THE ROMANTIC POETS
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[Note: Hough's chapter on Shelley begins with "Shelley and Godwin" (sect. i), followed by sections on "Prometheus Unbound" (ii), "Shelley as a Lyricist" (iii), and "the Defence of Poetry" (iv). Page numbers given below are those at top of page in the Grey Arrow reprint edition of 1964 given at Internet Archive at [accessed 24.08.2019; reviewed 11.05.2023.]

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Chapter IV: Shelley

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iii. "Shelley as a Lyricist"

To many readers Shelley's genius is primarily lyrical: which commonly implies emotional. This is very doubtful—intense and unremitting intellectual activity seems to have been the main characteristic of his mind. The slender wisps of song that are perhaps the most familiar of Shelley,s works were mostly written in moments of dejection or emotional abandonment. About half a dozen of them are exquisite; but many pages of Shelley's work are occupied with such brief lyrical fragments; and outside the famous anthology pieces most of them are bad. Many readers of *O Worlds O Life, O Time and Music, When Soft Voices Die* imagine that there is a great deal more on the same level. In fact there is very little. More characteristic of Shelley is the longish, elaborated poem, lyrical in spirit, though not in form. This may be outwardly elegy, like *Adonais*; narrative, like *The Sensitive Plant*; a love-rhapsody, like Epipsychidion; or a fragment of a fairy tale, like *The Witch of Atlas*: but all exhibit the same mixture of speculation, the elaboration of a private mythology, and the element of song. Midway between the two in scale and complexity are *The Cloud*, *To a Skylark*, the *Lines Written in the Euganean Hills* and the *Ode to the West Wind*. Two formal odes, very much in the eighteenth-century manner, *Naples* and *Liberty*, make a rather disconcerting appearance: very competent performances of their kind, but hard to fit in to the prevailing picture of Shelley's genius.

Shelley's command of melopoeia, musical suggestion, the use of words as song, is at its best exquisite; butit is capricious. Or rather, command is not the word. "Poetry," he says in the *Defence*, "differs in this respect from logic, that it is not subject to the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence have no necessary connexion with the consciousness or will." His most delicate music comes unsuspected like, wandering breeze, usually associated with some intense feeling, abstracted from particular circumstance. The hym of Asia, [141] "Life of Life" in *Prometheus*, is one example; the last chorus of *Hellas* is another. Both are ecstatic; the first a vision quivering with brilliant light, the second a serener glow. Sometimes it is despondency that awakens Shelley's Aeolian harp.

> Out of the day and night
> A joy has taken flight.
> Fresh spring, and summer and winter hoar
> Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
> No more, O never more.

On the level of easier emotion, this uncertain instrument breathes a melodious sentimentality that sometimes recalls Tom Moore.

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.

(To Jane: "The keen stars were twinkling".)

It is worth mentioning this, for Shelley is so often seen as "pinnacled dim in the intense inane" that too much has been claimed for poems that themselves make no such claims: and this in turn has called forth quite unnecessary blasts of depreciation. Many of his shorter lyrics are occasional poems, like *The Aziola*, which is charming; or *With a guitary to Janey* which is less so. zAt times—we can see it in this poem, in the *Lines Written in the Euganean Hills* —a kind of rhythmical automatism seems to overtake him:

For it had learned all harmonies
Of the plains and of the skies
Of the forest and the mountains
And the many-voiced fountains
The clearest echoes of the hills
The softest note of falling rills
The melodies of birds and bees
The murmuring of summer seas.

("With a Guitary to Jane") [142]

There seems no reason why the catalogue should ever end, and he seems to be going on largely because he does not know how to stop. Octosyllabics are particularly liable to bring on these attacks; but it may happen with any of the more facile measures —there is a good deal of it in *Epipsychidion*, Which means, not only that Shelley's musical gift is a shy, uncertain visitant, but that he has no certain command of style when it is absent.

The same contrast is found if we look at his images and structure. *Ozymandias* is an extremely clear and direct poem, advancing to a predetermined end by means of one firmly held image. "When the lamp is shattered', a poem that has been both admired and condemned, proceeds in a wholly different way. Images are put together, often in no logically comprehensible sequence. The series of analogies—flight will not survive the shattering of the lamp, music the breaking of the instrument—are all piled up to illustrate the statement that

The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute.

But there is nothing within the context of the poem (and I have not been able to discover anything outside it) to tell us what this means. Many of the succeeding images are kept together only by a community of emotional tone. Yet the poem does make a unified impression, in spite of the extremely loose relation of its parts. A demand for "metaphysical" clarity would be quite out of place here. Poems can attain unity by more than one means; and among the possibilities is that of retaining vaguely connected images in an informal pattern, floating, as it were, on a breeze of rhythm and music. This air-borne dance has always been recognized as one of Shelley's especial achievements. (The last act of Prometheus is a supreme example.) But the breeze has only to flag, and the whole becomes a heap of jarring atoms, or the spasmodic scurrying of loose papers in an idle gust.

The Skylark has great beauty in individual stanzas; it has been pointed out that the order of the stanzas is insignificant [143]—they could be rearranged almost anyhow without loss. This is not as damaging as is sometimes supposed: it is in fact a not unusual poetic situation: it is not obligatory for poems to progress in a temporal or logical sequence; they have often a timeless, synoptic point of view; and this is appropriate enough to a poem about the song of a far-off,

almost unseen bird. But the *Skylark* is rather a long lyric: and the absence of internal structure is more felt the longer a poem becomes. And it remains true that a more conscious designer than Shelley would either have given the poem a clearer sense of direction, or have made it a shorter poem.

The process in much of Shelley's lyric poetry is to find natural objeas a symbol for his own emotional pattern. His best poetry, arises when one of his major passions finds an adequate symbol; as it does in the *Ode to the West Wind*, The wind does not become, like the moon in the fragment quoted earlier, an arbitrary projection of an emotional state. It exists. in its own right, a a destroyer and preserver, sweeping away the old in storms, and gently fostering the new with zephyrs. Thus it becomes linked with another symbolism-—the cycle of the seasons. The poem begins with autumn and ends with spring, or the foretaste of spring: and the wind is the spirit of destruction and regeneration, the common power that moves through both. The theme of death and rebirth, destruction and regeneration. Doubly powerful to Shelley; first it is the great natural process of which political revolution is the human and social example; secondly because it affords an escape from the crushing personal despondency with which he was so often afflicted, which which bring about his not infrequent lapses into mere self-pity.

The death and rebirth themes are announced in the opening stanza. The wind drives away the dead leaves and conducts the seeds, apparently cold and dead, to their graves; but the graves are also cradles in which they are to be reborn in the spring. The second stanza pictures the wind in its stormy and terrible aspect. The third opens with an iridescent picture of the other west wind, the Zephyrus or Favonius of the ancients, who produced flowers and fruit by the sweetness of his breath. It [144] is a shimmering, Turneresque Mediterranean scene. But the stanza concludes with a return of the spirit of terror—the same wind which ruffles the surface of the Mediterranean also cleaves the Atlantic into chasms and frightens the submerged vegetation of the ocean. These three stanzas are built up on the antithesis between the two powers of the wind—its terrifying powers of destruction and its gentle fostering influence. They are descriptive, the imagery is largely visual, and the arrangement is a symmetrical one of contrasts of light and shade. The dark tones and brilliant sombre colours of the opening lines are contrasted with the lightness and softness of the lines on spring in the latter half of the stanza. Stanza two is all dark with brilliant flashes: and stanza three reverses the order of stanza one—the soft, light-toned Mediterranean picture giving place to the sombre depths of the Atlantic.

These three stanzas are something like the octave of a sonnet, announcing and elaborating a theme. The fourth and fifth stanzas are like the sestet, reflective and personal applications of the theme. The impression of the first three stanzas has been one of unimpeded energy and power: and it has been quite objective and impersonal. The poet and his sensibility have made no individual appearance. In the fourth stanza his own sense of oppression and constraint is related to the wind's freedom and strength. He would like to be a dead leaf, a cloud or a wave to be swept along by the wind's power; yet once he had been able to imagine that the wind's power was his own: and a similar power is naturally and by right his own: he too is tameless and swift, but has been crushed by the weight of the world.

At this point we might be on the way to more stanzas written in dejection. The wind is a power of destruction; and in his despondency the poet could wish to be swept away by it like a dead leaf. But that is not the final direction the poem is to take: the wind is also a power of regeneration, and so it can be to him. The last stanza is a prayer that it may be so. Why pray to an insentient natural force? Mere poetic "personification", to use a crass phrase for what can often be a crass device? No. As a force of death and rebirth the wind is one manifestation of the creative principle that runs through the whole universe. Therefore the poet can say

> Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is
> What if my leaves are falling like its own?

—and rightly ask to be used by the creative power even if his personal life is dejected and decayed. He then takes up the dead leaf image of the opening lines and gives it a new turn. Destruction, the sweeping away of the old, is necessary before recreation can begin; and that is implied in the opening stanza, for the wind sweeps away leaves and seeds together. But in the fifth stanza the withered leaves themselves "quicken a new birth"—they provide the soil in which the new seeds can grow. Dead thoughts, words which seem useless and unheeded, can nevertheless nurture a new life. If possessed by the wind, the creative power, the dead thoughts need not even be dead; and they become in the next line ashes and sparks, to kindle, not merely to feed a new conflagration. Death is only the prelude to renewed life; and the poem ends as it began, with the cycle of the seasons—

> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

The structure of this ode is quite different from that of a typical seventeenth-century lyric, which may, as we have been told, have a logical argument almost syllogistic in completeness. Nor is there any very close linkage between the individual images; nor is there any very marked use of the sound effects, assonances and alliterations, by which sorne poets organize their verse. The logic here is the logic of feeling, which has its own order, and its own possibilities of formal perfection. I have tried to analyse this structure; but after a poem has been split up that it may be better understood, it must be put together again. And the reader's final impression is not of separable parts, feelings or images, but of a continuous powerful movement, sweeping through the whole. It is in this sense of continuous and directed energy that the *West Wind* is superior to *The Cloud, The Skylark*, or any other of Shelley's lyrics on the same scale.

Here the principle of organization is entirely his own, without particular literary precedent. *Adonais*, on the death of Keats (1821), is a formal elegy, taking its place in a long tradition of such poems. It includes many features from the Sicilian pastoral elegies of Theocritus, Bion/and Moschus, long familiar in the vernacular literatures through poems written in imitation of them. Like *Lycidas*, also in the. same tradition, it is inspired by no very vivid sense of personal loss, but takes over a traditional pattern and uses it to expi,ss the writer's own preoccupations and his own philosophy. Shelley takes from the Sicilian elegies the machinery of the lament and the summoning of the powers of Nature to mourn for the dead shepherd, as Milton did in *Lycidas*: and as Milton expanded the convention by introducing the awful figure of St. Peter, so Shelley adds to it by introducing the mourning of Urania and the brother poets. Among these he brings in himself:

> one frail form,
> A phantom among men, companionless—

in lines where self-pity seems a little obtrusive. But they again serve to do what Milton did in *Lycidas* to relate the formal elegy to his own situation and to that of his subject. Adonais has been killed by the world's hostility, and the fellow-poet who celebrates him is exiled by its neglect. Shelley is depicting the fate of the romantic poet in the world of Eldon, Castlereagh and the *Quarterly Review*, as Milton that of the young Puritan poet in the world of Laud and Strafford.

An already consecrated feature of the traditional elegy is the turn at the close: after the lament, the recantation—he is not dead: but the cast which is given to this defiant assertion of immortality depends on the philosophy of the writer, pagan, Christian or modern pantheist. Milton, incurably classic as well as Christian, gives us two versions of the fate of Lycidas— he has become a nature-spirit, the genius of the shore; and he is received among the solemn troops and sweet societies of the [147] saints in heaven. The Shelleyan immortality foretold for Adonais is hardly of a personal kind.

> He is made one with Nature: there is heard
> His voice in all her music, from the moan

Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
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. (XLII)

A sort of pantheism: but Adonais is not, like Wordsworth's Lucy, simply "rolled round in earth's diurnal course, with rocks and stones and trees". He has become part of the spirit which governs the Universe, which is the Universe—for Shelley ends with a Platonic or neo-Platonic or Brahmanistic assertion that eternity alone is real, that the phenomenal world is an illusion, is Maya, a veil that hides us from the one true light.

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity. (LII)

But it would be a mistake to suppose that Shelley lives consistently on that plane. Though the world is illusion, it has a kind of fairy-tale reality in whose dominion his poetry is often I willing to linger: indeed, in which poetry must linger. The I white radiance of eternity leaves the poet with few subjects.

Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire, as Yeats puts it. *In The Witch of Atlas* and *The Sensitive Plant* Shelley is mythologizing, gracefully and half playfully: and the [148] lines "To Mary" which introduce *The Witch* show that he was willing enough to allow his muse to play.

What hand would crush the silken-winged fly
The youngest of inconstant April's minions,
Because it cannot climb the purest sky,
Where the swan sings, amid the sun's dominions?

In a study as short as this these diaphanous pieces may be spared the burden of an exposition. *Epipsychidion* (1821), however, claims rather more. It is the fruit of a short-lived passion for a young Italian girl, Emilia Viviani; one of those sudden devotions with which Shelley's life is punctuated; and it is a poem of idealized and ecstatic love. In a fictitious introduction Shelley presents it as the work of a dead friend, and compares it, in its refined and esoteric sentiment, to the *Vita Nuova*, It is prefaced by a seductive Platonic-romantic motto, taken from an essay by Emilia herself:

"L'anima amante si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea neir infinito un mondo tutto per essa, diverse assai di questo oscuro e pauroso baratro."

(The soul of the lover flings itself out from the created world, and creates in infinity a world all for itself, far different from this abyss of fear and darkness.)

And this should give us the key to the realm in which the poem moves. Emilia is a "Seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human"; she is" the veiled Glory of the lampless Universe"; she is a sister, a vestal sister, rather than a mistress: so tliat when we are told, at the hundredth line, that a ship is waiting in the harbour to bear them away to the Ionian islands we may be fairly sure that what follows is more a piece of fanciful self- indulgence than an3rthing else. Yet the poem contains a good deal of disguised and often obscure autobiography, Mary Shelley appears as the moon, to which Emilia is the sun, and they are to share the poet's life between them. The facility with which Shelley effects the transition from the actual to the ideal plane is disconcerting; the proposition "I do not at present intend to make you my mistress" does not really entail [149] the consequence "This is therefore a great spiritual love." It is probable that opinions will always differ about the value of this kind of sublimation; but I think we can say

that it should be both a more arduous and a less conscious process than Shelley seems to contemplate. The verse, too, has the kind of facility that is apt to overtake Shelley when he is possessed by a single one-way passion: and for all its reputation *Epipsychidion* has little importance except as a document of the romantic sensibility.

The last and most obscure fragment of Shelley's verse is the *Triumph of Life* (1822), the poem on which he was engaged at the time of his death. Over five hundred lines exist; but we cannot deduce from them what the ultimate purpose of the poem was to be. The first half of it describes the procession of Life, led by a blind charioteer—a rout of captives in which all humanity is enslaved. In the second half a distorted form which is all that is left of Rousseau explains how, having once seen a brighter vision, he too became enslaved to life. There is much obscurity which the completion of the poem might or might not have removed; and it is not clear whether the sombre view of human destiny so far presented would have been the ultimate one. Wliat is clear is the decision and rapidity of the verse. The poem is written in terza rima, and this has suggested the influence of Dante to some commentators. Both Dowden, however, and Shelley's latest biographer, Professor Newman Ivey White, remark what should be obvious, that the actual model is Petrarch's *Trionfi*, especially the Triumph of Love. The spare directness of the style and the clear visualization, quite divorced from the conventionally poetic, is, however, almost Dantesque in places, and is certainly new to Shelley. Even in detail there is much that is obscure, but enough remains to suggest that Shelley at the end of his life may have been on the threshold of a new technical development.

Development, however, is not a word that we naturally use of Shelley's poetry. The characteristic qualities of his mind were fixed early: though his ideas expanded, the fundamentals changed little, and he is not an industrious experimenter in various techniques. He writes as he must, and if he had lived [150] longer it is not likely that the impelling necessities of his poetry would have become very different.

iv. On *The Defence of Poetry*

It remains to say something of Shelley's beliefs about the nature and functions of poetry. There is something to be found in the letters (though his letters are not nearly so illuminating as those of Keats); much in the prefatory notes to the poems; but the principal place is the Defence of Poetry. There seems always to have been some uncertainty in Shelley's mind between didactic and purely artistic aims; but there is little doubt that the first predominate. The preface to the Revolt of Islam describes the poem as an experiment on the public mind to discover "how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral or political society" has survived the tempests of the times. Shelley goes on to say, "I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality". It will be noted that "all the elements which essentially compose a poem" are enlisted as subordinates in a moral cause that is separate from themselves. Writing to Peacock in January 1819, at the time of the composition of PrometheuSy Shelley says quite bluntly, "I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science". In similar vein he confesses in the preface to Prometheus to "a passion for reforming the world": yet adds "it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform... . Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse". A contradiction is apparent, but it is reconciled in the passage that follows.

> "My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence, aware that until the mind can love and admire and trust, and hope and endure, reasoned principles of moral

> conduct are [151] seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passengers trample into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness."

Poetry is to work by its own imaginative processes, but the aim is still to awaken and stimulate the moral sense. From this point of view Shelley never departed, and the Defence of Poetry is largely an expansion of it.

The *Defence of Poetry* appeared in 1821. It was originally intended to be a reply to a pamphlet by Peacock, *The Four Ages of Poetry*. This is a brilliant piece of work, satirical and only half serious, which maintains that in the current era of science and philosophy the poet is a relic of primitive barbarism "wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age". Shelley was indignant and resolved to break a lance with him. But what results is something different from a mere answer to Peacock; it is an exalted defence of the honours of poetry and the imagination, an extension of the tradition of Sidney and the Renaissance champions of the Muses, and the best statement in English of the early Romantic theory of poetry. Coleridge attempts to give his ideas a philosophical foundation wliich Shelley is content to assume; and he is more attractive to the speculative mind because it is never quite clear exactly what he is saying. Wordsworth's preface seems a more massive piece of polemic. But Shelley is a clearer expositor than either of these more celebrated theorists—and he remains a poet even in his prose. *The Defence* is itself a work of art—a claim which could not be made for the prose writings of Wordsworth or Coleridge.

He begins by stating as an axiom what Coleridge tries to prove—the power of the imagination to perceive, in some sense, essential reality with a directness impossible to the discursive faculties. His language here is partly Coleridgean; and since he had read Biographia Literaria in the year of its appearance, we need not doubt that this is the source of his theory of the imagination and its functions. Poetry is the expression of the imagination, and it has access, therefore, to this special [152] kind of imaginative knowledge. All men have some imagination, so all are in some degree poets. But there is an absolute standard of beauty, to which every artistic representation approximates more or less closely. The poet is simply the man whose faculties for approximation to this standard are exceptionally great. Since he is able then to express essential truth in the form of beauty, from which all men of uncorrupted taste receive pleasure, the poet is not only the inventor of the arts, but the institutor of laws and the founder of civil society. Without him the beauty of order and the beauty of holiness would never have been perceived; and if their beauty had never been perceived, they would never have been desired. The poet is even a prophet, for by seeing the present as it really is he sees in it the seeds of the future.

A critical passage on the distinction between prose and poetry follows (Shelley does not equate poetry with verse; for him Plato and Bacon are poets); and there is a passage, Aristotelian in origin, but echoed by all the great Romantics, about the universality of poetry. Then succeeds a long panoramic survey of poetry from Homer onwards, which occupies the bulk of the essay. Historical surveys of this kind are apt to date. Shelley's is remarkably fresh; and the whole passage is a testimony to the extent and sensitiveness of his reading. Its purpose is to show the effect of poetry on society, and to show that "the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form, has been found to be connected with good or evil in conduct or habit". The reason for this is at the core of Shelley's belief.

> The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another, and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry ministers to the effect by acting upon the cause.

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An objection to many such lofty transcendental claims for poetry is that they fail to account for minor poetry and the lesser kinds. To this Shelley provides an admirable answer. Without interrupting the majestic sweep of his own theory, he does beautiful justice to the more modest kinds of imaginative writing. Such compositions, he says, may be read simply as fragments or isolated portions; but the more perceptive will "recognize them as episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world''.

In modern times (and here the specific answer to Peacock begins) "poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists"—on the plea of utility. Shelley opposes this, on hedonist and utilitarian grounds. Utility is whatever conduces to pleasure. But it has a narrow and a wider sense. The first is all that satisfies the mere animal needs, that conduces to transitory pleasure: the second is whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the understanding, and conduces to durable and universal pleasure. It is to this second kind of utility that poetry contributes. We owe a debt of gratitude to the philosophers, to Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire and Rousseau: but if they had never lived

> a little more nonsense would have been talked for a century or two; and perhaps a few more men, women and children burnt as heretics. We might not at this moment be congratulating ourselves on the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain;

—but without the poets and creative artists the moral condition of mankind would be inconceivably degraded; for the analytical reason can itself do nothing to arouse men's generous faculties. The passage which follows has even more relevance today than when it was written.

> We have more moral, political and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice: we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it [154] multiplies. … There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government and political economy, or at least what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. But we want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act on that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life. ...
>
> The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature."

It is evident enough that by this time poetry has become something very different from making verses. It includes all the means by which the sympathetic and generous emotions are aroused. But of these the arts are the chief. Since imagination shows us the real nature of the world it inevitably takes us out of the small circle of self-regarding feeling. Since it sounds the depths of human nature it shows not only the goings on in the poet's mind, but in the mind of the age, and can see in them the germs of the future. Hence when Shelley in his final paragraph calls the poets "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present", he is not merely using a rhetorical phrase, but expressing a real conviction—that the poet's intuitions often show him the direction in which the world is moving more clearly than the speculations of the political philosopher. And it would not be hard to find examples to substantiate this claim. But from this we pass to the final phrase; "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"; we look forward into the succeeding century and observe thiat if the poets are legislators they have some very formidable competitors—soldiers, historians, economists, physicists. All that Shelley says about the gap between our natural science and our moral ability to use it is manifestly true—but is it really the business of poetry to bridge the gulf?

Many later nineteenth-century writers agreed that it was. Poetry, for Arnold, is to replace religion as the guide and [155] teacher of mankind: for Pater and his successors, art itself is to

become a sort of religion. Shelley's argument is more reasoned and his position stronger than theirs. It is a poor thing not to feel the purity and generosity of his enthusiasm; but there is, after all, a fallacy in the Romantic apology for poetry, as in all later attempts to save the world by literature; two senses of the word poetry are confused. Poetry as the whole imaginative and sympathetic life of man is one thing; poetry the work of art is another; and to transfer what is true of the first bodily to the second is only rhetorically eflfective. In Shelley's philosophical system there is always a gap between the wretched actuality and the radiant and possible ideal. In some of his expository prose writing, he is prepared to fill it laboriously by the methods of patient reformism. But his imagination was more impatient: the gap must be bridged by a spark, and the spark is to be poetry. Poetry becomes the instrument of redemption; it invades the territory of faith and sets up a succession of shortlived governments: while a horde of intrusive busybodies in the meantime invade its own domain. The generous confusion of the nineteenth century has begun.

NOTES

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11. To Jane: "The keen stars were twinkling".

12. With a guitary to Jane.

13. N. I. White, *Shelley*, III, 630, note 35.