

THE ENGLISH ELEGY

Studies in the Genre
from Spenser to Yeats

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Shelley: "Adonais"

While William Collins's "Ode on the Death of Mr. Thomson" (1749) remains very much a poem of its century, it nevertheless brings us to the foyer of the Romantic elegy, providing a convenient point of comparison with Wordsworth's "Remembrance of Collins," composed forty years later. The poems share similar concerns and a common form, but their differences are worth investigating. Instead of offering detailed readings, I shall merely sketch a few comparisons before going on to study Shelley's "Adonais."

Ode on the Death of Mr. Thomson

1

In yonder Grave a DRUID lies
Where slowly winds the stealing Wave!
The Year's best Sweets shall duteous rise
To deck *it's* POET's sylvan Grave!

2

In yon deep Bed of whispering Reeds
His airy Harp shall now be laid,
That he, whose Heart in Sorrow bleeds
May love thro' Life the soothing Shade.

3

Then Maids and Youths shall linger here,
And while *it's* Sounds at distance swell,
Shall sadly seem in Pity's Ear
To hear the WOODLAND PILGRIM's Knell.

4

REMEMBRANCE oft shall haunt the Shore
When THAMES in Summer-wreaths is drest,
And oft suspend the dashing Oar
To bid his gentle Spirit rest!

5

And oft as EASE and HEALTH retire
 To breezy Lawn, or Forest deep,
 The Friend shall view yon whit'ning Spire,
 And 'mid the varied Landschape weep.

6

But Thou, who own'st that Earthy Bed,
 Ah! what will ev'ry Dirge avail?
 Or Tears, which LOVE and PITY shed
 That mourn beneath the gliding Sail!

7

Yet lives there one, whose heedless Eye
 Shall scorn thy pale Shrine glimm'ring near?
 With Him, Sweet Bard, may FANCY die,
 And JOY desert the blooming Year.

8

But thou, lorn STREAM, whose sullen Tide
 No sedge-crown'd SISTERS now attend,
 Now waft me from the green Hill's Side
 Whose cold Turf hides the buried FRIEND!

9

And see, the Fairy Valleys fade,
 Dun Night has veil'd the solemn View!
 —Yet once again, Dear parted SHADE
 Meek NATURE'S CHILD again adieu!

10

The genial Meads assign'd to bless
 Thy Life, shall mourn thy early Doom,
 Their Hinds, and Shepherd-Girls shall dress
 With simple Hands thy rural Tomb.

11

Long, long, thy Stone and Pointed Clay
 Shall melt the musing BRITON'S Eyes,
 O! VALES, and WILD WOODS, shall HE say
 In yonder Grave YOUR DRUID lies!'

Collins's very title betrays some of the generic indeterminacy that will characterize the coming age, for odelike qualities scarcely domi-

nate this elegiac poem. The formal resemblance to the quiet, Horatian ode is surely no greater than to a truncated, tetrameter version of the elegiacs of Gray, Hammond, and Shenstone, or, indeed, to the Shakespeare songs "Full fathom five . . ." and "Fear no more . . ." (the latter of which directly inspired Collins's "A Song from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*"). In the dim light of the poem's resolution, the title seems to reveal something of Collins's characteristic establishment of a desired model or standard from which he can then measure his decline. In this case, the invocational or celebratory intentions of an ode yield to the elegiac accents of a mild farewell.²

The poem is haunting and beautiful, but it deserves study also for its particular reemployment of pastoral conventions. Admittedly, much of its effect comes from the very diffidence with which the generic figures are presented and, in effect, withdrawn or shrouded. But in Collins's poem, the traditional elements of pastoral elegy do seem to stir again in an actual locale, and they do find a delicate yet compelling relevance both to a poet's reflection on his own creative powers and to his brooding on the ability of those powers to withstand the hazards of time and mortal loss. These concerns are, as is usual in Collins, further entwined with a meditation on the disenchantment of the natural world and on the general decay of poetry itself.

Reading the Jonson and Dryden elegies prompts one to recognize several residually Neoclassical elements in Collins's poem: the formal and tonal restraint; the attempted suppression of personality, with an attendant focus on poetry itself; and the approximately epitaphic closure cast in a language that seems to quote and yet to supersede the elegist himself. Collins's diction and his use of conventional personifications are yet further instances of his general allegiance to certain Augustan norms.

But Collins's mourning has a gentle power which quietly outdistances these borrowings. The very term "DRUID" reveals his turning not to the classics but to his country's own original enchanters. In doing so, he was following Thomson's earlier example, and he was participating in a broader, mid-eighteenth-century revival of things Gothic and Druidic. Still, Collins's revivals were always deeply complicated, even tormented, and his characteristically tenuous mode of evocation gives this poem a distinctive subtlety and pathos. As we shall see, even the Druid attribution is a source both of comfort and of inescapable dismay.

One way to register the poem's complexity, as well as its incipient Romanticism, is to weigh the poet's own relation to the Druid. By calling Thomson a Druid, Collins elegiacally assimilates the dead poet to the kind of figure that he, Collins, reveres and yearns to be—a poet-priest whose powers conjure supernatural presences in natural regions. If this implies a consolation, it is undermined by Collins's fears that he himself will never exercise a Druid's power and that perhaps the only place for a Druid in contemporary Britain is, after all, a grave.³

As an obvious instance of this diffident blend, or rather contradiction, one puzzles over the uncertainty of the Druid's placement, oscillating as it does between a comforting diffusion and a bleaker specificity. By *diffusion* I mean perhaps *infusion* of the Druid into the landscape such that he animates and hallows it, as if he were a version of the vegetation deity become a *genius loci*. As long as his presence is thus somehow unlocatable and permeative, he remains alive, abroad. And as long as Collins can keep the Druid abroad, he will himself be exercising something of a Druid's power, thereby earning a crucial measure of consolation.

The opening words themselves introduce the odd mixture of diffusion and specificity. "In yonder grave" means in the actual confines of that grave, which is nevertheless vaguely distant, over yonder. The distance is not only spatial but, by virtue of the mild archaism, temporal and literary as well. If the Druid is in his grave, it is consolingly difficult to establish just where and when he may be. And if we expect greater precision from the second line, the effect is only one of further diffusion: "Where slowly winds the stealing Wave!" Once again, the vagueness is both spatial and temporal—there where the Thames slowly and continuously flows.

This interplay of precise grave and more vaguely indicated landscape is pursued throughout the poem. Thomson's Aeolian harp is laid in a bed of reeds, hence buried, yet also suspended so that its notes may float and "swell" into the distance. The Thames itself becomes imbued with Thomson's spirit, so that only by ceasing to disturb the water can a traveler "bid his gentle Spirit rest!" And the whitening spire is a clear, if fictional (Richmond church has never had a spire), marker, which nevertheless dominates a wide terrain.

At the same time, however, there is the bleak exactness of "that Earthy Bed," named at the moment when Collins doubts the efficacy of any remembrance. There follows mention of the "cold Turf" hiding

the buried friend, and in the final stanza the actual tomb is depicted ("thy Stone and Pointed Clay"). The poem thus evolves a complicated sense of Thomson's pervasive presence but tends increasingly to confine that spirit-in-the-landscape to the confines of the tomb.

As one might expect, this shrinking of the Druid's presence is inseparable from the elegist's own weakening powers of evocation, his recognition that the Thames is no more graced by "sedge-crowned SISTERS" and that his view of "Fairy Valleys" has already been veiled by "Dun Night." (The similarity to "Ode to Evening" and "Ode on the Poetical Character" is unmistakable.) He asks the Thames to waft him away, as though he were now almost deceased himself, dying away from the very scene he might have hoped to animate. Is this not Collins drifting further from the shrouded regions of dead poets and of poetry itself, as though it is *this* departure that the poem finally mourns? Even the vengeful curse against the scorners of poetry is far too weak to carry Collins beyond his minor key, and the poem ends with images of grief having replaced those of genial blessing, with the tears of mere pity, not solace, melting in a Briton's eyes. The final mention of "YOUR DRUID" instead of "a DRUID" does imply some possessive affinity between the landscape and the dead poet. But the musing Briton who speaks the words seems to be rather excluded from the comfort of that close relation. It is, finally, a relation to be remembered. And it is Collins's image of Remembrance that most catches the imagination of *his* memorializer, Wordsworth.

Remembrance of Collins

Glide gently, thus for ever glide,
O Thames! that other bards may see,
As lovely visions by thy side
As now, fair river! come to me.
O glide, fair stream! for ever so,
Thy quiet soul on all bestowing,
Till all our minds for ever flow
As thy deep waters now are flowing.

Vain thought!—Yet be as now thou art,
That in thy waters may be seen
The image of a poet's heart,
How bright, how solemn, how serene!
Such as did once the Poet bless,

Who, murmuring here a later ditty,
 Could find no refuge from distress
 But in the milder grief of pity.

Now let us, as we float along,
 For *him* suspend the dashing oar;
 And pray that never child of song
 May know that Poet's sorrows more.
 How calm! how still! the only sound,
 The dripping of the oar suspended!
 —The evening darkness gathers round
 By virtue's holiest powers attended.⁴

The title warns us that this is no elegy but rather a "remembrance," and in fact these stanzas were originally the final three stanzas of a five-stanza poem in *Lyrical Ballads* entitled simply "Lines Written While Sailing in a Boat at Evening" (written in 1789). The first two stanzas of that poem dwelt on the poet's wishful dream of unfading light, a dream of continuity such as recurs in Wordsworth's major poems. The three stanzas for Collins pursue the wish, but now, taking into account mortal ruptures, Wordsworth rejects the "vain thought" of mere incensancy and works toward a self-empowering gesture of memorial homage.

Wordsworth pursues the naturalizing direction of Collins's poem, dispensing altogether with personification, floral deckings, maids and youths, even the Druid figure. The meditation is expressly personal, privatized, and the Thames itself now becomes an image of a flowing mind, or of the medium in which a later poet can envision the image of a predecessor's heart. By this internalization alone we have entered a later mode of poetry. And Wordsworth's confident powers of will and imagination, rejecting Collins's "milder grief of pity" and establishing an almost mesmeric symbol of reenchantment, carry us even further into this new domain.

Wordsworth's quotation of Collins's phrase about the oar is a nice gesture of respect both for Collins's poetic image and for his place in a tradition that now stretches from Thomson to Collins to the nineteen-year-old Wordsworth himself. But Wordsworth deliberately prays for a better fate than that of Collins. And *his* suspension of the oar is a far bolder device. Collins attributed the gesture to Remembrance personified, and he forlornly disqualified himself from the veiled, if once-

enchanted, landscape. Wordsworth, on the other hand, is confidently present, and his figure of the oar becomes an axis of continuing enchantment. Around this image of the poised memorial imagination, the darkness "gathers round / By virtue's holiest Powers attended." We may think back to the laureled head of young Marcellus, forming a similar center for the encompassing darkness of Hades. Or we may look forward to a jar in Tennessee that made the "slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill." Between the Neoclassical allusion to a Virgilian hero and the symbolist department of a bare gray jar is Wordsworth's image of centripetal power, quietly gathering its attendant virtues, persistently marking the mind's insertion into both landscape and time.⁵

W.S.
elegiac
poems

I cannot here read Wordsworth's elegiac poetry at large—the Lucy poems, the many epitaphic pieces, the "Immortality Ode," the several poems for John, the graveyard section of *The Excursion*, and the frighteningly repressive "Laodamia." But the lines for Collins have interesting points of connection with Wordsworth's general elegiac strategy of inventing figures of persistence that gather to themselves protective accretions of power. Whether this power is of nature, darkness, or time, it is invariably associated with that of the self-protective mind. To cite only the most obvious example, Peele Castle becomes a symbol for Wordsworth himself, "Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time," braving the storms both of the ocean and of the grieving heart.

In what we recognize as a typically elegiac procedure, Wordsworth here rejects the fantasy, like that of the mirror stage, of a quasi-maternal natural continuity in which the erotically powerful "rugged Pile" seemed to be forever "sleeping on a glassy sea" of contentment "beneath a sky of bliss." Disrupting this fantasy, he bows, not just to the presence of death, but more crucially to the irrevocable loss of his own power as it yields to a previously unrecognized control.

So once it would have been—'tis so no more,
I have submitted to a new control:
A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
A deep distress hath humanized my Soul.

(Works, 453)

While this sacrifice occasions the first mention of the poet's soul, it also, as we have come to expect, represents the apparent socialization of the mourner (although this will be brought into doubt somewhat by

the image of the tower). This socialization is at first expressed as humanization, but the poet goes on to express a commitment to the social world ("farewell the heart that lives alone, / . . . at distance from the Kind!") and to include the elegiac acceptance of a triadically determined positionality that we associate with this process of mourning: Wordsworth hails the painter (George Beaumont, who enters the poem as a third figure, intervening between the poet and the poet's dead brother. Significantly, this intervention also involves the explicit recourse to the aesthetic mediation supplied by an actual work of art. And it is only by virtue of this work of art that Wordsworth erects his chastened, hence "sublime," self-image of defensive strength. Like the suspended oar, Wordsworth's tower has precisely the kind of phallic, totemic qualities that one expects in an elegy—it is the product of loss and submission, the symbol both of strength and of a suspended, deadened, yet resistant power.

Obviously, our understanding of Wordsworth's elegies would benefit from a far more careful and detailed application of our generic approach, but it is to Shelley's "Adonais" that I wish to turn—a poem that takes us back to the very mainstream, however revised, of the pastoral elegy.

It has become a commonplace that Romantic poets played havoc with the definitions of poetic genres, creating "visionary forms dramatic," autobiographical epics, "lyrical ballads," townscape sonnets, and other strange hybrids. Not surprisingly, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Byron avoided the pastoral elegy, with its highly traditional set of conventions. "Adonais" would therefore seem to be something of an anomaly, and any reader must wonder how the intricacies of Romantic self-consciousness are nevertheless elaborated in this most archaic and most revolutionary of poems.

As is well known, Shelley described "Adonais" as "a highly wrought piece of art, perhaps better in point of composition than anything I have written."⁶ The poem's carefully "wrought" texture has made it particularly susceptible to close readings. Yet these readings, of which Earl Wasserman's has been the most comprehensive, have left ungauged the deepest level of the poem's complex movement.⁷ In some ways this is not surprising, for the objective of an elegy is, after all, to displace the urgent psychological currents of its work of mourning into the apparently more placid, aesthetically organized currents of

language. Though elegies may weep, they must do so formally. They may not "break up their lines to weep" within that weeping.⁸

In what follows, I shall try to go beyond a description of the form of "Adonais" to suggest how the pattern of its language relates to psychological and philosophical currents running deep within the poem. My questions include the following: What and how does Shelley mourn? How does he revise the inherited fictions of elegy? What is his relation to Urania? How does his narcissism affect the work of mourning? What are the implications of the poem's extraordinary ending, and how does it relate to Shelley's ambivalence toward figurative language? Finally, how does this ambivalence, directed against the very fabric of the poem, relate specifically to the predicament of a mourner?

"Adonais" has two epigraphs. The first is a Greek couplet ascribed to Plato in the *Greek Anthology*. Following the common misattribution of the couplet to Plato the philosopher, Shelley translated the lines:

Thou wert the morning star among the living,
Ere thy fair light had fled,—
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving
New splendour to the dead.⁹

Besides drawing attention to the stellar imagery of consolation, Shelley's choice of the epigraph indicates his desire to believe in a poetry somehow compatible with Platonic thought.¹⁰ The fact that Shelley misattributed the lines to the harsh judge of poetry underscores the problem, and it is interesting to see how thoroughly and with what personal urgency "Adonais" reveals the contradictory nature of Shelley's aspiration.

The second epigraph quotes the lines in Moschus's elegy for Bion, referring to the poet's having been poisoned by some insensitive scorners of verse. Shelley will return to this in stanza 36, elaborating his theory about Keats's death. While stressing the accusation's relevance to the poem, the epigraph foregrounds Shelley's debt to the Alexandrian elegy at large.¹¹ The debt is immediately apparent in the opening line, which reads almost as a translation of Bion's "Lament for Adonis":

I weep for Adonais—he is dead!
O, weep for Adonais! though our tears

Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!
 And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years
 To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,
 And teach them thine own sorrow, say: 'With me
 Died Adonais, till the Future dares
 Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
 An echo and a light unto eternity!'

(Works, 432)

The first difference from Bion is, of course, the name Adonais, blending those of the vegetation deity, Adonis, and the Judaic Adonai. As historians of religion have shown, the originally physical significance of the fertility gods was allegorized and spiritualized by successive cults, and elegists, too, have continually revised the meaning of this most crucial figure of the genre. It is especially intriguing to note how Shelley has conserved the original figure within the new, for the poem itself unfolds the very *process* of resignification, moving from natural, sexual referents toward their spiritualized successors. Shelley's act of renaming neatly suggests his intention to use and yet alter the inherited elegiac tradition: to use its essential strategy of assimilating the deceased to a figure of immortality, while redefining the meaning of that figure.

A second difference declares itself at once: unlike Bion, Shelley turns immediately to question the efficacy of weeping. By so doing, he begins a long interrogation of conventional gestures and figures of mourning. This oddly skeptical employment of conventions marks this poem as a true heir of "Lycidas" and "Astrophel," whose obsessions with "false surmise" and "verses vaine" had driven them to carefully persuasive consolations. As our reference to the "Plato" epigraph hinted, and as the poem will in fact show, Shelley's struggle with his legacy and with his very medium itself is particularly vexed. We can perhaps see this in the unusual prematurity with which he initiates the self-questioning or self-qualifying mode. Spenser had at least gathered momentum before examining the vanity of verse. And although Milton did begin with a self-doubting admission of sour immaturity, he at least did not suspect the "meed of some melodious tear."

Shelley's struggle to begin his work of mourning is further apparent in his deliberate delegation of such work to various figures throughout the opening sections of the poem. In fact, it is not until quite far into the poem that Shelley moves beyond these delegate-mourners to

assume a more personal voice. The delegates have at least two functions: they are all inadequate mourners, allowing Shelley to criticize them and to distance himself from various forms of unsuccessful grieving; and yet they keep his poem in motion, giving it the processional character of traditional elegies, allowing it to achieve the self-purifying and self-surpassing ceremonies so important to the work of mourning.

the hour Already in the fourth line, therefore, Shelley turns to the first of these delegates, calling on the Hour to grieve and asking her in turn to transfer her sorrow to her compeers. The Hour's utterance reaches forward to the traditional conclusion of elegy, with its eternizing assertion. But this is felt to be proleptic, for the grief has somehow been elided, and the consolation unearned. It is too quick, with the kind of problematic sheerness of the opening line. We reread the statement and register a complication: "With me / Died Adonais." This Hour is past and dead. With its death died Adonais. Is it speaking from within death, speaking with the odd death-in-life intonation of a sepulchral inscription? And since this is a persona voice for Shelley, does it not already suggest some troubling association between Keats's death and Shelley's sense of having died with him? It is precisely this double death that the poem must avoid—or at least postpone long enough for Shelley to have immortalized himself and Keats. How else will Adonais's fate and fame keep echoing and shining to eternity?

In the second stanza, Shelley moves further into the conventions of pastoral elegy by querying the absence of the attendant deity:

Where wert thou, mighty Mother, when he lay,
When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies
In darkness? Where was Iorn Urania
When Adonais died?

We have already interpreted this conventional questioning several times, and it is therefore on the specificity of Shelley's version that we should dwell. The figure of Urania is of immediate interest. Just as he had compounded the sexual-spiritual identity of Adonais, so now Shelley merges Venus (mother of earthly life and the incestuous lover of Adonis) with her intellectual and spiritual self (Urania, Muse of astronomy, "Heav'nly Muse" of Milton). More significantly, Shelley's turn to the "mighty Mother" recalls Milton's anguished "What could the Muse herself . . . for her enchanting son . . . ?"¹² We are at the

core of loss, the elegist's bereavement not only of his friend or fellow but of the maternal figure, the original loss of whom this new bereavement recapitulates. As was true for Milton, Shelley will have eventually to work free from his attachment to this unavailing figure of the mother-Muse, submitting both her and himself to the ironic and repressive force of death. Only in the harsh light of that repression may an abiding object of consolation be found.

Shelley calls on Urania to mourn, but his address, like that in the first lines of the poem, turns to criticize its own futility:

Oh, weep for Adonais—he is dead!
 Wake, melancholy Mother, wake and weep!
 Yet wherefore? Quench within their burning bed
 Thy fiery tears, and let thy loud heart keep
 Like his, a mute and uncomplaining sleep;
 For he is gone, where all things wise and fair
 Descend;—oh, dream not that the amorous Deep
 Will yet restore him to the vital air,
 Death feeds on his mute voice, and laughs at our
 despair.

The echo of "Hyperion" is unmistakable, and Shelley had in fact been reading Keats's poem immediately before composing "Adonais." Here Shelley sounds like Thea, skeptical of her attempt to rouse the fallen Saturn:

"Saturn, look up—though wherefore, poor old King?

 Saturn, sleep on—O thoughtless, why did I
 Thus violate thy slumbrous solitude?"¹³

Shelley, lacking Thea's sedate fatigue, moves quickly to a bitter ironizing of the grief, again somehow obstructing its release. It is an odd situation: Shelley attempting to awaken a sleeper to mourning while at the same time checking that very attempt. And if the yet ungrieving Urania is the "most musical of mourners," surely Shelley is still trying to rouse himself to fuller song. Shelley appeals to Urania as the mother of a line of poets—Homer, Dante, and Milton—and he calls on her to weep for her most recent loss. From this perspective, Shelley like Thea, is trying to compel a certain recognition: while Thea would have Saturn recognize his own divinity, Shelley would have Urania recognize and admit the poet Keats to a grand genealogy, one

that would perhaps include himself, if she should recognize and respond to his cry.

At first, however, Shelley seems to make little impression on Urania. She is presented "with Veiled eyes," the first of many derogatory references to any form of interpositional texture or cloud. This very veiledness is somehow paradisaical, a false Eden of blindness in which the deluded Muse fondly supposes her poets to be invulnerable. There is, too, a faint suggestion that a certain kind of poetry may itself share the blame for this delusional masking of mortality ("... the fading melodies, / With which, like flowers that mock the corse beneath, / He had adorned and hid the coming bulk of Death"). Perhaps Shelley seeks a more clear-eyed poetry that unveils and takes account of the coming bulk. The traditional association of flowers with rhetoric alerts us to how disconcertingly Shelley is already moving against the very properties of poetic language, linking them here with precisely the natural, vegetative, and material realm that the poem so forcefully attacks and so desperately seeks to transcend.

Pursuing this critical association of flowers, material fabrics, and mortality, Shelley describes the physical death of Adonais. The details are significant, for Adonais is presented as a sexually unfulfilled and indeed broken flower ("Like a pale flower by some sad maiden cherished, / And fed with true-love tears, instead of dew"). In line with this castrative imagery of deprivation and submission, Shelley introduces the repressive, patriarchal figure of "kingly Death," in whose capital the shadow and the "mortal curtain" are forever drawn.

The presence of these gathering fabrics of shadow, veil, and curtain testifies to an elegist's acceptance not only of Death's castrative power, but also of the elegist's recapitulated entry into, and submission to, those very mediations of language that interpose between him and his object of loss or desire. The elegist's riposte to Death, his consoling counterassertion, however displaced, of desire and of the trope for a surviving power, must, therefore, come to terms with the enforced fabric of substitutions. This is where one of Shelley's most vexing problems comes to the fore. For while trying to rebut Death's power, Shelley also struggles to purge his counterassertive language of its inherent association, as language, with all the interposing fabrics—of Death's curtain, or of life's erotic but mortal physicality, or of the traces of this latter physicality in the material flowers, however spiritualized, of rhetoric.

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For the moment, Death governs, and Shelley's repeated urgings of Urania fall on silence. This increases his isolation, as though he were circling on the outside of a center of power and on the edges of a grander stance of mourning. Certainly, he is still circling his own grief. Part of this circling, as already suggested, involves the delegation and criticism of mourners. The flocks of Keats's "ministers of Thought" are therefore shown to droop, incapable of renovation, "round the cold heart." One such angelic figure believes that the tear she sheds is Keats's own. Another's gesture of symbolic substitution is undone or at least exposed by the poet's analysis:

Another in her wilful grief would break
Her bow and winged reeds, as if to stem
A greater loss with one which was more weak,

Yet another unavailingly seeks to revitalize the body with a caress that fades out like a meteor enwreathed in vapor.

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p. 2*

All these ineffective mourners keep the poem in motion, even though they are distanced by the yet withdrawn poet. As they multiply in a profusion of allegorical figures, they appear to interpose further between the poet and his own emotion. This interposition, apart from Shelley's sense of their inadequacy as mourners, seems to lie behind his description of their "moving pomp" as a "pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream." They are useless forms of mourning, a decorative mist or texture that seems to absorb rather than provide energy. This, too, is why each stanza has a movement of subsidence, an attempted quickening that trails off in a dying ebb. Shelley's particularly skillful use here of the Spenserian stanza will be reversed in the last section of the poem, where the stanzas yield their potential for exploratory romance, for the progressive crossing of thresholds. There the alexandrines do not seal a falling cadence; rather, they mount beyond themselves. ¹⁴

Shelley ends the first movement of the poem by extending the cast of mourners to include even the traditional figures of consolation, the regenerated Hyacinth and Narcissus. These flower-tropes themselves are now impotent, like the broken lily, Adonais ("wan they stand and sere . . . with dew all turned to tears . . ."), and as with Adonais, their seminal dew has yielded to salt. So, too, Shelley includes Spring herself in this general loss of vigor. Though beautiful, she is unaroused, finding no reason to awake the sullen year. The gathering

association between a failure of mourning and a lack of natural or even figurative regeneration seems fatal, but there is a surprising development within the seventeenth stanza:

Thy spirit's sister, the lorn nightingale
Mourns not her mate with such melodious pain,
Not so the eagle, who like thee could scale
Heaven, and could nourish in the sun's domain
Her mighty youth with morning, doth complain,
Soaring and screaming round her empty nest,
As Albion wails for thee: the curse of Cain
Light on his head who pierced thy innocent breast,
And scared the angel soul that was its earthly guest!

By a remarkable turn in the seventh line, the elaborate comparison is suddenly followed by a curse as though that curse had been gathering like another voice beneath the preceding language. Now, disjunctively, the curse breaks through, and it carries perhaps the first true ring of Shelley's voice. It cuts impatiently through the pageantry of mourners, disrupting the delicate melancholy of their poise.¹⁵ And this is, after all, the first reference to Keats's alleged destroyer, the hostile reviewer in the *Quarterly Review*.

It is fair to say that Shelley's notion of the cause of Keats's death was a misinterpretation motivated by his own experience of malignment. In the first draft of his preface to "Adonais" he had written,

Persecution, contumely, and calumny have been heaped upon me in profuse measure; and domestic conspiracy and legal oppression have violated in my person the most sacred rights of nature and humanity.

(Works, 444)

This passage, which Shelley omitted on the advice of John Taaffe, confirms the identification and leaves us certain that the sudden direct utterance in the seventeenth stanza is a burst of anger by Shelley partly on his own behalf. At last, by moving closer to the self in this way, Shelley has released some of the energy for mourning, hitherto held in check.

Interestingly enough, the second movement of the poem begins immediately after this release of anger. Yet critics have only related the ensuing expression of woe to the juxtaposition of a still mourning

*
Curse
Shelley's
own
in self

✓

poet over against a reviving world. This is not untrue, but surely that first note of personal grief—"Ah, woe is me"—is the result of the breakthrough at the end of the previous stanza. By expressing anger, Shelley has begun to undo the repression of his grief, and stanzas 17–20 contain repeated images of a distinctly erotic release:

The amorous birds now pair in every brake,

 And the green lizard, and the golden snake,
 Like unimprisoned flames, out of their trance awake.

.....
 Through wood and stream and field and Ocean
 A quickening life from the Earth's heart has burst

All baser things pant with life's sacred thirst;
 Diffuse themselves; and spend in love's delight,
 The beauty and the joy of their renewed might.

The irony behind this release is that the elegist himself remains apparently unmoved. He is unable to endorse the erotic flow and channels it into Nature's, rather than his own, renovation. This is crucial, for like Spenser and Milton, and indeed like any true mourner, Shelley must submit the natural force of his desire to a repressive refinement. It is essential that these energies be released—but only so that they may be troped and spiritualized.

Hence Shelley focuses contrastingly on what he would like to see immortalized: not man's genetic power, but rather his intellectual faculty, "that which knows." And yet, this higher faculty is represented by imagery that reflects originally physical referents:

. . . Shall that alone which knows
 Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
 By sightless lightning?—the intense atom glows
 A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose.

The cognitive being is thus represented by a sword, or by an atom whose glow is surely related in kind to the "unimprisoned flames" of Nature and to the forces that spend themselves "in love's delight." Nevertheless, it is with such residually erotic and material images of

elevation, penetration, and glowing radiance that Shelley will have to reach for consolation, trying to cut or burn through all material textures (present once again, here, in the form of the sheath).

✓ Fearing the extinction of these purer powers, Shelley is now moved to a further expression of genuine grief, his second truly direct utterance. Now recognition of his own mortality brings on not anger but painful perplexity, the gnomic questioning that one associates with elegy:

Alas! that all we loved of him should be,
But for our grief, as if it had not been,
And grief itself by mortal! Woe is me!
Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene
The actors or spectators?¹⁶

Urania
Dion
or P
obst

Shelley still cannot bear this burden alone, and again he transfers it to his chief alter mourner, Urania. The language becomes urgent, irresistible, and Urania wakes abruptly: "Swift as a Thought by the snake Memory stung, / From her ambrosial rest the fading Splendour sprung." She moves "like an autumnal Night" "out of her secret Paradise." This disparaging of Urania by a snake suggests that Shelley has finally been able to arouse her by curiously satanic means. It is a troubling suggestion, and it will return with Shelley's later self-images of sexual transgression ("Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness, / Actaeon-like") and damnation ("branded . . . like Cain's"). Predictably, Shelley's success here brings on its own rebuke, as Urania moves directly into the dominion of that father figure Death, under whose aegis her extravagantly sexual mourning will be mocked and where the separation from her son will be most punitively enforced.

As Urania enters the death chamber, her intensity momentarily cowers even Death and seems to send a "pale light" through the body of the poet. But hers is an intensity only of bereavement. She has nothing with which to oppose or menace Death, and he recovers his sway with a magisterially ironic gesture: "her distress / Roused Death: Death rose and smiled, and met her vain caress." Like the jealous father, Death exercises his prerogative, claiming the caress meant for the son. With this submission of the mother-son attachment to the male figure of Death, a crisis in the work of mourning is confronted. The primary experience of rupture is represented, here in the guise of a role reversal similar to that studied before in the primitive vegetation

rites or in the child's *fort-da* game. The child's separation from its mother, or man's separation from a withering nature, is performed but psychologically reversed, so that the mother/nature becomes the victim or mourner. And with this presentation of Urania, Shelley reaches his most acute and no doubt exorcistic critique of inadequate modes of mourning.¹⁷ The speech is Urania's:

'Stay yet awhile! speak to me once again,
Kiss me, so long but as a kiss may live,
And in my heartless breast and burning brain
That word, that kiss, shall all thoughts else survive,
With food of saddest memory kept alive,
Now thou art dead, as if it were a part
Of thee, my Adonais! I would give
All that I am to be as thou now art!
But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart!

↓
Yes, Urania!
inadequate
mourner!

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud distinguishes between the normal response to loss, what he calls the work of mourning, and the abnormal condition of melancholia, in which the subject cannot move beyond an unhealthy, often inert, reaction to loss.¹⁸ The work of mourning requires a gradual detachment from the lost object, followed by a transfer of the detached affections or libido onto a new love-object outside the self. The case of melancholia is complex, but as we saw before, it may occur either when the subject cannot renounce the lost object or when the detached and released libido regresses to an earlier form of narcissism by reattaching itself to the ego instead of to a new, external object. The various responses may be related to rhetorical tropes. It would seem that a detachment would involve a figure of disconnection, most simply irony (or a strongly substitutive metaphor), while a refusal to detach oneself would be associated with the more connective tropes of metonymy or synecdoche. In her melancholia, Urania cannot turn away from the dead poet. On the one hand she would take a last kiss-word from him to serve as a metonymic reminder of him. In fact, so tenacious is her attachment that it forces her to drive that metonymy to a synecdochic extreme ("a part of thee, my Adonais"). The lost object would thus be synecdochically internalized within Urania's "heartless breast and burning brain." On the other hand, yet again refusing to withdraw from Adonais, she would relinquish her own ego in order to be identi-

Urania
melancholic
The English Elegy

fied with the object of her attachment. She remains prostrate, unable to do either and yet unable to renounce the dead Adonais. ¹⁹

Having used Urania in a way that has allowed him to objectify one form of potential melancholia and also to further his own necessary departure from this mother figure, Shelley turns, in the remainder of the poem, to work his way through other forms and stages that Freud unquestionably regarded as symptoms of a griever's melancholia. Freud writes:

Shelley's
Melancholia

First there existed an object-choice, the libido had attached itself to a certain person; then, owing to a real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person, this object-relationship was undermined. The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference of it to a new one, but something different for which various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance, and was abandoned; but the free libido was withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object. It did not find application there, however, in any one of several possible ways, but served simply to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object.) Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object becomes transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification. ²⁰

To this Freud adds the logical suggestion that in such a case, the original object choice was narcissistic, this being indeed a part of "the disposition to succumb to melancholia." Now, as has been suggested, Shelley's original view of Keats's death *was* narcissistic, seeing Keats not only as a brother poet but also as a reflection of Shelley's own sense of martyrdom. Reacting to the death of Keats, Shelley withdrew from the dead youth, but reattaching his affections only to himself, he identified his ego with the abandoned object. Or rather, and this is crucial, he identified a part of his ego with the lost object. For the kind of splitting that Freud describes occurs within Shelley, setting a criticizing voice over against the weaker, vulnerable aspects of himself, seen now with frightening clarity in the light of their identification with the dead Keats. The splitting takes the form of an elaborate self-objectification. Not only does Shelley use the third-person *he* in referring to himself but he emphasizes the division by retaining, in close

Shelley's
melancholia
I.

juxtaposition, the *I* that makes this reference.²¹ Here is Shelley's portrait of himself among the procession of poet-mourners who pay homage to Adonais:

XXXI

Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
 A phantom among men; companionless
 As the last cloud of an expiring storm
 Whose thunder is its knell; he, as I guess,
 Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
 Actaeon-like, and now he fled astray
 With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
 And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
 Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

XXXII

A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift—
 A Love in desolation masked,—a Power
 Girt round with weakness,—it can scarce uplift
 The weight of the superincumbent hour;
 It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
 A breaking billow,—even whilst we speak
 Is it not broken? On the withering flower
 The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
 The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may
 break.

XXXIII

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
 And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
 And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
 Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
 Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,
 Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
 Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
 He came the last, neglected and apart;
 A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart.

The passage is complicated, in typically Shelleyan fashion, by a multiplication of images. Within the flux we make out versions of the vegetation deities, Actaeon and Dionysus (the [leo]pardlike spirit with the thyrsis wand). "Nature's naked loveliness" associates Diana

with Aphrodite-Venus, hence with the mother-Urania. Actaeon's transgression is, therefore, precisely the error a mourner must forego, and it is interesting to note how Shelley is both identifying with and yet objectifying and distancing himself from just this error. Actaeon is punished by the enervation and eventual *sparagmos* that typifies castrative martyrdom.

The Dionysus identification is a more unsettling complex of weakness and assertion. More precisely, assertive strength struggles to issue from an enveloping wreckage. The latter is marked, once again, by sexual expense and fragmentation ("It is a dying lamp, a falling shower, / A breaking billow, —even whilst we speak / Is it not broken? On the withering flower / The killing sun shines brightly: . . .") Shelley is here even identified with Adonais, the broken lily. But there is the contrastive figure of Dionysus holding his vibrating and dewy cone-tipped spear. Juxtaposed with the preceding imagery of expense and devastation, this phallic thyrsis does seem to hold out the consoling promise of recovery, but it will remain for Shelley to reestablish its significance. For the moment, the promise is still "girt round with weakness," as Shelley switches back momentarily to the more Actaeon-like figure of the stricken deer.

Returning to our recognition of the self-divisive aspect of Shelley's work of mourning, it is clear that this self-presentation in terms of wounded, withered, and annihilated vegetation figures identifies the mortal part of Shelley's ego with the slain Adonais. And this melancholically narcissistic identification prepares the way for a different identification, one that continues yet transforms the poet's narcissism. For even as Shelley's ego has cleaved into critic and criticized, observer and victim, this division corresponds to a division perceived in the nature of Adonais: the immortal poetic genius, the "angel soul," as divided from the empirical man who had been its temporary home. And it is this former genius-soul with whom Shelley will come to identify his own purified, immortal self. In the remainder of the poem, therefore, Shelley completes the work of mourning by a powerful detachment from the natural man and the natural world and a subsequent reattachment to a transcendent ideal instead.

But first, Shelley has a second, more expansive outbreak against the object of his anger. This outbreak is well situated. On the one hand, it allows Shelley to discharge his wrath in a burst of energy that will fuel his subsequent ascent. On the other hand, his vitriolic contempt for

the anonymous reviewer, Croker, conveniently supplies an extreme example of the lowest, wormlike or kitelike level of existence that Adonais is immediately shown to have transcended ("Nor let us weep that our delight is fled / Far from these carrion kites that scream below").

As I have already suggested, Shelley's transcendent ideal definitely draws on his narcissistic libido. Just as Shelley had distorted in his own image his version of Keats's death, so, too, his version of the immortal Keats is cast in his own ideal likeness. The process of narcissistic idealization has been analyzed in general by Heinz Kohut, one of the first theorists to explore the beneficial potential of narcissism. Kohut's essay "The Forms and Transformations of Narcissism" is particularly relevant here, for he stresses the important connection between narcissism and the acceptance of loss and death:

More difficult still, however, than the acknowledgment of the impermanence of object cathexes is the unqualified intellectual and emotional acceptance of the fact that we ourselves are impermanent, that the self which is cathected with narcissistic libido is finite in time. I believe that this rare feat rests not simply on a victory of autonomous reason and supreme objectivity over the claims of narcissism but on the creation of a higher form of narcissism.²²

The "higher form of narcissism" involves the construction of an ego ideal, what Kohut calls the "grandiose self." For Shelley, this is the transcendent human, or more strictly, the poetic spirit. I think Kohut's addition to Freud's theory of narcissism (particularly in relation to melancholia) may thus apply closely to the case of Shelley as he works through to the end of "Adonais."

Kohut's view of the "higher narcissism" may itself be too idealistic, however. In the concluding section of this chapter I hope to suggest how fragile and how specular the "grandiose" self-image remains. We should here recall Lacan's portrayal of the mirror stage. As I suggested earlier, a mourner may lapse back to a form of this stage—another potential factor in narcissistic melancholia. Shelley's work of mourning does appear to revert to elements of the mirror stage, and "Adonais" (particularly following the self-portrait beginning in stanza 31) is marked by that phase's unstable opposition between the condition of fragmentation on the one hand and idealized images of coherence on the other.

Shelley's represented reversion to the mirror stage is, admittedly, controlled by an exorcistic self-objectification, one that shatters and discards its imagings in order to reconstitute a higher version of the self. But this higher version, despite its apparently triadic inclusion of Death, may not entirely escape the dangers of the earlier mirror stage. If the griever seeks literally to identify with the new image—to literalize what must remain specular and fictional and to make immediate what must remain a mediated resemblance—he risks a delusional entrapment in another dyadic fantasy. By stressing, with Lacan, the degree of alienation and fictionalizing in any narcissistic self-imagining, we may recognize the vulnerability of Kohut's "grandiose self," even as we see with particular urgency the problems besetting Shelley in the remainder of his poem.

We have still to ask what ingredients, in Shelley's case, compose the immortal ideal ego. Of what, exactly, does Shelley construct the alternative to his fragmented and rejected self imaged earlier as a broken billow or withered flower? Who is the immortal Adonais with whom Shelley's higher self may be identified? Continuing the dramatic, oppositional argument that began with his rejection of the reviewer, Shelley pursues this exaltation of the soul:

Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same,
Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.

After its shattering demise in the "falling shower" of an explicitly sexual and mortal ruin, the earlier sexual imagery of fertile liquids and glowing fires here returns, but in a spiritualized version of itself, as the soul flows back to its origin and glows beyond extinction.

In order for this pure spirit to be an ideal self *for Shelley*, it must be more specifically defined. Most crucially, it must represent the poetic genius—not any generalized poetic genius, but the genius as Shelley defines it. This means that Shelley must modify the immortal Keats-Adonais so as to reflect and accommodate the immortal Shelley. Necessarily, this requires a distortion of Keats.

Shelley declares that the disembodied spirit of Keats flows back in purity to the "burning fountain whence it came." It is free "from the contagion of the world's slow stain." Now this in fact controverts

Keats's own view of the soul and of the mundane world. For Keats there is indeed a part of every human being, the "intelligence," which is a spark of the eternal. "[n]telligences," he wrote to George and Georgiana Keats on 28 April 1819, "are atoms of perception—they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God."²³ But whereas Shelley rejects the circumstantial world as contagious dross, Keats goes on to insist that an "intelligence" should be immersed "in the medium of a world like this" in order that it may advance to take on an "identity." Only this "identity" can be called a soul. For Keats, this attainment of a soul adequately stained by the world and by the heart constitutes salvation—a far different idea from that of Shelley's celebration of the return of a disembodied purity to its source.

A further misrepresentation of Keats in Shelley's adaptation of Adonais to his own ideal likeness is his implicit negation of Keats's espousal of empathy, unobtrusiveness, and negative capability. In their stead, Shelley associates Keats's poetic spirit with a shaping power more like that of egotistical sublimity:

He is a presence to be felt and known
 In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
 Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
 Which has withdrawn his being to its own,
 Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
 Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

XLIII

He is a portion of the loveliness
 Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear
 His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
 Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there,
 All new successions to the forms they wear,
 Torturing th'unwilling dross that checks its flight
 To its own likeness, as each mass may bear,
 And bursting in its beauty and its might
 From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.

Within Shelley's declaration we also note his revisionary employment of the vegetation deity. That figure's original infusion into Mother Nature has now become a reunification, not with a matrix to be fertilized, but rather with the shaping power of a narcissistic demiurge.

Greater yet than his need to see not Keats but himself as the beckoning star was Shelley's need to ensure that his projected orbit was well clear of the "lone star" he had once called Wordsworth. This is perfectly consonant with Shelley's need to celebrate an alternative to loss and death, and the early sonnet in which he had described Wordsworth as a "lone star" had in fact begun with the lines, "Poet of Nature, thou has wept to know / That things depart which never may return" (*Works*, 526).²⁴ For Wordsworth, the disappearance of the visionary gleam was irrevocable, but it led to the compensatory colorations that the humanized mind's eye lends to what remains. Shelley sought to refuse the very need for such a consolation. The glory and the freshness were always here, within a poet's vision of the world. Or, if that glory seemed to have "fled," then the poet's spirit, rather than remaining in an impoverished world, however hued by sad maturity, should follow after the gleam, returning to its first radiance.

In order to controvert Wordsworth, Shelley has to use Wordsworth's language, and the last eighteen stanzas of "Adonais" contain many echoes of the "Immortality Ode." This is partly a matter of certain words (such as *embers, fountain, light, splendour, glory, and radiance*). But there are more concerted passages in which Shelley echoes Wordsworth only to depart from him:

shelley
vs
Wordsworth
... Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air,
Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

What at first sounds like the final stanza of Wordsworth's ode veers off into an un-Wordsworthian and characteristically Shelleyan address to the Air. The address cuts specifically against Wordsworth's stanza, which, as we recall, goes on to appreciate "the clouds that gather round the setting sun." Wordsworth's resignation colors and hymns the very barriers that gather between him and the clear sky, and it is to the "meanest flower" here below that he finally turns in the last lines of his poem.

For Shelley, on the other hand, the earth is deliberately "abandoned," left to its despair (not unlike the desolate Urania), and no

veiling scarf must intervene between it and the smiling (rather cruelly joyous) stars. By such antithetical counterpointing, both to the mundane world and to what he regarded as the defeated poetry of that world, Shelley in effect begins to approach the beckoning ideal poetic self toward which he makes his final trajectory:

The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:
Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

LIV

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

LV

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given,
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

This conclusion is profoundly disturbing, as many readers have found. Shelley, as we know, perished a year later, precisely by giving sail to the tempest (accounts relate that Shelley, who could not swim, refused to follow a passing crew's advice to strike his sail during the storm).²⁵ But even if we did not know this, "Adonais" surely concludes on a suicidal note, and we may wonder what measure of success to accord the poet's work of mourning. Has Shelley not somehow burst beyond the elegy as a genre? The problem is deep-seated, for in many ways Shelley's poem has, since its first epigraph, worked against the possibility, the very form and texture, of poetry itself. This conflict

has great urgency, for as we saw in the cases of Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet, quarrels with literary or legal mediation are often inseparable from suicidal quarrels with life.

Several of these contradictions in "Adonais" have come to a head in the concluding stanzas of the poem. Shelley's ideal self, endowed with Light, Beauty, and Benediction, is nonetheless an image upheld in a mirroring relationship with the aspiring self. Here the latter is felt to be the reflection, while the ideal is seen as the original ("as each are mirrors of / The fire for which all thirst"). When Shelley moves to consummate his love for that ideal (that fire "now beams on me, / Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality"), we may think of Narcissus diving to the depths of what he had taken to be a substantial self. Shelley's course ("No more let Life divide what Death can join together") would necessarily rupture the specular *medium*, the dividing mirror, in which his very goal is imaged.

But if Shelley's figure of the star depends on an intervening medium, this suggests an unexpected connection between images of light and those of textured veils and clouds which the light would seem to oppose. The destruction of one must threaten the other. To make war on poetic language as an interpositional texture associated with a scarf, a veil, a pageantry of mist, a sheath, a dome of many-coloured glass, a web of being—all of which are to be trampled or torn—is to assault the very means by which the counterimage of a radiant star can be posited.²⁶

From this point of view, we may look back on Wordsworth's sunset clouds or Collins's veilings as the markers of a sad but saving wisdom. They indicate an elegist's sober sense, as at the end of Clorinda's lay in "Astrophel," of what divides the "there" of the deceased from the "here" of a survivor. Similarly, they reveal the elegist's self-knowledge regarding his unavoidable dependence on the fabric of his poem.

Indeed, if we review the entire history of the elegy, we recall countless images of weaving that characterize the genre. It is perhaps with relief that we turn from Shelley's antitextual flight to such figures as the basket-plaiting elegist in Virgil's "Eclogue X." Whether it be by way of Camus's garments "Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge / Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe," or Milton's framing review of his own Doric lay, or Jonson's witty focus on his "best piece of poetry," or Gray's attention to his own engraved epitaph, or Stevens's "weaving round the wonder of . . . need," almost

all elegists have found a way to suggest the very materiality of their poems. After all, that material not only allows the dead to be "robed," as Shelley himself could not help writing, "in dazzling immortality"; it also marks the saving distance between the dead and their survivors.

Shelley has successfully completed much of the work of mourning. He has renarrated and accepted the fact of death. He has ironized and surpassed inadequate modes of grief. He has expressed and purged his anger. He has submitted to a chastening power that deflects his own attachment to the dead and to the mother-Muse. By transforming his primary narcissism, he has created a consoling substitute for the mortal identities of both Keats and himself. And he has apparently accepted the fabric of language, not only to mediate his anger and desire, but also to represent the substitutive object of his affections. But having done all this, Shelley insists on what seems to be a literal rather than a figurative identification with the consolatory image. Refusing to accept that such an image exists only by virtue of his own material figurations, he threatens to "consume" the entire network of mediations so painfully woven in the poem. It is the very triumph of his mourning imagination, its apparently literal rather than literary thrust, that draws him on to what all mourners most need to avoid—their own drive beyond life and beyond the language whose detours and saving distances keep them alive.

Toward the end of "Lycidas," Milton wrote of the perilous flood. And it was to a protective "Genius of the shore" that he transformed Edward King. For Shelley, the perilous flood is shoreless, more vertical than horizontal. And the beacon does not so much protect as beckon. "Burning through the inmost Veil," the star would seem to carry Shelley beyond the possibilities of poetry, certainly beyond the assurance of pastures new. If we wondered how Shelley could have accepted this most conventional of forms, the pastoral elegy, we recognize now how thoroughly he has driven his version of the genre to the brink of its own ruin. Not surprisingly, "Adonais" marks an extremity that no later elegy would reach.