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Shelley in Eternity

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Eternity, in its philosophical and religious appearances, might seem at odds with Shelley's professed atheism; yet Shelley never lost sight of it, as separate from Christian meanings as he could manage, but nevertheless frequently borrowing its most characteristic descriptions. His poetry and prose reveal his attempt to write eternity rather than his confidence in achieving it. Poetry offers the closest you can come to approaching the eternal, a belief which Shelley chooses to develop through his response to the arguments of Christian theologians, all thinkers steeped in Platonic thought, such as Boethius,[1] Augustine, and Aquinas. The Christian God whom Shelley hated, was obviously the bedrock of the theologians' arguments, but Shelley was all the same influenced, especially, by the way in which Boethius, Augustine, and Aquinas drew a firm line between 'eternity', or 'atemporality', and 'sempiternity', or 'everlastingness'. For Aquinas, '[t]he primary intrinsic difference of time from eternity is that eternity exists as a simultaneous whole and time doesn't. Existence must fall short of eternity, as it is 'subject to time' which is 'the proper measure of change'.[2] Mortal life is mutability whereas eternity is unknowable wholeness: for Shelley, as for Plato, eternity is quite different from the mere everlastingness of the sempiternal. It is an elsewhere unknowable to mortals, but one that remains vital to mankind in its promise of 'some bright Eternity' (Epipsychidion, 115).[3] Epipsychidion is the pinnacle of Shelley's attempt to image and experience the eternal in language, where the inevitable and self-conscious failure to create and sustain a vision of eternity is built into the whole logic of the poem. The later 'Jane' poems see a change: eternity, in its new mode, is an unsustainable but nonetheless ideal 'momentary peace' ('To Jane. The Recollection', Major Works, 3. 47) which is elegised in affectingly dry-eyed poetry.

Alan M. Weinberg considers Shelley to be the 'child of the Revolution', claiming that '[o]f all Romantic poets, with the possible exception of Blake, Shelley is the most consistently subversive of the customs and institutions of the past';[4] but in relation to the concept of eternity, Shelley is notably less rebellious than he is studious. It was principally in Augustine's Confessions that Shelley found an analogy

for his own struggle to apprehend the eternal. The Confessions, as M. H. Abrams argued, was 'one of the most influential of all books, in Catholic as in Protestant Europe';[5] and Shelley had studied it with attention. (He takes his epigraph to Alastor from book III of the Confessions.) Shelley follows in Augustine's footsteps, despite rejecting the Christian God, as he echoes Augustine's impassioned questioning, his sense of sharing in the mystery of eternity, 'aglow with its fire', and his longing to 'seize the minds of men' while asking '[c]ould any words of mind have power to achieve so great a task?'[6] For both Augustine and Shelley, eternity is something that we crave and can sense in our mortal lives, but for Shelley in the absence of any divine architect. Faced with previous sages' 'records of their vain endeavour' ('Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', 3. 28), Shelley explores new possibilities of imagining the eternal, attempting to go beyond those thinkers in an audacious attempt to write 'the unascended heaven' (Prometheus Unbound, 3. 2. 203).

His interest in the Platonic-Christian tradition is not hard to explain: from first to last, Shelley was fascinated immense philosophical issues, and especially by the gulf between mortal life and the eternal. From Alastor -- which G. Kim Blank describes as the first Shelleyan poem[7] -- to The Triumph of Life -- Shelley's dark terminal exploration of 'what is Life' (The Triumph of Life, 544) -- the poetry works to define and refine the nature of 'human phantasy' ('Frail clouds arrayed in sunlight lose the glory', 6. 51). The animating force of Alastor is its exploration of the Poet's quest to become one with that which lies beyond humanity. The poem was prompted, in part, by a tale related to him by Thomas Jefferson Hogg about a missionary who had become captivated by his dreams more than by his life; and Shelley's response veers between censure and sympathetic fascination. Asking 'who is there that will not pursue phantoms, spend his choicest hours in hunting after dreams, and wake only to perceive his error and regret that death is so near?',[8] Shelley's intense fellow feeling with the unfortunate missionary sees him excited and repelled by the story in equal measure. Choosing to spurn existence in favour of a dream beyond life, the Poet, pursuing that 'fleeting shade', 'overleaps the bounds' of the 'web of human things' (Alastor, 206, 207, and 719): the capacity for vision and its pursuit becomes a poetic standard even as this standard creates the 'self-centred seclusion' ('Preface to Alastor', 92) from which the Poet suffers. Shelley calls for a suspension of judgement, neither condemning nor celebrating the Poet:[9] the poem refuses both Richard Cronin's view that the Poet represents the 'nightmare of solipsism',[10] and the

narrator's claim that the poet is some kind of 'elemental god' (Alastor, 351). Alastor seems to take as its motto Shelley's line 'None can reply—all seems eternal now' ('Mont Blanc', 75), as the Poet transcends moral response leaving only mystery in his wake. Yet that line from 'Mont Blanc', in its 'seems', points up the ultimately impenetrable nature of such mystery: unlike Augustine and Aquinas and his other precursors in the literature of eternity, Shelley is exposed to a whirlwind of doubts. Alastor suggests, with mixed feelings, that to aspire to an understanding or experience of the eternal is life-negating.

Plato offered an alternative authority for Shelley's sense of the divine possibility of poetry. Ion, which Shelley translated, defines the poet as a conduit of eternity;[11] and 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' takes up and explores this elevated status. James Notopoulos rightly shows that the Hymn is actually not directly derivative from Plato;[12] but, in his ardent hope to experience 'Intellectual Beauty', Shelley does resemble St Augustine ('the Christian Plato' to borrow E. K. Rand's phrase)[13] as he begs to witness its presence, describing it in a manner strongly reminiscent of Augustine's experience of the divine mystery:

> Who can understand this mystery or explain it to others? What is that light whose gentle beams now and again strikes through to my heart, causing me to shudder in awe yet firing me with their warmth? I shudder to feel how different I am from it: yet in so far as I am like it, I am aglow with its fire. It is the light of Wisdom, Wisdom itself, which at times shines upon me, parting my clouds. But when I weakly fall away from its light, those clouds envelop me again in the dense mantle of darkness which I bear for my punishment. For my strength ebbs away for very misery,[14] so that I cannot sustain my blessings.
>
> (Augustine, Confessions, Book XI, 9. 260)

Yet where Augustine believes in the 'light of Wisdom' as God's love, Shelley has no such support. It is Augustine who falls away from the light, not the other way around, which is how 'Hymn' has it: the 'dense mantle of darkness' is punishment rather than the stuff of life. The Scrope Davies Notebook version of 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' reveals Shelley's controlled iconoclasm even more clearly than the more tempered Examiner version:

While yet a boy I sought for Ghosts, and sped
Thro' many a lonely chamber, vault and ruin
And starlight wood, with fearful step pursuing
Hopes of strange converse with the storied dead.
I called on that false name with which our youth is fed;
He heard me not—I saw them not—
When musing deeply on the lot
Of Life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that live to bring
News of buds and blossoming—
Sudden thy shadow fell on me,
I shrieked and clasped my hands in extasy.

('Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', Scrope Davies Notebook, 5. 49-60)[15]

Judith Chernaik characterises lines 49-72 as 'almost painfully authentic';[16] and this stanza reveals Shelley's approach to the 'Power' as proceeding from personal experience rather than mere belief. Exchanging his childish longing for 'strange converse with the storied dead' for the moment of ecstatic communion with 'thy shadow', Shelley traces his approach, using autobiography as a means of intimating a personal devotion to and experience of 'Intellectual Beauty'. Not only a 'conscious myth of poetic maturation',[17] the lines show Shelley fine-tuning his poetry of the eternal. 'Intellectual Beauty' is certainly beyond the human, but can be experienced and then expressed by the aspirant poet: eternity is won even as the story reveals the difficulties experienced in his earlier attempts to connect with it. The overwrought Gothic pursuit portrayed in these lines is superseded by the measured exploration that more generally characterises the 'Hymn' as a whole. The 'Hymn' of the Scrope Davies Notebook makes it clear that it is God who is the 'poisonous name' that Shelley had called upon as a youth. Timothy Webb writes that in the 'Hymn', Shelley offers an emotion that is 'highly personal and emerges from a profoundly realised personal dilemma' while arguing that 'the personality of the poet is transcended, so that he becomes a bard, vates, a prophet'.[18] While Shelley does indeed adopt the voice of a prophet, it is the voice of a prophet without a God, experiencing something manifestly akin to the mystery that enraptured Augustine without his theological

explanation of what was going on. Leslie Brisman shows that Shelley's Intellectual Beauty is 'a wholly transcendent Imagination, a spirit wholly beyond and outside nature',[19] and Shelley's agnostic imagination seeks to address the Power itself without intermediary. Shelley becomes, as Timothy Clark puts it, 'an explorer in previously uncharted realms of the human mind'.[20]

'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' filters Plato through Augustine to relate a first-person approach to eternity. Subsequently, it is Dante who becomes the major figure in Shelley to spread his 'own figured curtain' (A Defence of Poetry, 98) over Plato's rationally delineated eternity.[21] Dante's significance for Shelley in Epipsychidion comes from the way in which his poetry sanctions Shelley's own attempt to figure love as a means of bridging Christian faith and Platonic philosophy. Notopoulos rightly claims that Shelley conceived of love as the key to the 'immortality of the soul', and shows how Shelley used Dante as a means of translating Platonic philosophy into poetry: 'whereas in Platonism the ladder from this world of shadows to the world of Being is essentially a logical process, for Dante a woman is the medium linking man with the divine'.[22] As in Plato's Timaeus, Shelley conceptualises immortality in relation to eternity, where the soul, as a reward for having 'lived well', returns to 'his native star and live[s] an appropriately happy life'.[23] If eternity is atemporal, the soul may only experience eternity outside of mortal existence, forcing the poet to assent to claims about the immortality of the soul. In an early letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, the recipient of some of his most thrilling correspondence, Shelley put it this way: 'I have considered it in every possible light & reason tells me that death is the boundary of the life of man. Yet I feel, I believe the direct contrary. The senses are the only inlets of knowledge, & there is an inward sense that has persuaded me of this'.[24] Life after death is irrational but an inward sense persuades him, nevertheless, of the rationality of his instinct. Immortality for Shelley, as for Plato, is figured as a return to an elsewhere, where by becoming a part of eternity, earth's corruption is banished from the soul.[25]

Love, for Shelley, is how the soul earns such a reward, and Epipsychidion is Shelley's fullest elucidation of the relationship between love and eternity. For Notopoulos, 'Emilia Viviani … is the incarnation of Platonic Beauty and Love';[26] and Dante is the Platonist whose poetry propelled Shelley's poem to its heights. Stuart Curran shows Dante's deep significance for Shelley[27] and the vital role of the Vita Nuova in Epipsychidion. His attention to Dante's significance underscores the

intellectual tradition embedded in Epipsychidion rather than the poem's emotional power, and such a reading ignores the tensions and resistance to doctrine implicit in an avowedly atheist poet responding to a Christian predecessor. Attempting to use its 'wingèd words' (Epipsychidion, 588) to go beyond that which is mortal into the 'intense inane' (Prometheus Unbound, 3. 4. 204) of eternity, Shelley tests whether it might be possible for love to deliver the poet into what W. B. Yeats terms the 'artifice of eternity', where Dante's Catholic framework is no longer pertinent to a determinedly modern poet.[28]

Dante offers a poetic Neo-Platonism amenable to Shelley for its mystery as much as its logic, and Shelley also returns to the Biblical sources that inform and inflect Dante's writing. John's First Epistle offered Shelley a Christianised version of Plato's emphasis on love as a means of worshipping ideal beauty. It insists that to love is the only way to gain access to the Divine author. 'He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love' (1. John 4:8),[29] and 'Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God' (1. John 4:7). To love one another is both God's gift and a means of knowing him. However, such love is understood as neither carnal nor worldly: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1. John 2: 15). Such verses recall Shelley's horror of the self as 'that burr that will stick to one' (Letters: PBS 1. 109). The problem, of course, is how to love without being guilty of loving the world, the bodily, all that is perishable as much or more than loving the soul. Can romantic love survive where 'The words I, you, they, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind' (Major Works, 635-36)? Such questions are magnified by Shelley's reading in Plato. The Banquet, which he translated in 1818, includes Diotima's claim that generation is the body's means of leaving another like itself, where 'what is mortal, the body and all other things', can thus 'partake of immortality; that which is immortal, is immortal in another manner. Wonder not, then, if every thing by nature cherishes that which was produced from itself, for this earnest Love is a tendency towards eternity'.[30] Poetry is defined as a higher means of achieving immortality and so gaining access to the eternal, and it is a means 'more suitable to the soul' than physical generation.[31] Romantic love becomes unnecessary if the poet can approach

that which is most high without requiring him or her to move from the body to the soul, from the individual to the universal.

Phaedrus offered an approach to romantic love that appears crucial to Shelley's exploration in Epipsychidion. Love there is said to impel the lover to move beyond normal boundaries and sexual desire is the energising force that allows him or her to make such a leap. But the individual lover is more a lure to take part in and pursue as an ideal, rather than important in his or her individual identity. Love is a way of being 'initiated into what we might call the most wonderful of mysteries'.[32] Both vitally significant and almost anonymous, the lover is a rung on the ladder to the Forms, rather than bright perfection in itself. Finding a way to accommodate both the individual and the universal, the temporal and the eternal the allot of which is poetry itself (according to A Defence of Poetry), becomes the task of Epipsychidion.

Epipsychidion stages its quest for ideal love -- a love that, combined with poetic inspiration, creates the most viable possibility of approaching eternity. For Shelley, both love and poetry are entry ways to the eternal: A Defence of Poetry proclaims that '[a]ll high poetry is infinite' (A Defence of Poetry, Major Works, 693) and in Prometheus Demogorgon affirms that 'All things are subject but eternal Love' (Prometheus Unbound, Major Works, 2. 4. 120). 'On Love' explains ideal love in terms that set out the nature of Shelley's understanding of both Plato and Dante and the associated Christian tradition:

> Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed: a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap'.
>
> ('On Love', Major Works, 632).

With its intimations of Eden regained through love, Shelley's idealisation of the other as 'a soul within our soul' self-consciously refashions love in terms of religion as myth. Little wonder that Mary Shelley would refer to Epipsychidion as the 'whole story of Shelley['s] Italian platonics'.[33] The complexity of the poem stems from Shelley testing these 'Italian platonics', revealing the way in which the poet

transfigures the living Teresa Viviani into Emily, a figure that both is and is not a mortal woman. Such a move is not only presented but also scrutinised.

Establishing Emily's nature becomes a challenge to Shelley's artistry early in the poem. Asking 'Art thou not void of guile, / A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless?' (Epipsychidion, 56-57), a note of uncertainty prevents the question from seeming merely rhetorical. Moving through abstract descriptions, Emily is a 'well', a 'Star', a 'Smile', 'a gentle tone', 'a belovèd light', 'Solitude, a Refuge, a Delight', a 'Lute', 'a buried treasure', a 'cradle of young thoughts' and a 'violet-shrouded grave of Woe' (Epipsychidion, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69), within twelve lines. Such abundance bespeaks Shelley's self-delighting imagination, but also he leaves open the possibility that such images emerge from 'mine own infirmity' (Epipsychidion, 71), the predicament of being unable to apprehend his beloved in her own right. The comparison of himself with Ixion in his discussion of the poem in a letter to John Gisborne (Letters: PBS II. 434) is foreshadowed in the poem as Shelley registers, even at this early stage, the delusory nature of his quest for eternity. Shelley's later reflection on the poem, where he defines the 'error' as 'consist[ing] in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal' (Letters: PBS II. 434), seems embedded in the mind of the speaker even as he hymns Emily. The rhyme of 'thee' and 'infirmity' (Epipsychidion, 70-71) creates a connection that underscores the problem of pursuing an impossible ideal; even as 'infirmity' confirms such weakness as part of the mortal constitution. Shelley's lines are heavy with longing for the atemporal that might be grasped through her being:

> See where she stands! a mortal shape indued
> With love and life and light and deity,
> And motion which may change but cannot die;
> An image of some bright Eternity;
> A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour
> Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender
> Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love
> Under whose motions life's dull billows move;
> A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning;
> A Vision like incarnate April, warning,
> With smiles and tears, Frost the Anatomy

Into his summer grave.

(Epipsychidion, 112-23)

Confirming her physical presence, Emily is encountered, momentarily, as a 'mortal shape', if one 'indued / With love and life and light and deity', but who imbues Emily with such attributes? Emily's mortality is overwhelmed by her status as an 'image of some bright Eternity' which hazily exists through the poet's perception. A 'Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning', the woman is lost in the process, transformed from flesh into abstraction. His self-consciousness of this transformation, where Emily is wrenched away from all that she is into an imagined purity that sparks an early breakdown in the poem:

Ah, woe is me!
What have I dared? where am I lifted? how
Shall I descend, and perish not?

(Epipsychidion, 123-25)

Daring to elevate a woman into a figuration of eternity, Shelley self-consciously reveals the testing mental gymnastics involved in such a transfiguration. Michael O'Neill argues that a 'process of vertigo-like self-exploration often occurs' in Shelley's finest poetry, and this is the source of the unnerving energy of the lines.[34] Love itself becomes what is desired rather than a woman who is loved:

I know
That Love makes all things equal: I have heard
By mine own heart this joyous truth averred:
The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
In love and worship, blends itself with God.

(Epipsychidion, 125-29)

Shelley's epigraph to Alastor, from St Augustine's Confessions, looms into view: 'I was not in love as yet, yet I loved to be in love, I sought about for something to love, loving still to be in love'.[35] The lines ripple with Biblical allusions,[36] from Isaiah to Proverbs, as Shelley summons authorities in a way that both sponsors his intimations

and implies a dependence on authorities given his own lack of first hand experience. The obvious transgression committed by the daring poet almost fractures the poetry: his question, 'how / Shall I descend, and perish not?' (Epipsychidion, 123-25) goes beyond mere rhetorical styling. Shelley conveys the willed quality of his feeling for Emily as an attempt to think his way into worship.

Characterising himself and Emily as not the same, but similar, like 'notes of music' (Epipsychidion, 142) which sound as 'difference without discord' (Epipsychidion, 144), Emily is the epitome of Shelley's imagination, the 'Vision' which had been 'veiled from me' (Epipsychidion, 343), where the chime in the rhyme of 'me' and Emily' whispers Shelley's artful co-option. Rather than ascending the Platonic ladder of love at a measured pace,[37] Shelley's deliberately erratic poetry returns to the sensual body. The sexuality described seems not a purified bodiless ecstasy but intrinsically physical. Though not 'mere carnality' as Stuart Curran points out, Shelley has not annulled the pleasures of the body, nor made them more soulful than sensual.[38] The description of the sexual act begins by lingering on the process of their coupling as Shelley moulds the lines which work to seduce their reader:

> Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound.
> And our veins beat together; and our lips
> With other eloquence than words, eclipse
> The soul that burns between them, and the wells
> Which boil under our being's inmost cells,
> The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
> Confused in passion's golden purity,
> As mountain-springs under the morning Sun.
>
> (Epipsychidion, 565-72)

This hymn to the 'One passion in twin-hearts' (Epipsychidion, 575) recalls Laon and Cythna and the protagonists' retreat to a cave for their proper reunion (Laon and Cythna, VI. XXXIV-XXXVI. 298-324, CPPBS). Yet here, as William Ulmer writes, 'all images of closure and fusion, including the unity of Shelleyan lovers, are backward configurations of an inaugural harmony that cannot be reattained because it never existed'.[39] The union can only be momentary, imagined, not experienced: 'even in the millennial world', says Morton Paley, 'there is still chance, death, and

mutability'.[40] Shelley recalls Aristophanes' speech in The Symposium: Aristophanes says that sexual intercourse 'draws the two halves of our original nature back together and tries to make one out of two and to heal the wound in human nature', going on to insist that 'our human nature can only achieve happiness if love reaches its conclusion, and each of us finds his loved one and restores his original nature'.[41] 'Confused in passion's golden purity' deliberately writes perplexity into the poetry, leaving the reader with no clear sense of what's meant, Shelley subtly drawing attention to the frustration implicit in seeking and failing to find one's 'original nature'. Heavy-handed in his attempt to force the perfect symbiosis of the lovers, Shelley's poem begins to show signs of strain:

> One hope within two wills, one will beneath
> Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
> One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
> And one annihilation.
>
> (Epipsychidion, 584-87)

Trying to convert one into two, the first two lines allow two into their scope before insisting on repeated oneness that can only lead to 'annihilation'. By 'seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal' (Letters: PBS II. 434), the poem begins to disintegrate. The 'perhaps' there is both the spur and the threat to the poem's integrity, an uncertainty which propels the poet into continued quest despite what appear overwhelming odds against success. The pronouncement, 'we shall be one', attempts to assert the outcome of his quest even as he must immediately admit that there remain 'two frames'. Like Byron, Shelley squarely faces 'the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions'.[42] The poetry witnesses the frustration of the will-driven poet before breaking down in a stylised cry of despair:

> …Woe is me!
> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
> Into the height of love's rare Universe,
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!
>
> (Epipsychidion, 587-91)

(It is Urania's complaint: 'I would give / All that I am to be as thou now art! / But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart!' Adonais, 26. 232-34.) Timothy Webb shows that '[t]here are transcendent realities which cannot be expressed directly but which we must try to approach, not least through the assistance of negatives. The via negativa is the road not of despair but of hope'.[43] Yet Shelley's attempt to intimate as much as possible, while holding onto an awareness of the impossibility of revelation, does not begin or end with negatives.

The Jane poems show Shelley returning to love poetry as a means of re-imaging the eternal. Paradoxically, it is now an eternity contained by time, a perfected moment that Shelley attempts to cage in 'its nets of gold'.[44] Shelley's lyrics fix upon a moment, though a moment that has passed, where the 'heaven above me is calm' (Letters: PBS II. 436) and '[t]he past and future were forgot' ('Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici', 31). The poetic effort to crystallise an image of eternity into poetry, as anticipation in 'To Jane. The Invitation', and as memory in 'To Jane. The Recollection', is a striking development of Epipsychidion's struggle to reach atemporal eternity through love poetry. The Jane poems no longer yearn towards achieved eternity. Instead, the moment is pursued and then elegised in this 'two-part lyric'.[45] In 'To Jane. The Recollection', Shelley immerses himself in the memory that allows him to blend artifice with the personal, the 'Eternal' and the 'mortal' (Letters: PBS II. 434), to borrow the terms from Shelley's letter to Gisborne, kiss lightly in the lines. If eternity cannot be reached by a mortal, Shelley will splice life with art, mortality with intimations of the eternal:

We wandered to the pine forest
  That skirts the Ocean foam,
The lightest wind was in its nest,
  The Tempest in its home;
The whispering waves were half asleep,
  The clouds were gone to play,
And on the bosom of the deep
  The smile of Heaven lay;
It seemed as if the hour were one
  Sent from beyond the skies,

Which scattered from above the sun
A light of Paradise.
('To Jane. The Recollection', 1., Major Works, 9-20)

Combining memory with imagination, the poetry self-consciously strives to heighten and mythologise experience in the 'seeming' perfection of the scene. The view, though recognisably mortal and time-bound, aspires towards universality, infinity, and eternity. Alluding to his own poetry, Shakespeare's The Tempest, [46] and Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode', Shelley slips the yoke of biography even as he uses it to anchor the lines. Relishing the beauty of nature, nature that seems idealised in its perfect attunement to the poet's taste, the 'smile of Heaven' becomes the centrepiece of the scene. The 'light of Paradise' perfects the memory where the temporal attains the grandeur of the eternal in Shelley's poetic reminiscence. Yet this grandeur is acknowledged to be self-created: it 'seemed' to be an Eden, and Shelley is content to honour the memory with such epithets. If eternity is out of view, the aspirant poet can at least imagine its past embodiment in his own life, where the 'scattered' light is as nearly as he can conjure 'the white radiance of Eternity' (Adonais 52. 463).

Refusing to let anxiety mar memory, Shelley passes to the central, affirming section of the poem, where the image of a past eternity is bolstered rather than undermined:

There seemed from the remotest seat
Of the white mountain-waste,
To the soft flower beneath our feet
A magic circle traced,
A spirit interfused around
A thrilling silent life.
To momentary peace it bound
Our mortal nature's strife;—
And still I felt the centre of
The magic circle there
Was one fair form that filled with love
The lifeless atmosphere.
('To Jane. The Recollection', 3. 41-52)

Marvelling at the silence that, for Shelley, had been a marker of erotic love, such as in Epipsychidion (560-72), the third section delights in the 'inviolable quietness' ('The Recollection', 3. 37) that reflects the peaceful intimacy of the couple. Gently admitting that such an experience is transient and incapable of stopping our 'mortal nature's strife', its beauty must be affirmed without allowing undercutting gestures fully to banish its power. The lines delight in and elegiacally close off such joy from the present moment, but 'The Recollection' is created as 'the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth' (A Defence of Poetry, Major Works, 679). Jane becomes one more 'dear image' ('The Recollection', 5. 84) of the fair form sought throughout Shelley's poetry. She offers a glimpse of an eternity that, as in Epipsychidion, cannot be sustained, but which offers a 'momentary peace' that soothes and salves the poet's present.

James Bieri refers to 'The Recollection' as 'a poem of mirroring' in a manner analogous to 'On Love' and its similar emphasis.[47] Remembering the pools, Shelley refers to the reflections of the forest in the water as 'More perfect both in shape and hue / Than any spreading there' ('To Jane. The Recollection', 4. 63-64). Such a description gestures to the hyperbolically ideal scene in Shelley's memory, suggesting the similarly perfected nature of Jane in Shelley's poetic reminiscence. Drawing our attention to the excessive quality of the description and Shelley's own preference for the image rather than reality, the poem signals its self-conscious myth-making.

> Sweet views, which in our world above
> Can never well be seen,
> Were imaged in the water's love
> Of that fair forest green;
> And all was interfused beneath
> With an Elysian glow,
> An atmosphere without a breath,
> A softer day below—
>
> ('To Jane. The Recollection', 5. 69-76)

Shelley's memory of such sweetness admits to being impossible to view in 'our world' above, where eternity hovers nearby but is not achieved. The image of the

forest being enhanced in the water is suggestive of the way in which the poem offers '[s]weet views' of their shared pleasure that also might 'never well be seen' in the reality actually experienced. To have made an Eden in which he and Jane dwell requires the idea of its destruction to bring the poem back to 'mortal nature's strife' ('The Recollection', 3. 48), the shade of which had already haunted the peace Shelley had earlier conjured. The lyric beauty of 'To Jane. The Recollection' comes from painful loss competing with the abundant recompense of memory. The past is imaged as seeming to 'content me so well that I could say with Faust to the passing moment, '"Remain, thou, thou art so beautiful"' (Letters: PBS II. 436). Eternity, 'forever sought, forever lost' (The Triumph of Life, 431), is recast and humanised in the Jane poems as an alloy of the human and the divine, anticipated and recollected, but never rendered in the present tense.

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NOTES

[1] See Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford, 2000), particularly Book 5, chapter 6, where Boethius regards God's eternity as 'the common view of all who live by reason' (110).
[2] Thomas Aquinas, 'Passage 22: Eternity and Time', Selected Philosophical Writings, trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford, 2008), 213.
[3] Percy Bysshe Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford, 2003), 98. All poetry and prose, unless otherwise specified, will be quoted from this edition.
[4] Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (1991), 244.
[5] M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (1971), 83.
[6] Saint Augustine, 'Book XI', Confessions, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth1961), 9. 260 and 11. 262.
[7] G. Kim Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Influence* (Basingstoke, 1988), 86.
[8] Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Frederick L. Jones (2 vols.; Oxford, 1964), I. 429-30.
[9] 'The poet is this irreducibly both cautionary spectacle and sympathetic hero; in relation to him the Preface solicits esteem, pity and critical judgement and will not decide between them. The effect of this is not simply to show Shelley to be in two or three minds, but to challenge circumscribed habits of mind, be they rigidly moralistic or otherwise ungenerous'. Vincent Newey, Centring the Self: Subjectivity, Society and Reading from Thomas Gray to Thomas Hardy (Aldershot, 1995), 125.
[10] Richard Cronin, S*helley's Poetic Thoughts* (1981), 90.
[11] For Shelley's translation, Percy Bysshe Shelley 'Ion, or of The Iliad, translated from Plato', James A. Notopoulos, The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind (New York, 1969), 475 (468-481).

[12] Notopoulos, 196.
[13] E. K. Rand, Founders of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, MA, 1928), 256, quoted in Notopoulos, 89.
[14] Ps. 30:11 (31:10).
[15] Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Neil Fraistat, Nora Crook Stuart Curran, Michael J. Neth and Michael O'Neill (3 vols to date; Baltimore, MD, 2012), III. 76.
[16] Judith Chernaik, The Lyrics of Shelley (Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972), 36.
[17] Spencer Hall, 'Power and the Poet: Religious Mythmaking in Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"', Keats-Shelley Journal 32 (1983), 146 (123-149).
[18] Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester, 1977), 38.
[19] Leslie Brisman, 'Mysterious Tongue: Shelley and the Language of Christianity', Texas Studies in Literature and Language 23.3 (1981), 411 (389-417).
[20] Timothy Clark, Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley (Oxford, 1989), 1.
[21] The role of Dante in Epipsychidion has already received a great deal of attention. See Richard E. Brown, 'The Role of Dante in Epipsychidion', Comparative Literature 30.3 (1978), 223-235; Stuart Curran, 'Epipsychidion, Dante, and the Renewable Life', Dante and Italy in British Romanticism, ed. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (New York, 2011), 93-104; Timothy Webb, The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation (Oxford, 1976); and Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (1991).
[22] Notopoulos, 320 and 96.
[23] Plato, Timaeus and Critias, trans. Desmond Lee (1977; repr., Harmondsworth, 1987), 42, 58
[24] Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Frederick L. Jones (2 vols.; Oxford, 1964), I. 150.
[25] Plato, 'The Myth of Er', The Republic, trans. with an introd. by Desmond Lee, 2nd ed. (1974; repr., Harmondsworth, 1987), 621c & 621d, 393.
[26] Notopoulos, 19.
[27] Stuart Curran, 'Epipsychidion, Dante, and the Renewable Life', Dante and Italy in British Romanticism, ed. Burwick and Douglass, 94 (93-104).
[28] W. B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium', III. 8, W. B. Yeats: The Poems, ed. Daniel Albright (1992), 240.
[29] The Bible: Authorized King James Version, with an introduction and notes by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford, 2007), 293.
[30] Shelley, translation of The Banquet, Notopoulos, 446-47 (414-461).
[31] Notopoulos, 447.
[32] Plato, Phaedrus, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford, 2002), 34, 250c.
[33] Mary Shelley, letter to Maria Gisborne, 7 March 1822, The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (3 vols.; Baltimore, MD, 1980-88), 1. 223.
[34] Michael O'Neill, "The Gleam of those Words: Coleridge and Shelley," The Keats-Shelley Review 19 (2005), 78 (76-96).
[35] Augustine, Confessions, 3.I, translated by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Major Works, 717.
[36] See Bryan Shelley, Shelley and Scripture: The Interpreting Angel (Oxford, 1994), 182.
[37] Plato, The Symposium, trans. with introd. and notes by Christopher Gill (1999), 47-49, 210a-211b.
[38] Stuart Curran, 'Epipsychidion, Dante, and the Renewable Life', in Dante and Italy in British Romanticism, ed. Burwick and Douglass, 102 (93-104).
[39] William A. Ulmer, Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 9.
[40] Morton D. Paley, Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry (Oxford, 1999), 270.
[41] Plato, The Symposium, trans. with introd. and notes by Christopher Gill (London: Penguin, 1999), 24, 191d, 26-27, 193c.
[42] Lord George Gordon Byron, *In the Wind's Eye: Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (13 vols.; 1979), 9. 54.
[43] Timothy Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in Prometheus Unbound', Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference, ed. Kelvin Everest (Leicester, 1983), 57 (37-62).
[44] Louis MacNeice, 'The Sunlight on the Garden', Louis MacNeice: Collected Poems, ed. Peter McDonald (2007), 57.
[45] Stephen C. Behrendt, Shelley and His Audiences (Lincoln, NE, 1989), 244.
[46] Barry Weller, 'Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric', MLN 93. 5 (1978), 925 (912-937).
[47] James Bieri, Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography: Exile of Unfulfilled Reknown, 1816-1822 (Newark, NJ, 2005), 286.