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The Senior Thesis of

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The Lighthouse in the Fickle Storm—Love in the World Built by Percy

Shelley

A phenomenon that always fascinates me is that when it comes to almost any study focused on the Romantics—especially on those of the “Satanic School”—the discussion never stays within the limit of their writings. At a certain point, biographical events are bound to be mentioned and cast a considerable influence on the reading of their works. While the young poets’ flaring personalities and dramatic life experience are two of the most apparent reasons for the public’s interest in their personal lives, I think another reason that readers tend to overlook is that these poets started their literary careers fairly young in age, granting more space for personal growth to shake their belief about certain ideals they expressed in poetry. Especially when the nucleus of discussion falls onto love—the foremost and forever source of inspiration for poetry and literature in general—all love poems are granted another layer of meaning when we know when and where the poets wrote each of them, and who they were in love with at the time.

In that regard, compared to chaotic and mostly sexual “love” life of Byron, the love life of Percy Bysshe Shelley has attracted more scholarly scrutiny, due to both its complicated yet traceable nature and Shelley’s own obsession to theorize and present love in his writing. Despite the poet himself making hardly any claims that his vision of love had undergone any major changes, many scholars have presented their analysis of how Shelley’s has evolved along the progression of his works and life. Interestingly, among the scholars,

there are those like Shahidha Bari (2012) who believes Shelley's understanding of love gradually becomes less idealized and more concerned with reality, while there are others, like David Bromwich (2003) who argues his love ideals matured into a concept even more purified and positive. My essay will lead us through the arguments from each side, and attempt to present my own conclusion, through a close reading on some of Shelley's poetry, that in his world love is the steadfast center that grants meaning to all the other elements of life.

One of the trends scholars like Bari and Holmes have noticed in Shelley's timeline is that despite having started experiencing romantic passions early—his first love dated back to his cousin Harriet Grove when he was 17, or even much earlier if we take a guess when his affection began to glow in secret—Shelley wrote the majority of his love poems in the later stages of his life, after the end of his first marriage with Harriet Westbrook in 1816. Of course, before that, love is still one of the major themes in his poetry, but Shelley seems to prefer conceptualizing love itself directly in his journals, letters and more philosophical and abstract poems like *Alastor* or *Epipsychidion*. After 1816, however, the love poems he wrote became closer to the traditional sense, as they reflect romantic admiration towards a specific person. Bari, as he focuses his studies on these love poems, categorizes them both in a generally chronological order and according to the three major addressees: Sophia Stacey, a family friend who met Shelley in Florence in 1819; Jane Williams (the wife of Captain Edward Williams who famously drowned with Shelley in the end) with whom Shelley grew obsessively infatuated since 1822; and of course, Mary Shelley, his wife.

Shelley's own statement about his understanding of love is fortunately not difficult to summarize. Many scholars would usually present a block quote from the poet himself, from his essay *On Love* written in his personal notebook sometime around 1814-15:

If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own; that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness.

Pg.71, *Shelley on Love*

Despite the extensiveness of Shelley's paraphrase, the center of his ideology points obviously to a fascination with a sense of union: that the two people in love should eventually become one, and able to see the image of their selves in each other. Scholars from Shelley's time and modern days would sometimes even attribute such an ideal to an adolescent narcissism, not only because Shelley's persistent projection of self into his portrait of love, but also, as Richard Holmes suggests, due to his "insatiable drive to pursue the tantalizing woman of dreams in preference to the chosen woman of reality." (Pg.66, *Shelley on Love*) According to critics such as D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley and F.R. Leavis, such "adolescent narcissism" is something which Shelley never outgrew.

However, in that regard, Bari's studies suggest otherwise. Surely, in the year 1819, when most of his love poems were composed for Sophia Stacey, the theme of union and self reflection is still omnipresent in Shelley's affectionate writings. Take the most famous, *To Sophia*, for example:

Thou art fair, and few are fairer
Of the Nymphs of earth or ocean;

They are robes that fit the wearer—
Those soft limbs of thine, whose motion
Ever falls and shifts and glances
As the life within them dances.

(1-6)

In the first stanza of the poem, the “Nymphs of earth or ocean” represent the outward physical beauty that wrap around the lover’s “soft limbs,” while the spiritual beauty—her soul, her passion, her “life”—“within them dances.” Therefore, in this rather mythical imagery, the subject of the poet’s love—the “thou”—makes her entrance as a center of union, a bridge that connects the inside and outside, the physical and the spiritual. Furthermore, by showing love’s power of blurring boundaries between opposite concepts, the first stanza also begins a chain of interlocking connections that is, in fact, guiding the progression of the poem. Here, it transforms the living “Nymphs” into inanimate “robes,” and then links the “robes” back again to the lovers “life within”. This interlocking chain of connections continues as we move into the lovers’ inner world:

Thy deep eyes, a double Planet,
Gaze the wisest into madness
With soft clear fire,—the winds that fan it
Are those thoughts of tender gladness
Which, like zephyrs on the billow,
Make thy gentle soul their pillow.

(7-12)

In Stanza 2, “my” mind is affected by “your” “gaze”; your “gaze” is powered by “my” “tender thoughts”; and eventually, “my” “thoughts” are supported by “thy gentle soul.” The connections are both vertically straight—from “gaze” to “thoughts” and then to “soul”—and horizontally back and forth between the narrator and his lover. The image, helped by the enjambment between lines, is almost as if love is a string sewing the two of them and each side’s elements together. More interactions between the two

sides of love start to appear in the next stanza:

If, whatever face thou paintest
In those eyes, grows pale with pleasure,
If the fainting soul is faintest
When it hears thy harp's wild measure,
Wonder not that when thou speakest
Of the weak my heart is weakest.

(13-18)

In Stanza 3, the lovers are merged even more tightly together as the presence of “me” is shown as a reflection “painted in those [thy] eyes”. It is a rather clever choice to mention the harp skill of the lover here, since the way the narrator reacts—“grows pale”, “faintest” and “weakest”—solely from the actions of his love is exactly like the way a chord reacts to a harpist's fingers. Not to mention that the concept of music itself implies harmony, that is essentially a union of notes.

As dew beneath the wind of morning,
As the sea which whirlwinds waken,
As the birds at thunder's warning,
As aught mute yet deeply shaken,
As one who feels an unseen spirit
Is my heart when thine is near it.

(19-24)

The last stanza ends the poem by drawing a picture of nature in which every element conflicts with each other. At first this might appear as an anomaly due to the poem's previous emphasis on union, yet if we take a look at this picture under Shelley's philosophy, we would find that conflict itself often leads to merger. The dew, the sea and the birds would no longer remain the same, after a clash with the wind, the whirlwinds and the thunder, as when the latter conflicts with the former, it leaves its mark and influence on it and renders it something new. In the poem's own words, all of them might still be “mute” yet in fact the conflicts leave them “deeply shaken.” So is the narrator shaken by his love—the presence of his lover has made him different,

because the connection between them has already altered him, or both of them, into one new being.

While it might still require some degree of interpretation to recognize the theme of union in *To Sophia*, the other poem, *Love's Philosophy*, presents a similar concept through a much more obvious metaphor. The poem is subtitled by Mary Shelley as *An Anacreontic* (a Greek poetic form that celebrates love and wine) for its lighthearted and cute playfulness, as we can see here:

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?—

(1-8)

In the first half of this short poem about his “philosophy,” the metaphor Shelley picks for love is water and air—both omnipresent in the world of nature, and both shapeless and therefore subject to change and amalgamation. Again, the boundary blurring power of love from *To Sophia* is shown in this poem, but only stronger and more naturally. While love in *To Sophia* connects different elements together, in the first half of *Love's Philosophy* there is essentially no such thing as different elements: When the fountain mingles with the river, it does not only add to the river, but actually becomes part of the river, since they are both water by nature; So is the wind, as there is never such a thing as a boundary in between air. In that regard, we can say that *Love's Philosophy* is reflecting, to a greater extent, Shelley's own ideology described in *On Love*: when two people are in love, what they find attractive in each other is essentially themselves. Thus water mingles with

water, and wind with wind, for two people in love are bound to be similar people in nature. That interpretation could have been true if the poem stops at the first stanza. The second half the poem, while seemingly repeating a similar plea to the first half, actually elevates the power of love to an even higher degree:

See the mountains kiss high heaven
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What is all this sweet work worth
If thou kiss not me?

(9-16)

While in the little world built by the first stanza only things of the same essence mix with each other, in the second half of the poem the world becomes vaster with more elements within. There are not only shapeless substances like heaven, waves, sunlight and moonbeams, but also solid objects like mountains, flowers and the earth. More importantly, when “the sunlight clasps the earth,” and when “the moonbeams kiss the sea,” what we see is the tangible and intangible things of different nature mixing with each other. If love is what makes all these minglings happen, then instead of people fall in love because of seeing their own reflection in each other, it is more the opposite way, as love itself makes different people find themselves in each other since they are actually becoming each other the moment they fall in love. In this case, love in *Love’s Philosophy* does not only possess the bridging power as in *To Sophia*, but also pulls people closer together by subtly merging their personalities into a new one.

However, when the timelines moves onto the 1820s, and when Shelley’s infatuation moves onto Jane Williams, the aforementioned boundary-blurring

power of love dramatically diminishes in Shelley's love poems. There are scholars, like Tilar Mazzeo (06), who have argued that Shelley's idealized figuration of love and union is still to some extent preserved in his poems to Jane, especially as most of these poems have music as a frequent theme that represents beauty through harmony. Yet compared to the effusive and eloquent representation in the poems to Sophia, Shelley's emphasis on his own ideal from *On Love* has no doubt been modified into moments of subtlety. Sometimes, instead of two lovers merging into one, we can even see the exact opposite, as in *With a Guitar, to Jane*:

Ariel to Miranda:--Take
This slave of Music, for the sake
Of him who is the slave of thee,
And teach it all the harmony
In which thou canst, and only thou,
Make the delighted spirit glow,
Till joy denies itself again,
And, too intense, is turned to pain;
For by permission and command
Of thine own Prince Ferdinand,
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken;
Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who,
From life to life, must still pursue
Your happiness;--for thus alone
Can Ariel ever find his own.

(1-16)

In comparison to the more general and impersonal "thou" and "I" from the poems to Sophia, characters start to have more detailed names and roles in relation to each other: "Ariel" to "Miranda" is the deliverer of the guitar, an admirer of her music, a guardian spirit and likely a not-so-secret admirer, while there is a "Prince Ferdinand" to whom the love of "Miranda" already belongs. We may still catch a slight trace of Shelley's ideal on self-reflection in the lines, "Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who, /From life to life, must still pursue /Your happiness;--for thus alone /Can Ariel ever find his own" in terms of

“Ariel” still needing to go after Miranda’s affection in order to find his own identity, yet even that comes with a distracting vibe of frustration which we never saw in the poems to Sophia:

Since Ferdinand and you begun
Your course of love, and Ariel still
Has tracked your steps, and served your will;
Now, in humbler, happier lot,
This is all remembered not;
And now, alas! the poor sprite is
Imprisoned, for some fault of his,
In a body like a grave;--
From you he only dares to crave,
For his service and his sorrow,
A smile today, a song tomorrow.

(32-42)

Although still voluntarily and actively serving and loving Miranda after knowing she is in love with Ferdinand, Ariel nonetheless chooses to tell Miranda directly about how much it pains him to be still in love with her. Similar sentiments are seen in another poem, *To Jane: The Invitation*:

I leave this notice on my door
For each accustomed visitor:—
“I am gone into the fields
To take what this sweet hour yields;—
Reflection, you may come tomorrow,
Sit by the fireside with Sorrow.—
You with the unpaid bill, Despair,—
You, tiresome verse-reciter, Care,—
I will pay you in the grave,—
Death will listen to your stave.
Expectation too, be off!
Today is for itself enough;
Hope, in pity mock not Woe
With smiles, nor follow where I go;
Long having lived on thy sweet food,
At length I find one moment’s good
After long pain—with all your love,
This you never told me of.”

(29-46)

This poem, similarly, while showing us a moment of love and union in the end, feels the need to elaborate on the pain of love’s pining and waiting. Some scholars, like Michael O’Neill and Donald Reiman(1997), interpreted

such complaints as a reflection of Shelley's personal intensified sexual desire and frustration, as one of the main reasons he sought close company to Jane and her husband was because own married life with Mary was not exactly pleasant at the time. However, whatever reason it was, it is clear that Shelley's view of love in the poems to Jane, though not necessarily any less passionate than in the Sophia poems, has become less perfect as the young poet seems to start realizing and accepting the possible negativities--jealousy, frustration, despair—that love can bring as well as union and joy. Perhaps the ending of another poem to Jane *An Ariette for Music* implies this subtle change in his sentiments best:

Though the sound overpowers,
Sing again, with your dear voice revealing
A tone
Of some world far from ours,
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.

(19-24)

The world in which all things “are one”, at this point, already seems like a world “far from ours” to the poet.

Ironically, when it comes to the poems written for Mary, his actual wife, the most dominant sentiments in Shelley's love become hardship and desperation. Before he even starts analyzing specific poems, Bari points out a noteworthy fact that most of Shelley's poems to Mary are either unfinished or filled with lacunae. He interprets this as a sign of the poet's struggle to express both his love to Mary and the joy he gets from such love as fervently and confidently as he does with his affection for Sophia or Jane. Take the excerpt *O Mary dear, that you were here* for example:

O Mary dear, that you were here
With your brown eyes bright and clear.
And your sweet voice, like a bird

Singing love to its lone mate
In the ivy bower disconsolate;
Voice the sweetest ever heard!
And your brow more...
Than the ... sky
Of this azure Italy.
Mary dear, come to me soon,
I am not well whilst thou art far;
As sunset to the sphered moon,
As twilight to the western star,
Thou, beloved, art to me.
O Mary dear, that you were here;
The Castle echo whispers 'Here!'

(1-16)

The first “oddity” we might notice here is that the wording in this poem appears to be much more simplified and uncreative than Shelley’s usual style. Compared to frequent and passionate similes or metaphors in all the love poems we previously mentioned, this one starts with a set of direct description followed by one brief simile with rather common spoken words like “brown, bright, clear, sweet and lone.” Besides that, most of the words and lines are used for describing the superficial aspects—the “eyes” and “voice”—of Mary, instead of the narrator’s own feelings and how it resonates with hers, which is one of the most prevalent themes in the poems to Sophia and Jane. Even when the poem does address the narrator’s inner feelings, it covers it with two similes in which there are no emotion related adjectives involved, rendering the sentiment rather vague and underwhelming:

As sunset to the sphered moon,
As twilight to the western star,
Thou, beloved, art to me.

(12-14)

Of course, the most glaring anomaly most readers notice is not even the over-simplified and uninspiring wordings and similes, but the lines 7-8, where the lacunae appear:

And your brow more...
Than the ... sky

(8-9)

It is not unusual for a poet like Shelley to leave unfilled blanks in manuscripts and come back to it. What is noteworthy though, is that this is one of the few poems he left forever incomplete. The unresolved difficulty in even finishing his lines does not only occur in this poem. Another similar example can be found in *My Dearest Mary, Wherefore Hast Thou Gone*:

My dearest Mary, wherefore hast thou gone,
And left me in this dreary world alone?
Thy form is here indeed—a lovely one—
But thou art fled, gone down a dreary road
That leads to Sorrow's most obscure abode.
Where...
For thine own sake I cannot follow thee
Do thou return for mine...

(1-8)

Ironically, it looks as if the narrator really “cannot follow” as he cannot even complete the previous line that is supposed to describe to “where” his lover’s spirit has fled to. Instead of seeing all the lacunae as Shelley’s struggle to express, I understand them as his struggle to admit that he simply cannot bring himself to feel as fervently and positively as he did towards Sophia and Jane. The word “thee” is a common word and should not post much difficulty for a poet like Shelley to rhyme with it, on top of that he cannot even find a proper response to “do thou return for mine” without sounding too forced. The failure to bring himself to express enthusiasm towards Mary is also reflected in Shelley’s other poems addressed to his wife, which straightforwardly add constant themes of exhaustion and forced optimism. For example, in *To Mary*:

The world is dreary,
And I am weary
Of wandering on without thee, Mary;
A joy was erewhile
In thy voice and thy smile,
And 'tis gone, when I should be gone too, Mary.

(1-6)

And in *Invocation to Misery*—which although does not address Mary directly, is argued by Bari to be another poem to Mary due to its written time and place, the personification of “Misery” as the poet’s lover and the fact that the word sounds a lot like Mary’s name—we have:

Come, be happy!—sit near me,
Shadow-vested Misery:
Coy, unwilling, silent bride,
Mourning in thy robe of pride,
Desolation—deified!

(1-6)

It is not hard to notice that the wordings, for describing both the narrator and his lover, are becoming generally more brooding and frustrated, contrast starts to form instead of the harmony in the Sophia poems and the one-sided dependency in the Jane poems. In *To Mary* the lover is “gone” when the narrator is trapped in this “dreary world” when he thinks he “should be gone too”; In *O Mary dear, that you were here* the lover is “the sunset” and “the twilight” to the narrator’s “sphered moon” and “western star”—in both cases they are separated natural elements that are not supposed to co-exist, as twilight happens only after the sun is below the horizon and starlight is the dimmest during nights with a full moon; In *Invocation to Misery*, the lover is “shadow-vested”, “coy, unwilling, silent” and “mourning”, a “deified desolation”, the narrator is trying with all his spirit to stay active and optimistic:

'Tis an evil lot, and yet
Let us make the best of it;
If love can live when pleasure dies,
We two will love, till in our eyes
This heart's Hell seem Paradise.

(16-20)

The line “let us make the best of it”, according to Bari, is “more pragmatic than poetic” as Shelley seems to be at least “frank in the analysis of his broken marital life” and still trying to maintain it with the joy he used to find in

love. The poem goes on for several stanzas of attempting to cheer Mary up, but eventually the narrator's attempt of optimism bitterly fails as the poem ends with a stanza rather gloomy and heartbreaking:

All the wide world, beside us,
Show like multitudinous
Puppets passing from a scene;
What but mockery can they mean,
Where I am—where thou hast been?
(61-65)

As we see, in the end, after the cheerful façade fades away, the narrator still returns to the depressing loneliness prevalent in all the Mary poems.

Sometimes, depression is also reflected in the form of nostalgia, which is in fact the preference to a more careless and loving time that is no longer present in Shelley's life. Such as in *The Past*:

Wilt thou forget the happy hours
Which we buried in Love's sweet bowers,
Heaping over their corpses cold
Blossoms and leaves, instead of mould?
Blossoms which were the joys that fell,
And leaves, the hopes that yet remain.

Forget the dead, the past? Oh, yet
There are ghosts that may take revenge for it,
Memories that make the heart a tomb,
Regrets which glide through the spirit's gloom,
And with ghastly whispers tell
That joy, once lost, is pain.

(1-12)

The "happy hours" of love is already "buried" and "cold", covered by the "blossoms" which are now nothing but a painful reminder of the joy they used to find in love. Even though the poet wants to believe there are still "hopes that yet remain", he is obviously doubtful if his lover is still going to remember there used to be a happier time for the two of them. If the first time he asks her "wilt thou forget" in line 1 can still be seen as an invocation to memory, then the second time he asks "forget the dead, the past?" in line 9 appears a

lot closer to a frustrated assumption that their happier time is already meaning no more to her. The tone of the poem also turns more desperate and aggressive after line 9, stating that the sweet memory of love, once forgotten, has become nothing but a “tomb”, a mere monument of something forever gone. “Regrets” starts to fill his world as if the poet is admitting that their love has become different from the sweet inspiration and source of happiness it used to be. In the end, perhaps nothing sums what Shelley experienced during his struggle to maintain his relationship with Mary than the last line: “That Joy, once lost, is pain.”

If the Sophia poems comprise passionate, courtly emotions and Shelley’s purest idealization of romance, and the Jane poems are a delicate balance between the excitements from loving someone and the melancholy from the feeling being unrequited, then the Mary poems are the reflection of the pain Shelley has gone through to admit that love’s power has its limits and cannot always keep the lovers away from real life misery. In all the Mary poems he attempts to invoke love as a distraction to Mary’s mourning over her miscarriage, but in none is Mary actually brought back to happiness and all the failures eventually drag Shelley himself into a pond of sadness and frustration. He has to admit that either his love to Mary is not as strong as he wants, or that love itself is not powerful enough to be, as he once pictured, “the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists.” (Pg.71, *Shelley on Love*) Such increasing recognition of the imperfection in love sums up Bari’s side of argument, that, as Shelley became more involved with the real world, he had to step down from his spiritual ideal into the acceptance that love is not always the positive

force that only brings people together. Sometimes it hurts people, and sometimes it even keeps people further apart.

In comparison to Bari, David Bromwich (2002) decided to focus less on Shelley's personal life experience and actual romantic relationships, but rather on the trail of Shelley's more philosophical works, namely *Alastor* and the poetic drama *Prometheus Unbound*, in which the poet directly theorizes his understanding of love as a concept without necessarily addressing a particular lover. *Alastor*, written fairly early in Shelley's literary career, unsurprisingly reflects a great deal on the union and "narcissism" theme that he mentioned in *On Love* and which we analyzed in the poems to Sophia Stacey. *Alastor* narrates the journey of a young, lonesome poet from the ruins of one ancient empire to another. Once he reaches "the vale of Cashmire," he starts to have a dream about an ideal lover for him:

Till in the vale of Cashmire, far within
Its loneliest dell, where odorous plants entwine
Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower,
Beside a sparkling rivulet he stretched
His languid limbs. A vision on his sleep
There came, a dream of hopes that never yet
Had flushed his cheek. He dreamed a veiled maid
Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.
Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought; its music long,
Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held
His inmost sense suspended in its web
Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues.
(145-157)

Where the dream of love happens, even the plants are "entwined" with each other, just like the fountain and river, and the moonbeams kissing the sea in the poems to Sophia Stacey. Furthermore, when it comes to this lover for the poet, Shelley seems to deliberately avoid giving detailed description of her physical appearance by simply telling us her face is "veiled." Instead, he

chooses to focus on the more abstract elements he finds more important in making someone a lover: the sense of “likeness”, that “connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists” which he described in *On Love* (Pg.76, *Shelley on Love*). The lover’s voice, again, like love in the Sophia poems, brings unity and connections within nature as it is “like woven sounds of streams and breezes.” Yet more directly, the poet’s craving for “likeness,” without needing any more sophisticated similes, is expressed in the line, “Her voice was like the voice of his own soul/Heard in the calm of thoughts.” From here, love continues to wield its power of mixing as it starts to render the identity of the two lovers as one:

Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,
And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
Thoughts the most dear to him, and poesy,
Herself a poet...

(158-161)

The alternating use of the “he” and “she” pronouns in these lines, as it emphasizes the element of likeness to an extreme, is also implying another major theme in *Alastor*: loneliness. As we saw just a few lines previous, this dream of love takes place “...far within/ Its[Cashmire’s] loneliest dale,” and when this dream ends, what the poet experiences is an irrepressible feeling of emptiness and disappointment:

The distinct valley and the vacant woods,
Spread round him where he stood. Whither have fled
The hues of heaven that canopied his bower
Of yesternight? The sounds that soothed his sleep,
The mystery and the majesty of Earth,
The joy, the exultation? His wan eyes
Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven.

(195-202)

All in a sudden, the frequent use of words like “entwine,” “woven,” “near” and “like” are replaced by the likes of “distinct,” “vacant,” “wan” and “empty.” In

fact, in this long poem that contemplates love, loneliness is ironically the omnipresent driving force behind the aught of *Alastor's* progression. The poet in the poem, while walking across the human and natural worlds, always seems to be rather detached from both. Although he is supposed to be the center of the poem's plot, the readers are told extremely little about this so called protagonist. The only life events we know about the poet is his death, which is introduced to us even before his journey starts:

There was a Poet whose untimely tomb
No human hands with pious reverence reared,
But the charmed eddies of autumnal winds
Built o'er his mouldering bones a pyramid
Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness:—
A lovely youth,—no mourning maiden decked
With weeping flowers, or votive cypress wreath,
The lone couch of his everlasting sleep:—
Gentle, and brave, and generous,—no lorn bard
Breathed o'er his dark fate one melodious sigh:
He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude.

(50-60)

As a result of these lines, the poet starts off as a lonesome figure who is respected by the poem's narrator—or presumably Shelley himself—yet not understood by the rest of the world in which he lives, and since he is introduced by his death, we know such loneliness is likely to stay with him till his end. The “intended moral,” in Bromwich's opinion, is that “...this hero is a spirit of youth and renovation, the passionate heart of the age, an example of the good who die young. He is a creature of ardent love, and the world does not understand love: the web of human things must be changed if such a catastrophe is not to become the pattern for all generous feeling.” However, I believe there should be another layer of meaning added to that. As the poem progresses, the reader soon becomes aware that the poet's loneliness is not a result of his own desire. On the contrary, on multiple occasions, the poet

finds solitude unbearable and feels puzzled by his lack of romantic companionship. For example:

...A swan was there,
Beside a sluggish stream among the reeds.
It rose as he approached, and with strong wings
Scaling the upward sky, bent its bright course
High over the immeasurable main.
His eyes pursued its flight.—"Thou hast a home,
Beautiful bird; thou voyagest to thine home,
Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
With thine, and welcome thy return with eyes
Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.
And what am I that I should linger here,
With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes,
Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heaven
That echoes not my thoughts?"...

(275-290)

The answer to why he is always alone while desperately seeking love, in my opinion, is exactly because of the poet's extreme obsession about likeness in love. The perfect lover for him, as his dream implies, needs to be so attuned to his thoughts and soul that the only person he can be truly in love with eventually becomes a mirror image of himself. As a result, the love presented in *Alastor* is essentially a form of disguised narcissism. There is no way to tell if Shelley was self-aware or would agree with such a claim at the time he composed *Alastor*, but it is definitely plausible that he finds such understanding of love poetically beautiful, as the narrator appears to be the only voice in the poem that understands, laments and even applauds the poet as "gentle, and brave, and generous" despite the sufferings he brings upon himself. To a considerable extent, we can even assume Shelley is projecting an idealized image of himself into the poem, through which he may or may not have knowingly expressed a mixture of narcissism and self-pity. Many later

critics, such as T.S Eliot and D.H Lawrence, as we have mentioned, found this sentiment immature and irritating.

Bromwich offers a rather thorough analysis of how Mary probably also found the perpetually brooding presentation of love in *Alastor* a subject for ridicule, and how the monster in *Frankenstein* could likely be a parody on the difference between how the rest of the world perceives her husband's "love philosophy" and how he views it himself. I am not going to discuss that in details in this thesis, but to sum up the significance of it for Bromwich, who believes reading *Frankenstein* was a turning point for Shelley to rethink his perception of the concept of love, and, as a result, his understanding matures greatly into what we see in *Prometheus Unbound*.

Roughly based on the plot of the famous Greek myth, *Prometheus Unbound* begins with the Titan chained to a rock in the Indian Caucasus, as the punishment from Jupiter for giving fire to mankind. Having endured the torture for already three thousand years, Prometheus opens the play with a surprisingly "positive" speech addressing to Jupiter:

...Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate,
Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn,
O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge.
Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours,
And moments aye divided by keen pangs
Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,
Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire:—
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!

(1.9-

17)

The speech, of course, with all its description on the pain he has to endure, is without a doubt still filled with immense sorrow. However, I would still describe it as "positive" since the tormented Prometheus makes it clear that he is "eyeless in hate" and does not envy Jupiter's power. The monologue

then continues to describe the torture he has experienced in detail, but eventually comes back to emphasize the fact that he has already stopped hating his tormentor:

...I speak in grief,
Not exultation, for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise.
(1.56-58)

Furthermore, he even expresses regret for once having the desire to take revenge against Jupiter. However, the attitude reflected in his lines is more complicated than forgiveness:

If then my words had power,
Though I am changed so that aught evil wish
Is dead within; although no memory be
Of what is hate, let them not lose it now!
(1.69-

72)

Strangely, although he keeps claiming that he is no longer eager to see Jupiter suffer for what he has done to him, Prometheus still keeps urging the elements around him to remind him what his curse on Jupiter was, for he wants to know if his curse has had any actual effect. Bromwich, in his attempt to explain Prometheus's determination to give up hatred and vengeance, cites Shelley's comment on his another play *The Cenci*, in which the heroine Beatrice insists on planning to murder her father for raping and torturing her. The play was written shortly before Shelley started working on *Prometheus* and in the comment he expresses a strong disapproval towards his heroine's actions:

Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better. But she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs

justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge; that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists.

(Pg.240)

A similar and more detailed expression of the idea is made by Shelley in the preface to *Prometheus*. This time, he is comparing his hero to Satan in

Paradise Lost:

The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgment, a more poetical character than Satan because, in addition to courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible to being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which in the Hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest.

(Pg.133)

As we can see, in both circumstances Shelley claims that he believes our desire to seek revenge and our tendency to associate vengeance with justice is nothing but “casuistry.” It is almost in our human instinct to justify vengeance with suffering, that we often forget the fact that vengeance itself is an act of inflicting suffering in nature. Thus people often tend to find sympathy in characters like Beatrice and Satan, while forgetting what they are doing is in fact morally wrong. In a similar way, I believe there might also be a realization in Shelley’s mind that in *Alastor* he romanticized sadness and isolation with unfulfilled desire for love, while forgetting the fact love is supposed to be the positive force that grants people hope instead of desperation. In the preface to *Prometheus* he states that he wishes his hero to be exempt from such casuistry, and perhaps in the same way he wishes that he can outgrow his attitude shown in *Alastor*.

However, if that is the case, Prometheus’s insistence on hearing about the effects of the curse he made in the past would appear peculiar. The way I understand this conflicted attitude is that, at this point, though already

evolving towards the mindset for love, it still takes time for Prometheus to thoroughly give up the violent desire for retaliation that is somewhat carved in our human instinct. In fact, as Bromwich also notes later in his article, the progression of *Prometheus's* plot is essentially a progression of the hero gradually learning to abandon all his selfish desires before truly embracing the world of love. This theory is supported by the text, as right after hearing the Earth telling him what he wanted to hear, this is our hero's reply:

...Mother, let not aught
Of that which may be evil, pass again
My lips, or those of aught resembling me.

(I.118-

220)

The regrets in his tone imply a further determination to be detached from the feeling of hatred and the desire for revenge. Later in the act, after the Phantasm of Jupiter repeated to him exactly the curse he once made on his enemy, the determination steps even further towards pure benevolence:

It doth repent me: words are quick and vain;
Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine.
I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

(I.303-305)

It is at the end of Act I, however, do we actually start to see the real reason that keeps Prometheus away from his vengeful instincts:

...and yet I feel
Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far,
Asia! who, when my being overflowed,
Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine
Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust.

(I.807-811)

After being chained in the mountains for three thousand years, all hopes are vain except his love for Asia, which remains undying. While this revelation may not be surprising, what is surprising is that in *Prometheus* Shelley no longer seems to be obsessed with the idea of love bringing a union of identity between the lovers. Asia, the lover of Prometheus, is meanwhile taking

actions on her own to save her lover. After she travels to the cave of the Demogorgon, to whom she asks the question about whether there is such a thing that truly creates and rules the world, the Demogorgon answers:

If the abyss
Could vomit forth its secrets . . . But a voice
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
On the revolving world? What to bid speak
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these
All things are subject but eternal Love.

(II.4.114-120)

Bromwich finds an interesting irony in this scene as he thinks the question Asia asks is already answered by her very presence from the beginning. As both the force that passively keeps Prometheus maturing during thousands of years of torture and actively seeking the way to eventually free her lover, Asia becomes “the personal prophet of a great change that love alone can bring into the world.” (Pg.255, *Love Against Revenge in Shelley's Prometheus*) She reads the two dreams of her sister Panthea, in the first dream this is what she sees:

There is a change: beyond their inmost depth
I see a shade—a shape—’tis He, arrayed
In the soft light of his own smiles which spread
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.
Prometheus, it is thou—depart not yet!

(II.1.119-123)

In this scene of dream reading, Asia’s love for Prometheus is overflowing from her own mind onto everyone around her. Shelley’s move to have her see her lover in someone else’s dream, through someone else’s eyes, is a mark of genius, as it shows true love’s effusive power to pass its happiness and hope onto everyone who witnesses it. Panthea, after waking up from her dream, refers to their love as “some enchantment old” that is “sweet/Even to desire.” Meanwhile, with his love to her, Prometheus, though worlds away from Asia in

terms of distance, can still be “arrayed/In the soft light of his own smiles.” The “soft light” comes from his own “smiles,” as if his feelings for her alone is already enough to support his happiness, without even requiring that it be reciprocated. I agree with Bromwich’s interpretation here that love has become “the antithesis of revenge, which requires someone or something prior to itself to supply the motive for action.”(Pg.256, *Love Against Revenge in Shelley's Prometheus*) The actions of both Prometheus and Asia up to this point are completely separated, as if their love for each other has made them each a more independent, complete person who still thrives and grows even when far separated, instead of becoming two identical images from a mirror (what Shelley once desired in *Alastor*). At the end of the play, after Prometheus is freed from his chains, the two lovers stay together while watching Jupiter’s reign quickly fall apart and the hopeful start of a new world. I understand the ending as a metaphor in which love is the essence that supports us, keeps us maturing and shielding us from degrading into the vicious cycle of wrongs and revenge even during the darkest time of our suffering, while perpetually offering us the inspiring hope for a better future. It makes two people complete without losing their identity in each other, and does not turn to infinite pain when it is absent. In all these ways, the love presented in *Prometheus* is both a maturation and further idealization of what Shelley believed in *Alastor*. It has elevated from a desire to a faith, and perhaps the ending of *Prometheus* sums it up the best:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;
To defy Power which seems Omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.
(IV.570-574)

It would be unfair, of course, to simply try to come to any kind of conclusion about whether Bari's or Bromwich's argument is closer to the truth. After all, despite focusing on the same topic, the starting points and angles that the two scholars take have rather little overlap in between: Bari focuses dedicatedly on the actual love interests among Shelley's biographical events and draws supports for his theory from Shelley's love poems to assumed specific addressees; Bromwich, on the contrary, chooses to place his attention solely on the poems in which Shelley gets the chance to freely philosophize his vision of love in its most ideal state, without involving the setbacks he encountered in real life. Therefore, to some extents, we can even argue that the two scholars' opinions do not even necessarily contradict each other as the former is an analysis on what Shelley experienced with love, while the latter presents us with what he believed love should be, a state that he has not yet achieved but still desired nonetheless.

However, there is in fact one key word upon which both Bari and Bromwich touched in their reading and I believe this could be the very nucleus of what love means to Shelley. That keyword is "stability." In the poems Bari examines, regardless of the state of the poet, his actions always carry a theme of constancy: in the Sophia poems, he and everything around him are always in the process of mingling; in the Jane poems, he is forever on the trail of his unrequited feelings and always wondering the kind of happiness he could have had if his love were reciprocated; finally, in the Mary poems, he is always struggling at his attempts to cast away his lover's melancholy and his own dissatisfaction. Despite the multitude of his love poems towards each of his love interests, they always seem to repeat a similar development of

emotions. In the Bromwich analysis, it is more obvious, as the protagonist of *Alastor* starts off alone and dies alone, and in *Prometheus* there is the line directly stating: “Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these/All things are subject but eternal Love.”

Surely, since the poems are all written by the same man, consistency would not be something so problematic if it were not placed in a more special, chaotic context. However, the context of the world created by Shelley’s poetics is exactly a rather chaotic one. Movement and change are two of the almost omnipresent elements in Shelley’s works, and with this idea in mind, we can find examples in nearly every single one of Shelley’s poems: In *Ode to the West Wind*, nature and life are always going through a violent cycle of death and rebirth; in *To a Skylark*, the human mind is constantly shifting from one illusion to the other following the trail of poetic inspiration; in *Ozymandias*, no human achievements can ever achieve true immortality and in the end “nothing besides remains” in the memory of history. The list of examples goes on, yet none of the poems addresses the world’s fickleness as explicitly as the one titled *Mutability*:

I.

We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed and gleam and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly! yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost for ever:—

II.

Or like forgotten lyres whose dissonant strings
Give various response to each varying blast,
To whose frail frame no second motion brings
One mood or modulation like the last.

III.

We rest—a dream has power to poison sleep;
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep,
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away:—

IV.

It is the same!—For, be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free;
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Nought may endure but Mutability.

(1-16)

The sentiment this poem delivers hardly needs further explanation: it states that nothing in life—physical or emotional—will remain forever, while the only thing constant is mutability itself. However, what should draw this paper's attention to this poem is that every stanza of it poses a direct contrast with some of the analysis we previously undertook. To begin with, the first stanza compares "we"—presumably the influence we leave in the world and other's life—to the "clouds that veil the midnight moon." The same simile, if we recall, is used in *Prometheus* when Asia sees her love through Panthea's dream:

There is a change: beyond their inmost depth
I see a shade—a shape—'tis He, arrayed
In the soft light of his own smiles which spread
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.

(II.1.119-122)

In *Mutability*, however, the beauty of moonlight through the clouds immediately disappears "forever" as soon as the night becomes darker. No laments or pity is heard from the narrator, as if he is only describing a process of nature. In *Prometheus*, however, the moonbeam that shines through the veiling clouds does not vanish even after Panthea has woken from her dream, since the true nature of it is Prometheus's "smile" granted to him by his love for Asia, which remains as the guiding force that Asia follows throughout the rest of the play.

The second stanza of *Mutability* speaks of how music, despite being played repeatedly, cannot awake the same emotion in its audience when they hear it the last time. This statement immediately reminds us of the poems to

Jane Williams, as in those poems her skill as a musician is one of the recurring themes. In my reading of the Jane poems I focused mainly on the additional elements of unfulfillment compared to the Sophia poems, but what we also need to notice is that such unfulfillment is often a result of Shelley's desire for the same "joy today, song tomorrow" that Shelley keeps hearing in Jane's music. In *To Jane: The Keen Stars Were Twinkling*, Shelley makes a clear statement about what he hears whenever Jane plays the guitar:

The keen stars were twinkling,
And the fair moon was rising among them,
Dear Jane!
The guitar was tinkling,
But the notes were not sweet till you sung them
Again.

As the moon's soft splendour
O'er the faint cold starlight of Heaven
Is thrown,
So your voice most tender
To the strings without soul had then given
Its own.

(1-12)

In these lines, even though the strings and notes themselves may be meaningless and soul-less, the poet's admiration towards Jane gives them meaning. Thus, every time the poet hears her music, what he actually hears is the "sweet" and "tender" aspects in her voice, and his own passion and desire towards her. More importantly, as we already said, what he hears from her music is repeated from one love poem to another, anything but "forgotten" and "various" like the music in *Mutability*.

The third stanza of *Mutability* does not employ any specific similes. Instead, it directly states the belief that our life is full of interruptions: dreams disrupt our sleep, and random thoughts keep distracting us when we are awake. However, the concept of dream is never presented as a disruption in

Prometheus—rather, as we have already discussed, the dream of Panthea is the unwavering agent that tells Asia to follow and rescue her love. Nor do all the thoughts—neither the questions that Asia asks the Demogorgon, nor the contemplation of both Prometheus and Asia about what they want from the world and what they should do—ever seem to “pollute” their minds. Instead, in a completely opposite way, the “dreams” and “thoughts” in *Prometheus* act as the force that in fact guides the characters towards their course instead of distracting them. The reason that makes the same elements fleeting and lifeless in *Mutability* yet constant and meaningful in the love poems is of course that the latter are either embodied by love or at least perceived through a mindset that is filled with love. It is the awareness of love that gives meaning to the struck strings, and makes the moments of beauty captured by the similes memorable. Without love, all we notice is the mutability that reminds us of the futility of life, the absence of all things in life once they are gone, instead of the joys and enlightenment they once gave us when they were present.

When it comes to love itself, in Shelley’s world of poetics it is often presented as an exception to the previously stated “naught may endure but mutability.” While all kinds of beauty in *Mutability* expire and become forgotten, in various examples love in Shelley’s poems demonstrates an unquestioned power to survive the passage of time. Take for instance, the poem titled *Love’s Rose*, in which the poet urges young people to take action pursuing their love interests:

Dear the boon to Fancy given,
Retracted whilst it’s granted:
Sweet the rose which lives in Heaven,
Although on earth ’tis planted,

Where its honours blow,
While by earth's slaves the leaves are riven
Which die the while they glow.

Age cannot Love destroy,
But perfidy can blast the flower,
Even when in most unwary hour
It blooms in Fancy's bower.
Age cannot Love destroy,
But perfidy can rend the shrine
In which its vermeil splendours shine.

(1-14)

Despite the poem's main message, which is essentially *carpe diem*, unlike the multitude of other poems with the similar sentiment, stressing how youth is short and time is fleeting, *Love's Rose* also feels the need to repeatedly highlight "age cannot love destroy." The fact that the rose—the symbolization of love—lives in heaven, despite being planted and dying on earth, is a metaphor for love as an eternal emotion that outlives time even though it is spawned and possessed within the lives of us mortals. By encouraging youth to pursue love, Shelley is in fact encouraging them to pursue something worthy of trading with their time in life, as the beauty of love will remain just as valuable even after their youth is no more.

A similar statement is also made by Shelley in a poem titled simply *Love*:

Why is it said thou canst not live
In a youthful breast and fair,
Since thou eternal life canst give,
Canst bloom for ever there?
Since withering pain no power possessed,
Nor age, to blanch thy vermeil hue,
Nor time's dread victor, death, confessed,
Though bathed with his poison dew,
Still thou retain'st unchanging bloom,
Fixed tranquil, even in the tomb.

(1-10)

It would seem redundant to stress my point here again, since the poem already directly says that love has the power to give "eternal life" to youth and "bloom for ever there." In this poem, love is the core element that gives beauty

and memorability to youthful life. It is, again, eternal and unwavering, as its bloom remains “unchanging” and “fixed tranquil” against pain, age, time and even death. As the poem continues, it develops on love’s “fixed tranquility”:

Hast thou ne’er felt a rapturous thrill,
Like June’s warm breath, athwart thee fly,
O’er each idea then to steal,
When other passions die?
Felt it in some wild noonday dream,
When sitting by the lonely stream,
Where Silence says, 'Mine is the dell';
And not a murmur from the plain,
And not an echo from the fell,
Disputes her silent reign.

(15-24)

Not only does the poem keep stressing how stable and quiet love is, in comparison to the relentless movement that is almost everywhere in Shelley’s non-love poems, it also implies a sense of absoluteness about such uniqueness of love. “When other passions die” love still remains unmoving. The emphasis on the silence around it—reflected from the lack of “murmur” and “echo”—also indicates an absence of questions and debates, which could be another hint from the poet that love’s significance outlives not only time and toil, but also doubts, slanders and disbeliefs.

At this point, I believe we have already looked at enough examples about love’s constancy and immortality in Shelley’s world. However, what makes love so unique among everything else in his world is still yet to be discovered. In my opinion, the answer lies in the poem *To –*:

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the belovèd's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

As almost an antithesis to *Mutability*, *To—* lays stress on the immortality of the memory love leaves behind when the tangible parts of its beauty is inevitably gone. By drawing a clear line of distinction between what will vanish and what will remain, Shelley could in fact be pointing out that the essence of beauty lies more in the happiness it bestows upon others instead of in itself: the value of music is in the memory of those who hear it; the sweetness of a violet's fragrance is in the pleasure of those who sniff it; and eventually, what makes our existence memorable falls onto love—not only in terms of how love can bring joy to other people, but also in terms of how it brings out the same beautiful, self-less emotion from whoever receives it.

As Bromwich says, when examining Asia's love to Prometheus, "it is the nature of love to overflow." (Pg. 255, *Love Against Revenge in Shelley's Prometheus*) Love in Shelley's poem is more than just the one stable and unwavering anchor that grants immortality to memory, but rather it is also the driving force that sets all the other parts of life in motion, in the same way it causes the world to change in Bromwich's reading of *Prometheus*. In the poems Bari read, love pushes the young poet to experience various stages of life and eventually he learns to let his understanding of love grow: from the self-immersed, carefree courtship in the Sophia poems, to the coexistence of adoration and acceptance to unfulfillment in the Jane poems, and eventually to the genuine misery he too could feel when it is his loved one who is suffering. While some critics view this change of attitude as a gradual surrender from the ideal to reality, I see this as another kind of maturation, through which Shelley, little by little, realizes that the value of love lies in the appreciation and care towards others, instead of finding a mirror image of

himself, which would be essentially just another kind of self-fulfillment. It is love, or his journey searching for the true meaning of it, that eventually leads him to such growth. In this way, the arguments of the two scholars actually manage to find a common ground: regardless of being in the ideal world or real life of Shelley, love is the one constant in the ever changing world. It is like a light house--while love itself will never change or move, it guides everything else in life into motion, as its altruistic and contagious nature gives people a reason to be adored, desired and remembered. Art, experience, and physical beauty—in Shelley's world of poetry, all survive mutability because of our awareness and desire for love.

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