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“More than ever can be spoken”: Unconscious Fantasy in Shelley’s Jane Williams Poems

by *Thomas R. Frosch*

IN June 1822, living on the shore of the Bay of Lerici, Shelley wrote to John Gisborne of sailing with Jane Williams and her husband, Edward:

Williams is captain, and we drive along this delightful bay in the evening wind, under the summer moon, until earth appears another world. Jane brings her guitar, and if the past and the future could be obliterated, the present would content me so well that I could say with Faust to the passing moment, “Remain, thou, thou art so beautiful.”¹

That Shelley’s life at Lerici was marked by tensions and crises has been well noted. His estrangement from Mary was becoming increasingly severe; she herself had almost died in a miscarriage two days before this letter; the daughter of Mary’s half-sister Claire Clairmont, Allegra, had recently died; rumors of an affair between Shelley and Clairmont persisted. In the same letter, Shelley wrote that he detested almost all company, that Byron was “the nucleus of all that is hateful and tiresome in it,” and that he himself was too unhappy about the past and the future to give much attention to writing.² During this period he was beset by hallucinations: he saw his own figure strangling Mary in her bed; he also saw “the figure of himself which met him as he walked on the terrace & said to him—‘How long do you mean to be content?’”³ In this

¹ *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2:435–36.

² *Ibid.*, 2:434, 436.

³ Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 1:245.

“circle of tempests,” he wrote to Gisborne, Jane Williams was a “spirit of embodied peace.”⁴ And yet G. M. Matthews suggests that Shelley’s relationship with Williams was “the most profoundly disturbing personal experience of [his] whole maturity.”⁵

Together, Shelley’s lyrics to and about Jane Williams form a rich and subtly dramatic story of Romantic love, the richness and the drama appearing not in large-scale characters, gestures, plots, and passions but in the portrayal in a conversational style of complex, changing emotions in an intricate human situation. Judith Chernaik, in writing of the poems’ description of “complicated adult relationships” and their analytical introspection, has, in effect, called attention to an under-appreciated side of Shelley, his subtlety as a psychological poet.⁶ William Keach has studied the ways in which style in the poems is “enmeshed” in “biographical pressures.”⁷ Constance Walker, saying that the poems “sound like nothing that had been written in English up to that point,” has stressed their depiction of “the fluid, individual nature” of emotions, their obliqueness, and their evocation of “an uncharted realm of feeling.”⁸ Susan Wolfson has seen in their formal workings strategies by which Shelley writes a script for himself and others to play, and Brian Weller, in discussing the relations with Shakespeare that appear in the sequence, has studied Shelley’s treatment of the function of art.⁹ I would like to continue the exploration of all these themes—the engagement of poetic imaginings with complex actualities, the flow and nuances of subjectivity, the sense of indirectly expressed and missing things, the role of art, the efforts to manage and manipulate the self and others, the relations with Shakespearean and other texts, and the coherence of a distinctive story of Romantic eros—from a psychoanalytic perspective.

In two valuable psychoanalytically influenced studies of Shelley in general, Stuart Sperry has observed that the most provocative element in Shelley’s work is its strong regressive impulse, and Barbara Gelpi has

⁴ January 12, 1822, *Letters of Shelley*, ed. Jones, 2: 376.

⁵ Matthews, “Shelley and Jane Williams,” *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 12 (1961): 48.

⁶ See Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972), 164.

⁷ Keach, *Shelley’s Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 202.

⁸ Walker, “Shelley’s Portrayal of Emotion in the Lyrics to Jane Williams,” in *Approaches to Teaching Shelley’s Poetry*, ed. Spencer Hall (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990), 103, 106.

⁹ Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 206–26; Weller, “Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric,” *Modern Language Notes* 93 (1978): 912–37.

studied the erotic relationship of the infant to the nursing mother at the center of his poetic imaginings.¹⁰ Paul Vatalaro has analyzed the theme of the mother in the poems to Jane Williams, using the categories of Julia Kristeva to point out a conflict between an impulse towards the bliss of the nursing relationship embodied by Jane and her music and a contrary need to keep that bliss and its attendant dissolution of subjectivity and autonomy at a safe distance.¹¹ Vatalaro helps us see the outlines of a fundamental conflict, but we need to return those outlines and abstract categories to the fluidity and complexity of the lived experience Shelley presents in the poems and to remember, as well, that they tell a story of adult sexual wishes in addition to regressive ones. In that story, we also need to distinguish between the oral desire for the nursing, preoedipal mother and the genital desire for the oedipal mother. Furthermore, we need to understand not only the roles of eros and regression in these poems but also the role of aggression, in the widest sense, including mastery and self-assertion.

I think that the perspective of Freudian ego psychology can give us the fullest view of the flow of subjectivity in the lyrics to Jane Williams. In Freud, the ego is both a lying politician trying to please conflicting constituencies and a noble hero seeking to conquer the irrational.¹² Heinz Hartmann, a chief figure of later ego psychology, while acknowledging the conflict-ridden and defensive qualities of the ego, developed the positive side of Freud's double characterization, stressing the ego's synthesizing and adaptive functions.¹³ Ego psychology, with its focus on a partly unconscious ego navigating among impulses, restraints, and circumstances, pursuing aims and creating syntheses while defending itself from inner and outer threats, is well suited to bring out the subtleties of wish and conflict that make the Jane Williams sequence compelling in its psychological depth. In particular, I wish to study the play of

¹⁰ Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 106; Gelpi, *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹¹ Vatalaro, "The Semiotic Echoes in Percy Shelley's Poems to Jane Williams," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 48 (1999): 69–89.

¹² Both concepts of the ego appear in close proximity in *The Ego and the Id*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 19:56.

¹³ See Hartmann, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*, trans. David Rapaport (New York: International Universities Press, 1958). The psychoanalytic perspective that I use in this essay is also influenced by the work of Margaret Mahler and other investigators of the preoedipal period and of regression, such as Géza Róheim, Sandor Ferenczi, Ernst Kris, and Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel.

unconscious fantasies and the effort to handle them as Shelley in these poems seeks love, certain types of mastery, and also peace of mind.¹⁴ Peace of mind is a goal not to be undervalued in the troubled, agitated, conflict-filled psyche that appears throughout his poetry and with particular explicitness and intimacy in these last lyrics. Stuart Curran has seen in the Jane Williams poems an attempt to create a “pastoral of the mind” and a “timeless bower of psychic peace.”¹⁵ I wish to study the ways in which the goal of psychic peace is invested with fantasies that intensify conflict. In studying the poems to Jane Williams psychologically, I also hope to contribute to a portrayal of Shelley in his late work not as turning away from the Romantic poetic myths of his earlier career—imagination, ideal love, the possibility of paradise—as he is sometimes seen to be doing, but as remaining Romantic to the end.¹⁶

* * *

Jane enters Shelley’s poetic mythology in the unfinished *The Zucca*, written in January 1822. The speaker of *The Zucca* desires “[m]ore in this world than any understand” (4), for beauty, “like sea retiring, / Had left the earth bare as the wave-worn sand / Of my lorn heart” (5–7).¹⁷ An oceanic presence, like the primal mother, has withdrawn from his world, and nothing human or earthly can compensate for it: “I loved, I know not what—but this low sphere / And all that it contains, contains not thee” (20–21). His desire is expressed in infinite, object-less longing and in the Shelleyan myth of the Spirit of Beauty: “Thou, whom, seen nowhere, I feel everywhere” (22). In his sorrow the poet in winter

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, I will be describing fantasies with unconscious, or latent, dimensions. Jacob A. Arlow, developing Freud’s idea of unconscious fantasies, writes that “[n]o sharp line of distinction can be made between conscious and unconscious fantasies. . . . [I]t seems more appropriate to speak of fantasies which are fended off to a greater or lesser extent. . . . Fantasies are not exclusively vehicles for discharge of the instinctual energies of the id. The ego and superego play a part in their formation. The contribution which unconscious fantasy makes to conscious experience may be dominated by defensive, adaptive, and self-punitive trends as well” (“Unconscious Fantasy and Disturbances of Conscious Experience,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 38 [1969]: 25).

¹⁵ Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 126, 124.

¹⁶ See Jerome McGann for a clear and influential statement of the view of a changed Shelley in the last poems (“The Secrets of an Elder Day: Shelley after *Hellas*,” *Keats-Shelley Journal* 15 [1966]: 25–41).

¹⁷ Quotations from the poetry, with parenthetical line references, are taken, unless otherwise noted, from *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2002). Quotations from *The Zucca* are taken from *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd ed., corrected by G. M. Matthews (1970; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 664–67.

comes upon a plant, which is "[l]ike one who loved beyond his nature's law, / And in despair had cast him down to die" (43-44) and which "the Earth / Had crushed . . . on her unmaternal breast" (49-50). The plant is like the narrator, except that now obscure and transcendent desire becomes violation, the complaint against the mother becomes an explicit and angry indictment, and melancholy becomes suicidal despair.

The poet takes the plant home and cares for it lovingly. He thus makes a reflection of himself to love; doubling here is a way of re-creating the mother-child dyad, of responding to the retiring of the sea of beauty or to an unmaternal breast. But in this re-creation of the mother-child relationship, the poet takes over the role of the mother. He is so successful in that role that the zucca grows strong again. But that fantasy turns out to be a displacement of another one. We learn that all winter long the poet has wept healing tears over the zucca because "sounds of softest song / Mixed with . . . stringèd melodies" "Had loosed [his] heart" (71-72, 74). *The Zucca* has found its way to its true subject, Jane Williams, the singer and the player of stringed melodies in the Shelley circle at this time.

Meanwhile, a "savage storm" (76)

Was raving round the chamber hushed and warm;
The birds were shivering in their leafless bowers,
The fish were frozen in the pools, the form
Of every summer plant was dead . . .
Whilst this. . .

(78-82)

Here the poem breaks off, as if unable to answer the questions it has raised. *The Zucca* wonders if, in the midst of a killing winter of the spirit, there can be a renewed blossoming of emotional life through the care of a nurturing presence. Specifically, the poem plays with the fantasy of placing Jane in the motherly role. But both the issue of Jane and the issue of the mother raise strong uncertainties. The poem wonders if common human love can restore a spirit blasted by the failure of ideal love, by the failure of the primal mother to be a perpetual presence with us, and, perhaps even more, by the destructiveness or wintry coldness of the mother: "[t]he birds [are] . . . shivering" in their maternal nests; "[t]he fish [are] . . . frozen in the[ir uterine] pools." Early in the poem the poet loves "I know not what"; at the end of the poem, the suggestion is that he loves Jane, but he does not know whether he loves her as a nurturing, anaclitic compensation for the loss of ideal love or as a new

incarnation of it, and he does not know whether he loves her sexually. For the poet to love Jane sexually would not be to love beyond his nature's law, but it would be to love lawlessly, contrary to the demands of marriage and friendship. She fills the role of forbidden object. He can easily describe the storm outside, but he cannot describe exactly what would be happening within, either in the chamber with Jane or in his own heart. The poet's unresolved feelings about Jane and his anxieties about whether she means comfort or disturbance take over *The Zucca* and help us understand why the poem is left unfinished.

* * *

In *The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise*, also dated January 1822, Shelley writes manifestly about Jane and Edward Williams, but what he writes about them and exactly whom he is writing for are equivocal. Shelley sent the stanzas to Edward with instructions that "you may read them to Jane, but to no one else — and yet on second thought I had rather you would not."¹⁸ It seems that Shelley wanted Jane to see the poem but had some conflict about this wish, and that he absolutely did not want Mary to see it.

The serpent shut out from paradise in the poem's opening line is Shelley himself in a satanic or aggressive persona; "the snake," as is often noted, was a common nickname for him, coined by Byron.¹⁹ The poem follows with dissonant appositives:

The wounded deer must seek the herb no more
 In which its heart's cure lies —
 The widowed dove must cease to haunt a bower
 Like that from which its mate with feigned sighs
 Fleed in the April hour.

(2–6)

The movement from the wounding serpent to the "wounded deer" and then to the betrayed and abandoned dove is that of reaction formation. The figure of the "widowed dove" may seem to indicate that the paradise Shelley is exiled from is his relationship with his wife, and the manifest theme of the whole poem is the poet's unhappiness at home. But

¹⁸ *Letters of Shelley*, ed. Jones, 2:384.

¹⁹ Keach suggests that the poem is written in a disguised version of the ottava rima stanza that Byron had used in *Childe Harold* and that it alludes to Shelley's unhappiness in having to play a role in a performance of *litterati* when he was with Byron (see lines 27–31; Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 218).

he is literally speaking of a relationship "Like that," another bower that is as paradisaical as his own with Mary once was. The final appositive—"I, too, must seldom seek again / Near happy friends a mitigated pain" (7–8)—confirms that the paradise he speaks of is the happy marriage of Edward and Jane. In this stanza Shelley appears as an aggressor against the happiness of a perfect Adam and Eve, an intruder into the primal scene. But then Shelley denies that aggressive impulse, portraying himself as a harmless, passive victim.

As the poem develops, its audience becomes explicitly ambiguous:

Therefore, if now I see you seldomer,
 Dear friends, dear *friend*, know that I only fly
 Your looks, because they stir
 Grievs that should sleep, and hopes that cannot die.
(17–20)

First, the poet seems to be talking to both friends about his unhappiness over Mary. Then he singles out a particular friend; but is he talking to Jane about his uneasiness over his growing love for her, or is he talking to Edward and thereby denying that Jane is his special concern? He follows with a conventional image of love: "Full half an hour, to-day, I tried my lot / With various flowers, and every one still said, / 'She loves me, loves me, not'" (33–35). On the manifest level, "she" would be Mary. The lover's flower game, however, is typically associated not with husbands in a troubled marriage but with romantic youths in the early stages of courtship.

Estranged from his wife, disturbed by the Williamses, and uncertain of what he wants, the poet seeks "a place of peace / Where *my* weak heart and all its throbs will cease" (47–48). The stress on weakness is in part a defense against the aggressive sexual desire for his friend's wife and in part an expression of helplessness to resolve his ambivalence. In the final stanza he concentrates on that helplessness: "I asked her yesterday if she believed / That I had resolution" (49–50). The "her" would be Mary, and the kind of resolution pointed to manifestly by the drift of the poem would be suicide.²⁰ But the unspoken question is whether he has the resolution either to sleep with Jane or to end by suicide an unhappiness that is being exacerbated by his feelings for her. The answer

²⁰ On the same day that he wrote to Gisborne of the moonlit sails, he wrote to Edward Trelawney that he "would give any price" for the poison, prussic acid: "I need not tell you I have no intention of suicide at present,—but I confess it would be a comfort to me to hold in my possession that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest" (June 18, 1822, *Letters of Shelley*, ed. Jones, 2:433).

he gives himself is that he does not have resolution, and he writes the poem as a substitute for suicide or seduction: one who did have resolution "Would ne'er have thus relieved / His heart with words, but what his judgment bade / Would do" (50–52).

The poem concludes by returning to its opening situation in which the poet is an outsider and Edward and Jane are in paradise, although now the outsider is no threat but wholly a sorrowful figure deserving of sympathy: "These verses were too sad / To send to you, but that I know, / Happy yourself, you feel another's woe" (54–56). It is perhaps not the sadness of the verses that makes Shelley think about suppressing them but their provocative and aggressive implications.

The uncertainty about the audience of this poem is not only one of its ambiguities but also a strategy for dealing with them. Addressing the poem to the lady's husband is a way for the poet to deny his interest in the lady. Edward serves to protect Shelley from his own impulses.²¹ But Edward also has a positive value in the poem. The outsider looking enviously and sorrowfully into paradise is like the child closed out of his parents' intimacy, and for that situation to have its full excitement the position of the father must be filled. Edward plays the necessary role of the other man, without whom the love for the lady would not have its fullest forbidden quality. That the other man is not a paternal ogre, as is usually the case in Shelley, but a close friend, adds a third element to the situation. By putting that kind of figure in the father's position, Shelley can express in displaced form love for the father, which is one of the most deeply repressed impulses in his sensibility. In addition, Shelley had been friendly with Edward before he also became fond of Jane—he at first found her of no interest at all—and in *The Boat on the Serchio* he wrote of the pleasures of their sailing trips together and their reminiscences of life at the same public school. Their friendship in the context of Shelley's infatuation with Jane brings to mind the fantasy psychoanalysts have observed in which sleeping with another man's woman is a way for a man to have his penis in the same place as the other man's.²² The point is more clearly applicable to Shelley's friend T. J. Hogg, who tried to seduce Shelley's first wife, Harriet, may actually have slept with Mary, and eventually married Jane Williams. But

²¹ Vatalaro writes that Edward and Mary both serve in the Williams poems as buffers to protect Shelley against his regressive wishes ("Semiotic Echoes," 76), but he does not include genital wishes among the impulses that provoke defensive measures.

²² See, for example, John Frosch, *The Psychotic Process* (New York: International Universities Press, 1983), 477–86.

Shelley's bringing the other man into a series of love poems in a trusting and affectionate way suggests that homosocial desire plays a role in the complex emotional dynamics of the situation.²³ Thus, when the poet says, "Dear friends, dear *friend*," he is specifying three distinct objects of affection in an elaborate fantasy: Jane, Edward and Jane as a quasi-parental unit, and Edward.

* * *

One Word Is Too Often Profaned, a lyric usually associated with Jane, is another poem that expresses not desire but its restraint. This work too begins with a parallel structure in which the parallel elements are actually divergent:

One word is too often profaned
 For me to profane it,
 One feeling too falsely disdained
 For thee to disdain it.

(1-4)

The lady need not fear any sexual proposition from the poet; the word "love" will remain sacred and spiritual in his relationship with her. At the same time, he acknowledges that he does have sexual feelings for her, and he shapes her response to that information by telling her that she is too sensitive to treat those feelings with scorn. At a certain level he is pursuing the wishes he is claiming to restrain, for if the lady will not scorn his desire, then, logically, she may fulfill it.

In the second stanza, far from giving up his love, he tries to transform it into something acceptable:

I can give not what men call love, —
 But wilt thou accept not
 The worship the heart lifts above
 And the Heavens reject not?
 The desire of the moth for the star,
 Of the night for the morrow,
 The devotion to something afar
 From the sphere of our sorrow.

(9-16)

²³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in analyzing erotic triangles, uses the concept of "male homosocial desire" to refer to a continuum from male bonding to homosexuality. See *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1-2. A thorough discussion of triangles in Shelley's work would have to consider that the third figure is sometimes a woman, as in *Epipsychidion*.

What he can give the lady is both sadder and higher than sexual love. We can see in this poem the clear workings of sublimation, as the sublime in the second stanza answers the problematically sexual in the first stanza. *One Word Is Too Often Profaned* is a Platonic seduction poem, with Platonic meaning not only innocent but also transcendent and ideal, and with the seduction, the invitation to be "something afar" for the poet's heart, carrying as much weight as the innocence. In this poem the poet tries both to rise above his sexual desire for the lady and to intensify his intimacy with her.

* * *

Sublimation is not the strategy of *The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient*. Shelley had been hypnotized by Mary to ease the pain from his kidney stones, and now Jane had taken over the role of mesmerist. Shelley's physical distress was intense, but it is not the main issue of this poem, which conveys wit and seductiveness more than suffering and which centers on the erotic quality of mesmerism and the poet's fascination with surrendering totally to the power of a woman.

The speaker is the Magnetic Lady herself: "Sleep, sleep on, forget thy pain— / My hand is on thy brow"; "from my fingers flow / The powers of life, and like a sign / Seal thee from thine hour of woe" (1-2, 5-7).²⁴ She is a maternal source of the flowing powers of life, and her touch on his forehead magically keeps him enclosed from any harm, as if in a womb. The stanza concludes with a reversal of mood, in which the Magnetic Lady tells the patient that her powers of life may "brood on thee, but may not blend / With thine" (8-9). It is the poem's controlling myth that while Jane can't be a lover to Shelley, she can be a mother, brooding on him, and that these roles are safely distinct.

The second stanza begins with a reiteration of her sexual refusal—"I love thee not" (10)—but then goes on to justify her taking on the maternal, consoling role: she is made to imagine sympathetically that her beloved Edward "Might have been lost like thee" and "'a hand which was not mine / Might then have charmed his agony / As I another's'" (14-17). The poem thus solicits the consent of Edward and even Mary to the relationship. We might even see Shelley trying to persuade himself that there is nothing wrong with the emotional intimacy he is encouraging.

²⁴ Quotations from *The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient* are taken from the text published by Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 257-59.

In the third stanza Jane offers Shelley an anodyne not only for his physical suffering but for all the pain in his past and future; she offers a uterine repose:

"Sleep, sleep, and with the slumber of
The dead and the unborn . . .
Forget thy life and love;
Forget that thou must wake,—forever
Forget the world's dull scorn."

(19–23)

But then at the end of this series of *yeses* comes a *no*: "And forget me, for I can never / Be thine'" (26–27).

After this disavowal, however, Jane in the fourth stanza reiterates her offer to be a mother: "Like a cloud big with a May shower / My soul weeps healing rain / On thee, thou withered flower'" (28–30). She is like a breast filled with milk, and the poet, far from an aggressive seducer, is a passive, sensitive being, even a castrated one. Under her influence he regresses to infancy, recovering "a second youth again'" (34). In contrast to the previous stanza, this one ends with an affirmation: "By mine thy being is to its deep / Possesst'" (35–36). Although she can never be his, he can be hers. He may not have an oedipal triumph, but he can have a preoedipal one.

In the final stanza, "The spell is done,'" and the sleeper awakes, feeling better (37). Jane asks, "What would do / You good when suffering and awake?" (39–40). The poet answers,

"What would cure that would kill me, Jane,
And as I must on earth abide
Awhile yet, tempt me not to break
My chain."

(42–45)

Now she is the sexual aggressor, the one to blame for his arousal and his tangled emotions. His passivity in the poem is both defensive—he is the tempted, innocent one—and erotic—he is the hypnotized one, the healed flower. But in reality the poet is highly active, or aggressive: he is the author of Jane's words in the poem; he makes her say *no* but in a way that leaves the door open and indeed is accompanied by her stimulating and provocative conduct of the hypnosis. It is important, however, that "*no*" is one of the things he makes her say. That is, in this complex seduction poem, the character Jane is not wholly saying *no* and the author Shelley is not wholly saying *yes*.

To portray Shelley as the active author is not to say that his passivity is merely a mask. Shelley has a need in the Jane poems to be the recipient of the magic words and touch of a motherly figure. At the same time, he seeks to be an originator of magic words; and perhaps the most potent or seductive magic word is the word "Jane" in the last stanza, for with that word the poet is telling her that the sexual feeling expressed in the poem goes beyond the borders of a courtly poem about a Magnetic Lady and really does refer to "you, Jane Williams." I would add one further note about audience. Above the poem Shelley wrote, "For Jane & Williams alone to see"; and on the wrapping in which he sent it, he wrote, "To Jane. Not to be opened unless you are alone, or with Williams."²⁵ That means, "Don't let Mary see it." It also means, "Williams can or should see it." Edward is to be present both as safeguard against dangerous impulses and as rival in an exciting oedipal triangle.

* * *

The companion poems *To Jane: The Invitation* and *To Jane: The Recollection* were written after a full-day walk Shelley took with Mary and Jane to a seaside forest near Pisa and were then given to Jane. In the poems the original experience is notably transformed, for *The Invitation* opens with Mary eliminated from the scene and the poet addressing Jane in the mode of a pastoral love poem: "Best and brightest, come away" (1).

The poem compares Jane to the day itself—she is "Fairer far than this fair day" (2)—a marvelous visitation of spring-like earliness in the middle of wintry lateness: "The brightest hour of unborn spring" has appeared in "hoar February" (7, 10). It is as if the poet has found an entry into a realm of pre-existence. But that hour is also a lover, kissing "the forehead of the earth" and warming "the frozen streams" (12, 14). The day or hour is again compared to Jane, "Making the wintry world appear / Like one on whom thou smilest, dear" (19–20). The fantasy of the magical hour suggests the Hours, or Horai, of Greek myth, fertility goddesses of the seasons, attendants or versions of the great goddess.²⁶ Jane and the day or hour are ultimately comparable because both are incarnations of the good mother.

The domain of the female Hour is a state of nature, "Where the soul need not repress / Its music" (24–25)—a state where the poet and Jane

²⁵ See Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 257.

²⁶ As Reiman and Fraistat note, Shelley uses the concept of the Horai in the first speech of *Prometheus Unbound*, in which Prometheus anticipates the hour that will liberate him (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 211).

can be unrepressed. In contrast is the realm of "men and towns" (21) and of disturbing thoughts:

Reflexion, 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.

(33-38)

It may seem surprising to find staves and verse grouped among the sorrows of thought; in effect, even poetry is dismissed. Indeed, Shelley goes on to say farewell to aspects of mind associated with imagination: "Expectation too, be off! / To-day is for itself enough"; and "Long having lived on [hope's] sweet food, / At length I find one moment's good" (39-40, 43-44). Here is enjoyment of "what this sweet hour yields" (32), rather than the desire of the moth for the star, the characteristic subject matter of Shelley's past staves and verse. And yet as an invitation the poem is a work of hope and expectation. Nature invites the poet away from the pains and disturbances of imagination, but that nature with its perfect love is itself something imagined and desired. The apparent rejection of the Romantic imagination defends against the extremity of the hopes and imaginings Shelley has for his relationship with Jane. The good "one moment" is not part of the mortal, limited world; it is the Faustian ideal moment that haunted Shelley throughout this last period of his life. The "sweet hour," or *Hora*, is an embodiment of Faust's "eternal feminine."

In the conclusion, the poet invites Jane into a dark forest of Dionysian pine and ivy, in which they will find "pools where winter-rains / Image all their roof of leaves" (50-51). Here are the reflections not of common thought but of early narcissism, in which the child sees its mother to be as intimately related to him as a mirror image. Beyond the forest is the seashore, a realm of earliness and potential, adorned with daisies, "wind-flowers, and violets / Which yet join not scent to hue" and "Crown the pale year weak and new" (59-61); on that shore "the night is left behind" and "the earth and ocean meet, / And all things seem only one / In the universal Sun" (62, 67-69). The walk in the country has become a regressive voyage, like Asia's in *Prometheus Unbound* back to the primordial ocean, to the radiance of "a diviner day" (2.5.103).

Chernaik remarks on the innocence of Shelley's landscape: "The elements that meet or reflect one another in love do not merge, barely

touch, and bear no fruit, scent, or color."²⁷ That scent and hue are not yet joined in the flowers is a sign of their youth, and that youth helps constitute the Edenic nature of this landscape. But the emphasis on youthfulness and regression also serves to deny oedipal or genital intentions. Those intentions, however, emerge in the flowers of the landscape. The windflower was originally a nymph who was changed into a flower after the West Wind fell in love with her. The violet was associated with the nymph Io, who was beloved by Zeus and disguised as a cow to hide her from his wife; Zeus created violets for her to feed on. The daisy in Roman myth was the nymph Belides, who changed herself into a flower to escape a pursuing god.²⁸ All three flowers allude to maidens being pursued. In the beginning of the poem, the unborn hour "Found, it seems, this halcyon morn" (9); at the end "all things seem only one" (68). *The Invitation* is a poem of multifold seeming. In it the poet wishes to seem to Jane and perhaps to himself to be writing not an invitation specifically to sex but only a piece of charming whimsy, only a poem, only a bit of seeming.

* * *

In *The Recollection*, the day, "All beautiful and bright as thou," is "dead," and the poet must "trace / The epitaph of glory fled" (2-3, 5-6). *The Recollection* describes what happened when Jane accepted the fictional invitation, not what actually happened when the poet, his wife, and Williams went for a walk on February 2, and thus the poem portrays not a return from fantasy to actuality but the full playing out of the original fantasy. Why does the fantasy end in loss and death?

As Shelley begins his recollection of the day, he stresses its peacefulness: "The lightest wind was in its nest, / The Tempest in its home" (11-12). The poet feels as if he has returned to a world of primal glory: "It seemed as if the hour were one / Sent from beyond the skies," scattering on the world "A light of Paradise" (17-18, 20). We are momentarily reminded of the absent wind, as the travelers pass pines "Tortured by storms to shapes as rude / As serpents interlaced" (23-24). But the threat is kept in check, as the pines are "soothed by every azure breath" (25), and the mood of regressive serenity prevails and even intensifies: the trees are "As still as in the silent deep / The Ocean woods may be" (31-32). The entire landscape becomes a womb-like "magic circle," in

²⁷ Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 172.

²⁸ See Ernst Lehner and Johanna Lehner, *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees* (New York: Tudor, 1960), 58.

the center of which is "one fair form that filled with love / The lifeless atmosphere" (50, 51–52). The regressive mood culminates in an extended description of the forest pools, in which the poet sees "a little sky / Gulphed in a world below," a "More perfect," "Elysian" world (55–56, 63, 74). He finds in that "softer day below" not only a uterine paradise but also a vision of reciprocal love, for in the reflections he sees "the water's love / Of that fair forest green," while "like one beloved" the forest lends "To the dark water's breast, / Its every leaf and lineament / With more than truth express" (76, 71–72, 77–80).

But suddenly the trance is broken, and the poet returns fully to the world of care and sorrow, as

an envious wind crept by,
Like an unwelcome thought
Which from the mind's too faithful eye
Blots one dear image out.

(81–84)

"Less oft is peace in _____'s mind," he concludes, "Than calm in water seen" (87–88).²⁹ Some readers see in the envious wind the jealousy of Mary Shelley, her presence finally breaking through into the poem's surface.³⁰ But the connotations of the image go further. In *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, composed three years earlier, envy is similarly the antagonist of paradise, and that envy is pandemic: in the paradise of that poem, "Every sprite beneath the moon / Would repent its envy vain, / And the earth grow young again" (371–73). Also pertinent is the envious wind of Greek myth, Zephyr, who destroyed Hyacinthus out of jealousy. The imagining of perfect love provokes a sense of destructive authority: "A frown is on the Heaven's brow," the poet reports at the beginning of the poem (8). But that the wind is like an unwelcome thought suggests that the beautiful moment is disrupted by inner as well as outer factors. Angela Leighton writes that the passage manifests a skeptical tendency in Shelley that "leaves nothing indelible," and Keach suggests

²⁹ This is Chernaik's version of line 87; she is following a fair copy (British Museum add. MS 37538, fols. 40–41). Reiman and Fraistat print line 87 as "Less oft is peace in S[helley]'s mind" (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 474). Chernaik notes that Reiman and Fraistat's version first appears, as "S_____s," in Mary Shelley's edition, *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824). See Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 266, 272.

³⁰ For example, Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), 2:343. Vatalaro writes that Mary Shelley "still manages to shatter the vision [and] eventually terminates the poem," although the poet tries to keep her out; according to Vatalaro, she "figuratively drain[s] . . . Jane's nourishment away from Shelley" ("Semiotic Echoes," 82, 86).

that the vanishing of the moment with Jane in the landscape is inherent in the manner of its creation, for that moment, as either a wish in the first poem or a memory in the second, "is always out of reach."³¹ I think that a psychological description can help us further understand this episode of erasure and particularly its association with envy and unwelcome thoughts. In the return of the wind that had tortured the trees to "rude" serpent shapes, we can see the intrusion of phallic and satanic impulses to shatter the calm. Furthermore, breaking into the love between the forest and the water, the envious wind suggests not only the father's jealousy of the mother and child but also the child's jealousy of the loving parents, like the jealousy of the serpent Shelley shut out of Jane and Edward's paradise. Envy, from various sources, is an inevitable product of the triangular situation that Shelley has constructed.

The passage suggests still another source of disturbance. If the mind in these lines contains unwelcome thoughts, it is also "too faithful" to "one dear image," or in an earlier version, "thy bright image,"³² that is, to its own paradisaical vision of Jane or to its own idealized imaginings in general. Susan Wolfson writes that "imagination itself . . . blots out its dear image."³³ How can we understand this process psychologically? Hostile elements of the outside world or unwelcome thoughts blot out the beautiful reflection, but so does a final pulling back from a disturbingly extreme commitment to what is described as both an Elysian world and, ambiguously, "An atmosphere without a breath" (75). If the atmosphere without the primal mother is lifeless, so, in its own way, is the atmosphere with her. That the sky in the water is "More boundless than the depth of night" (59) suggests transcendence and freedom but also dissolution and primal darkness.³⁴ In *The Invitation* and *The Recollection*, the idea of serenity is invested with a regressive impulse that is, in part, disturbing, and so the very desire for peace leads eventually to the end of peace. In this respect it is suggestive that the poem closes with Shelley naming himself. The poet returns from the edge of the water to a

³¹ See Leighton, "Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*," in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth Century Views*, ed. G. Kim Blank (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 239–40; and Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 216, 208. Keach is particularly good in his treatment of Shelley's development and undoing of the reflection imagery in the companion poems (208–16). See also McGann, who writes that the wind "that wipes away the image . . . is itself a part of that vision" ("Secrets of an Elder Day," 34).

³² See *The Pine Forest of the Cascine Near Pisa*, which combines the companion poems into one (*Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson, 671, line 112).

³³ Wolfson, *Formal Charges*, 219.

³⁴ For Vatalaro, the entire scene in the forest "appears to Shelley as a world of harmonic possibility, but also as a place of suffocating fusion" ("Semiotic Echoes," 83).

world which is not only the realm of care and self-conscious reflectiveness but also the realm of differences, of personal identity, of names. In a way, what is being re-collected in *The Recollection* is the poet's mature identity and its world. If the poem latently sees disturbance in the beautiful world in the water, it also latently sees value in the sorrow-filled world above.

I suggest that what spoils Shelley's imagining is, in part, the imagination's own excessiveness and the anxiety attendant upon that excessiveness. The wind that is like a thought, that seems both outer and inner, is reminiscent of Wordsworth's inward "correspondent breeze"

that gently moved
With quickening virtue, but is now become
A tempest, a redundant energy,
Vexing its own creation.

(*The Prelude*, 1.35–38)

In *The Recollection*, the soothing "azure breath" turns into the destroying envious wind. The imagination creates a paradisaic image of serenity and then, excessive and uncontrollable, charged with oedipal, preoedipal, and uterine fantasy, goes on to vex its creation. In addition, since in the opening, the day, which is like "thou," is "dead," the poet cannot imagine the primal mother without also imagining her loss.³⁵

What has been vexed, however, is ultimately not a regressive ideal of the id but another moment of seeming. The magical hour "seemed . . . one / Sent from beyond the skies" (17–18). With an act of seeming, with a poem, the ego had tried to hold together in a fragile peace the reflections in the water and the reflections of the separate, mature mind. But as the poet imagines too many things, he also wants too many things for that peaceful seeming to be sustained: he wants the perfect world "gulphed" below, and he wants to breathe; he envies Edward and Jane, but if he had Jane, he might envy the important friendship he used to have with Edward and the relationship, troubled as it was, that he had with Mary; he might envy, as well, a clear conscience.

Even so, the poem at its end, far from portraying, as Keach suggests, that the reflections are "delusively untruthful," affirms its faith in a paradisaic vision.³⁶ The tone of the poem's conclusion is reminiscent of Coleridge's tone at the end of *Dejection*, where the poet prays that his "Dear

³⁵ Vatalaro writes that while Jane represents the nursing mother, Mary represents "the abandoning mother" ("Semiotic Echoes," 86). In my argument, Jane is both; Shelley can't keep the positive sense of the mother from slipping into the negative.

³⁶ Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 214.

Lady" may "evermore" know a joy that he is unable to foresee for himself (138–39). Coleridge is like Moses on Pisgah, granted a sight of the Promised Land but knowing that he will never be able to enter it. So for Shelley in the last quatrain, the paradise of Jane and the landscape is real, but he himself will not be part of it:

Though thou art ever fair and kind
And forests ever green,
Less oft is peace in _____'s mind
Than calm in water seen.

(85–88)

The fantasy of a voyage to paradise ends with the poet's dark sense of himself as a troubled and troubling presence, an outsider, intruder, and destroyer, an envious Satan.

* * *

Shelley's friend Edward Trelawney reported another, later outing into the pine forest near Pisa, in which he came upon the poet lost in "bardish reverie," gazing into "a deep pool of dark glimmering water." According to Trelawney, Shelley had been working in the forest on a poem, which he later presented to Jane Williams with a gift of a guitar.³⁷ In *With a Guitar. To Jane*, Shelley, Jane, and Edward Williams appear as characters in *The Tempest*, Ariel, Miranda, and Ferdinand. The poem is framed as a speech of Ariel, a favorite name of Shelley for himself, to Miranda. In *The Tempest* itself, Ariel neither speaks nor appears to Miranda; in *With a Guitar*, Ariel serves the daughter, not the father:

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 can'st, and only thou,
Make the delighted spirit glow,
'Till joy denies itself again
And too intense is turned to pain.

(1–8)

To judge from this opening, the poem might be better labeled "Ferdinand to Miranda"; indeed, in a draft, Ariel speaks of Miranda making

³⁷ Edward John Trelawney, *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 1:103, 107. This edition includes in one volume both volumes of the original, separately paginated.

not "the" but "his" delighted spirit glow.³⁸ But as if in reaction to this ambiguous beginning, the speaker now clarifies his relationship to the lady and justifies his making a gift and writing an affectionate poem to her:

For by permission and command
Of thine own *prince Ferdinand*
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken.
(9–12)

The poet goes on to imagine himself as the lady's guardian; he has guided her "From Prospero's enchanted cell, / As the mighty verses tell" (17–18) to her current happiness with Ferdinand on the throne of Naples, and he will continue to guide her even beyond this life:

When you die, the silent Moon
In her interlunar swoon
Is not sadder in her cell
Than deserted Ariel;
When you live again on Earth
Like an unseen Star of birth
Ariel guides you o'er the sea
Of life from your nativity.
(23–30)

Why this motif of reincarnation? We can say at this point that Shelley is creating a little poetic myth of intimacy; Ariel is closer and more important to her than she knows, more important even than Ferdinand, for he will always be with her, like her native star.

Shakespeare's Ariel was a disembodied spirit, who once had been imprisoned in a pine by the witch Sycorax because he had refused to do her evil bidding. Shelley's Ariel, however, is "Imprisoned for some fault of his / In a body like a grave" (38–39). This is Ariel in a man's body, a dark Ariel who feels buried alive, and, since he is being punished even after the action of the original play is over and Miranda and Ferdinand are on the throne of Naples, he is an Ariel with an unexplained and lingering sense of guilt. But he is careful to note that his desires in relation to Miranda are properly restrained and harmless: "From you, he only dares to crave / For his service and his sorrow / A smile today, a song tomorrow" (40–42).

In the second section of the poem, the subject changes to the guitar

³⁸ See Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 262.

and its history. Its maker cut down a tree that was dreaming of love in its "winter sleep" (46), and the tree is reborn into a "happier form" (56), in which it will have a special relationship with Jane. As a gift the guitar is a "silent token" of the inexpressible, but as an instrument it has a special eloquence: its maker "taught it justly to reply / To all who question skillfully" (59–60), and to those it will reveal "sweet oracles," "secrets of an elder day," even the music of the spheres (63, 86, 74–78). Its deepest mysteries of all, however, are reserved for a single musician: "It keeps its highest holiest tone / For our beloved Jane alone" (89–90).

Jerome McGann judges the poem severely flawed because of the presence of Ariel, "a source of embarrassment" in the work.³⁹ Ariel belongs to a paradisaical vision that Shelley has surpassed:

The poem is divided against itself, since Ariel really has no reason for being there and yet insists on intruding in the first forty-two lines. . . . Ariel is a renegade from [Shelley's Promethean] world, lost in the world of humanity, out of his element. . . . The place of stability, of beauty, of honor, is no longer the bower of bliss, but "the humbler, happier lot" (35) shared by Ferdinand and Miranda, and away from any enchanted island. . . . Ariel is lost and useless, a symbol merely of a past that has been rejected. The unimportance of the faery sprite is betrayed by his virtual absence from the last half of the poem.⁴⁰

But we need to take into account the rhetorical context of the poem; it is a poem to Jane, written within the framework of a complicated relationship. In the Shakespearean role-playing of the poem, Shelley tries to imagine an acceptable part that he can play in her life. Guardian spirits, Northrop Frye writes, are characteristic creatures of an innocent world,⁴¹ and the first half of *With a Guitar* is a lengthy demonstration of Shelley's innocence: although he may appear to have a man's body, that is only his prison; he is really a spirit without physical feelings; he desires from her only a smile and a song. For Shelley to be Ariel is for him to deny any lust and aggression; to be Ariel is not to be Caliban.⁴² To be Ariel is to be pregenital or seemingly asexual, a harmless child.

³⁹ McGann, "Secrets of an Elder Day," 32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

⁴¹ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 151.

⁴² Weller writes that Shelley's Ariel is presented "as though [he] had been compromised by a touch of Caliban" ("Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric," 918), and Keach suggests that when the guitar is said not to produce its best music for "those who tempt it to betray / These secrets of an elder day," it is hard for the reader not to think of "tempt" and "betray" in sexual terms (lines 85–86, cited in *Shelley's Style*, 223). I am analyzing "Ariel" as a construction that tries to defend against such associations by reaction formation.

Far from being a satanic intruder into the Williamses' paradise, he presides over Miranda's transformation from maiden to queen by guiding her from Prospero's island to the throne of Naples. Indeed, Shelley denies assertiveness of any kind. His explicit precursor work, *The Tempest*, is spoken of in reverent terms as "the mighty verses"; Ariel has nothing to do with the paternal realm of might. Behind Shakespeare's Ariel, Frye writes, lies the archetype of the tricky slave,⁴³ but Shelley's Ariel is cleansed of the slightest tinge of trickiness or rebellion. As a childlike being, he is the antithesis of another Shelleyan child, and another inventor of a musical instrument that replies with revelations to those who "question" it with skill: the subversive, usurping trickster god in Shelley's translation of *Homer's Hymn to Mercury*.⁴⁴

But if Shelley uses his Ariel-mask to deny one kind of relationship with Jane, he uses the same device to cultivate another. As Miranda's guide, he is comparable to the childlike Hermaphrodite, who pilots the Witch of Atlas's boat, or the child Spirit of Earth, who in *Prometheus Unbound* is the "delicate spirit / That guides the earth through Heaven" (3.4.6-7). Shelley's Ariel is Eros as the child-companion of the goddess, as a child so close to the mother as to be almost part of her identity. Shelley's Ariel is the child who replaces the husband, Ferdinand, in importance and priority in a mother-centered vision. The theme of reincarnation becomes clearer in this context. What Jane Ellen Harrison calls "the great reincarnation cycle of man and nature" was characteristic of the pre-Olympian religion of the archaic goddess.⁴⁵ In such a setting Ferdinand becomes a minor figure, the temporary consort of an eternally returning divinity, whose permanent companion is the symbol and manifestation of her female power, the child. The motifs in the first half of the poem—reincarnation, harmony, music, the music of the spheres, the priority of the soul, the body as a prison, stars and especially stars of destiny—are all elements of Pythagoreanism, which Harrison describes as a version of Orphism and a revival of matriarchalism. Pythagoras, she writes, was said to have learned "most of his ethical lore

⁴³ See Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 173-74.

⁴⁴ "Question" appears in *With a Guitar*, line 60, and *Homer's Hymn to Mercury*, line 654. See *Hymn to Mercury*, in *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson, 696-97. Shelley's description of Mercury's lyre is parallel in theme and in several details to his description of the guitar.

⁴⁵ Harrison, *Themis*, 294; I use the 1921 revised edition reprinted in "*Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion*" and "*Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*" (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1962). See also pages 492-98 on matrilineal structure, the goddess, and the male figure in her realm.

from a woman, Themistoclea, a priestess of Delphi," and the Pythagorean religion was, in essence, a women's movement.⁴⁶

A further Pythagorean idea in the poem is purification, which appears in the doctrine that the soul must cleanse itself of the grave-like body in which it has been imprisoned for its sinfulness.⁴⁷ In *With a Guitar*, Ariel is expiating some unnamed guilt. More generally, we can see the whole poem as an effort of purification. At the same time he wrote the poem, Shelley was translating *Faust*;⁴⁸ in what we may call the poem's pre-text, Shelley and Jane are not Ariel and Miranda but Faust and Gretchen, and we can sense that pre-text in the rapture of the opening lines. The two halves of the poem are two attempts at sublimation. In the first half, Ariel, the spirit, the creature of air and heights, is an emblem of sublimation, while in the second half, the felling of the tree as it is dreaming of love is like a castration, and the guitar is a new sublimated form of the lost phallus. Ariel and the guitar are parallel forms of sublimated desire; at the outset they are explicitly identified with each other: "Take / This slave of music for the sake / Of him who is the slave of thee." Further, just as Ariel is childlike, the guitar in a draft of the opening lines is a "child of music."⁴⁹ The motif of metempsychosis suggests, among other things, the vicissitudes of an instinct as it passes from life to life, from sexual desire to ideals of disembodiment, harmony, and even holiness, as well as to music and poetry.

When Jane is named in the last line, the Shakespearean disguises come off, and the masque is over. After a passage about questions, oracles, and secrets, Shelley seems to be saying, "It's true, I have been hiding something, and here is what I have to confess: my deep but chaste devotion to our Jane." But some things are still left unspoken. When we read of the spirit within the guitar, we may think of Ariel, the spirit within a body. And if we see Ariel reincarnated in the guitar, we can see in the relationship between Miranda and the "loved" guitar (58), who whispers to her "in enamoured tone" (62), an intimacy that the poet would like to have with Jane. And if we see the guitar as a metamorphosed

⁴⁶ See Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (1922; repr., New York: Meridian, 1959), 645–47.

⁴⁷ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. "Pythagoras (1)"; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 296–301, 302–3; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 143–56.

⁴⁸ Neville Rogers shows Shelley in his notebook moving directly from the *Faust* translation to *With a Guitar*. See *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 202–3.

⁴⁹ See Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 262.

phallus, then the suggestion of castration, in the asexual Ariel and the cutting down of the tree, is only a disguise and the poet's gift of a guitar is, thinly veiled, the gift of his phallus.

Unspoken too is another fantasy. Insofar as Ariel is Miranda's guide and guardian, he is strikingly unlike a passive and dependent preoedipal child. Ariel represents a fantasy of being in childlike, dyadic closeness to the mother and at the same time of having control over her, of being her protector, shaping her destiny, and having power over her absences and other interests. Coleridge said that the original Ariel was like "the child to whom supernatural powers are given."⁵⁰ Shelley's Ariel too is both childlike and supernaturally powerful.

The Tempest is not only a source of roles and masks that Shelley manipulates to express what cannot otherwise be spoken. Its presence brings into focus the dreams of the poem. *The Tempest* embodies a dream of happy endings to labyrinthine entanglements, a dream of storms that may be providential. It embodies a dream of woman, of mothers, and of the oceanic: Sycorax gives way to Miranda; and "Though the seas threaten, they are merciful" (5.1.178). It also embodies a dream of transformation, a sea-change, as in Ariel's famous song, into the rich and strange; it embodies a dream of perfect sublimation. So Coleridge says of Ariel's mind that "when one feeling is past from it, not a trace is left behind."⁵¹

But above all, *The Tempest* embodies what is perhaps the poem's deepest secret: a dream of using poetry to control reality.⁵² *The Tempest* is an emblem of male, paternal power—"mighty verses"—that Shelley, as Ariel, would never presume to challenge. But although Shelley takes the role of Ariel, he also stages the entire masque and in that respect is like Prospero, a figure who in Shakespeare is angry and aggrieved as well as godlike. One shadowy presence in the poem is the "artist" (43), who cuts down the tree, makes the guitar, and teaches it to reply to ques-

⁵⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1811–12 *Lectures on Shakespeare & Milton*, Lecture 9, in *Lectures 1808–1819 on Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, vol. 5, part 1 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 364.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² For Weller too, "the force of art to charm experience" is an important theme in *With a Guitar*; here and in the other lyrics to Jane Williams, Shelley envisions using art "to confer a supernatural duration and fixity on moments of human time" ("Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric," 928). In the present paragraph I suggest a different view of the force of art, but the effort to make the beautiful Faustian hour endure through art is certainly a theme in the sequence. Weller interestingly sees the capitalized "Tempest" that is "in its home," or far away, in *The Recollection* (line 12) as an allusion to *The Tempest* (925).

tions. Especially because Shelley calls him an artist, we may assimilate this figure of authority and violence with the father Prospero and with Shakespeare, author of “mighty verses,” into a composite male figure as antithetical to Ariel as Caliban is. *With a Guitar. To Jane* dreams of sublimating sexual desire and aggression into art, but it ultimately reveals art to be an instrument of eros and aggression. The strategy of the poem appears most clearly in the repeated word “cell”: Prospero inhabits an “enchanted cell” (17), and then the moon “Is not sadder in her cell / Than deserted Ariel” (25–26). Ariel is associated with the female moon, but the moon, as an occupant of a cell, is associated with Prospero: Ariel is thus deviously associated with Prospero; the comparison with the mother is a screen for the identification with the father. “I’m not the aggressive male,” the poem says to Jane, Edward, and Mary, “and this is only poetry”; but what the poem dreams most deeply is that poetry may be a great magic for transforming reality. In such a transformation, Shelley would have Jane and be free of guilt too. We can even say that at a certain level Shelley dreams of transforming his idyllic little community of friends into a primal horde, with himself as the father and the women at his disposal.

We are now very far from the poem’s urbane, graceful, and deferential surface tone. That tone represents a denial of the underlying fantasies, a resistance to them, and a realistic assessment of them; but insofar as that tone is charming and seductive in its own way, it also represents the poet’s effort to bring those fantasies to life.

* * *

Shelley takes up the theme of Jane’s guitar playing again in *To Jane: The Keen Stars Were Twinkling*, which was given to her the same day that Shelley wrote to Gisborne about his evening sails with the Williamses and Jane’s playing. On the manuscript Shelley added another of his elusive prefaces: “I sate down to write some words for an ariette which might be profane—but it was in vain to struggle with the ruling spirit, who compelled me to speak of things sacred to yours & Wilhelmeister’s indulgence—I commit them to your secrecy & your mercy & will try & do better another time.”⁵³ In this poetic rendering of the moonlit, musical boat rides, Edward Williams, the “captain,” is eliminated, but in the note he is an indulgent and approving Prince Ferdinand, made, in effect, to acquiesce in his own removal.

⁵³ Reiman and Fraistat, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 479.

In a playful renaming, he is also cast as a Romantic hero, Goethe's Wilhelm Meister. In the letter to Gisborne, Shelley identifies with Faust, but here he gives the role of the quester to the other man. The allusion is suggestive in several ways. Like Shelley, Meister follows a vision of an ideal woman. Unlike Shelley, he achieves earthly contentment: "I know I have attained a happiness which I have not deserved, and which I would not change with any thing in life," he says at the end of the *Apprenticeship*.⁵⁴ He has found the Faustian moment without having to pay the price of death and damnation, and he is also the possessor of the desirable woman. Meister thus appears in the novel both as a melancholy and idealistic seeker, like Shelley, and as one who has what Shelley lacks. Ultimately, Meister is a figure through whom Goethe conducts an ambivalent exploration and attempted catharsis of Romantic idealism. Novalis called *Wilhelm Meister* "a *Candide* directed against the poetic experience."⁵⁵ Meister emerges from Romanticism into a healthy maturity, while the two characters who embody Romantic longing die: Mignon, the child of incest, sexually ambiguous, haunted by the sea and by a longing for origins; and her father, the tragic harper, an earlier analogue of Wordsworth's Solitary in *The Excursion* or Byron's Manfred. What Georg Lukács disapprovingly called the "seductive beauty" of Mignon and her father is epitomized by Mignon's famous song of yearning for her paradisaical homeland, the land of the *Zitronen*:⁵⁶

Know'st thou the land where citron-apples bloom,
 And oranges like gold in leafy gloom;
 A gentle wind from deep blue heaven blows,
 The myrtle thick, and high the laurel grows?
 Know'st thou it, then?
 'Tis there! 'tis there,
 O my belov'd one, thou with me must go!⁵⁷

If in Shelley's trace of a masque, Edward Williams is cast as Meister, he himself, author of the song to Jane, would be the Ariel-like Mignon or the suicidal harper. Shelley's casual allusion sets his poetic gift to

⁵⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, trans. Thomas Carlyle (1824; repr., New York: Heritage Press, 1959), 567.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Georg Lukács, "*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*," trans. L. Evans and Victor Lange, in *Goethe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Victor Lange, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 95. The Novalis passage ("*Es ist ein Candide gegen die Poësie*") comes from a letter to Ludwig Tieck, in *Novalis Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich Von Hardenbergs*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960-75), 4:323.

⁵⁶ See Lukács, "*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*," 95.

⁵⁷ Goethe, *William Meister's Apprenticeship*, 137.

Jane Williams within a complex web of longing and denial and reveals a darkness beneath his "ariette."

The Keen Stars Were Twinkling is a poem about listening to music and is thus comparable to the early *To Constantia*, in which listening to a woman singing is described as, in effect, being taken up into the primal mother: "I am dissolved in these consuming extacies" (11).⁵⁸ The tone of *The Keen Stars Were Twinkling* is measured and restrained rather than Dionysiac, but Shelley still plays the role of the passive child with the mother:

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 souls had then given
Its own.

(1–12)

The stars and the guitar are cold and empty without the maternal presence. Jane's voice, like the nourishing power of the mother, gives the instrument an inner plenitude, a soul. But if these lines dream of a strong and benevolent maternal influence, they also dream of the power of art, not only in the form of Jane's singing voice but also in that of the poet's own lyric voice, which builds an elaborate simile bringing together the diverse elements of the scene: Jane, guitar, moon, and stars.

In the second stanza that unity comes apart. The stanza opens with a small disjoining—"The stars will awaken, / Though the moon sleep a full hour later, / Tonight" (13–15)—and ends with a large one:

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)

⁵⁸ Vatalaro sees contrasts between the two poems in "Semiotic Echoes," 75, 78.

While in the first stanza music and moonlight were unified, "feeling" is a new term, and its introduction is perhaps one reason for the loss or distancing of unity. If only feeling could be brought into the union of music and moonlight, the poet wishes; if only Jane's feelings about him were of the same tone as the music and moonlight; if only his own disturbing feelings could be harmonized with the scene. But although he says that Jane's song overpowers, it is his own feelings of passion and conflict that might overpower the tranquil scene.

The union of music and moonlight and feeling is far from an inner world of turbulence and an outer world of domestic unhappiness, failed hopes, complex relationships, and persistent crisis and tragedy. Mary Shelley's near-fatal miscarriage had come only two days before. The paradise suggested by Jane's singing is also far from the infernal world of *The Triumph of Life*, in the manuscript of which the draft of the poem is embedded in fragments.⁵⁹ But *The Keen Stars Were Twinkling* is a poem of restraint, not renunciation. It particularly does not renounce the poet's hopes for art: he asks Jane to sing again. Indeed, the poem's conspicuous craft, what Chernaik terms its "ingenious verbal and metrical patterning,"⁶⁰ calls attention to the ongoing act of artistic shaping. The poem is divided into eight tercets, the three lines having, respectively, two stresses, three stresses, and one stress. Furthermore, the first two lines are anapestic, while the dramatically short third line is iambic. By virtue of this highly deliberate and unusual patterning, the poet becomes a strong, active presence in our experience of the poem. That patterning is emblematic of a quest to shape or take control in general. In the poem Shelley constructs a fantasy in which Edward is eliminated, he himself is alone with Jane, and she, singing for him and singing again at his request, is following his wishes. *The Keen Stars Were Twinkling* is a song about an episode of singing in which the listener is the controlling presence; the passive "child" seeking to be nursed and loved by the mother builds and controls the maternal influence. Vatalaro sees the poet trying to "recreate the effects of Jane's performance . . . the way an infant might respond to the rhythmic patterns of its mother's voice" and, at the same time, appropriating "some of the power behind Jane's musical talent for himself, [thereby] checking the risk of vulnerability."⁶¹ In my view,

⁵⁹ See Donald H. Reiman, *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 245-46.

⁶⁰ Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 166. By "verbal patterning" Chernaik means the interweaving of "stars," "moon," and "tone" throughout the poem.

⁶¹ Vatalaro, "Semiotic Echoes," 76-77.

that appropriation has a purpose beyond protection. Ego psychology is valuable in showing that the ego does not only function defensively; it takes pleasure in its achievement of autonomy: a young child does not want to give up the maternal presence, but he or she does want to move independently with increasing skill and agility.⁶² The ego also takes joy in its ability to shape and create. I would emphasize in addition that the primary goal of the shaping in *The Keen Stars* is not the distancing of a fantasy but its recovery and realization. In this poem Shelley seeks the same goal as Goethe's "William Master," mastery of life;⁶³ but unlike Goethe's hero, he does so without renouncing Mignon's dream of the land of the *Zitronen*.

* * *

The unfinished *We Meet Not as We Parted* was extracted by Richard Garnett from what Harry Buxton Forman calls "certainly one of the most tangled wildernesses of the Note Books."⁶⁴ The poem apparently reflects a dramatic change in the relationship between Shelley and Williams:

We meet not as we parted,
 We feel more than all may see;
 My bosom is heavy-hearted,
 And thine full of doubt for me:—
 One moment has bound the free.
 (1–5)

The poem suggests that Shelley did express his feelings for Jane, verbally and perhaps physically.⁶⁵ But the consequences bear out some of

⁶² While in Vatalaro's Kristevan approach, the bliss of union with the primal mother is countered by the fear of self-loss, I think that a fuller paradigm can be found in the work of Margaret Mahler. She sees the bliss of union with the primal mother countered as well by impulses toward independence and the development of potentialities. See Mahler, Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation* (1975; repr., New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3–11, 41–120.

⁶³ See Lukács, who writes of Goethe's longing for "the new 'poesy of life' embodied in the individual who actively masters life" (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 94).

⁶⁴ Buxton Forman, *Note Books of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 3 vols. (1911; repr., New York: Phaethon Press, 1968), 3:137; Richard Garnett, ed., *Relics of Shelley* (London, 1862), 43–44. I quote from the version in Hutchinson's edition, which differs from Garnett's in some punctuation and also has ellipses to indicate presumably missing lines (*Shelley: Poetical Works*, 674).

⁶⁵ See White, who surmised that a "relatively trivial" event occurred, such as "a kiss or a passionate declaration, followed by a rebuke" (*Shelley*, 2:627–28). Ernest Dowden in his copy of Garnett's *Relics* wrote under the title, "after a kiss reproved" (Berg Collection, New York Public Library [Berg Coll 78–244]).

the anxiety evident in the previous lyrics. This is not a poem that Shelley could possibly have sent to Edward and Jane together, and indeed it was never, so far as we know, copied out and given even to Jane.

The second stanza portrays the meeting as a beautiful, ephemeral instant, like a visitation of the Spirit of Beauty but with no hope of return: "That moment is gone for ever, / Like lightning that flashed and died" (6-7). But in the third stanza, in a hyperbole that suggests the original separation from the mother, the moment appears as "the first of a life of pain" (12). In the moment, the poet drank from a cup that held both "joy" and "Delusion too sweet" (13-14),⁶⁶ and the orality of that image culminates in the fourth stanza in images of being swallowed, as if in an ultimate, oceanic regression:

Sweet lips, could my heart have hidden
That its life was crushed by you,
Ye would not have then forbidden
The death which a heart so true
Sought in your briny dew.

(16-20)⁶⁷

The moment ended because the lady rejected him. She would not have objected to the kiss, it seems, if he had been able to conceal the intensity of his desire.⁶⁸ What we have of the text closes with a couplet that suggests that the encounter, which was also an encounter of adulterous, oedipal, and preoedipal fantasy with reality, was worth the sorrow it caused: "Methinks too little cost / For a moment so found, so lost!" (24-25). "Cost" is the mark of the ego, which has to do the reckoning before and after impulses are acted on or not. Emotionally, as well as poetically, *We Meet Not as We Parted* leaves the poet in the especially "tangled wilderness" he entered after his momentary Eden. Even so, if we can

⁶⁶ Cancelled lines recorded by Forman speak of "The delusion of unknown pleasure," "brief passion," and "delusion & madness too sweet." In the drafts, the poet embraces a Dionysian destruction: "O fill high the cup with ruin / Mix delusion & madness therein." See *Note Books*, 3:142-43.

⁶⁷ Forman reads "burning dew" in place of Garnett's "briny dew." In one case we have a fiery consummation as at the end of *Adonais*, in the other a thalassal one. In Buxton Forman's version, the poet's soul is consumed by the lady's lips, instead of his heart being crushed by them. In either version, we have an image of being devoured by the female. See *Note Books*, 3:138.

⁶⁸ One draft passage recorded by Forman suggests that the lady refuses to kiss the poet: "Sweet lips I forswear your sweetness / The sweetness not given to me." Other draft lines suggest that he does kiss her: "The sweetness that cost ye pain"; "The sweetness I stole." See *Note Books*, 3:143-44. The poem as a whole suggests that the lady's refusal comes after the kiss.

sense in the poem the compulsive re-enactment of a primal loss, we can also sense in the closing affirmation the poet's continuing allegiance to his Romantic imaginings.

* * *

In the *Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici*, Shelley steps back to take a wide view of his experience with Jane. The poem is written about Jane, not to her,⁶⁹ and so we hear the poet, as in *The Zucca* at the beginning of the sequence, singing, in the words of *The Defence of Poetry*, "to cheer [his] own solitude".⁷⁰

She left me at the silent time
 When the moon had ceased to climb
 The azure dome of Heaven's steep,
 And like an albatross asleep,
 Balanced on her wings of light,
 Hovered in the purple night,
 Ere she sought her Ocean nest
 In the chambers of the west.

(7-14)

The moment of repose when the moon ceased to climb the sky was, the poet understands in retrospect, the moment when his relationship with Jane had gone as far as it would go. Now, left by himself, he realizes that she has a separate life to pursue, a nest elsewhere. Matthews proposed that several lines found in the manuscript above the poem were intended as a revised opening:

Bright wanderer, fair coquette of Heaven,
 To whom alone it has been given
 To change and be adored for ever. . . .
 Envy not this dim world, for never
 But once within its shadow grew
 One fair as [thou], but far more true.

(1-6)⁷¹

⁶⁹ Matthews finds what he takes to be Jane's name deleted except for the "J" on the manuscript ("Shelley and Jane Williams," 40).

⁷⁰ Reiman and Fraistat, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 516.

⁷¹ See Matthews, "Shelley and Jane Williams," 40-41. The poem is now usually printed beginning with these lines, even though, as Keach writes, "they spoil one of Shelley's finest openings" (*Shelley's Style*, 229). They might not have that effect if, instead of being run continuously into the original text, they were clearly separated from it, for example, as an epigraph. The lines do tighten, with an ironic twist, the association between Jane and the moon. I quote the lines as Reiman and Fraistat print them; Matthews has "you" for "[thou]" in line 6 and an ampersand in line 3.

With the word "coquette" and the thought that women in general are faithless, the lines bring closer to the surface a certain criticism of Jane: she may be "far more true" than the wandering moon, but, as it turns out, she is true to somebody else.

The complex of nesting or maternal figures in the poem includes not only Jane and the moon but also the albatross. It is difficult to read, and probably was difficult to write, about an albatross in a Romantic poem without thinking of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge's albatross is not maternal in the sense of being a nourisher; rather, it is fed by the mariners. But in its all-importance to the well-being of the mariners, and in the intense reciprocity, or dyadic relationship, it shares with them, it has maternal connotations. The albatross also brings into Shelley's poem the hint of seemingly inexplicable violence and terrible guilt. Here too we can glimpse beneath the poem's gentle, lyrical surface and its praise of Jane a current of anger against the abandoning woman.

As the poem continues, the poet tries to recover the absent Jane internally, recalling "every tone" of her voice and "The soft vibrations of her touch" on his brow (16, 22). And then "although she absent were / Memory gave me all of her / That even fancy dares to claim" (25–27). Shelley's wording leaves open the possibility that he had sex with her. However, he next reports that her "presence had made weak and tame / All passions" (28–29). In addition, in drafts of these lines it is "Fancy," not "Memory," that gave him as much of her as "I dare," not "fancy dares," to claim.⁷² The text as Shelley left it is extraordinarily ambiguous, but I suggest that, according to that text, remembering the voice and touch that he did experience has led him to a fantasy of love with her—whether sexual intercourse or as close to it as a modest and respectful fancy might permit. The poet is remembering what never happened; his imagination creates an anterior reality. Then, in reaction to that idea of aggressive sexual passion and also in fulfillment of a regressive impulse, the poet becomes like a child with the mother, his passions tamed.

Now in the aura of Jane's presence the poet

lived alone,
In the time which is our own;
The past and future were forgot
As they had been, and would be, not.
(29–32)

⁷² See Chernaik, *Lyrics*, 274.

With memory and imagination, he has succeeded in creating the ideal moment of serenity, the Faustian fair hour of union with her, so that he feels himself to be living in a state of transcendent intimacy, the special "time which is our own," the time of the dyad. He is alone now but as an infant is alone in the pleasurable aftermath of nursing, or, in the other part of his fantasy, as an adult is alone in the pleasurable aftermath of coitus.

But "I lived alone" is also an acknowledgment of separation; and in his solitude he cannot sustain the moment of peace: "But soon, the guardian angel gone, / The demon reassumed his throne / In my faint heart" (33-35). He characterizes himself as "disturbed and weak" and says, "I dare not speak / My thoughts" (35-36). The Jane poems together suggest what those thoughts might be. One is that he would like to have sex with Jane in reality, at whatever cost to his relations with Mary and Edward. Other thoughts are unthinkable, as well as unspeakable: oedipal impulses; anger at rejecting women; a primary desire to gratify the self, the I that lives alone even in the time of the dyad. Perhaps, with the bottom dropping out of his melancholy, suicide is also among those unspeakable thoughts. Without his guardian angel to protect him from his own impulses, Ariel, himself a guardian spirit, is replaced by Satan. The poet's melancholy includes not only his feeling that he cannot have what he wants and his feeling that he is re-experiencing with Jane a primal loss but also, as in *The Serpent Is Shut Out from Paradise*, his feeling that he is not a good person. The Jane poems help us understand that the absence of "self-esteem" Shelley laments throughout his career refers to more than a feeling of being unloved.⁷³ Shelley identified with Satan not only as a rebel against tyranny but also as a destroyer of goodness.

The weakness or faintness he now feels is in part debility without the nourishing presence of a woman, in part helplessness before his own powerful, ego-dystonic impulses, and in part reaction formation against them. Portraying himself as not a demon but a sensitive victim, he turns outward to the beautiful scene around him: "I sate and watched the vessels glide / Along the ocean bright and wide, / Like spirit-winged chariots" traveling "As if to some Elysian star" for the "drink" that would "medicine" his "sweet and bitter pain" (37-39, 42-44). At first it seems that the poet, after failing to find peace through his inner faculties, now seeks it through outer nature. But the "like" and the "as if" and the romance imagery of winged chariots, star-voyages,

⁷³ See, for example, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*: "Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds depart / And come, for some uncertain moments lent" (37-38).

and Elysium tell us that he is once again pursuing his quest through the poetic imagination at its most idealizing and Romantic. If paradisaical imaginings have led him to the demon in the middle of the poem and have been in some degree responsible for his bittersweet pain, now paradisaical imaginings of a different kind appear as the medicine. In the first part of the poem, he imagined love with another man's woman; now his mind dwells on water, an ocean that is bright even at night, winged spirits, the stars, Elysium. The oedipal imagination did not bring him peace; now he tries the preoedipal imagination.

The poet is seated on the shore of the "twinkling bay" (50), and in his mind he is poised on the verge of an idyllic primal ocean. Then the border between the land and the water is breached, with violent results:

And the fisher with his lamp
And spear, about the low rocks damp
Crept, and struck the fish who came
To worship the delusive flame.

(51-54)

The bright lights of the poem—the moon, the Elysian star, the twinkling bay—are replaced by a killing illumination. As Keach points out, the poet should be seen as not only the fish but also the fisher.⁷⁴ In the fisher, as in the demon, the poet's unspeakable thoughts come to the surface. With his spear and flame, the fisher embodies the aggressive phallic undercurrents in the poet's gentle meditation; the fisher represents love not as a mating of souls or an idealized merging or Dionysian dissolving but as lust, seduction, adultery, penetration, and self-gratification. In this image, Shelley is a predator and Jane is his prey. The fisher embodies the genital and ultimately oedipal impulses that arise to disturb the poet's peace of mind as he tries to create and prolong his moment of serenity. The fisher suggests as well the fear that sexuality is a form of violence, the child's fantasy that the father's lust is hurting or destroying the mother. At the same time the image expresses the poet's wish to hurt or punish the woman; after all, she left him. In the fisher, the implications of the image of the albatross, the maternal figure killed for no apparent reason, are realized.

As the fisher, the poet is a seducer and also a man who is angry at women. As the fish, he is a quester who pursues his vision of peace, beauty, and love in a maternal world of ocean, moon, and night; he is not in this case an aggressive man but a regressive child; indeed, he is like

⁷⁴ Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 232.

an embryo in the womb. But to try to live in the water is to be destroyed. And in this instance we do not have a gentle, idealized, oceanic death, as, for example, in the *Stanzas Written in Dejection*, in which the poet on the seashore imagines lying down “like a tired child” until “Death like Sleep might steal on me” and the sea “Breathe o’er my dying brain its last monotony” (30, 33, 36).⁷⁵ In the *Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici* the death in the water is surprising and violent. Also, the mother’s destructiveness is not a drowning or even a devouring; rather, the primal radiance that lures the child is a terrible coquetry that exposes him to the castrating, feminizing, killing assault of the oedipal father and his spear. The poet’s identification with the helpless, victimized fish is, in part, a defense against his impulse to be like the predatory fisher and, in part, an embodiment of his fear of what would happen if he actually followed that impulse.

Now in the poem’s dark conclusion, the fish are sharply distinguished from the poet:

Too happy, they whose pleasure sought
Extinguishes all sense and thought
Of the regret that pleasure []
Destroying life alone not peace.

(55–58)

As Keach suggests, Shelley’s inability to integrate “peace” into the poem prosodically is indicative of a deeper uncertainty.⁷⁶ Matthews observed that in the manuscript “Destroying” is crossed out and “Seeking” written below, although Donald H. Reiman takes “Seeking” as the beginning of a new line.⁷⁷ Shelley leaves us with a riddle. We are not sure, and he apparently was not sure, what he wanted to say about seeking and destroying, pleasure and regret, peace and life. But if the letter of the conclusion is mysterious, its spirit is not. Happy they, the poet concludes, who die when they reach their pleasure, who die into the radiance, instead of living on to suffer the loss of pleasure and also the kind of sorrow that would be an unavoidable part of pleasure with Jane. As for peace, the fish don’t seek it, and it cannot be destroyed for them. They can never know a dilemma in which what brings peace—like the

⁷⁵ Chernaik and Keach discuss other aspects of this poem in relation to *Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici* (*Lyrics*, 175–76; *Shelley’s Style*, 231).

⁷⁶ See Keach, *Shelley’s Style*, 233. Garnett supplied “leaves” as the missing rhyme (*Relics of Shelley*, 47).

⁷⁷ Matthews, “Shelley and Jane Williams,” 43–44, 47; Reiman, “Shelley’s ‘The Triumph of Life’: The Biographical Problem,” *PMLA* 78 (1963): 538.

presence or thought of Jane, or behind it, the thought of the mother—also destroys peace. Indeed, the difference between medicine and pain has broken down: Jane brings both, and so does the imagination, and Shelley said as much in *The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient*: “What would cure that would kill me, Jane” (42). But now, on the dark shore of Lerici at the end of the adventure with Jane, the tone of witty playfulness is gone.

* * *

During this period, in which Shelley was thinking of Goethe and *The Tempest*, he was also thinking of Rousseau, the central character in the long poem, *The Triumph of Life*, which he was working on at the time of his death. “Even in our keenest pleasures,” Rousseau wrote in *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, “there is scarcely a single moment of which the heart could truthfully say: ‘Would that this moment could last for ever!’”⁷⁸ He goes on to describe his own version of the Faustian fair hour, imagining “a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future.” In this state, he writes, “we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul.”⁷⁹ In Rousseau, as in Shelley, the turning toward the present moment is not a turning away from the Romantic imagination but another form of paradisaic longing. That was the story that continued to fascinate Shelley to the end. We see it in *The Triumph of Life* in the character Rousseau’s pursuit of a “shape all light” (152). Even after the seemingly valedictory *Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici*, we can see it in a letter to Jane composed while he was away on the voyage with Edward from which he never returned: “How soon those hours past, & how slowly they return to pass so soon again, & perhaps for ever, in which we have lived together so intimately so happily!—Adieu, my dearest friend—I only write these lines for the pleasure of tracing what will meet your eyes.”⁸⁰

Rousseau in the *Reveries* did claim to have known a state of happiness

⁷⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (1971; repr., Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1984), 88.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Letters of Shelley*, ed. Jones, 2:445. See Wolfson’s discussion of this letter, perhaps the last text he wrote (*Formal Charges*, 226).

that left no emptiness in his soul: "Such is the state which I often experienced on the Island of Saint-Pierre in my solitary reveries, whether I lay in a boat and drifted where the water carried me, or sat by the shores of the stormy lake, or elsewhere, on the banks of a lovely river or a stream murmuring over the stones." In this state he felt "self-sufficient like God."⁸¹ Shelley sought his fair hour close to the water too, not in solitude, however, but with Jane. Unlike Rousseau, he didn't claim to have found his happiness. But in the *Magnetic Lady*, *Ariel*, Jane's guitar, *Wilhelm Meister*, the serpent in paradise, the zucca, the envious wind and the reflecting water, the fisher and the fish, he did find a series of rich figures in which we can see the ego by turns restraining, sublimating, and pursuing a variety of preoedipal, oedipal, and adult fantasies.

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⁸¹ Rousseau, *Reveries*, 88–89.