” (line 47) to make poetry arrives unbidden out of nature. Such a belief animates the dramatic moments elsewhere in Shelley’s poetry--*The Mask of Anarchy*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Laon & Cythna*--when the poet has the voice of the Earth speak in verse. By the end of this second section of “Mont Blanc” the fundamental problem of using words to speak of sensations that are dizzy, confusing, and ineffable has been

¹¹F.S. Ellis, in his still-useful but eccentric 1892 concordance to Shelley’s poetry, divides the over 150 appearances of “wild” into twenty-three adjectival and three adverbial subdefinitions, doubling the number in the Oxford English Dictionary. Similarly, Ellis finds seven different figurative uses of “wilderness” to go along with twenty examples of a literal use. Though Ellis may have been overly clever with his collations, it does indicate how much more concerned Shelley was with the meaning of “wildness” than even Wordsworth, in a manner that anticipates Gary Snyder’s *The Practice of the Wild*. This particular use of “wild” is listed by Ellis as meaning “strange, extravagant,” which seems inadequate to me, and indicates how challenging the emergent discourse of “wildness” remained even in the 1890s and even for Shelley’s champions.

brought to the forefront of the poet's consciousness, as well as the difference between words and "thoughts," which move wildly, without the intervention of the will.

Part III of the poem begins with another attempt to explain this exposed state of mind by looking to philosophical precedent. These lines are often discussed as a discrete section of the poem because its neoplatonism and the use of the word "gleams" announce this section as a response to Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." In the fifth section of that poem, Wordsworth imagines that the insight of childhood comes from nearness to the remoter world that we forget when we awaken.¹² In one sense, this is a clear example of Wordsworth's influence on Shelley ("No man ever admired Wordsworth's poetry more," wrote Mary, "he read it perpetually"¹³), but what is lost in discussing this section in isolation is a sense of how the interruptions of the poem as a whole work to disrupt the illusion of cognitive control. Every time an existing framework is tried on for size, the mountain returns to the poet's conscious sight and defies classification:

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
 Visit the soul in sleep,--that death is slumber,
 And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
 Of those who wake and live.--I look on high:

¹²See Wordsworth's "Ode," lines 58-76. In a famous comment about the poem's composition in a letter to Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth says that the first four stanzas of the poem--about the loss of the "visionary gleam" of childhood--were written two years before the second half, beginning with these lines about a neoplatonic pre-existence. At least within the structure of the final poem, Wordsworth finds a philosophical model which he offers as adequate to the task of explaining this loss; Shelley's poem does not seem nearly as reconciled to the available choices.

¹³Mary Shelley's notes for her 1839 edition of Percy's *Poetical Works* are reprinted in Hutchinson's 1904 edition of the *Complete Poetical Works*, and are cited from this more widely available edition. See her note to *Peter Bell the Third*, 357.

Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessibly
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales!
Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears[.] (49-61)

The punctuating gesture of “I look on high” marks the difference between Shelley in this poem and the model provided by Wordsworth: looking outward leads Wordsworth further inside the self, the “omnipotence” which blends “the mind of man” with external nature is not “unknown” (as Shelley has it here, line 53) to Wordsworth, but simply “Nature,” or later, “God.” Of course, the “forms of beauty” Wordsworth sees and recalls in “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” are more temperate and picturesque than the dangerous and sublime view that disorients Shelley here, and thus the mood this scene creates is not “serene and blessed” (“Lines” 42) but dizzy and haunted. “Mont Blanc,” in its departures from Wordsworth, attends to the terror and violence that is part of wilderness, an extremity of exposure which annihilates the possibility of philosophical certainty and bodily independence. Part of Shelley’s particular achievement--not “better” than Wordsworth’s, but responding to different imperatives--results from his sustained attention to loss and decay.

Shelley's mythopoetic imagination shapes his utterances even when he attempts to describe a world without people, a perhaps inevitable aspect of the use of human language, since trees and rocks do not concern themselves (or at least don't publish their musings) with their own mythic origins. Try to imagine a place without people, and see it from a nonhuman perspective. "The very spirit fails" indeed when faced with such a challenge. Shelley moves towards the poem's central, complicated declaration after looking more at the upper reaches of the mountain, and draws attention to the human mind's inescapable anthropomorphism through his unusual choice of verbs. These reaches are:

A desert peopled by the storms alone,
 Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
 And the wolf tracks her there--how hideously
 Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
 Ghastly, and scarred, and riven.--Is this the scene
 Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
 Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
 Of fire, envelope once this silent snow?
 None can reply--all seems eternal now. (67-75)

The verb "peopled" suggests a refusal to differentiate between human and nonhuman animals. The space becomes "peopled" by the depositing of human remains ("some hunter's bone") but does not become fully peopled until "the wolf tracks her [the eagle] there." From there the vision of mini-daemons playing with these rocks, like organic

Godzillas picking up cars, takes the imagination back to pre-Olympian creation myths, but even these are not ancient enough for Shelley. The move from the earliest conceivable point in linear time to a cyclical model of history comes with “all seems eternal now,” and echoes the “everlasting universe of things” in the poem’s opening line. After several attempts to find an adequate mythology for this experience, all of which are at least partially rejected, the poet has finally prepared the context for the central expression of the poem’s philosophy.

“None can reply” to these questions about origins, which read the earth as the ruined stage of a past cosmological drama, but is the mountain mute? If one cannot help but think it speaks, can we expect it to use a human language? If all humans are formed out of and dependent upon nature, why should there be variation in our responses to its power? Most questioners do not get far past this point without the intercession of religious faith or existential nausea, but Shelley persists with mysterious compression:

**The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be
But for such faith with nature reconciled;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel. (76-83)**

The first issue to be unpacked in these extraordinary lines is a matter of syntax, which connects to famous debates about how to interpret the phrase “[b]ut for such faith,” and about the textual status and manuscript history of these lines.¹⁴ The general critical opinion is that this “but” does not mean “except for,” the most common sense of the word, and instead means “only” or “only through.” This interpretation draws on other examples in Shelley’s works where “but” is clearly used in this way.¹⁵ These rocks and glaciers, taken together as “wilderness,” are indeed found to speak, but they do not make a uniform statement. As opposed to Christian travelers who saw in Mont Blanc’s majesty an occasion for the proving of natural religion, Shelley says that the mountain does indeed teach, but teaches doubt along with faith. The complexity of the poem’s grammar reflects the contingency and awful reverence of its meaning: doubt and faith cease to be opposites in these lines, they are part of the same thoughtful, complex, humble response to this scene. Given the horror of earthquakes and unknowable Power that lies behind this

¹⁴I have been using the version of the poem as it was first published in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), with the useful five-part divisions, which has remained the best-known version since, including Reiman and Powers’s 1977 Norton Critical Edition. The first variation on these lines to be published was an eight-line “Cancelled Passage of Mont Blanc” in Garnett’s *Relics of Shelley* (1862) and reprinted in Hutchinson’s 1904 Oxford Standard Authors edition. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, in the first volume of their *Poems of Shelley* (1989, the only volume yet published), print the version discussed in this essay as “Text B” (542-49), and precede it with “Text A,” from a holograph lost until 1976 and containing significant variations and cancellations, especially on these lines. Everest’s thorough introduction to the poem on pages 532-537 has relieved later commentators from needing to fully rehearse all of this history each time these lines are reached. The long-awaited *Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley* edited by Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat has begun to appear as of this writing (Vol. 1, Johns Hopkins UP: 2000), but ends well before “Mont Blanc.”

¹⁵See Everest’s note on page 546, and *Queen Mab* viii.97 and *Prometheus Unbound* III.iv.194-7. Reiman (1977) glosses *awful doubt* as “reverent open-mindedness,” a good start but hardly *awful* enough, as I read the terrified awareness in the poem. Everest, with more room for editorial apparatus, offers this: “Nature, and its magnificent but enigmatic causal Power, may rather be understood either in a spirit of constructive skepticism, or of serene confidence in an unChristian and morally indifferent Power, informing Nature, which may be susceptible of human understanding and control” (546). Except as it applies to the invention of poetic language, I do not think that “control” of nature is part of Shelley’s purpose here; the entire poem seems a skeptical critique of and humble response to the various forms and illusions of human control over nature.

“awful doubt,” there is no reason to assume that the poet will decide that the mountain’s voice speaks truths that people will want to hear. It is Shelley’s reaction against reductive statements made in the mountain’s name that strengthens him in seeing such religious piety as a “code of fraud and woe.” That such codes would have currency for the vast majority of people in his time leads to the explanation that the mountain’s voice is “not understood by all.” This is a moment at which the difficulty of the poem’s language and structure is, in my opinion, fully justified by and a perfect mirror for the poet’s intense and conflicted contact with his subject matter. Not easy to read, not forthcoming, but rich in contemplative power, the poem resembles the mountain of the title.

A respective arrangement of the last lines in this section may help us to see Shelley’s own sense of the purpose of this poem and of poetry in general in terms of the mountain’s voice. That this voice is “not understood by all” is significant in itself, suggesting that “the wise, and great, and good” have learned to unstop their ears, coming closer to understanding the wilderness’s voice, which is not automatically within each person’s power of understanding. These three categories of those who understand (the wise, great, and good) correspond to the three ways of responding to the voice’s power to repeal falsehood: the wise “interpret” the voice, presumably in philosophical discourse.¹⁶ The great “make felt” the mountain’s voice in those who are not yet aware its clarifying power; they are, Shelley implies, the greatest poets in the world, who inspire others’ eyes to open and ears to hear better. I do not think that Shelley believes himself among these great, but among the good, who “deeply feel” the presence of this voice. The very

¹⁶Shelley had been thinking about Rousseau as an “interpreter” of nature during this entire trip to Switzerland in 1816. See Holmes, Chapter XIII.

intensity of the poem, its concentrated effort, might be attributed to Shelley's desire to move from his own deep feelings ("the good") into the effort to make this power felt by others ("the great"). It is the natural reticence of the mountain, whose voice is mostly silence, that guarantees that this work will be demanding, requiring that readers who have "not understood" the mountain to have what he calls in Part IV "adverting minds" to follow their interpreters.

These culminating lines of Part III bring many of the poem's initial philosophical questions into a tentative clarity; it would be a profound, though very different, poem if it ended here with this affirmation of the power of the wilderness's tongue. To turn from these aphoristic lines to the eleven-line list of dependent clauses which opens Part IV is to slow the pace of reading. Naming and locating the wilderness's voice is a centripetal movement, an attempt to extract some concentrate of truth. The ensuing list whips out like a centrifuge, starting large in the first place (fields, lakes) and expanding to include all "the works and ways of man" within its purview before Shelley finally gives us the governing verb phrase ("are born and die").¹⁷ More interesting than this stylistic control, however, is the erasure of the historical distinction between natural and cultural phenomena: human and their works are not ontologically different from plants, earthquakes, or seasons of the year:

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,

Ocean, and all the living things that dwell

Within the daedal earth; lightning and rain,

¹⁷Shelley used this grammatical strategy again in one of his greatest sonnets, "England in 1819," where the list of contemporary evils beginning with "An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King" builds up for twelve lines before the verb.

Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
 The torpor of the year when feeble dreams
 Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
 Holds every future leaf and flower;--the bound
 With which from that detested trance they leap;
 The works and ways of man, their death and birth,
 And that of him and all that his may be;
 All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
 Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell. (84-95)

The earth is “daedal” in its original meaning of “intricately fashioned”; Shelley borrows this use from Lucretius’ *daedala tellus* (“inventive earth”), a view which conceives of the earth not as the result of a separate Creation, but as everlastingly fecund. Shelley extends this inventive power not just to flowers (which Spenser has the “daedale earth throw forth . . . out of her fruitfall lap”) but to humans as well.¹⁸ This unconventional way of thinking about the earth’s creativity complements the inclusion of all that is “of” humans and all that may belong to them as subject to the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth that affect all things. In this view, humans dwell “within” the earth as opposed to on top of it or in a prescribed space superior to that of its other inhabitants. If we “revolve, subside, and swell” (line 95) like an earthquake or a growing plant, then this swelling could be both the bloating and decay that happens to our dead flesh, as well as the swelling into new growth

¹⁸Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.7. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* 4.10.45. Shelley uses “daedel earth” again in the *Ode to Liberty* (1820) to gain a distant perspective on the earth’s life-giving atmosphere. Fascinated by astronomy, Shelley uses “earth” to mean this planet, and “world” to mean an even larger creation, like the universe: “The daedal earth, / That island in the ocean of the world, / Hung in its cloud of all-sustaining air” (18-20).

out of the nutrients of the old.¹⁹ All bodies are engaged in these cyclical changes; the Power that drives the change “dwells apart in its tranquillity / Remote, serene and inaccessible” (line 95-96). As the voice of the mountain was “not understood by all,” so this lesson about where Power dwells is taught to “the adverting mind” (line 100), turned to listen and trained to hear.

What is taught remains threatening, however; if Shelley did not attend to the violence in nature then his achievement as a proto-ecological poet would be far less comprehensive than it is. To make claims in the name of “Nature” without including avalanches, carnivorous animals, and one’s own decay would be the work of a faith, as it were, *too* mild to be accountable to the earth as it is. To come near to the source of Power “in likeness of the Arve” is terrifying and dangerous; in the lines to follow, Shelley compares the movement of the glacier to attacking snakes and insatiable hunters, registering the particular terrors of a consumable body. Thus exposed, the mind reaches for familiar metaphors and metaphysics, and Shelley tries on an available image (a city), but rejects it because it is a mechanical figuration where the matter in question is organic:

The glaciers creep

Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,

Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice

Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power

Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,

A city of death, distinct with many a tower

¹⁹See *Queen Mab* V.1-15 for the beginning of Shelley’s attention to organic compost as an image of renewal. Perhaps his most refined example of this is the leaf-mulch in “Ode to the West Wind,” which “quicken a new birth” (64).

**And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
 Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
 Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
 Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewing
 Its destined path, or in the mangled soil
 Branchless and shattered stand: the rocks, drawn down
 From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
 The limits of the dead and living world,
 Never to be reclaimed. The dwelling-place
 Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
 Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
 So much of life and joy is lost. The race
 Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
 Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
 And their place is not known. (100-120)**

Here what makes the distinction between “the dead and living world” inscrutable is not “some unknown omnipotence,” as he queried earlier in the poem (line 53), but boulders ripping through pines, the known and potent force of gravity. The movement of the poem is towards a more detailed awareness of the cycles and systems of the natural world, even as this awareness brings the loss of the “life and joy” that is vitally within the individual “insects, birds, and beasts” which die in the process. This awareness develops simultaneously with that of the inadequacies inherent in using language to describe this

encounter. “Yet not a city” functions like “I look on high,” “Dizzy Ravine!,” “None can reply,” “Mont Blanc appears,” and the “Mont Blanc yet gleams on high” that will open the fifth and final section of the poem: it interrupts the attempt to impose an anthropocentric narrative onto a scene indifferent to human affairs. No matter how rhetorically compelling or aesthetically attractive the words one puts together, their very construction in human language guarantees a certain failure to describe a remote and inaccessible scene as it is, without intervention. As Michael Ferber argues, regarding this dynamic in *Mont Blanc*:

One might despair over this inevitable failure, but Shelley seems to say, and his poem seems to show in its very workings, that the effort too, is inevitable, and one of the glories of being human. (Poetry 48)

Shelley’s thinking about the condition of humans extends to the question of “dwelling,” a word that appears three times in Part IV: the remote and inaccessible site where “Power dwells apart in its tranquillity” (96); the “work and dwelling” of humans that vanishes before this downward crush of ice (118); and the “dwelling-place of insects, birds, and beasts” below the tree line (114). This attention to dwelling emerges from two sources, I think. At least since the essays on vegetarianism (1813-14), Shelley had been alert to the availability and suitability of food within a particular climate: when the glaciers overwhelm edible fauna he imagines the effect of this not only on humans, but on other creatures’ dietary needs. Relatedly, the exposure to the elements he is undergoing in the moment heightens his awareness that he too, though far from the summit, cannot remain long where he is. Humans do not dwell on glaciers for good reasons, but going to

uninhabitable places can, for some people, draw attention to the contingency of human existence in a way that is humbling, and valuable in the lessons it teaches.

For a moment, the poet seems to imagine the glaciers' movement as perpetual, chasing "the race of man" forever farther away. This vision of icy apocalypse can be partially understood by the fact that the summer of 1816, when the poem was written, was the coldest summer in memory and became a meteorological legend: even well below the bridge over the Arve (Pont Pellisier) where this experience took place temperatures threatened to drop to near freezing.²⁰ The poet's attention turns to the connection between these particular waters, flowing from the unseen heights of the glaciers, through temperate zones, into the ocean, and evaporating back to the atmosphere.²¹ This terrifying flood becomes "the breath and blood of distant lands" as the Arve flows to Lake Geneva, then as the Rhone through France to the Mediterranean:

Below, vast caves

Shine in the rushing torrents' restless gleam,

Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling

Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,

The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever

Rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves,

Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air. (120-26)

²⁰Jonathan Bate has discussed the implications of what we know about the Summer of 1816's weather patterns in terms of the sunless vision of Byron's "Darkness" in "Living With the Weather."

²¹In later lyrics, Shelley would return to less geographically-specific versions of the water cycle, as in the beginning of "Love's Philosophy" (1819): "The fountains mingle with the river / And the rivers with the Ocean, / The winds of Heaven mix for ever / With a sweet emotion; / Nothing in the world is single; / All things by a law divine / In one spirit meet and mingle. / Why not I with thine?"

As many have pointed out, the “secret chasms in tumult” in these lines is an echo of Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” and these “loud waters” may also be a deliberate contrast to the “soft inland murmur” of the Wye in Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey.” Perhaps more remarkable than these influences is that Shelley’s attention would turn from an imaginative engagement with the glacier’s movement to an awareness of how these waters, like all waters, belong to a particular watershed. The mountain and river advert his mind, and his response to their ecological impact is heightened as a result.

I have been arguing that the demands this poem makes on its readers are commensurate to the challenges any writer faces when attempting to artfully render, without resorting to a prescribed set of assumptions, an intense encounter with the natural world. Any further simplification of Shelley’s complex mental and physical experience on the mountain would be inappropriately reductive. Virtually all who have written about this poem agree that Shelley investigates the distinction between the power of the imaginative human mind, which both “renders and receives,” and the inhuman Power which drives the ice and water down from the mountaintop. I do not disagree that this is part of what emerges in his meditations, but I dissent from any reading of the poem which concludes that it is primarily “about” the mind; the recurring shock of the physical throughout the poem lends no support to this reading. Of course, no good poem is about only one topic, even when that topic is as big as a mountain, yet the questions and assertions about the human mind in the first and last few lines of the poem draw far too much critical attention away from the scene which gives rise to these lines in the first place. In fact, reading the poem on the assumption that looking at Mont Blanc was an

occasion for speculative meditation for Shelley--as opposed to a challenging, dizzying, humbling experience--misplaces what Shelley means by the difference between "silence and solitude" and "vacancy":

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:--the power is there,
 The still and solemn power of many sights,
 And many sounds, and much of life and death.
 In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
 In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
 Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
 Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
 Or the star-beams dart through them:--Winds contend
 Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
 Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
 The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
 Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
 Over the snow. The secret strength of things
 Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
 Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
 And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
 If to the human mind's imaginings
 Silence and solitude were vacancy? (127-144)

This final description of the mountain's upper reaches establishes what Shelley means by silence and solitude: they are natural conditions, as opposed to vacancy which exists only in the mind. "Silently" appears in consecutive lines, followed by "voiceless," all used to describe a scene with no human witnesses. Wind itself has no sound until it moves across something, as the poet already established in Part II, where the "chainless winds" visit "thy giant brood of pines . . . their mighty swinging / To hear." The scene "on high" described in Part V is above the timber line, the only substance wind meets there is snow, which "heap" yieldingly into drifts, unlike a swinging tree. Solitude also denotes a specific condition in these lines. The most common sense of "solitude" is of one person (often reflecting on his isolation) and no one else, but Shelley uses it in the less-common sense of absent of all people, including himself. The "glare of day" that shines upon the descending snows is "lone" because "none beholds them there." This place is "peopled by the storms alone" (67); it is a place *of solitude*, and this description holds whether the poet looks on or not. Of no place on earth could it be said, however, that it is *of vacancy*: something is always there, at least wind and stars, which does not wait for humans. The apprehension of such a place allows the poet to become aware of the Power which drives all cycles of decay and regeneration, and to register its ineffability.

All of this bears on what I see as an unduly abstract turn in the criticism of the final six lines, already cited above. For example, the notes by Reiman and Powers in their critical edition of Shelley, which are for the most part authoritative and practical, work to obscure the inescapable physicality that "silence and solitude" denote in the poem. Their

interpretive guide for the complex assertion that precedes the final question is, characteristically, clear and helpful:

The clause, *The secret strength . . . law*, states that the *Power* that generates things and is the law of nature also *governs thought*--that mind is ultimately subordinate to the *remote, serene, and inaccessible* (line 97) forces that originates the amoral cycles of Necessity. (93, note 2)

This is a fine example of what footnotes for difficult poems should do: clarify the pronoun referents, unpack complex syntax, and direct the reader's attention. Here, this attention is to the theme of the mind's dependency on the body: consciousness cannot exist without the world of things brought forth by the inescapable law of nature, which gives it the brain it requires to come into being. It seems unnecessary and inaccurate, then, in the final note to the poem, for Reiman and Powers to assert that:

The very power of imagination to realize the nature of Power, so remote and foreign to all mortal experience, illustrates the supremacy of that imagination over the *silence and solitude* that threaten it. The poet is equal to Mont Blanc, for though the amoral Power can destroy him, only he can comprehend its meaning. (93, note 3)

The assumption here is that the poem takes "supremacy" as an important idea, when the poetics of ineffability seem much closer to the point. Does Shelley seek to write a great poem about this experience so he can be "equal to Mont Blanc"? I find this untenable. These comments presume an imperative of competitive individualism nowhere present in this poem. The terrifying force of earthquakes, glaciers, and all that marks amoral,

nonanthropomorphic power is indeed “threatening” to Shelley, but silence and solitude are not, for they call the mind towards reflection and, ultimately, humility.

A similar problem befalls those who read the function of “the human mind’s imaginings” as governing all of perception: that is, following Berkeley, the assertion that if no human mind were there to perceive this gigantic mountain that it could not be proven to exist, since one always relies on the senses for such evidence. Even Henry Salt, whom I defend elsewhere for his recognition and championing of Shelley as a proto-ecological thinker, wrote in his *Shelley Primer* (1887) that “in the first and last stanzas we see traces of Shelley’s Berkeleyan philosophy; even the Alps cannot exist independently of human thought” (81).²² This comment, like the other brief notices in the *Primer*, reflects the received reading of the poem, a reading which persists. The stubborn physicality of the poem remains difficult to remember in the context of philosophical speculation, but “Mont Blanc yet gleams on high.” As Onno Oerlemans argues about *Mont Blanc*:

We may recognize that we interpret and define nature differently as individuals and cultures, but we cannot get beyond the fact demonstrated here . . . that a material world exists that is infinitely larger and more complex than we, and which is indifferent to our existence. (Ideal 551-2)

One could come away from such a realization with a number of responses, the most pervasive being a desire to control nature, to assert human dominance over the material world; Shelley’s response is to see this natural indifference as crucial to liberating us all

²² In Chapter Four I argue for Salt’s importance in drawing attention to Shelley’s longer works instead of a few popular lyrics, a crucial matter for the development of Shelley’s reputation. This *Primer* was Salt’s first full-length book and contains concise essays on Shelley’s style and opinions as well as synopses and brief commentaries on all of his then-published works. Salt never paid extended attention to *Mont Blanc* in any of his writings on Shelley.

from the naturalized claims of religion, monarchy, and other “codes of fraud and woe.”

What I wish to suggest is that rivers, ravines, caves, pines, and unseen peaks are not just the machinery for a poetic treatise on Berkeleyan philosophy, but are themselves the most demanding and important matter of the poem for Shelley. To think otherwise, in my view, is to mistake effects for causes. The ice in the poem is cold. To look at water falling from an unseen height, and to imagine it falling forever onward as it has forever fallen, is better than the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER THREE

SHELLEY AND GANDHI: A CONNECTION REVALUED

An English passenger, taking kindly to me, drew me into conversation. He was older than I. He asked me what I ate, what I was, where I was going, why I was shy, and so on. He also advised me to come to table. He laughed at my insistence on abjuring meat, and said in a friendly way when we were in the Red Sea: 'It is all very well so far but you will have to revise your decision in the Bay of Biscay. And it is so cold in England that one cannot possibly live there without meat.'

'But I have heard that people can live there without eating meat,' I said.

'Rest assured it is a fib,' said he. 'No one, to my knowledge, lives there without being a meat-eater. Don't you see that I am not asking you to take liquor, though I do so? But I do think you should eat meat, for you cannot live without it.' (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 42-3).

Part One: Making the Connection: Diet and Cultural Imperialism

By 1948, the nature of nonviolence had changed forever. This change was not in the individual acts of non-cooperation that a person might strategically use, but in the way a single figure became virtually synonymous with large-scale nonviolent resistance. By the time of his assassination, the Indian nationalist movement led by Mohandas Gandhi had seen to the withdrawal of the largest colonial government in the world without a

conventional war. For all of the civil strife that followed from this enormous change, this achievement marked the end of whatever hypothetical status nonviolent resistance once had: the strategy worked against the British Army. In the context of events that shaped millions of lives, one must speak carefully of the theme of this chapter: a British poet's effect on an Indian national leader. As Gauri Viswanathan has argued, the study of English literature in Colonial India "had its beginnings as a strategy of containment," an effort towards conquest by consent which preceded the use of force (10). I will look at Gandhi's autobiographical writings for what he says about his own reading. He did not read Shelley at school; the narrative of how he did come to read Shelley involves the importance of diet in Gandhi's (and Shelley's) imagination, and is central to this discussion. The multivalent importance of vegetarianism for Shelley has been discussed in Chapter One; its meanings for Gandhi overlap but with some important differences. Meena Alexander, the only Shelleyan to write about diet as part of the link between Shelley and Gandhi, somewhat dismissively considers "Gandhi's pleasure in Shelley as part of the eccentricity of a vegetarian vision, its meatless quest fit fulfillment of an ideality that flees the bodily realm" (173). I disagree with this aspect of Alexander's discussion, instead seeing diet as a lens onto larger issues of imperialism and British culture. But Alexander extends her argument in previously neglected directions, and helps to locate the Shelley-Gandhi connection in the context of postcolonial discussions of the uses of literature: "For part of the postcolonial effort has been to peel away the legacy of Gandhi's nonviolence, seeing in it a nationalism that has arisen as a precise counterpart to the colonial force in our history" (174). Gandhi's effort was specifically focused on an

Indian nation, an “imagined community” (in Benedict Anderson’s term) of millions united by a created conceptual identity. Partha Chatterjee’s analysis of how the term “nationalism” has shifted in significance over time inquires skeptically into the assumptions behind Gandhi’s appeal to nationalism. As can be seen in terms of Gandhi’s status as a Western cultural icon, his nonviolent means may have been appropriated as less threatening than conventional, militaristic models of national change. “By the 1970s,” explains Chatterjee, “nationalism had become a matter of ethnic politics, the reason why people in the Third World killed each other,” as opposed to having any more empowering possible meanings (3). That part of Chatterjee’s thesis opens up new possibilities for historical analysis; yet I see no reason to continue, as Chatterjee does, that by that time “Gandhi had been appropriated by such marginal cults as pacifism and vegetarianism” (3). Whether pacifism and vegetarianism are marginal in world culture is less in question here than their central importance, and interrelatedness, in Gandhi’s life, and it is from this point that my disagreement with Chatterjee proceeds.

In 1888, Mohandas Gandhi sailed to England, a nineteen year old student eager to experience English culture and to be admitted to the bar. His credentials as an attorney would be the *sine qua non* for his emergence as an influential figure among Indian emigrants in South Africa in the following decades, as very few “colored” barristers were qualified and willing to defend the legal rights of this exploited population. From these years proceed the sacrifice and achievement of his later career, which made Gandhi a permanent part of the moral conscience of the world. Yet this first trip to England nearly

didn't happen, in large part because of the religious and cultural implications of traveling to a destination famous for its beef-eating.¹ As his autobiographical writings attest, the status of meat never ceased to be a vexing problem for Gandhi, and several of his life's defining moments turned on questions of diet. Eating is, for anyone, both a biological necessity and a social act, providing constant opportunities for defining one's cultural identity through food selection and table manners. At the same time, the need for food is a daily recurring and forceful reminder of our physicality, making the renunciation of certain foods (and quantities) in one's diet a potentially intense encounter with the body's limits. Gandhi wrote of the appeal for him of the idea that "renunciation should be the highest form of religion," and that this idea occurred to him while trying to unify the *Gita* with the Sermon on the Mount (Autobiography 69). His daily renunciation of meat in a foreign land needs to be understood, in part, in terms of this religious imagination.

Indeed, several themes bear on the culturally significant moment of Gandhi's introduction to British culture--his attitudes towards nation and empire, the formation of his own public identity, his response to becoming an "outcaste"--but in his version the ubiquity of meat and the meaning of vegetarianism are themes which include all of these. In terms of how central a role his vegetarian diet played in his emerging identity, his story is like Shelley's. The pairing may seem strange, for the ways in which these two figures differ are virtually overwhelming: in time and place, in profession, in religious beliefs, in number of followers, and in posthumous reputation. Perhaps a most telling difference is in the importance and authority of sexual desire in their imaginations: Gandhi took the vow

¹ Chapter XI of the *Autobiography*, "Preparation for England," includes a narrative of the misgivings shared by Gandhi's mother and other relatives about this trip.

of celibacy (*Bramachara*) in 1906 and found it incomparably empowering; whereas for Shelley sexual passion shapes his imagination, whether he is at his most sensual or most sublime. What they do share is an idealism and a devotion to the concept of nonviolent resistance. It would be both culturally imperialistic and simply wrong to say that Shelley alone defined the scope and practice of nonviolent resistance, to which Gandhi gave the name *Satyagraha* (truth force), but the importance of Shelley's legacy on Gandhi requires no such exaggeration or imperative on exclusivity.

Surprisingly few scholars before Alexander have written about this connection; they have focused on Shelley's political imagination, and the documentation of Gandhi's reading of *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819). This poem was Shelley's horrified response to the massacre of citizens in St. Peter's Fields in Manchester on August 16, 1819, assembled to hear a speech by the liberal orator Henry Hunt. Even the most conservative accounts reported six people killed and over eighty wounded; it marked the nadir of the threat to civil liberties in Britain in the reactionary, post-Waterloo years. In one of his greatest achievements, Shelley makes out of the wreck of his hopes a vision of such a gathering had the assembled crowd responded in a non-violent but resolvedly organized way. *The Mask of Anarchy* matters for several reasons: because its imaginings were unprecedented, because Gandhi read and was inspired by it, and because it poses challenges which are still with us. Art Young makes Gandhi a central figure in his *Shelley and Nonviolence* (1975), and claims Shelley as a practical, contributing member of the historical movement of nonviolence because of this poem's influence on Gandhi. Geoffrey Ashe's *Gandhi*, his popular and influential 1968 biography, also discusses why reading this poem was so

significant to Gandhi, and Ashe makes more references to Shelley than in any book on Gandhi before or since.² Without Gandhi's direct mention of *The Mask of Anarchy*, any suggestion of a direct influence on him by Shelley would seem tenuous indeed. The second section of this chapter offers a close reading of this poem and its influence on Gandhi and other readers, further developing and complicating the arguments from the formative work of Ashe and Young.

Yet an indirect, mediated connection between Shelley and Gandhi has not been given sufficient attention in discussions of their relationship up to now, and that this link may be ultimately more encompassing in its significance than the direct contact provided by this single poem. The link is vegetarianism, and the mediator is Henry S. Salt. For Ashe and Young, diet is at best a secondary concern, hardly a matter to put alongside political philosophy or vision of collective action. This predisposition obscures the importance of diet in the Shelley-Gandhi link, and the discovery of a vegetarian subculture in Gandhi's first experience of English society. Conversely, as we have seen, those Shelleyans like Morton and Cameron who do consider diet a matter of great seriousness to Shelley--and significance to his readers--have not chosen to extend their analysis into the later generations who responded particularly to this aspect of his thought. In the 1880s, this group included Salt, Axon, Shaw and others who actively championed both Shelley and vegetarianism at the time of Gandhi's arrival in London. To show how vegetarianism functions as a link between Gandhi and Shelley in this nonviolent legacy, we

² For example, Erik Erikson's *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*, published to wide acclaim at the same time as Ashe's book, never mentions Shelley. The same is true of Yogesh Chadha's *Gandhi: A Life* (1997), though it is the most comprehensive of recent biographies. Ved Mehta does mention Shelley in *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (1976), but only in passing.

need first to return to the story of Gandhi's journey to England, and his first few weeks in London.

The epigraph to this chapter, taken from Gandhi's autobiography *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, has a kindly-enough Englishman informing Gandhi not only that "one cannot possibly live without" eating meat in England, but that "to the best of [his] knowledge" no one does. Such declarations reinscribe our sense of how radical and paradoxically unnatural vegetarianism must have seemed to respectable Victorians. This is no mere critique of a meatless diet on the grounds of taste or variety, but a confident statement of its infeasibility for a human in the British climate. In such a view, the nature of the human body is not universal; it changes somewhere in the Bay of Biscay. Such generally accepted, racist assumptions informed much of nineteenth century efforts to explain the success of empire in terms of a natural order. For example, Dr. George M. Beard in an 1898 treatise on *Sexual Neurasthenia* included a chapter on "Diet for the Nervous" which reveals how these ideological assumptions proceed:

In proportion as man grows sensitive through civilization or through disease, he should diminish the quantity of cereals and fruits, which are far below him on the scale of evolution, and increase the quantity of animal food, which is nearly related to him in the scale of evolution, and therefore more easily assimilated. (qtd in Adams 30)³

³ George M. Beard, M.D., *Sexual Neurasthenia [Nervous Exhaustion] Its Hygiene, Causes, Symptoms and Treatment with a Chapter on Diet for the Nervous*. New York: E.B. Treat & Co., 1898. pp. 272-78. See Carol Adams's section on "The Racial Politics of Meat" in Chapter One of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990). The opposite of Beard's position, where sensitive minds are instructed to eat less meat, has an ancient precedent as part of the Pythagorean tradition; Seneca writes of the effect of meat-eating in *Lucilium Epistulae Morales* [Epistle 58], comparing the mind's capacity for philosophy when abstaining

In such a view, as Carol Adams points out, Darwin's theory of evolution is employed to prove how diet effectively guarantees the dominance of the English over "savages and semi-savages" who live on plant-based foods "far below them in the scale of development" (qtd in Adams 30). This is where Beard's tract most explicitly illustrates the imperial force of meat:

[Savages are] little removed from the common animal stock from which they are derived. They are much nearer to the forms of life from which they feed than are the highly civilized brain-workers, and can therefore subsist on forms of life which would be most poisonous to us. Secondly, savages who feed on poor food are poor savages, and intellectually far inferior to the beef-eaters of any race. (qtd in Adams 31)

At issue is not merely brain-power, though this would be enough, but military might, in terms that the young Gandhi learned, as we will see, at school:

The rice-eating Hindoo and Chinese and the potato-eating Irish peasant are kept in subjection by the well-fed English. Of the various causes that contributed to the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, one of the chief was that for the first time he was brought face to face with the nation of beef-eaters, who stood still until they were killed. (qtd in Adams 31)

Not just a battalion of beef-eaters, or a nation of beef-eaters, but *the* nation of beef-eaters: the English. Beef is more than an external trapping in depictions of John Bull, it is an essential characteristic: Jove's lightning bolt as opposed to his eagle. Gandhi had already

from meat to when he eats meat. See Part I of Walters and Portmess's *Ethical Vegetarianism* for various classical sources on Pythagoras.

been thinking of the cultural politics and religious significance of meat before he left India, and it was these concerns--as opposed to any particularly wide reading in English poetry--that would allow Shelley's writings to find him.

First person accounts of the moment at which eating meat becomes repellent, no longer as an abstract possibility but as a physical experience, give the literature of ethical vegetarianism its own powerful tradition of conversion narratives. From Joseph Ritson to Alice Walker, those who have chosen to write about their vegetarianism seize upon these memories with all of the emotion, intelligence, and awareness of a new aspect of self that mark religious writing. Prerequisite for such conversions, though, is a meaty past from which one wants to break away. Therefore, Gandhi's own vegetarian conversion narrative comes as a bit of a surprise, for the years before it were not filled with meat-eating.

Raised in a Vaishnava family, third in the order of Hindu sub-castes, they held cows as sacred and never had meat on their table in the first place. Yet he insisted upon a distinction between the meatless diet of his childhood which he followed as a matter of course, and the conscious choice to proclaim himself a vegetarian, with all of the attendant issues of ethical restraint and protest against unnecessary suffering that it had come to define in the non-Hindu world. The young man on his journey to England had promised his mother that he would stay away from "wine, women, and meat," and took "the three vows" from a Jainist monk to secure her final permission to go (Autobiography 39).

Never one to treat vows with anything but religious devotion, Gandhi nonetheless doubted the wisdom of such a move. For friends had persuaded the young Gandhi to believe, as the English themselves boasted, though perhaps with fewer histrionics than Dr. Beard, that

eating beef was what gave the colonizers physical power and a disposition for military strategy. Doggerel popular among his schoolmates illustrates this:

Behold the mighty Englishman
 He rules the Indian small,
 Because being a meat-eater
 He is five cubits tall. (Autobiography 21)

The vulnerability of non-meat-eaters captured his imagination at the time. Recollecting the experience of fear in those days Gandhi composes a list of symptoms that sounds uncannily like the Gothic nightmares of the young Shelley, complete with ghosts and snakes.⁴ These were fears from which meat-eating friends seemed exempt:

I used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts, and serpents. I did not dare to stir out of doors at night. Darkness was a terror to me. It was almost impossible for me to sleep in the dark, as I would imagine ghosts coming from one direction, thieves from another and serpents from a third. I could not therefore bear to sleep without a light in the room. . . . My friend knew all these weaknesses of mine. He would tell me that he could hold in his hand live serpents, could defy thieves and did not believe in ghosts. And all this was, of course, the result of eating meat.
 (Autobiography 20-21)

⁴ Shelley became a vegetarian when he was about twenty (sometime in 1812), though he ate small portions of food in general even before that time. For Shelley's diet as a student, as well as recollections of early snake encounters, the chief source is Thomas Jefferson Hogg's *Life of Shelley*, published almost fifty years after he and Shelley were expelled from Oxford (1858). Cameron's *The Young Shelley* (1950) is the best critical estimate of Hogg's recollections; see especially Chapter VI.

Friends like the one in this chapter were persuasive enough to convince Gandhi to try meat to see what strength he could gain. The extraordinary chapter “Stealing and Atonement” from early in his autobiography gives a rare and ultimately humorous glimpse of the young Mahatma-to-be smoking cigarettes and eating meat, not out of the usual impulse of adolescent rebellion against parental authority, but to discover the secret of British power. So after arriving in England and faithfully subsisting on bread, sweets, and the unseasoned, endlessly boiled vegetables the English cannot seem to keep themselves from making, he all the while was questioning the role of a meatless diet as an efficient cause in India’s subjugation (although he still thought that British rule was best for India). The revolutionary model that was taking shape in his mind was the only one visible in world affairs: violent, militaristic, and destructive, taking as a given that a power can only be fought on its own terms. He was walking “ten or twelve miles each day” around London, learning the city and searching for places he could eat, yet seeing few signs that his fellow passenger had been wrong about the jurisdiction of meat in England. Then, finally:

[d]uring these wanderings I once hit on a vegetarian restaurant in Farringdon Street. The sight of it filled me with the same joy that a child feels on getting a thing after its own heart. Before I entered I noticed books for sale exhibited under a glass window near the door. I saw among them Salt’s Plea for Vegetarianism. This I purchased for a shilling and went straight to the dining room. This was my first hearty meal since my arrival in England. God had come to my aid. (47-8)

This passage invites us to consider the meaning of a hearty meal. Usually “hearty” connotes quantity of food, or availability of filling dishes, especially meat, but here he denotes the heart itself, and all it has come to mean in terms of the heart’s desires, and the heart as the seat of love. The moment itself must have been powerful; many travelers share the experience of a shelter or guide appearing at a time of weariness. These events seem momentous at the time, although years later one might revise his opinion. But thirty-five years passed before he wrote this account, and still Gandhi testified that “God had come to [his] aid” in that restaurant, in the form of Salt’s pamphlet.⁵ *A Plea for Vegetarianism* (1886) was Henry Salt’s first, fairly brief attempt to persuade his fellow Englishmen to join him in rejecting a meat-based diet, a plea “reflective of a larger concern to eliminate power structures at all levels that promote cruelty and needless suffering” (Walters and Portmess 115). The emphasis on “Plea” in Salt’s title is ungainly, suggesting the solicitation of powerful superiors; later reworkings on this theme, clarified by years of resistance, would be more confidently titled *The Logic of Vegetarianism* (1906) and *The Humanities of Diet* (1914), but elements of this original pamphlet remained in his work for years. This unlikely pamphlet began the link between Shelley and Gandhi, for even though Salt’s citations of Shelley here are brief (from *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, just reprinted by the Shelley Society), they emerge in the familiar context of “defining” meat--flesh only, or milk and eggs?--which Gandhi was already, like many vegetarians, struggling with philosophically:

⁵ The importance of Shelley in Salt’s life and career is discussed at length in Chapter Four.

The immediate object which food-reformers aim at is not so much the disuse of animal substances in general, as the abolition of flesh-meat in particular; and if they can drive their opponents to make the important admission that actual flesh-food is unnecessary, they can afford to smile at the trivial retort that animal substance is still used in eggs and milk. . . . [Dairy produce] will doubtless be dispensed with altogether under a more natural system of diet. In the meantime, however, one step is sufficient. Let us first recognize the fact that the slaughter-house, with all its attendant horrors, might easily be abolished; that point gained, the question of the total disuse of all animal products is one that will be decided hereafter (qtd in Portmess and Walters 119).⁶

The language of “natural systems of diet” and “easily abolished” slaughterhouses is right out of Shelley’s *Vindication*; Gandhi encountered these ideas not in terms of religious distinctions but as a prioritized, practical series of reforms. “It was in Salt’s work,” writes Alexander, “that Gandhi first encountered Shelley’s poetry, and his further study of the vegetarians--Howard Williams and Anna Kingsford--reinforced the bond” (172). Howard Williams’s *The Ethics of Diet*, a “biographical history of the literature of humane dietetics from the earliest period to the present day,” also included a prominent chapter on Shelley.

⁶ Salt revisited this section of the *Plea* in *The Humanities of Diet* (1914), to refute critics’ claims that food-reformers had not considered the issue of other animal substances besides flesh; Salt pointed out that it had been part of the discussion for thirty years. Kerry S. Walters and Lisa Portmess choose this later essay to represent Salt in their recent anthology *Ethical Vegetarianism: From Pythagoras to Peter Singer* (1999), which also reprints most of Shelley’s *Vindication of Natural Diet* and an address that Gandhi made to the London Vegetarian Society on a return trip in 1931. Before entering his theme of “Vegetarianism as Moral Choice” Gandhi remarked “I feel especially honoured to find on my right Mr. Henry Salt. . . . He showed my why it was a moral duty incumbent on vegetarians not to live upon fellow-animals” (141-2).

Gandhi seems to have read this book, much longer than Salt's, with special care, and used Williams's book as a source for letters to the *Natal Messenger* he would write about vegetarianism in the coming years.⁷ Moral outrage inspired Salt, and shouts from his title, but the text levelheadedly sets about establishing a proper sequence for his agenda, a skill in which the young Gandhi was a quick study. This "first hearty meal" in England invited Gandhi to make cultural and philosophical connections which would transcend and reinvent his Jainist commitments. The Autobiography continues:

I read Salt's book from cover to cover and was very much impressed by it. From the date of reading this book I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice. I blessed the day on which I had taken the vow before my mother. I had all along abstained from meat in the interests of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at the same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater, and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became my mission. (48)

The importance of this choice cannot be overestimated. From this moment on, Gandhi would define his life as a "mission," always seeking to "enlist" others in the cause of truth. This is why the statements by otherwise illuminating critics like Alexander and Chatterjee about vegetarianism as an "eccentricity" or "cult," trying to marginalize what was central to Gandhi, seem off the mark. For this is the moment when Gandhi surprises himself, and

⁷ See *Collected Works*, Volume I: 286-292.

reverses the direction of his previous thinking regarding the nature of strength. If the springs of good ideas flow to the surface in countries far removed from one another he was becoming ready to combine them. Gandhi's travel, his reading, his testing of concepts against the standard of truth rather than ease allows the Western tradition of ethical vegetarianism--Salt through Shelley and back to Pythagoras--to mingle with his own religious upbringing as "the fountains mingle with the river / and the rivers with the Ocean," as Shelley puts it in "Love's Philosophy." In his later career Gandhi's polyvocal, synthetic, recombinant imagination would set the *Baghavat Gita* alongside the Sermon on the Mount, without any irritably reaching after consistency, but rather with an eye towards what can be learned.

If we think back to the humorous warning that Gandhi's shipmate gave him about needing to change his mind about meat in the Bay of Biscay, we can see this as an example of the widely held belief that a change in the human condition awaits us all when certain natural and national boundaries are crossed. Finding the vegetarian restaurant on Farringdon Street betrays the falsehood in shipmate's belief. Though the British vegetarians were certainly a minority, one that was often mentioned dismissively, they did actually exist, and this created in Gandhi a sense of possibility. It led him to wonder : might not, then, other assumptions about differences in kind between Asians and Europeans, or between human and nonhuman animals, also be based on cultural biases which could not withstand careful investigation? This question is central to Gandhi's character and achievement, and it becomes clarified at the moment of reading Salt's book. Before this point in Gandhi's training and experience, to the extent that revolution or

Indian liberty could be imagined, it was in terms of an overthrow; that is, in the violent terms of the political hierarchies as they already existed. To change his mind about the value of vegetarianism was to redefine the nature of power as including other potentialities besides sheer force: love, sympathy, restraint, community: in short, *Satyagraha*.

Part Two: Nonviolent Resistance and *The Mask of Anarchy*

On the twelfth of December, 1938, the International Missionary Conference opened at Tambaram, India. A group of Christian missionaries at this conference interviewed Gandhi, and the published version of this interview (reprinted in the posthumous *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 38: 201-7) includes several stanzas of Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*. This is the only time Shelley's poetry is quoted in the ninety-volume *Collected Works*. Regrettably, the transcription of the interview breaks off, so that instead of reporting the exact words Gandhi used to introduce the poem, the missionaries report it indirectly: "And in support of this argument [Gandhi] referred to Shelley's celebrated lines from *The Mask of Anarchy*, 'Ye are many, they are few,'" followed by five stanzas from the last section of the poem, to be discussed at length below. What is "this argument" for which Shelley is brought in for support? It is nothing less than Gandhi's position supporting the viability of nonviolent resistance in 1938, an extraordinary historical moment in terms of political and military strategy. Gandhi speaks in this interview about what was then known about the escalating genocide of European Jews, and the brutal invasion and occupation of neighboring China by the Japanese Army. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate whether the Second World War or the

Holocaust could have been prevented by nonviolent means. Gandhi declares his faith that *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) works more effectively than *Himsa* (violence, war), despite *Himsa*'s ubiquity and the sacrifices nonviolent resistance requires. Nonviolence is not a tactic of the weak but of the strong; it *is* more effective; but to be so requires "soldiers" with discipline, courage, training, even willingness to die. Philosophers, historians, poets, or anyone else engaged with the ethical question of whether violence can ever be justified need look no further than 1938--on the brink of a global war with unprecedented weaponry--to test what might be done by nations and individuals.

That this would be the time when Shelley's poem was on Gandhi's lips indicates the impression that *The Mask of Anarchy* made on Gandhi's imagination. Though the poem was written, as its subtitle declares, "On the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester," it is not, in the pejorative sense, an occasional poem. Shelley, residing in Leghorn at the time, learned of what had happened at St. Peter's Fields in a letter from Thomas Love Peacock on September 5, 1819, and by the 23rd of that month the poem, recopied by Mary, was in the mail to Leigh Hunt for publication in the *Examiner*.⁸ In a moment so unstable, when all public officials were endorsing the actions of the murderous troops and editors of liberal journals were imprisoned for sedition at the slightest provocation, Hunt could not publish a poem so incendiary. Already having spent months in prison, he can hardly be blamed for his prudence. Hunt would write his own preface and see the poem into print in 1832, after the passage of the Reform Bill which included some of the basic rights Shelley demanded. So not only is the poet's rallying cry not heard

⁸ See the *Letters* (Vol. 2, 113-123) for this rapid exchange of correspondence between Peacock, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt.

immediately, but he is not even in England at the time of its greatest unrest. These two points are seized upon by those who cite Matthew Arnold's adjective for Shelley, "ineffectual," as applicable to his political as well as his lyrical poetry.⁹

The opening stanza of the poem even contributes to this distancing, as Shelley repeats the framing device of the "dream-vision" he used in *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam*; in *The Mask of Anarchy* it creates a rushed, awkward, artificial manner before the confident voice of the rest of the poem takes over:

As I lay asleep in Italy
 There came a voice from over the Sea
 And with great power it forth led me
 To walk in the visions of Poesy. (ll. 1-4)

One could wish the voice to lead him back to *England*, or at least to walk in the visions of *Epic* verse as opposed to the archaic *Poesy*; at best these lines prepare the reader for the pageant to follow, though in a much less resonant way than in the other vision poems.

But any misgivings are quickly forgotten with the entrance of Murder in the next line. The first long section of the poem describes the narrator's witnessing of Murder, Fraud, and

⁹ Arnold's famous comment is discussed in Chapter One. The subtlest assessment of Shelley's political impact--neither worshipful nor damning--may be Virginia Woolf's, occasioned by a review of Walter Peck's 1927 biography: His England was "a barbarous place where they imprison journalists for being disrespectful to the Prince Regent, stand men in stocks for publishing attacks on Scriptures Politically, then, Shelley's England has already receded, and his fight, valiant though it is, seems to be with monsters who are a little out of date and therefore slightly ridiculous. But privately he is much closer to us. For alongside the public battle wages, from generation to generation, another fight which is as important as the other, though much less is said about it. Husband fights with wife and son with father. The poor fight the rich and the employer fights the employed. There is a perpetual effort on the one hand to make all these relationships more reasonable, less painful and servile; on the other, to keep them as they are. Shelley, both as son and as husband, fought for reason and freedom in private life, and his experiments, disastrous as they were in many ways, have helped us to greater sincerity and happiness in our own conflicts" (25).

Hypocrisy as they precede Anarchy in a “ghastly masquerade” of destruction. The first three abstractions are personified as Castlereagh (then Foreign Secretary), Eldon (Lord Chancellor), and Sidmouth (Home Secretary), and most later editions of the poem provide helpful historical footnotes explaining who these contemporary figures were and why they provoked Shelley’s disdain so thoroughly.¹⁰ This is the proper work of footnotes, and indicates the popular currency Shelley intended his poem to have for its first readers, who never saw it due to the delay in publication. Yet the effort to contextualize these important proper names has perhaps diverted attention away from Shelley’s metaphorical treatment of this scene of destruction, and the terms in which it is repeated in the second half of the poem when Hope refutes Anarchy. Shelley builds three structures of imagery around food, violence, and the Earth itself in this poem, and investigating these structures allows us to see why *The Mask of Anarchy* might have been so memorable and attractive to Gandhi. Moreover, these structures of imagery reveal the poem to be not an anomaly within Shelley’s work--as it is often treated, because of its explicitly popular form--but as consistent with his most characteristic reflections on nature and violence. What is unprecedented about this poem is Shelley’s expansion of available traditions of pacifism into an imagined form of mass nonviolent resistance. His early mentor Godwin’s *Political Justice* provided some hints towards this view, but not in such a clearly envisioned way.

The particular horror of this procession emerges through Shelley’s awareness that few images are more repulsive than human flesh as food, an awareness gained out of years

¹⁰ See the notes on 301-2 of *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*.

of considering that status for animal flesh. He imagines the metamorphosis of Castlereagh's supporters into carnivorous animals:

I met Murder on the way--
 He had a mask like Castlereagh--
 Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
 Seven bloodhounds followed him:

All were fat; and well they might
 Be in admirable plight,
 For one by one, and two by two,
 He tossed them human hearts to chew
 Which from his wide cloak he drew. (ll. 5-13)

These allegorical dogs, in their "admirable plight," are not the only dogs in the poem.

When the Earth responds to the massacre "[a]s if her heart had cried aloud," she tells the "Men of England" about one of the definitions of Slavery:

'Tis to hunger for such diet
 As the rich man in his riot
 Cast to the fat dogs that lie
 Surfeiting beneath his eye. (ll. 172-5)

Thus we have a parallel between the grotesque consumption of human flesh and the excessive, misdirected flinging of nourishing food, fit for humans, to dogs who are already fat. This pairing conceives of a continuity between human and animal flesh, both as eaters

and as the eaten; the vision is everywhere wasteful and brutal. Bearing on this description of rich people's overfed dogs as a symptom of slavery is the fact that the "Seven bloodhounds" following Castlereagh are taken by most critics to represent the seven European nations Castlereagh persuaded in 1815 to delay the abolition of the African Slave trade (Reiman and Powers 301), the literal commodification of flesh for private profit.

Hunger and thirst function as two of the most basic metaphors in the language (no matter what the writer eats), but Shelley's attention to the cultural values attributed to certain kinds and quantities of food and drink keeps his imagery fresh. In *The Mask of Anarchy* food, in addition to shelter, is taken seriously at the most basic level of sustenance, even as Shelley continues his explorations of the meaning of natural diet:

Birds find rest in narrow nest,
 When weary of their winged quest;
 Beasts find fare in woody lair
 When storm and snow are in the air;

Asses, swine, have litter spread,
 And with fitting food are fed;
 All things have a home but one--
 Though, O Englishman, hast none!

This is Slavery!--savage men,

Or wild beasts within a den,
 Would endure not as ye do--
 But such ills they never knew. (ll. 197-208)¹¹

The key phrase here is “fitting food”; Shelley does not interrupt the narrative to rhapsodize on the shape of orang-utan intestines here (as he does in the notes to *Queen Mab*), though he does make clear that “fitness” refers to kind as well as quantity. For example, in the stanzas which answer the question “What art thou, Freedom?” he uses “bread” rather than “meat” as a synecdoche for food:

For the labourer, thou art bread
 And a comely table spread,
 From his daily labour come
 In a neat and happy home.

Thou art clothes, and fire, and food
 For the trampled multitude--
 No--in countries that are free
 Such starvation cannot be
 As in England now we see! (ll. 217-225)

¹¹ Hunt’s 1832 edition has an additional stanza after line 200: “Horses, oxen have a home / When from daily toil they come; / Household dogs, when the wind roars, / Find a home within warm doors.” These lines, which do not seem to add much to the meaning, are not in other manuscripts and all modern editors have left them out until the recent *Longman Anthology of British Literature*, eds. Susan Wolfson and Peter Manning (Damrosch, Vol. 2, 666). In the “Editorial Overview” of their new edition, Reiman and Fraistat point out that, beginning with Hunt’s edition, the poem had its “character somewhat altered by the addition of roman numerals” between the stanzas, a non-authorial move repeated through most editions, perhaps in an effort to dignify the ballad form (xxxvi). These are excised in Reiman and Powers’s critical edition (used here), as well as frankly populist reprintings like Paul Foot’s *Shelley’s Revolutionary Year* (1990).

Starvation functions as a trope linking all of this food imagery to the violence which is the poem's central concern. This direct reference to actual starvation makes the figurative use of hunger and thirst immediately powerful. Shelley is revivifying the dead metaphors of "thirst for blood" and "bloodthirsty" by making their literal referents an insistent presence in the poem. Thirst appears first when the effects of enslavement are addressed by the voice of the Earth:

Then it is to feel revenge,
 Fiercely thirsting to exchange
 Blood for blood--and wrong for wrong--
 Do not thus when ye are strong! (ll. 193-6)

The resistance to thirst, to an impulsive urge, emerges here as the type of nonviolent resistance. Strength, here, does not mean taking on more blood, armor, or action, but of refusing to succumb to an urge so strong that it seems to be natural. This stanza marks the foundation for the model of nonviolence established in *The Mask of Anarchy*. Thirst and hunger reappear as attributes of the bayonets and scimitars of the cavalry in the two powerful stanzas that lead into the most famous section of the poem:

Let the fixed bayonet
 Gleam with sharp desire to wet
 Its bright point in English blood,
 Looking keen as one for food.

Let the horseman's scimitars

Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars

Thirsting to eclipse their burning

In a sea of death and mourning. (ll. 311-318)

The terrific momentum of the poem launches the reader into the great lines to follow (“Stand ye calm and resolute”). The “sphereless stars” seem to have escaped their natural cosmological position, suggesting that Shelley wants to consider the emerging triumph of Hope and nonviolent resistance in terms of its place in a natural order. Nature contains violence--volcanoes, cataracts, carnivorous animals--but is nonviolence also part of nature? This is what the poem has been preparing to argue, and this is its most comprehensive claim. When Gandhi states that he has “nothing new to teach the world [because] truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills” (Autobiography xiii) he echoes the same conception of the *natural* possibility of nonviolent resistance. When Hope “lay down in the street / Right before the horses’ feet,” (98-99) expecting to be trampled, but instead giving rise to the misty “Shape arrayed in mail” (110) which marks the end of Anarchy’s reign, Shelley is emphatic that this transformation emerges from a latent power in nature. Thoughts of collective power and nonviolent resistance are compared to other natural phenomena:

As flowers beneath May’s footstep waken

As stars from Night’s loose hair are shaken

As waves arise when loud winds call

Thoughts sprung where’er that step did fall. (ll. 122-5)

The list of similes creates a composite effect of inevitability: spring brings flowers, night brings stars, winds bring waves, and Hope naturally brings about a change in the thinking of large numbers of people. Nature participates in, and makes possible, the power of the Assembly:

**Let a great Assembly be
Of the fearless and the free
On some spot of English ground
Where the plains stretch wide around.**

**Let the blue sky overhead,
The green earth on which ye tread,
All that must eternal be,
Witness the solemnity. (ll. 262-269)**

That which “must eternal be” includes Hope, the daughter of Time. Anarchy, Murder, and Fraud are aberrations, even if they seem omnipotent, and “Patience” is required to reveal their limits. As Shelley explored often in his poetry--most concisely in “Ozymandias”--tyranny cannot last, it will eventually consume itself, and its artifacts will be “dead earth upon the earth” (*Mask*, line 131). The time involved may be longer than an individual’s life, but it will happen. The crowd at Peterloo had panicked; once the dragoons attacked it was bloody chaos. Shelley immediately recognized the implications of this, and used his poem to urge the realization that panic can only befall a movement which does not expect individual sacrifice for the collective good, as particular trees are sometimes lost for the

preservation of a healthy forest. This is the pivot of Shelley's revolutionary vision, and the stanza with which Gandhi's citation of the poem begins:

Stand ye calm and resolute,
 Like a forest close and mute,
 With folded arms, and looks which are
 Weapons of unvanquished war,

And let Panic, who outspeeds
 The career of armored steeds
 Pass, a disregarded shade
 Through your phalanx undismayed. (ll. 319-326)

Exhorting people not to panic when armored steeds and thirsty scimitars are coming at them is a serious, perhaps matchless, test of faith. It is to this intensity that Gandhi must have responded. If the poem was less vivid on the matter of sacrifice, and of the need for citizens to think of themselves in military terms like "phalanx," it would less likely have come to Gandhi's thoughts at the moment when violence was spreading throughout the earth, threatening to put new tyrants in place for the foreseeable future. Shelley does not imagine that standing like a forest will curtail all violence, but asks for resolution even after the massacre has begun:

And, if then the tyrants dare,
 Let them ride among you there,
 Slash and stab and maim and hew,--

What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes,

And little fear and less surprise,

Look upon them as they slay

Till their rage has died away.

Then they will return with shame

To the place from which they came,

And the blood thus shed will speak

In hot blushes on their cheek. (ll. 340-351)

Shame carries tremendous importance here, and one's own response to this revolutionary vision has everything to do with one's expectation of such a capacity in other people: evidence of shamelessness is never hard to find. In the next stanzas Shelley turns, quite heartily, to a depiction of the soldiers' humiliation at the hands of "every woman in the land," "true warriors" and even "acquaintances" if they took part in such a massacre: they have reduced themselves to "base company." His confidence is less in the immediate judgment of the soldiers and their officers than in the good people from whence their ranks are formed. The families that furnish the nation with soldiers are part of the multitude under attack, and the poem ends with the repeated reminder of their final authority:

And these words shall then become

**Like oppression's thundered doom
 Ringing through each heart and brain,
 Heard again--again--again--**

**Rise like lions after slumber,
 In unvanquishable number--
 Shake your chains to earth like dew
 Which in sleep had fallen on you--
 Ye are many--they are few. (ll. 368-372)**

It is a triumphant conclusion to the poem, as directly inspiring as anything Shelley ever wrote. As in *Prometheus Unbound*, chains are the product of time and convention, but not finally binding. Yet with the spectre of slaughter-- "slash and stab and maim and hew"--the painful costs of this stand are explicitly acknowledged. When power comes through numbers, the value and importance of the individual is thrown into question, and this is what makes the adoption of such a vision difficult and, for some people, even repellent. In the interview when Gandhi quotes these lines, the verse is preceded by a discussion of China's strategy against Japan in the 1930's. Gandhi's statement is worth quoting at length, as the precise meaning of "unvanquishable number" is put to the test here, in an extraordinarily confident challenge to "accepted standards" of resistance to tyranny:

What about China, you will ask. The Chinese have no designs upon other people. They have no desire for territory. True, perhaps, China is not

ready for such aggression; perhaps, what looks like her pacifism is only indolence. In any case China's is not active non-violence. Her putting up a valiant defence against Japan is proof enough that China was never intentionally non-violent. That she is on the defensive is no answer in terms of non-violence. Therefore, when the time for testing her active non-violence came, she failed in the test. This is no criticism of China. I wish the Chinese success. According to the accepted standards her behavior is strictly correct. But when the position is examined in terms of non-violence, I must say it is unbecoming for a nation of 400 millions, a nation as cultured as [China], to repel Japanese aggression by resorting to Japan's own methods. If the Chinese had non-violence of my conception, there would be no use left for the latest machinery for destruction which Japan possesses. The Chinese would say to Japan, 'Bring all your machinery, we present half our population to you. But the remaining two hundred millions won't bend their knee to you.' If the Chinese did that, Japan would become China's slave. (Collected 38: 203)

Among the crucial aspects of this statement is the distinction between "active non-violence" and "indolence," the former conceived as something far different from "passive resistance." For Gandhi, Satyagraha is a collective, predetermined course of action, which can look with "little fear, and less surprise" on slaughter, even of two hundred million people. A full-scale war between China and the Japanese Army also kills millions of people, but leaves the nations in a continuing struggle for dominance, placing their people

in as much danger as ever. The voice Gandhi would have the Chinese use in their defiance places them in the active role, the imperative “bring” of “[b]ring all your machinery” resembles the repeated injunctions of Shelley’s poem. “Let them ride among you there” makes the attacked people the agents of their fate, exactly the opposite of the attacker’s intention. When Gandhi re-imagines the recent past by having China say “bring all your machinery,” and then quotes *The Mask of Anarchy*, he shows how Shelley’s vision of what the poet would have the English land say to its people at Peterloo (“Stand ye calm and resolute”) became a flexible working model for his own thinking.

But there remains a basic difference between what Gandhi says here about China’s resistance to Japan and the Indian independence movement, the central project of his career. He asserts that the strategy he suggests for China would work because those Chinese remaining will not “bend their knee” to Japan: thus the plan for military conquest becomes impractical, no longer adding to Japanese power or productivity. He does not speak of the Chinese trying to *shame* the Japanese into relenting, and in this it differs from both India’s situation and from the method imagined in Shelley’s poem. These comments are made in one spoken conversation, and perhaps Gandhi would have been interested in the reaction of the Japanese people to the soldiers returning from having killed 200 million Chinese if he wrote about these matters at greater length. But the rejection of such soldiers as the “base company” that Shelley imagines does reappear as a foundational belief in Gandhi’s strategy against the British. Most soldiers would rather face an opposing army than civilians. A violent culture can contain the seeds of nonviolence, and conscienceless actions may be seen over time with shame. Gandhi saw that the nation that

produced the General Dyer behind the massacre at Amritsar is also the nation that produced the Shelley behind *The Mask of Anarchy*. Geoffrey Ashe returns to this point in his biography of Gandhi, and his analysis merits attention because of the difficulties it poses for post-colonial assessments of a Western writer's influence on a non-Western subject. Ashe concludes:

Finally, the Mahatma has a special meaning for another nation besides his own. Because of him Britain learned as important a lesson as any country has ever learnt. It was not a lesson given entirely from outside, but one that Britain evolved out of her own better conscience, which unwittingly made Gandhi its agent. Henry Salt, Annie Besant, John Ruskin, G. K. Chesterton, never knew what they were doing. Yet they formed his mind and they returned him to India as a genius whom India could not have reared unaided. In all his campaigns he took for granted an essential British decency which they had helped him to trust. After 1930 the better conscience spoke up again, and louder. In response to Gandhi Britain resigned a world mission which had outlived whatever rightness it had, and turned back to a humbler and saner quest for self-realization. . . . It is unthinkable that the realm of Elizabeth II would commit another Amritsar massacre, or present the perpetrator of such a crime with twenty thousand pounds. Gandhi did that for us. He was the only result of Britain's Indian conquests that was quite certainly for her own good. (391)

Whether the last half century has been a time of “sane quests,” or whether any “rightness” can be attributed to the colonial project in the first place are serious problems raised by Ashe’s assertions. Moreover, the notion of Britain making Gandhi “its agent” repeats the colonialist expectation that events in India are meaningful strictly in terms of their effects in Britain. Yet his central point about Gandhi’s trust in an “essential British decency,” suggests that even the soldiers are capable of shame, and recourse to this “essence” became part of Gandhi’s resolve. This part of Ashe’s observation does seem to be an accurate extension of Gandhi’s own account of his discovery of a vegetarian subculture in London and to his own estimation of Shelley’s poem and its applicability.

Part III: Atheism, Holiness, and the Problem of Literary Influence

Anyone arguing for the substantial influence of Shelley on Gandhi, including some characteristic habits of mind as well as dietary practice, should confront the fact that when Gandhi lists “[t]hree moderns” who “have left a deep impress on my life, and captivated me,” both Shelley and Gandhi’s contemporary Salt are absent. He cites, instead, his scholarly friend “Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book *The Kingdom of God is Within You*; and Ruskin by his *Unto This Last*” (Autobiography 90). In other versions of this list Thoreau often merits a particular mention for his *Civil Disobedience*, which would have been gratifying to Salt as an early champion of Thoreau’s importance in England.¹² My point is not that Gandhi was mistaken when he made these lists, nor that

¹² Salt’s biography of Thoreau brought him to the attention of the American Thoreauvian Raymond Adams. Adams knew that Salt had met Gandhi, and asked him if he would write to see if Gandhi would acknowledge whether Thoreau had been an influence. Gandhi wrote back to Salt on October 12, 1929 that he remembered Salt and that his “first introduction to Thoreau’s writings was, I think, in 1907, or late[r], when I was in the thick of [the] passive resistance struggle. A friend sent me Thoreau’s essay on

studies of the influence of these other figures on Gandhi--like Martin Burgess Green's *The Origins of Nonviolence: Tolstoy and Gandhi in Their Historical Settings*--are profoundly incomplete because of their unconcern with Shelley. Furthermore, though I am clearly in sympathy with Ashe and Young on Shelley's importance to Gandhi, their inattention to the fact that Gandhi very rarely mentions him--compared to Ruskin or Tolstoy-- in a lifelong river of utterances somewhat limits the reliability of their analysis. In response to this seeming contradiction, then, I make two attempts at explanation.

One possible answer is atheism--or, rather, "atheism"--that regrettably vague, socially charged, easily misinterpreted, supremely Shelleyan word, without the force of which his life story could well have been quite different. What are the chances that the deeply religious Mohandas Gandhi would respond to the title "The Necessity of Atheism" with anything but aversion? That 1811 pamphlet, and the expulsion from Oxford its distribution precipitated, comes up, as it must, in even the briefest discussion of Shelley's life and career, and Gandhi saw it when he read Howard Williams's chapter on Shelley in *The Ethics of Diet* (1896 ed.; 415-17). The irony, of course, is that the label Shelley chose as most inclusive of his anti-tyrannical, ethical, compassionate beliefs belies their virtual congruence with Gandhi's beliefs. Not conventionally orthodox, Gandhi questioned the social customs that barnacled themselves to religions which might otherwise teach wisely about truth and virtue. Never would the result of his experiments be the rejection of all kinds of religious practice as inappropriate or a declamation of God's absence. It is the difference in personal constitution and structure of feeling

civil disobedience. It left a deep impression on me," adding that he translated sections of it and made many copies for friends. See the "Introduction" by Hendrick, et al, to Salt's *Life of Henry David Thoreau* (reissued 1993): xxviii-xxix.

between Gandhi and Shelley: they agree on ethical questions regarding nonviolence, vegetarianism, and unselfish goals, yet base their practices on completely different conceptions of what is gained or lost by invoking the name of God. Even skeptical readers can admire Gandhi's eagerness to read all the sacred texts he could find and to seek out learned companions everywhere he went for what they could teach him in his search for truth. One of these experiences presents us with a scene which teases the mind with a glimpse of Shelley and Gandhi together, and how difficult it would be for them to talk, no matter the grounds of agreement, without the polite Salt to introduce them. Gandhi reports of overhearing an encounter between a clergyman and a "champion atheist" on a crowded train platform. The atheist speaks like Shelley himself, or at least like Peacock's caricature of him as *Nightmare Abbey's* Scythrop:

A champion atheist from the crowd heckled one of [the] clergymen. 'Well, sir, you believe in the existence of God?'

'I do,' said the good man in a low tone.

'You also agree that the circumference of the Earth is 28,000 miles, don't you?' said the atheist with a smile of self-assurance.

'Indeed.'

'Pray tell me then the size of your God and where he may be?'

'Well, if we but knew, He resides in the hearts of us both.'

'Now, now, don't take me to be a child,' said the champion with a triumphant look at us.

The clergyman assumed a humble silence.

This talk still further increased my prejudice against atheism.

(Autobiography 69-70)

Given accounts like this, that Gandhi would *ever* refer to Shelley approvingly seems to indicate a generosity of spirit, a sudden fountain of acceptance. Salt's introduction of Shelley as a vegetarian hero allowed Gandhi to see past the label of atheist for what the poet could show him about nature and nonviolence. The question of what to call Shelley's religion is a perennial challenge for Shelleyans, for his atheism hardly indicates a lack of spirituality. As Ellsworth Barnard, M.H. Abrams, and others have persuasively demonstrated, Shelley is a deeply religious poet, his costly commitment to atheism blossoming from his unwillingness to perform the set of superficial gestures about matters of religious significance that were expected of someone born to his position.¹³ Such a form of religiosity was difficult to discuss in the context of late-Victorian attacks on Shelley's character. Shelley was far more known for his views on the institution of marriage than he was for his ethical vegetarianism, and if Gandhi had been introduced to him first in the context of sexual morality he may have set him aside altogether. But Shelley as didactic vegetarian and author of *The Mask of Anarchy* was too close to his own goals for Gandhi to resist. Still, we can imagine that the believer's apprehension at the atheist may account for the relative scarcity of direct mentions of Shelley.

The second possible reason why Gandhi didn't talk about Shelley more often than he did is that Gandhi was not a habitual student of poetry in general. This sounds dismissive, or inconsistent with the recitation from *The Mask of Anarchy*, but Gandhi's

¹³ See Barnard's *Shelley's Religion* (1964); Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism*, esp. 460-2; Wasserman 295-305 for Shelley's uses of Christianity.

genius was not for verbal play, ambiguity, or dramatic tension as pleasurable ends in themselves. He was what Barthes would call a “readerly” reader, not there for the play of writerly texts. There are no references to him reading Keats, or Swinburne, or following Yeats’s career as it evolved contemporaneously with his own.¹⁴ Nor do we have any evidence (or reason to believe) that he read Shelley in his denser, impractical, psychosexual, writerly mode: the Shelley of *Epipsychidion*. When he read Tolstoy, it was for the ideas; little surprise, then, that he would praise *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* and be unconcerned with *Anna Karenina*. We approach here a paradox of the literary imagination, for if such a lack of curiosity suggests a limit to Gandhi’s comprehensiveness of thought, then we must also account for the capacity of people with a highly developed aesthetic sensibility for cowardly and inhumane acts.

Because Gandhi did not read widely in English literature, or habitually in any literature beyond religious texts and legal studies, we can appreciate how unlikely it was that he would find *The Mask of Anarchy* in the first place. Meena Alexander points out that “the vegetarians were not Shelley’s only conduit into the radical nationalist circles of India” (173), and for the followers of Gandhi who worked with him in the 1920s and 1930s this was true. Alexander draws on her own experience as a student and teacher to say that “[t]he lyrics of Shelley were taught and have remained part of the set curriculum of Indian universities: ‘Ode to the West Wind,’ ‘To a Skylark,’ even the great elegy *Adonais*. But the radical, political poet, whose words would have been too disruptive of an imperial order that sought the careful importation of poetry into the colonies, was

¹⁴ For a sense of Gandhi’s appetite as a reader, see the lists in Chadha’s biography (267) of the 150 books he read while imprisoned in 1922. Most of these were religious commentaries or in social sciences, though he did read Goethe’s *Faust*, Shaw’s *Man and Superman* and Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads*.

cauterized, cut away” (174). This bifurcation of Shelley’s canon and reception happened in England as well. But the India from which Gandhi departed on his first trip to England was a different place than in the period after the First World War: “radical nationalist circles,” circulating books of poetry amongst themselves, did not exist. Though it is unclear the precise moment at which Gandhi first read or heard *The Mask of Anarchy*, based on the evidence above there is no reason to think he would have found it without the direction given to him by vegetarian authors. Gandhi made patient use of ennobling writings from all of the traditions he was able to discover; he dedicated his life to combining the good parts of what was available to him into something new. Tolstoy and Thoreau taught him much about individual action, the Sermon on the Mount about offering the other cheek, but none of these contained in such detail a literal working model of *Satyagraha* in practice than he found in *The Mask of Anarchy*. He credited it with inspiring him in practice, and his followers when he recited it to them. *The Mask of Anarchy* helped Gandhi to envision collective nonviolence by giving him an imaginative precedent. We should be grateful and attentive to those like Henry Salt who helped Shelley’s poem to find him.

CHAPTER FOUR

HENRY SALT ON SHELLEY:

LITERARY CRITICISM AND ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

Two key stages in the development of Percy Shelley's posthumous reputation came a half century apart. In 1886, revival of interest in the poet expanded with the publication of Edward Dowden's massive biography and the founding of the Shelley Society. By the mid-1930's, famous and influential critiques of the poet by T.S. Eliot and others felled trees over Shelleyan paths it would take years to clear. What makes these dates remarkable here is how they frame the active career of Henry Stephens Salt (1851-1939), one of Shelley's most perceptive readers and a forerunner, I will argue, of contemporary Ecocriticism. From his first book (*A Shelley Primer*, 1887) to the final chapter of his last (*The Creed of Kinship*, 1935), Salt remained engaged with Shelley's ideas and cited Shelley as a key inspiration for his reformist efforts. Of the nearly forty books Salt wrote (see APPENDIX), a handful announce themselves as specifically about Shelley: the *Primer*, obviously, plus critical studies of *Julian and Maddalo* and Hogg's *Life of Shelley*, prepared for the Shelley Society. Some of this material became part of the often-reprinted *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poet and Pioneer* (1896), which Salt would supplement in later pamphlets like *Shelley as a Pioneer of Humanitarianism* (1902). Though much of Salt's discussion of Shelley's proto-ecological thought takes place in these volumes, others of his works, more resistant to classification, also have Shelley as a

shaping force. In *Seventy Years Among Savages* (1921), *The Story of My Cousins* (1923) and *The Creed of Kinship* (1935), the mature Salt combined frequent citations from Shelley's poetry with sections on animal rights, wilderness protection, the fight against corporal punishment in schools, other forms of nonviolent change, and his own autobiography.¹

Salt was born in India in 1851, where his father was a Colonel in the Royal Bengal Artillery. Sent back to England to be educated at Eton (years later his friend G.B. Shaw would write that "Eton was a matter of course in Salt's family"), he went on to King's College at the University of Cambridge, where he excelled as a classics scholar. From 1875 to 1884 he returned to Eton in the position of a junior Master, and seemed to have a long and comfortable career ahead of him as a respectable scholar, being waited on in his rooms by many servants and expected to join his fellows at table for a daily feast of beef and other, more exotic meats.² But by age 33, a change was underway, fueled by his reading. Salt could no longer tolerate the difference between this life and that which was described and imagined in the literature he found increasingly important: classical descriptions of joyous human life when freed from the custom of meat-eating, found in his studies and translations of Plutarch and Ovid; a life of deliberate simplicity as espoused by

¹Two biographical studies of Salt exist, the most reliable being George Hendrick's *Henry Salt: Humanitarian Reformer and Man of Letters* (1977). This work seeks to introduce Salt to new readers, a task which is unfortunately still necessary. Hendrick also reprints a number of unpublished letters written by and addressed to Salt. Stephen Winsten's *Salt and His Circle* (1951) is made and marred by its association with G.B. Shaw, who wrote a preface for it at age 95 (!) and provided other materials in remembrance of his friend. Winsten's penchant for imagined dialogue and undocumented conjecture makes one appreciate the obsessive answerability of the best modern biographies.

² Salt recalled his change in consciousness in his 1921 autobiography *Seventy Years Among Savages*: "We Eton masters . . . were but cannibals in cap and gown—almost literally cannibals, as devouring the flesh and blood of the higher nonhuman animals so closely akin to us, and indirectly cannibals, as living by the sweat and toil of the classes who do the hard work of the world" (64).

the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (then still relatively obscure to British readers); and the combination of awe at the natural world, love for all creatures, and disdain for tyranny in any form that he found in the controversial, misrepresented, and under-appreciated Percy Bysshe Shelley. At the time Shelley was either read as a maker of wispy, ethereal lyrics about Skylarks and Clouds, or not read at all. Remembering his times at Eton, Salt later wrote that “[w]hen I commended Shelley to my Eton colleagues as not only an Etonian and a great poet, but a thinker and a prophet, I got little support” (Memories 191). Salt and his wife, the former Kate Joynes, left Eton and took a cottage in Surrey, about twenty miles from London, where they put in a vegetable garden and lived without servants, a move which shocked their families and fellow Etonians, who had been worried about Salt since he started riding those “horrible” new bicycles, but didn’t imagine that he would so fully reject the life he had been born to. Never a best-selling author, never in the majority in his opinions, Salt nonetheless was a key organizer and articulate spokesperson for a range of movements collected under the name “humanitarian.” The word seems to denote only an interest in humans, though Salt and his colleagues consistently used it for animals as well, in the sense that we still use “humane.” His most famous book, which went through several editions, was *Animals’ Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress* the most thorough book of its kind until quite recently.³

With so many books, on such a range of important topics, why does Salt remain obscure? More, why should we care about Salt except as a transitional figure: given the

³See Walters and Portmess’s *Ethical Vegetarianism: From Pythagoras to Peter Singer* for a long-overdue anthology that brings Salt’s “The Humanities of Diet” (1914) back into print. This book also features a large section of Shelley’s *Vindication of Natural Diet* after a selection of his classical sources.

difference between contemporary cultural studies and the pre-professional subjectivity of Salt's method, have not his books, especially on Shelley, been rendered obsolete? With these questions, the issue of Salt's class status matters as well: is it now appropriate, when class along with race and gender are now central rather than peripheral to literary studies, to champion a respectable Etonian, sixty-years dead, as a contemporary hero? Answers to all three questions are related, and have everything to do with important shifts in the critical understanding of Shelley's works, as well as the disputed role of ecological consciousness within the practice of literary criticism.

What has emerged in recent years as Ecocriticism is in many ways quite different from what Salt wrote. There is no consensus, nor does there need to be, as to what Ecocriticism precisely means; in practice it includes any number of historical and philosophical approaches which make the implications of "the natural" central to the discussion of a given text. These discussions go on to investigate how these texts participate in proto-ecological discourse about the role and function of humans in the natural world, not merely to test whether a particular work or author is "green" or not, but rather to discern what can be learned through investigating the ideological uses to which "nature" has been employed. In nearly all cases, this work has sought to bring a more physical, embodied sense back to criticism from the solipsism of post-structuralist theory at its most abstruse. In Shelley studies, the work of such Ecocritics as Timothy Morton, Onno Oerlemans, and Jennifer Lokash complicates our understanding of a poet and essayist whose political and philosophical beliefs cannot be extricated from his positions on natural diet and the limits of anthropocentric thought. In *Shelley and the Revolution in*

Taste (1994), Morton went back to Shelley's immediate sources to locate "the poetics of natural diet" within the radical discourse of natural rights central to the revolutionary period. It is because so many people, including otherwise learned and helpful critics, have been predisposed to see Shelley's vegetarianism as an adolescent affectation, its interest strictly peripheral, that the context, implications, and legacy of these beliefs has for so long gone unanalyzed. Before the recent work of Morton and Oerlemans, the only Shelleyan since Salt to write about the importance of Shelley's vegetarianism was Kenneth Neill Cameron in 1950's *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*. Morton does make use of Cameron's work in his study; but surprisingly, given that his was the first book in decades to make Shelley's writings on diet a central issue, Morton does not mention Salt, or Shelley's legacy on the reforms of intervening years, at all.⁴

Salt's career developed concurrently with debates about the post-Darwinian status of humans in the natural world. Scholars of literature after the Romantic period, such as Gillian Beer, have explored in detail the implications of these debates, providing an historical model for ecologically-minded critics of any era. Salt is a Romantic, in an optimistically generic sense of the word: he has a secular faith in the power of the sympathetic imagination, fueled by a love of the natural world, to change material conditions. But it is in his citation of texts from Romantic period that his work maps the active legacy of Romantic texts onto a later stage of evolutionary science. The following passages, for example, are from 1923's *The Story of My Cousins*, the subtitle of which,

⁴Morton does, however, consider Shelley's importance for later aspects of the environmental movement, especially in "Shelley's Green Desert." Onno Oerlemans, in "Shelley's Ideal Body: Vegetarianism and Nature," helpfully discusses both Cameron's exceptionalism as a biographer who takes diet seriously, and names Salt as the only serious defender of Shelley's vegetarianism (532).

Brief Animal Biographies, gives a sense of why the word “cranky” often came to be used with Salt. The title comes from a line in ethicist J. Howard Moore’s *The Universal Kinship* (1906): “They are not conveniences, but cousins.” Salt dedicated this collection of fond stories about animal companions past and present to his late friend from the animal rights movement. The idea of belonging to a family, of recognizing kinship, is deceptively simple but endlessly important to Salt, and appears with increasing devotion throughout his career. Though adoration for domestic animals abounds in this book--“In the early morning she arrives on my bed, and with a tap of the softest of soft paws upon my face informs me that she is ready to be noticed”(56)--there is a difference in kind between what Salt takes from this feelingful contact and the familiar experience that many pet-lovers have had, especially since the Victorians, where their own animal attains a membership status unrelated to that of animals at large. In the final chapter “What My Cousins Taught Me,” these stories prepare the way for Shelley’s words to appear in the context of post-Darwinian circumspection:

It is surprising that so many persons should not only reject but *resent* the belief in evolution, in a common origin, which to some of us is the one sure consolation, the gospel of great joy. It is a question not of sentiment but of science; yet, as far as sentiment may be permitted, one would have expected human beings to welcome, not disdain, a theory which relieves them of a churlish isolation in a world of slaves and strangers, and leads them gradually to the true civilization which Shelley was inspired to foretell:--

All things are void of terror: man has lost

His terrible prerogative, and stands

An equal amidst equals: happiness

And science dawn, though late, upon the earth. (Story 69)

The lines are from *Queen Mab* (8: 225-8) and follow quickly upon those that Shelley glossed with his note on vegetarianism. “Science” as Shelley uses it here is a strikingly modern addition to a vision of a new Golden Age and Salt uses the word in similar fashion when he says that he speaks of matters “not of sentiment but of science.” If the object of scientific observation is Nature, then what we learn from such study will be healthier than the world created by superstition and tyranny. The loss of an ontologically privileged status for humans, the collapsing of the Great Chain of Being, is only a problem if one has a low opinion of animals. To hold them in high regard, or to acknowledge that they have a standing of their own and a capacity for suffering even before the delineation of species becomes an issue, makes one’s role as a member of the animal kingdom anything but a matter for anxiety. Sentiment remains, for Salt, also a fortunate elixir, one that promises companionship with agreeable cousins, some of whom are soft and furry. It is not difficult to construct a far less warm and fuzzy version of nature than this, even if not “red in tooth and claw.” Sentiment exists only in consciousness, and it is our awareness of death, whether the inevitability of our own or the lament for another’s, that makes all easy claims for reconciliation with nature so fraught with difficulties. Shelley certainly took terror seriously, and for all his serenity Salt elsewhere writes of the violence in nature quite

directly.⁵ Some struggles are inevitable, like bringing crops from rocky soil, but the struggle of admitting one's fundamental animalness need not be difficult, and this was Salt's message to his contemporaries. It was an unpopular opinion, of course, and even if Salt's certainty of "great joy" seems gloriously, inaccessibly pre-modern, the investment many of us have--as humans and as humanists--in defining ourselves in opposition to the Animal remains an active issue.

Immediately after quoting the lines from *Queen Mab*, Salt continues:

The relation that should exist between mankind and the lower races has been the subject of many controversies [but requires a] 'change of heart,' and when kinship has been not merely argued and demonstrated but felt, any further reasoning will be superfluous; there will be no more need for us to sit in committees and to spend time in contriving release for animals from intolerable wrongs--time that might be more fitly spent in the worship of nature or of art. For when the oneness of life shall be recognized, such practices as blood-sports will be not only childish but impossible; vivisection unthinkable; and the butchery of our fellow-animals for food an outgrown absurdity of the past. (Story 69-70)

The confidence here in something like Godwinian perfectibility demonstrates how thoroughly Salt identified his own goals and work with Shelley's: even his other favorite

⁵ Regarding emergency situations, such as the threat of starvation or mortal danger, Salt writes: "If we must kill, whether it be man or animal, let us kill and have done with it; if we must inflict pain, let us do what is inevitable without hypocrisy, or evasion, or cant. But (here is the cardinal point) let us first be assured that it is necessary; let us not wantonly trade on the needless miseries of other beings, and then attempt to lull our consciences by a series of shuffling excuses which cannot endure a moment's candid investigation" (*Animals' Rights*, 1892 ed., 28-9).

writers--Thoreau, Richard Jefferies, James Thomson--do not write like this. The lines from *Queen Mab* are not analyzed as they would be in a thematic discussion such as *Shelley's Principles* (1892)--Salt does not even name the poem here--but they inspire such heightened confidence in future progress. Salt enacts Shelley's own statement in the "Preface" to *Prometheus Unbound* that "the great writers of our own age are . . . the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it" (134). Salt's mild complaint about the time he had spent in committee meetings as an officer for the Humanitarian League and the Vegetarian Union--"time that might be more fitly spent in the worship of nature or of art"--itself echoes the wish for the future that Prometheus imagines for himself and Asia in his speech after Hercules unbinds him in Act III of Shelley's drama:

There is a cave

All overgrown with trailing odorous plants

.....

. . . . and all around are mossy seats

And the rough walls are clothed with long soft grass;

A simple dwelling, which shall be our own,

Where we will sit and talk of time and change

As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged--

.....

[and there shall] visit us the progeny immortal

Of Painting, Sculpture and rapt Poesy

**And arts, though unimagined, yet to be.
 The wandering voices and the shadows these
 Of all that man becomes, the mediators
 Of that best worship, love, by him and us
 Given and returned, swift shapes and sounds which grow
 More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,
 And veil by veil evil and error fall . . .**

Such virtue has the cave and place around. (III.iii.10-11, 20-24, 55-63).

Evil and error, put on through custom, keep us from worship. Is Salt's "worship of nature or of art" identical to Prometheus' "that best worship, love"? It is hard to imagine them being very different, though this also demands that we imagine what worship looks like. Is it careful scientific study, like Linnean taxonomy? The writing of poetry? Political action? It seems to be some mindful combination of all of these. The list of abuses at the end of the Salt quotation--vivisection, blood-sports, and butchery--were causes which he knew would not be won overnight, yet the Shelleyan model gave him a rhetoric of hope.

The recent work of environmentalist educator Mitchell Thomashow provides a flexible model for understanding Salt's goals as a Shelleyan, a reformer, and a person trying to live in accordance with his ideals. Thomashow calls for greater introspection on the part of those active in the contemporary environmental movement, so that one can guard against reacting with outrage to a particular situation--say, an oil spill--while failing to recognize one's own participation in the culture that creates these situations. In the place of an automatically available consumerist identity, Thomashow proposes a

challenging path towards what he calls “Ecological Identity.” The word “identity” signifies both sameness (as in identical objects), as well as the construction of a personality, both of which are ripe for misinterpretation. As Thomashow explains:

To have an identity crisis is to be lost in the world, lacking the ability (temporarily, one hopes) to connect the self to meaningful objects, people, or ideas--the typical sources of identification. . . . Ecological identity refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self. Nature becomes an object of identification. For the individual, this has extraordinary conceptual ramifications. the interpretation of life experience transcends social and cultural interactions. It also includes a person’s connection to the earth, perception of the ecosystem, and direct experience of nature. (3)

One of the clusters of concepts Thomashow proposes for developing ecological identity is the study of “ecological identity role models.” The term sounds somewhat clumsy out of context, but the evidence he presents of students whose engagement with Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson has led them to ecologically responsible careers in forestry, agriculture, and biochemistry speaks to the power of language to inspire forms of sustainable action.⁶ Perhaps his examples also serve to remind teachers of literature that for all the dangers of offering writers to our students as cultural heroes--not the least of which is that all writers are human and therefore imperfect—students do often respond

⁶Thomashow’s historical tracings of “Trees of Environmentalism” (see chart on 26) shares with much American environmental writing a foreshortened sense of history, with Thoreau and Muir as the deep roots of the tree. Are Wordsworth, Clare, and Darwin then soil?

to them in this way, and occasionally with wonderful results. In Salt's case, he identified his goals for the increase of human sympathy and kinship with other forms of life with what he read in Shelley; his path of ecological identity further led him to create a way of life in accordance with his beliefs, following the enthusiasm for "the simple life" he responded to in Edward Carpenter and William Morris.⁷ Though this essay is clearly written in approval of such a marriage of life and work, the contrast between Salt's work and the standard for literary commentary as practiced in this era of professional criticism could hardly be greater. The historical intersection of T.S. Eliot's critiques of Shelley and the writings of Salt's later career form a pivotal juncture in the removal of ecological identity from critical discourse.

In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), Eliot distinguished three stages in the development of taste in poetry. The first is shared by "the majority of children," up to age twelve or so (32). Eliot does not name any poets in this category; presumably he means the enjoyment of nursery rhymes and poetic rhythm. Next, "the usual adolescent course with Byron, Shelley, Keats, Rosetti, Swinburne." (33) For himself, this stage went until age nineteen, but "it is one beyond which I dare say many people never advance; so that such taste for poetry as they retain in later life is only a sentimental memory of the pleasures of youth" (33-34). The third stage, from which he now speaks, is where "identity" becomes a negative term:

⁷Morris certainly shared many of Salt's ideals, but asked crucial questions about the claims of the vegetarian movement: "Simplicity in life is good, most good, so long as it is voluntary; but surely there is enough involuntary simplification of life. To live poorly is no remedy against poverty but a necessity of it. If our whole system were to become vegetarian altogether the poor would be forced to live on vegetarian cag-mag, while the rich lived on vegetarian dainties" (qtd in Winsten 94).

The third, or mature stage of enjoyment of poetry, comes when we cease to identify ourselves with the poet we happen to be reading; when our critical faculties remain awake; when we are aware of what one poet can be expected to give and what he cannot. The poem has its own existence, apart from us; it was there before us and will endure after us. It is only at this stage that the reader is prepared to distinguish between degrees of greatness in poetry[.] (34)

If we imagine the word “nature” in place of “poem” here, then the concept of objective individuality which Eliot presupposes comes into focus. Reading a poem, in this view, is like looking at a landscape, which one visits on expert advice. Other ways of experiencing the natural world, where one acknowledges one’s own dependence upon a particular ecosystem, are not possible. Of course, we change our surroundings and are changed by them; poems, I would argue, operate on the mind in a similar way: we are not the same observer after the experience of living with a poem as we were before. If we were objective, then the experience could hardly seem to matter, would touch us only on the surface or not at all. The ultimate goal of reading in Eliot’s description here is the apprehension of true greatness. Our individual self, salient though we might imagine it to be, witnesses the external reality of the poem; if great, the old poem “shall endure after us,” as we hope the cycles of nature will. Paradoxically, the same tribute to the endurance of Art which Eliot proclaims here--and which seems incompatible with “ecological identity”--also propels Shelley’s confidence in the lines cited above from the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* about the enduring and nourishing effects of great writers on future

generations. In the end, though, Eliot's imperative that one equate "critical faculties" with the careful excision of indulgent subjectivity became the *sine qua non* of serious criticism for most of the ensuing decades.

But the practice of objectively responding to poems--for all these concerns an important and enabling skill--effectively transformed over time into a kind of antagonism between critic and artist, and ultimately, I would argue, into the implicit view that the critic's objective understanding was superior to that of the subjective artist. The best and clearest Ecocriticism attempts to reverse this trend. For example, Jonathan Bate begins his *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) with a brief history of Wordsworth criticism up to the present moment, then states his unorthodox conviction that where "the critic's purposes are also the writer's . . . there can be a communion between living reader and dead writer which may bring with it a particular enjoyment and a perception about endurance" (5). Such a confident and accessible statement makes it clear why Bate's book instantly became a classic of the contemporary Ecocritical movement.⁸ The notably "non-communal" approaches of immediate concern to Bate included certain New Historicist and deconstructivist criticism, and these developments are obviously subsequent to Eliot. Yet the debate over when agreement between the commentator and primary writer transgresses into irresponsibility unfolds along comparable lines both in our moment and in Salt's.

Besides relegating Shelley--along with Byron and Keats--to a merely "adolescent" interest, additional comments of Eliot's on Shelley reveal exactly how deeply his

⁸ For a response to this passage in full disagreement with Bate's thesis as well as that of this essay see P.M.S. Dawson's "The Empire of Man': Shelley and Ecology," in Bennett and Curran 232-239

disapprobation was rooted in matters of animal rights and ecological identity. The defense of the canonical importance of Shelley's poetry against Eliot's attacks is a *fait accompli*, of course, but our attention to the precise terms of these famous attacks can be fruitfully understood in terms of the disgust that Shelley's vegetarianism engendered in Eliot. In the lecture on "Shelley and Keats" in *The Use of Poetry*, Eliot remarked that

With Shelley we are struck from the beginning by the number of things poetry is expected to do; from a poet who tells us, in a note on vegetarianism, that 'the orang-outang perfectly resembles man both in the order and the number of his teeth', we shall not know what to expect. The notes to *Queen Mab* express, it is true, only the views of an intelligent and enthusiastic schoolboy, but a schoolboy who knows how to write; and throughout his work, which is of no small bulk for a short life, he does not, I think, let us forget that he took his ideas seriously. The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be the ideas of adolescence--as there is every reason why they should be. And an enthusiasm for Shelley seems to me also to be an affair of adolescence: for most of us, Shelley has marked an intense period before maturity, but for how many does Shelley remain the companion of age? I confess that I never open the volume of his poems simply because I want to read poetry, but only with some special reason for reference. I find his ideas repellent; and the difficulty of separating Shelley from his ideas and beliefs is still greater than with Wordsworth. (88-89)

Eliot is rather vague on the "ideas" he finds so repellent: the subsequent mention of how Shelley was "sometimes almost a blackguard" (89) seems to indicate a concern he shared with many readers about Shelley's views on marriage and his treatment of Harriet, although this comment is not developed. Vegetarianism is named, however (with an arch, understated sneer), and its connotations of "adolescence" continue to have cultural currency. If the other Shelleyan ideas he found repellent included those which Salt enumerated in *Shelley's Principles*--disdain for tyranny of all sorts, whether of one class of humans over another, or of humans over other forms of life--then the maturity which Eliot commends painfully resembles the withered sensibility depicted in *Gerontion*: "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season."

Eliot gave this talk in February of 1933; at that point Salt was eighty-two and had been writing about and returning to Shelley's poetry for fifty years. The book Salt was preparing would be his last, and in the title *The Creed of Kinship* he compressed the themes of his life and work into a succinct principle of the oneness of life. It is a short and strange autobiography, for his life story is told through the causes he worked for, the friends (some of them famous) who enriched his life, and the writers from Lucretius to Shaw who had been his intellectual company. All of this is developed without any personal details about his marriage, childhood, or other matters which have since become the core of modern memoir. The book deserves a wider audience: often when we hear someone express opinions held dear for half a century calcification has long since set in; but when those positions have been held on principle against outrage and hostility they can take on the grandeur of a painter's late style, and to me the book reads like the last

canvasses of Titian and O'Keeffe. The final chapter, "One Who Understood," is a condensed version of all of Salt's writings about Shelley. Though I think he overstates the uniformity of Shelley's writings about animals, Salt's perception of how crucially interested Shelley was in the recognition by humans of both our animal nature and the need to use our power responsibly stands in marked contrast to virtually all other discussions of the poet:

There is nothing in [Shelley] more delightful than the utter absence of the 'superior person' (would that the same could be said of many of his critics!), both as regards his human and non-human fellow-beings.

Whenever he speaks of animals, it is with an instinctive, childlike, and perfectly natural sense of kinship and brotherhood. Thus in *Alastor*, in the invocation of Nature [lines 13-15], we find him saying:

'If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast
I consciously have injured, but still loved
And cherished these my kindred.'

My kindred! Perhaps no feature of his philosophy has been more often ridiculed than his vegetarianism; yet here, too, he gave proof not only of personal humaneness but of practical foresight, for food-reform is now widely recognised as a necessary part of any well-considered scheme for humanising our relation toward the animals, and everyone who deals with the question of animals' rights is compelled to take some note of it. Alone among the poets of his generation, he was unwilling to sentimentalise about

the beauty of kindness to animals, and at the same time 'to slay the lamb that looks him in the face,' or, what is no less immoral, to devolve that unpleasant process on another person. (Creed 114-115)

In tone this resembles much of the breathless enthusiasm for Shelley among his apologists from the Victorians to Andre Maurois, but in its emphasis on Shelley's ideas in their historical context it is different in kind. Salt does not present an angelic Shelley, altogether lyrical and impractical, "not one of us"; but rather a poet who has anticipated issues which will remain challenging and controversial long after immediate concerns have been resolved. This kind of commentary distinguishes Salt's writings on Shelley even from those of other champions whose works first appeared in the late-nineteenth century. William E. Axon's *Shelley's Vegetarianism* (1891), for example, is a compendium of citations from *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, and the two prose essays of 1813-14, but with very little discussion: enlightening for those who did not know about this aspect of Shelley, but adding very little to the historical understanding of a familiar reader. It is the kind of book that *can* be replaced by studies which examine the same passages in far more detail: readers of Morton's recent book are well beyond needing Axon. Salt, however, is up to something else, and his concerns went underground, in a sense, until the recent development of franker versions of autobiographical criticism.

Whether breathless or not, the attitudes described above by Salt have become fairly mainstream, and to the growing number of urbane new vegetarian readers the "ridicule" experienced by Salt in his time might seem surprising. This is where what Carol J. Adams has called "the sexual politics of meat" bears on the history of responses to Shelley:

People with power have always eaten meat. The aristocracy of Europe consumed large courses filled with every kind of meat while the laborer consumed the complex carbohydrates. Dietary habits proclaim class distinctions, but they proclaim patriarchal distinctions as well. Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat. The sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity. (Adams 26)

In Adams's analysis, attempts to dismiss the claims of vegetarians for the reduction of a meat-based diet--whether these claims are based on health concerns, the moral status of animals, or environmental destruction--inevitably function as defenses of patriarchal power. The terms used in the "ridicule" of Shelley's vegetarianism are usually couched in terms of its unmanliness: either because it is feminized or, as we have already seen, "adolescent." I return to T.S. Eliot for further illustration, perhaps unfairly; yet because his influence was so formative, at least well into the 1960s, the diction of Eliot's derision remains essential:

[S]ome of Shelley's views I positively dislike, and that hampers my enjoyment of the poems in which they occur; and others seem to me so *puerile* that I cannot enjoy the poems in which they occur. [. . .] [It] is not the presentation of beliefs which I do not hold, or--to put the case as extremely as possible--of beliefs that excite my abhorrence, that makes the

difficulty. Still less is it that Shelley is deliberately making use of his poetic gifts to propagate a doctrine; for Dante and Lucretius did the same thing. I suggest that the position is somewhat as follows. When the doctrine, theory, belief, or 'view of life' presented in a poem is one which the mind of the reader can accept as coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience, it interposes no obstacle to the reader's enjoyment, whether it be one that he accept or deny, approve or deprecate. When it is one which the reader *rejects as childish or feeble*, it may, for a reader of well-developed mind, set up an almost complete check. (91, 96; emphasis added)

Because the only belief which Eliot names in his essay concerns Shelley's vegetarianism (though he almost certainly means those on marriage, too), the anti-masculine words *puerile*, *childish*, and *feeble* reveal a culturally-endorsed hostility toward these beliefs. These terms resemble those used to patronize idealistic people of any era, including many currently involved in the environmental movement accused of intuiting an overly gentle view of nature. "Resist not the weakness / Such strength is in meekness" goes the Song of Spirits in *Prometheus Unbound* (II.iii.93-4), and this message of humility might make resistance to available forms of violence and acquisitiveness sustainable over a long and healthy life.

Ecological criticism, in its contemporary development, has come to include a variety of autobiographical approaches, most of which are written without Salt's characteristic reserve. Though Adams's feminist understanding of vegetarian discourse

concurs with my argument about the cultural imperatives that kept Salt's beliefs unpopular and his works obscure, one could make a convincing case from feminist and Ecofeminist perspectives that Salt's nonetheless Victorian and upper-class reserve limits his contemporary importance as a model for Ecocriticism or for creative autobiography. Salt, after all, *chose* to live a simple life, without servants: most people have to. More, he never wrote about Kate, his wife, whom Shaw used as the model for his *Candida* and later, after both Kate and Henry were dead, revealed as a lesbian who had lived with her husband as a like-minded intellectual companion. I think the important question is whether Salt's class position functioned as a prerequisite to his beliefs. Not having to earn his living by writing certainly enabled him to develop his interests in subjects then unpopular, but it does not negate the selfless devotion in which he found his life's meaning. It is never difficult--in Salt's time or our own--to find evidence to discourage pacifists and other reformers, but one thing we *can* celebrate in our time is the expansion of education and access to critical discussion far beyond the enclaves of male privilege in which Salt was first trained. Scholars developing a critical method answerable to the demands of a world in crisis should consider the history of criticism in this century, and its deliberate exclusion of earlier, effusive writers like Salt. Even among Shelleyans, Salt is rarely mentioned, despite his thorough knowledge of Shelley's works and clear discussions and translations of his classical sources, perhaps because we are trained to expect critics to be a specialist in one subject only, not committed to many.

This essay is not meant as a call for merely affective standards of inclusion in literary discussion: in Shelley studies, the need for consistently edited texts and skillful

winnowing of a forest of impassioned secondary works is as essential to advancing our understanding of Shelley as it is for any other author. All who love the poems are grateful for this ongoing work. As critical discussion has become more specialized, the effort to be inclusive of students and non-professional readers also becomes a priority, and in this sense writings from the era we now call pre-professional offer old yet relevant models, like good gardening advice that never quite goes out of style. This approach to critical work requires not the slightest lapse in sophistication, and perhaps makes possible a greater elegance than what has become all-too-standard practice. The many versions of practices in contemporary Ecocriticism include a variety of autobiographical approaches that recall and resuscitate the best of Salt. A book like John Elder's *Reading the Mountains of Home* (1998) is representative of this trend, although such a nuanced and satisfying work as this is never "typical" of anything. In it, Elder combines an examination of the geological history of the Vermont country near his home with stories of his family, particularly the challenges and rewards of raising his teenage son. The book is structured around a series of walks taken in this area over the course of a year, and his interpretive guidebook is Robert Frost's long poem "Directive." The volume and acuity of Elder's insights on Frost make this one of the finest critical discussions of Frost since the pathclearing work of Louis Untermeyer, but is it literary criticism, exactly? How should it be catalogued? Such a question at this stage in the ongoing process of "redrawing the boundaries" of cultural studies invites us to revisit the moment when arguments for the exacting, quantifiable practice of literary studies were first perceived as necessary to defend the status of modern literature in the university. Henry Salt was not objective; he

wrote to praise or blame; and praise came more naturally to his disposition. But he did not hold his opinions about poetry or about the kinship of humans with other forms of life *a priori*; his half-century of writing about Shelley chronicles the extent to which the poetry had become a part of his inner life; the values expressed in the poetry became part of his ecological identity. For Salt to analyze Shelley dispassionately, to engage with challenging ideas in his works and then fail to proceed on a course of reform and hopeful progress, would have been wholly inadequate to the experience of allowing himself to be so available to poetry's power. Whether one agrees with all that Salt stood for, or whether Percy Shelley is the poet to accompany one on such a sustained engagement, there remains something fundamentally sane about this way of talking about poetry, especially poetry which exists to inspire. Such a belief, taken to its logical extreme, opens literary studies to a number of charges: impressionism, associative reasoning, lack of reproducible method: but there will always be those who misuse any approach. One of the pleasures of literary study is finding deserving work whose audience didn't exist when it was first written, but later comes into being. Such we are now, through our shared and enduring attention to Percy Shelley, for Henry Salt.

Appendix to Chapter Four

"We Must Tell the Truth About Somebody": G.B.S on P.B.S.

1892. As plans were underway for both official and unofficial celebrations of the Centenary of Shelley's birth, the only people who were alive at the same time as the poet were septuagenarians. Seventy years was more than enough time for waters to close in

over the drowned man; some of these celebrants wanted the waters to rest as still as baptismal founts, creating a cool and smooth space for their lost lyrical angel. Other Shelleyans pointed to ideas that gained sound and speed by running into Shelley, and celebrated him as a contrary force, an unexpected rapids on the Thames. Enough had changed that Shelley's name could now be spoken in polite society, and handsome collected editions of his poems were widely available. Even his old College had accepted a gift in the previous year from Lady Jane Shelley (Mary's daughter-in-law) of an idealized sculpture of the poet, to be displayed near the site of his inglorious expulsion. Drowning never looked so good as in Edward Onslow Ford's reclining marble figure, with smooth hermaphroditic hips and, on the bronze base, a mourning muse.⁹ This sort of emotional appeal for clemency in Shelley's case--because of his angelic lyricism and otherworldly weakness--was part of the "official" image makeover well underway by the 1890s. Perhaps it is unfair to begrudge Shelley's heirs this desire for respectability after years of having inheritances withheld because of his "Satanic" writings, yet such developments came at the expense of Shelley as a poet of ideas, the core of his most interesting claims on later readers. Among those who voiced an appreciation of Shelley (the largest number remained, of course, his detractors), two factions emerged, and their incompatibility would put an end to the active career of the Shelley Society only six years after its optimistic launch in 1886.¹⁰ Many in the group resisted the application for membership of Edward

⁹See Rosenblum and Janson's *Nineteenth Century Art* (493) for a reproduction and unaccountably positive commentary on this sculpture. For the strange provenance of this Memorial, originally intended for the gravesite in Rome, see Sylva Norman's *The Flight of the Skylark* (1954), Chap XIII.

¹⁰Officially, the group did not dissolve until 1895, and its last financial liabilities lasted until 1902. These debts emerged largely because of printing far more material--both original studies and Shelley reprints--in the first few years of the Society than the subscription price could merit. See Norman 268-273.

Aveling, Marx's son-in-law, though William Michael Rosetti was able to persuade them that if any group should welcome champions of socialism it should be one dedicated to Shelley.¹¹ Sir Percy Florence Shelley, the poet's only surviving son with Mary, who now held the family baronetcy, was advised to have "no confidence in the promoters" of the Society, and held only a token membership (Norman 269). The best witness to the Centenary and this schism was not an impartial observer, but one who could speak to matters in which he was intimately involved and still give his readers the pleasures of farce, that Puritan Thersites, Bernard Shaw.

Shaw's most famous affiliation was with the Fabian Society, founded in 1890, but he was a member of many groups: it was the Age of Societies. The Dr. Furnivall who founded the Shelley Society had within the space of two decades also founded the Early English Text Society, the Ballad Society, the Chaucer Society, the New Shakespeare Society, the Browning Society, and the Wyclif Society (Norman 243). To the suggestion of forming a group for the study and discussion of Shelley, like a comedic stereotype he is said to have exclaimed, "By Jove, I will!" To be drawn to one meeting out of curiosity--as Gandhi went to meet the Vegetarian Society--would be to meet the members of another Society, and hear their earnest entreaties why the interests of the groups should be related. Such a heady atmosphere was difficult to sustain, not only because the study of modern letters would become increasingly incorporated into University curricula, but also because anyone not of independent means (like Salt) or a *flâneur* (like Shaw) could hardly make time for so many meetings. It is at once dismaying to see how such Societies could only

¹¹ For more on this controversy, see Salt's *Seventy Years Among Savages* 95.

reach those with the time to discuss ideas--even if their explicit focus was equality among the classes--and delightful to revisit a moment just preceding a departmentalization of knowledge which, whatever its benefits, created artificial boundaries between literary studies and other areas of knowledge.

Shaw certainly did not feel that he lived in a Golden Age of insight, and expected much from the less image-conscious truth-seekers of the future:

I make all allowances for the fact that we are passing through an epidemic of cowardice on the part of literary men and politicians which will certainly make us appear to the historians of 1992 the most dastardly crew that ever disgraced the platform and the press. (Shaming 322)

These comments appeared in Shaw's article for the *Albemarle Review* about the Centenary celebrations. His essay might be no more than a cheeky, occasional piece had he not been so moved to point out that the image of Shelley which many were claiming to be the transcendent truth about him proceeded in complete disregard for his most challenging and consistent themes. As Mark Kipperman has argued, Shelley "became a Romantic" in these years only by the exclusive featuring of his lyrics (not including the "interventionist" short pieces of 1819) and the obscuring of his longest and most ambitious poems. In this Salt and Shaw were in total agreement and absolutely correct. Shaw mimicked the position of the respectable revisionists:

'We want our great Shelley, our darling Shelley, our best noblest, highest of poets. We will not have it said that he was a Leveller, an Atheist, a foe to marriage, an advocate of incest. He was a little unfortunate in his first

marriage; and we pity him for it. He was a little eccentric in his vegetarianism; but we are not ashamed of that: we glory in the humanity of it (with morsels of beefsteak, fresh from the slaughter house, sticking between our teeth). We ask the public to be generous--to read his really great works, such as the *Ode to a Skylark*, and not to gloat over those boyish indiscretions known as *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus*, *Rosalind and Helen*, *The Cenci*, *The Masque of Anarchy*, &c., &c. Take no notice of the Church papers; for our Shelley was a true Christian at heart. (319)

This is one of the boldest attempts to reconfigure a writer's canon that I can think of; in Shelley studies, it is surely one of the least abstract. The balancing of one title against five and then the two "&c's" is a perfect Shavian touch. But his purpose here is more than to tear down the falsehood constructed by the Shelley Memorialites; he also champions an alternative. For after leaving the official celebration in Horsham--where he felt that the Sussex establishment would continue distorting Shelley's actual interests to the point of having a relief sculpture carved "representing Shelley in a tall hat, Bible in hand, leading his children on Sunday morning to the church of his native parish" (320)--he went to a meeting in London held by "working men who took Shelley quite seriously." This meeting was addressed and loosely arranged by G.W. Foote, President of the National Secular Society:

Mr. Foote's meeting, which was as spontaneous as the absence of committee and advertisement could make it, was composed for the most part of people whose lives had been considerably influenced by Shelley. . . .

An old Chartist who was present . . . rose to confess that . . . it was through Shelley that he got the ideas that led him to join the Chartists. . . .

The discussion of [Shelley's] life, which makes our literary *dilettanti* so horribly uneasy, cannot be checked, no matter how exquisitely they protest. (321)¹²

The meeting concluded with Foote reciting "Men of England," one of Shelley's most incendiary ballads, causing Shaw to wonder "[w]hat would have happened had anyone recited it at Horsham Possibly the police would have been sent for" (321). At this remove, such comments make the Horsham celebrants out to be easy targets, but despite the earnestly direct appeal by Shaw for honesty about what Shelley stood for, such candor was almost unheard of in his day. In all essentials, the radical yet understated Salt agreed with Shaw on what matters about Shelley, yet the two friends were almost alone in sharing these insights. Predictably, perhaps, Shaw believed that he fully comprehended Shelley, even in the poet's complicated (and contradictory) views on love; Salt tended to be more reserved in these matters.

The attempts by Salt and Shaw to re-focus Shelley's legacy on unpopular themes were nonetheless, as we have seen, based firmly in the texts that Shelley wrote, and not in an idealized notion of the poet based on an extremely selective reading of his lyrics. Those whom I have called "Memorialites" ignored this radical history at their own peril, for it was their Victorian excesses that made the poet's public reputation so ripe for devastation at the hands of the New Critics. Shaw and Eliot would have both rolled their eyes at the

¹² See Bouthaina Shaaban's "Shelley and the Chartists," and the discussion of Queen Mab in Chapter One.

recumbent figure of Onslow Ford's *Shelley Memorial*, but for different reasons: Shaw for the inaccuracy of its "pleading" for Shelley as a "privileged weakling"; Eliot for its aesthetic barrenness, its uncomplicated looking to the past for artistic models, and perhaps also for its banal dishonesty about the force of death. The Memorialite project took a range of forms-- culminating in Maurois' bestselling *Ariel: The Life of Shelley* (1924)-- which crowded out the spirited exchange of ideas about Shelley between adventurous, if purblind, modernists like Eliot, and Shelley's intellectual and activist heirs like Salt, Shaw, and Edward Carpenter. Since his death, Shelley's reputation has gone through almost total renovations, and of course one can only guess at the permanence of his current canonical status. Certainly the conferences and publications surrounding his Bicentenary in 1992 were more subtle in their critical approaches than any of the meetings Shaw attended in 1892. What remains important, especially if we are to be free of the "epidemic of cowardice among literary men and politicians" Shaw complained of then, is to allow Shelley's occasionally discomfiting words to lead us into active and reflective questioning of what passes for respectable behavior.

CHAPTER FIVE

DID SHELLEY ABANDON HOPE?

THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE AND THE CYCLES OF DESPAIR

When he drowned in the Bay of Spezia on July 8th, 1822, Shelley was at work on *The Triumph of Life*. Though he was not quite thirty, nine years had passed since *Queen Mab*, and most critics concur that he compressed an extremely varied career into these short years. After having attempted work in virtually every verse form and genre available in the English, Italian, and Classical Greek traditions, Shelley still found the structure of the mythopoetic dream-vision sufficiently versatile and evocative to favor its use for his most characteristic statements on politics, ethics, fame, and the question of how we should conduct our lives, both as individuals and as a society. *The Triumph of Life* resembles *Queen Mab* in that it is structured around a “waking dream,” where the speaker is guided through time and space to witness various spectacles of misery. But does it retain the hopeful vision at the heart of the earlier poem, developed at even greater length in Shelley’s notes, demanding and expecting radical reform?

A study like the present one, which uses Shelley’s attitudes towards diet and the natural world as a lens onto larger concerns about political violence and individual agency, cannot help but pay primary attention to the formative works where these ideas were first developed at length: *Queen Mab*, *Mont Blanc*, *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*; poems written between 1813 and 1819. It still remains to

follow these themes in detail into works of the last two years of Shelley's life, and a longer study could also explore *Hellas*, *The Witch of Atlas*, and the neo-platonic Nature of *Adonais* in the same detail as I have attempted with the earlier poems. Yet in the course of these readings, and especially in the previous chapter on Henry Salt, I have tried to make some wider claims about the directions that Shelley studies have gone in the 180 years since his vessel the *Don Juan* went down, claims which some readers might wish to dispute. These claims have been motivated by the relative scarcity of critical approaches which explore and complicate the role of the natural world in Shelley's literary imagination. Even more than *Mont Blanc*, *The Triumph of Life* has been discussed as an extremely abstract, interiorized, ungrounded text. This poem, which existed only as fragments of manuscript--chaotic even by Shelleyan textual standards--was first published by Mary in the *Posthumous Poems* of 1824; the most reliable critical edition has dozens of major and minor differences from this original, as well as from the later editions used by Salt, Shaw, and Eliot.¹ Partly because of this history, *The Triumph of Life* has become the occasion for some of the most original, influential, and occasionally, in my view, misleading commentary on Shelley's poetry. As they did in my discussion of Henry Salt, the criticism and influence of T.S. Eliot are involved in this, as *The Triumph of Life* was the one Shelley poem which he found repeated occasion to praise. More recent critics, including Paul de Man, Tilottama Rajan, and Arkady Plotnitsky, have made this poem central to discussions of Shelley's theory of language and his use of science.

¹ See Donald H. Reiman's *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study* (1965) for the documentation of these changes.

Even without such prestigious meta-commentary, this poem must be directly engaged by all readers of a green, nonviolent, hopeful Shelley, because he seems to come very close to saying that all such efforts at reform and amelioration of problems are in vain. Did Shelley abandon hope by 1822; or is the question frankly unsuitable for a poem which exists only as a fragment? The second half of this question should inspire our caution rather than our license, (*pace* de Man's "Shelley Disfigured"²), but the first half invites us to define the contours of Shelleyan hope and its corollary, despair. The particular despair of this poem has to do with the apparent futility of human effort: as the triumphal chariot of Life rolls over the multitude, even "the Wise, // the great, the unforgotten" of the world are trampled into indistinct foam (ll. 208-9; 163). Knowledge itself seems threatened in the vision presented to the speaker in his trance, as this "great stream of people" are "[a]ll hastening onward, yet none seemed to know / Whither he went, or whence he came, or why / He made one of the multitude" (ll. 47-49). This abnegation of memory, foresight, or self-consciousness does not extend to Rousseau, of course, whose tale dominates the last section of the fragment as we have it; yet the paucity of human comprehension in this crowd of accomplished personalities is disturbing. Little wonder, perhaps, that T.S. Eliot chose this poem to admire out of all of Shelley's works, for here we find an image of history as a wasteland of fragmented consciousness exactly a century before Eliot's poetic masterpiece. In Chapter Four, Eliot's deeply critical writings on Shelley were discussed in contrast to those of Henry Salt, but *The Triumph of Life*

² This essay first appeared in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979), a collection of essays by Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Jacques Derrida, and other Yale deconstructionists. Several of the essays use *The Triumph of Life* as an illustrative text for their approaches. A few pages of de Man's essay are guaranteed to make one want to read Henry Salt.

seemed to have impressed Eliot enough to keep Shelley from being relegated to the ashpile. In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, he addressed the changes in Shelley's brief career:

His views remained pretty fixed, though his poetic gift matured. It is open to us to guess whether his mind would have matured too; certainly, in his last, and to my mind greatest though unfinished poem, *The Triumph of Life*, there is evidence not only of better writing than in any previous long poem, but of greater wisdom:

Then what I thought was an old root that grew
 To strange distortion out of the hillside,
 Was indeed one of those (*sic*) deluded crew
 And that the grass, which methought hung so wide
 And white, was but his thin discoloured hair
 And that the holes he vainly sought to hide
 Were or had been eyes . . .

There is a precision of image and an economy here that is new to Shelley. But so far as we can judge, he never quite escaped from the tutelage of Godwin, even when he saw through the humbug as a man; and the weight of Mrs. Shelley must have been pretty heavy too. (90)

So much for complimenting Shelley! In addition to the gratuitous swipe at Mary Shelley (without whom no one would know the poem in any form), Eliot somewhat misquotes

Shelley, perhaps because of an older edition.³ But the most remarkable aspect of this passage is what Eliot means by “wisdom.” I would agree that “precision of imagery” and “economy” of diction energize this section of the poem, but if asked for an example of “wisdom” in Shelley I would certainly look to the great speeches of *Prometheus Unbound*, or “Ozymandias” instead of a descriptive passage like this one. What Eliot has found is a moment where Shelley posits an anthropocentric vision in the persona of the poem’s speaker. Usually in Shelley’s poetry--in *Mont Blanc*, for example--descriptions of the natural world include a sense of “awful doubt” about the power of the nonhuman world; he does not write about nature in strictly anthropocentric terms. But in the passage Eliot chooses the opposite happens: what looked like a hillside is revealed as a person. Is it never wisdom, then, when the hillside is a hillside? The Shelley Eliot chooses to exempt from general censure is the one who can temporarily look at nature from an alienated viewpoint, a perspective more like Eliot’s own. As I will argue below, this anti-ecological view does not permeate the whole poem, and exists in the poem as part of a dramatic situation, not necessarily as an expression of a change in Shelley’s thought.

For G. B. Shaw, who for all his pedantry knew a great deal more about dramatic effects than Eliot, *The Triumph of Life* did not pose a threat to the legacy of Shelley as the poet of revolutionary hope. He viewed it as a stylistic development, a new challenge:

And he did not go back upon his opinions in the least as he grew older. By the time he had begun *The Triumph of Life*, he had naturally come to think

³ I cite the lines as quoted in Eliot’s essay; they are noticeably different not only from more recent critical editions, but even those most widely available to Eliot: Hutchinson’s Oxford edition of 1904 and Rossetti’s 1870 edition, also popular in America. I have not found any edition where the lines look like this, suggesting a carelessness in Eliot’s transcription for which he, in turn, blames Shelley.

Queen Mab a boyish piece of work, not that what it affirmed seemed false to him or what it denied true, but because it did not affirm and deny enough. (318)

Part of Shaw's project, as we have seen, was to champion the longer poems rather than the lyrics, a shift which he would be glad to see has since been accomplished in Shelley studies. The dream-vision in *The Triumph of Life* makes greater demands on the speaker than that in *Queen Mab*, and Shaw may have been responding to the dramatic power of this situation. Shaw's use of "Boyish" is not, like Eliot's "adolescence," a comment on Shelley's ideas, but an acknowledgment that *The Triumph of Life* bears a solemnity and an awareness of sacrifice that *Queen Mab* had not yet begun to approach. A line such as "Hark! Whence that rushing sound?," from the first Canto of *Queen Mab* (line 45), had long since been aesthetically exceeded in Shelley's writing, even though the vision that the Fairy Mab showed Ianthe remained current.

Some of the critical attention *The Triumph of Life* receives is due to its obvious biographical importance as the major work in progress at the time of Shelley's death; but in recent decades this attention has increased because this poem seems like Shelley's most "postmodern" work. The poem features bold juxtapositions across time and space: Plato and Napoleon are brought together at last, generations before computer imaging, hypertext, or the old public television show *Meeting of the Minds*. Shelley's model for such effects, of course, is Dante; yet in the strictly calibrated world of the *Divine Comedy* one does not find such apparently motiveless actions as in Shelley's poem. Such actions, especially when they happen in crowds, are familiar to us in recent decades, and perhaps

lend themselves more readily to many people's imaginations than poems set on mountains. One effect of this, in recent criticism on this poem, is its identification as a "tragic landscape . . . both *postlapsarian* and *postmodern*" (269). Arkady Plotnitsky, in making this point, adds that *The Triumph of Life* has a particularly important status in the Shelley canon because it is "arguably the most quantum mechanical and the most postmodern, or even post-postmodern, of Shelley's works" (265). In Plotnitsky's reading, what is most prescient in Shelley's writings is not his views on the status of animals, for example, but how the motiveless actions of the "multitude" in this poem are figurations for the deconstruction of all theories of origin and causality. Plotnitsky brings to his discussion of the poem his understanding of Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity, and appreciates the metaphorical urgency of Shelley's poem as illustrative examples of this theory, even though, he argues, the poem "inscribes the death of reading and the death of writing, and thus its own death" (273). This is very different from what Shaw made of the poem. But Plotnitsky's declaration of the postmodernity of the poem's "landscape" seems consistent with those of other critics who read the poem forward into later theoretical debates.⁴

Though all canonical texts which continue to attract extended critical attention have been read, in recent decades, through the various lenses of postmodernism, few seem to excite the sense that they were written in the context of these theories quite like *The Triumph of Life*. One reason, already cited, is that the poem was not available in a well-edited version until 1965, at the moment when literary studies was about to change utterly into a more

⁴ Plotnitsky's use of the word "landscape" is particularly troubling, in my reading, because of its utter indifference to any dependence that humans (and human discourse) have on the natural world: "The features just described--indeterminacy, the radical loss in representation, fragmentation, irreducible multiplicity--are related to many by now familiar features of the postmodernist landscape" (264). At the very least, a more specific word than "landscape" might be used to acknowledge this distinction.

theoretically based pursuit. A more profound reason, helped by the fragmentary state of the poem, involves the unstable construction of the characters in the narrative. Shelley seems to be acutely aware of the limits of language to shape a consistent life story, and the moments of slippage in the vision, where chaos enters, allow for extraordinary opportunities to explore the deconstructive method, as in the work of Tilottama Rajan.

Yet even with all of this attention, another view of the poem seems merited, and despite my reservations about reading the poem “forward,” Shelley’s prescience makes uncanny demands. *The Triumph of Life* can tell us much about Shelley’s understanding of nature and its role over the course of his career, and provides a ground for understanding the subsequent development of discourse about the relationship of the individual to larger ethical and ecological responsibilities. By looking closely at the opening sections of the poem, and comparing the context of this vision to other moments in Shelley’s poetry, I hope to continue discussing *The Triumph of Life* without resorting to excessive conjecture about what Shelley might have gone on to do with it, nor to praise it primarily in terms of its preconfiguration of the twentieth-century specialties of chaotic crowd scenes and impending meaninglessness. For despair not to be a threat to Shelley would severely limit the power of his hope. He could not feel one so deeply without knowing intimately the power of the other, and *The Triumph of Life* embodies Shelley’s struggle with these emotions. Even at his most idealistic he is a restless, searching poet, who learned much in his short life about the difficulties of both political reform and poetic achievement.

Before the vision is “rolled” on the brain of the entranced speaker, the poem opens in a world that is not a creation of the waking dream, but the reality which serves as a foil for understanding this vision. Shelley delays the introduction of the “I” for twenty lines, allowing for a narrative world of the poem to take shape in which causal relationships not only exist, but are identified in specifically religious terms. Even for this densely lyrical poet, the compression of the opening lines is astounding:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task

Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth

Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask

Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth.

The smokeless altars of the mountain snows

Flamed above crimson clouds, and at the birth

Of light, the Ocean’s orison arose

To which the birds tempered their matin lay. (ll. 1-8)

The sun is compared to a benign spirit in the first line, but after that the harmonious relations between various parts of the Earth are simply asserted. Spatially, the action moves from the sun, to mountaintops higher than the clouds, to the air above the ocean: a Miltonic sweep of action in only eight lines. The religious imagery of altars and orisons continues as the sunlight finally reaches the ground:

All flowers in field or forest which unclose

**Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day,
 Swinging their censers in the element,
 With orient incense lit by the new ray**

Burned slow and unconsumably, and sent

Their odorous sighs up to the smiling air[.] (ll. 9-14)

Like the birds who consciously “temper” their song to the Ocean’s prompt, “all flowers” are personified not only by their “eyelids,” but also as bearers of censers. Thus the flowers are at once the priests of this religion and the subjects of worship, the image of unconsumed burning evoking God’s manifestation to Moses (Exodus 3: 1-6). To what purpose is Shelley using this simultaneity of meaning? Here he conflates pantheism with Christian practices and pagan rituals with extraordinary power, yet this world of immanent worship is nowhere identified as in need of reclamation by a savior. Such a configuration of natural and human history in terms of religious imagery is, of course, the premise of many major Romantic works, including Wordsworth’s “Prospectus to *The Recluse*.” Yet a more important model for Shelley’s cosmological imagination is Dante, from whom he learned not only the powerful range of *terza rima*, but also how to enfold great sweeps of time and distance into his verse. The description goes on to include the history of the Sun’s reign, and of the Earth itself:

And in succession due, did Continent,

Isle, Ocean, and all things that in them wear

The form and character of mortal mould

Rise as the sun their father rose, to bear

Their portion of the toil which he of old

Took as his own and then imposed on them[.] (ll. 15-20)

It may be possible to read the sun in this account as both tyrannical--as "imposed" seems to suggest--and as benevolent in his dissemination of vivifying power. In either case, the picture of reality we get in the opening lines is orderly, where all things of "mortal mould" carry an intrinsic understanding of "whither they went."

Yet before turning to the speaker who is outcast from this harmonic order because of "thoughts which must remain untold" (line 21), it is worth pausing on the extent to which this poem's setting differs from that of other alienated heroes in both contemporary and subsequent literature. It is neither a vulgar, mercantile, or violent world from which one needs refuge, nor has it faded into the light of common day, leaving one in need of spiritual nourishment. The reality of the dawn as described in the first twenty lines is one of astonishing beauty, comprehensible only to those who see in the opening flower that single part's participation in the whole. The effort to sustain such a wide angle of vision is analogous to the effort to sustain hope despite the constant pressure of discouragement from individual circumstances.

It is in this sense that we should understand Shelley's decision to begin the poem in this way in terms of the larger implications of his poetic career. Though it is not

particularly original to say that the speaker's crisis precipitates from his inharmonious existence with the natural world, such a view seems clearly supported by the poem as we have it. I pause to make such a point, in fact, because it requires one to view this poem not as a detached, "postmodern" effort, but thematically and metaphorically linked to Shelley's earlier works. For example, once the vision begins, we are told that the multitude "mixed in one mighty torrent did appear" (line 53). This metaphoric use of "torrent" to describe the crowd shifts quickly into the perception of literal waters, which the speaker somehow perceives above the dust and din. He says that the great stream of people,

weary with vain toil and faint for thirst

Heard not the fountains whose melodious dew

Out of their mossy cells forever burst

Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told

Of grassy paths, and wood lawns interspersed

With overarching elms and caverns cold,

And violet banks where sweet dreams brood, but they

Pursued their serious folly as of old. . . . (ll. 66-73)

These lines connect to consistent Shelleyan themes in several ways. First, waters which "forever burst" out of hidden sources figure frequently in his poetry, most significantly in *Mont Blanc*. That poem of six years earlier is most often discussed in terms of how the

outer landscape leads him to reflect upon the workings of his own mind. Whether or not other people are actually present as the poet looks across the Ravine of Arve, *Mont Blanc* is a poem of solitude and reflection: the “everlasting universe of things” is clearly not a multitude of people who parade before him. For the fountains in *The Triumph of Life*, we see that the “serious folly” of the multitude keeps them from hearing the waters; by extension, could we say that hearing the fountains and their “melodious dew” might keep one from pursuing such serious folly in the first place? It is a quandary, a test of listening and comprehension, which Shelley wrestled with in *Mont Blanc* as well. What, at its most demanding level, does it mean to hear? And if the fountains “forever burst,” as the Arve “ceaselessly bursts and raves” (line 11), why wouldn’t this eternal movement make itself intelligible, rather than inaudible, to the multitude? He considers his answer at the end of part three of *Mont Blanc*:

Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
 Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
 By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
 Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel. (ll. 80-83)

A reading of *The Triumph of Life* which finds despair victorious in the poem would be supported by the reappearance of “the wise, and great, and good,” who function positively in *Mont Blanc*, as “the Wise // The great, the unforgotten” who get dragged by the car of Life. It does seem, at first, as though Shelley has given up hope. Yet in the earlier poem the situation of hope is hardly unconstrained, as the litany of qualifying, subordinate clauses attests. In *The Triumph of Life*, fewer people seem to escape the car of Life than

the assumed set of sympathetic spirits whom Shelley speaks of in *Mont Blanc*, but there are *some* who do all the same. They are held to an extremely high standard of greatness--of water-hearing ability, as it were--which not even Rousseau can achieve. Yet they are absent from the crushed multitude, and though six years of experience may have made Shelley warier, any loss of hope that this suggests is far from total.

A second way of understanding the lines quoted above from *The Triumph of Life* involves the "breeze which from the forest told / Of grassy paths," which lead to "violet banks where sweet dreams brood" (ll. 69-70; 72). This personification of the "speaking" forest leads to dreams which run counter to the "serious folly" which keeps people chained to the car. The banks are nearby, but the multitude are not aware of this proximity because the paths leading there are indicated in a language not understood by the participants in the pageant's forceful "folly." In *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley reverses the metaphor to achieve a comparable effect. Rather than assigning human qualities to the forest, he urges a different multitude--those who knew "whither they went" when they gathered in St. Peter's Field--to resemble a forest in order to let a different force pass by:

‘Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war,

‘And let Panic, who outspeeds
The career of armed steeds

Pass, a disregarded shade

Through your phalanx undismayed.' (ll. 319-326)

These triumphal cars--of Panic, as of Life--run on kinetic energy. In *The Triumph of Life*, the crowd turns frantically against each other, "Some flying from the thing they feared and some / Seeking the object of another's fear" (ll. 54-55). The result of this flying and seeking is that "the throng grew wilder" (75), bringing on the appearance of the chariot. In *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley imagines stillness in the crowd, thus robbing the chariot of its kinetic fuel. The model for effective action is from nature: we must imitate the very forests we yet struggle to hear and interpret. The complexities of this are legion, starting with the difference between flesh and wood, and between the "voice" of the forest and that of human consciousness. But beyond even this is the problem of collective identity. When a crowd resembles a forest to stop an advancing army, such a subordination of the individual self seems a consummation devoutly to be wished, but to imagine Voltaire and Plato being run over by a blind charioteer is another story.

Shelley uses the question of how we participate in and are conscious of the order of nature to critique the idea of individualism itself. The terror of *The Triumph of Life* comes from the apparent obliteration of distinct personalities as the car of Life drags and tramples almost everyone. The choice of Rousseau to act as Virgil to the speaker's Dante demonstrates how even an acutely sensitive, famous, popularly effective individual is subject to Life's trajectory. Perhaps Wordsworth would have provided for Shelley an even closer example of an accomplished life, but only the dead are included in this re-visioning of the poet's descent into Hades. It may be another source of hope that the

living are not yet trampled; they may yet have time to free themselves from the car. The “one sad thought” of which the poet’s heart is sick (line 299) must be the dread that even an achievement to which any one person would be bold to aspire--such as that of Rousseau, Plato, Alexander, or Napoleon--still condemns one to the foamy multitude.

For a political reformer, or a poet looking for an audience, the specter of such futile results could reasonably lead to despair, but only if a key aspect of this ambition is the quest for fame. Though “they of Athens and Jerusalem” (line 134) who escape being chained to the car are also among the most famous names of world history, Shelley praises Socrates and Jesus here (as elsewhere in his works) for their selflessness, because they “put aside the diadem / Of earthly thrones and gems” (ll. 132-33). Thus fame remains a versatile theme for Shelley: in many early poems, and notably in “Ozymandias,” it is a vain delusion of tyrants, which if they should realize its fleetingness might lead to humbler uses of their power; in *The Triumph of Life*, this vision of fame’s promised end has developed into a critique of the modern cult of the individual. There is no fame in nature, one might say: a daffodil sings its part in the choir, living well as an integral yet indistinguishable part of the group. Exactly what a human *should* do at dawn as part of the natural progression described in the poem’s opening is, of course, difficult to say, and beyond the scope of any single poem or interpretation. Yet to divest the self from the desire for fame, or to use the powers of consciousness to tame “the mutiny within” which calls almost all of us to act out of self-interest, these seem to be issues which Shelley wrestles with allegorically in this poem. The resulting disorientation resembles exactly the sort of problem modern ecologists wrestle with: the sense of personal diminishment that

can attend one's learning to think of oneself as an organism, or of humans as simply one species among many, with no ontologically privileged status. Despair at the limits of human life can never be held comfortably at bay from one with such thoughts, and its appearance at times, in both Shelley's poetry and in the world at large, seems inevitable. What distinguishes this poem, even in its fragmentary state, is how it is at once threatened by actions that appear random--Life as a car driven by a blindfolded charioteer--and set in terms of a description of life on earth as harmonious and causally connected. Shelley would be less interesting as a poet, and less important to understand today, if his hope or despair ever canceled out the other. If the sources of despair seem embarrassingly manifest in this world of war and injustice, the sources of hope require the tireless eye to present them. To write such a hymn to natural beauty as the first twenty lines of this poem, and then go on to test them to see if his description sustains an intellectually exacting critique, is a gesture characteristic of Shelley at any stage of his career, and a mark of the complexity of his achievement.

Such a reading, guardedly optimistic as it is, is in marked contrast to some of the best-known readings of the poem. Paul de Man's approach in "Shelley Disfigured" could hardly be more different in terms of what it makes of *The Triumph of Life*, and what it projects from reading the poem back onto the world. It may also illustrate what I hope is a difference between my sense of Shelley's significance and much of what is written about him. de Man's essay concludes:

The Triumph of Life warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that

precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence.

(73)

Are we to take this to mean that the poem gives us this warning about the world in general? Or just about events that occur within the dramatic action of the poem? In either case, this statement is more than inaccurate, it monstrously misrepresents Shelley's poetics. It is true that Shelley worried about randomness and chaotic action, and also true that his own life--and this very poem's composition--was subject to the power of accidental death. But de Man is wrong because his approach is denatured: it is not the randomness of death that gives it such horrible power, but its inevitability. One could be "with nature reconciled" if nature were not at once, as Shelley calls it in the "Ode to the West Wind," both "Destroyer and Preserver" (line 14). The source of beauty, this daedal earth, also takes away each individual, including those we love, including ourselves: that we can call this process "natural" does not help our pain, no matter how much we claim to love nature. Shelley meditated on these matters for his entire career. What is lost in saying, as de Man does here, that nothing ever happens in positive or negative relation to anything that came before or after is the fact that Shelley, throughout his career, responded to randomness and mystery by looking to the future with hope. How a statement like this one of de Man's could be accepted as critically influential, or illuminating about Shelley's poetry, is astonishing to me. As the dawn arrives in *The Triumph of Life*, ignored by those engaged in "serious folly," so do the seasons follow meaningfully upon each other elsewhere in Shelley's poetry: "O Wind, / If Winter comes,

can Spring be far behind?" I cannot think of a clearer example than that of finding hope within the cycles of the natural world. Let us hope that the question remains rhetorical, and that its answer continues to find a place in the hopeful actions of the living.

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APPENDIX

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HENRY STEPHENS SALT

My explicit concern in Chapter Four is on Salt as a Shelleyan; yet as I hope my argument makes clear, to be a Shelleyan as practiced by Salt invites and perhaps even demands a wide range of interests and expertise. This selected bibliography is in chronological order, indicating the recurring themes and varied developments of Salt's career.

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