ON HISTORICAL THOUGHT IN JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU AND PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's complex involvement with the politics of historical representation and of historiography in general. It demonstrates how both authors repeatedly offered alternative visions of history so as to contradict prevailing meta-narratives about social progress in eighteenth-century France and, subsequently for Shelley, in early nineteenth-century England. Their historical thought not only shaped the political arguments they put to their own contemporaries, but also provides us with a framework in which to reconfigure their political relevance today. In this way, this dissertation responds to the work of James Swenson, Susan Wolfson, Mark Kipperman, and Jerome Christensen, by offering a new direction for the recent critical debate about the political potency of Romantic texts in the twenty-first century. The first two chapters explore Rousseau and Shelley's interest in histories that are politically contentious and how they construct their political arguments as well as their own political identities within historical frameworks. The third chapter charts the intellectual history that links the planting of corn, or large-scale agriculture, with imperial progress, starting with Defoe, who celebrates corn in Robinson Crusoe as Providence's prompt for Western colonial expansion. In his "Second Discourse," Rousseau historicizes the planting of corn (*blé*) as the moment of social and economic

debasement and corruption, thereby rejecting Defoe's politics and vision of historical progress. Shelley's father-in-law, William Godwin, delineates in his historical novel, St. Leon, the process by which governments have subjugated populations through subsidizing large-scale agriculture time and time again. The forth chapter lays out how Shelley adopts the radical agrarian politics of Rousseau and Godwin, and the historical frameworks in which these politics are configured, in such melancholy reflections on social degeneration as "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" and "Ode to the West Wind." In the final chapter, I argue that Shelley's historical drama, "The Cenci," is not only a critique of the degeneration of popular theatre, but also a radical recasting of theatrical poetics that agitates for a political response from the audience through a reenactment of social history.

For Audrey

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Rise like Lions after slumber

In unvanquishable number

Shake your chains to Earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you --

Ye are many -- they are few.

(Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy," 51-5)

Introduction

In early September of 1819, while in Italy, Percy Shelley composed the "The Mask of Anarchy" in a fury. It was his response to the news of the massacre of reform-seeking protesters who had gathered in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, on August 16. Local yeomanry on horseback, who had been ordered by magistrates to arrest the speaker, Henry Hunt, charged the crowd, killing eleven and brutalizing over four hundred men, women and children. A fierce and highly accessible satire of the government, Shelley's response aimed to rally the people, the "many," to oppose the repressive efforts of the "few." In her editorial comments on his poems of 1819, Mary Shelley said,

> Shelley loved the People; and respected them as often more virtuous, as always more suffering, and therefore more deserving of sympathy, than the great. He believed that a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable, and he eagerly ranged himself on the people's side. (The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley 626)

"The Mask of Anarchy," however, made no impact on the people to whom it was addressed and prompted no new clash, because Charles Ollier, Shelley's publisher in England at the time, did not publish it. As Donald H. Reiman notes in his edition of the

poem, Ollier, “fearful of prosecution because of the volatile temper of the country and the new repressive legislation passed late in 1819 and 1820 – refrained from publishing the poem until 1832” (Shelley’s Poetry and Prose 315). Because it was not published in the political context for which it was written, the political efficacy of “The Mask of Anarchy” has remained a matter of critical speculation, and, recently, of critical debate.

Mark Kipperman addresses this question of the political dimension of Shelley’s poetry in a critically self-reflective manner. In “Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889-1903,” Kipperman revisits the history of Shelley’s critical reception as it evolved over the Victorian period (drawing upon the work of Sylva Norman, Flight of the Skylark: The Development of Shelley’s Reputation, William St. Clair, The Godwins and the Shelleys, Roland A. Duerksen, Shelleyan Ideas in Victorian Literature, and M. Siddiq Kalim, The Social Orpheus: Shelley and the Owenites, among others). In the years after Shelley’s death, Kipperman finds a significant disjuncture in Shelley’s readership. On the one hand, Shelley for some time was celebrated among the working class, the Owenites, and the Chartists, and they celebrated him as a leading voice in their political and economic plight. Kipperman quotes Frederick Engels’ famous encomium for Shelley in The Conditions of the Working Class in England:

> Shelley, the genius, the prophet, Shelley, and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, cut down in accordance with the hypocritical morality of today. (196)

On the other hand, Kipperman stresses that some of Shelley's contemporaries felt a real aversion to his political appeals:

> Shelley's whole notion of political change and the radical possibilities of art remained threatening to most of the poets and critics who lived in the generation of the Reform Bill, the collapse of Chartism in the late 1840s as a focus for change by organized mass demonstration, and the creation of a politics of bureaucracy, centralization, and middle-class consensus in the critical years of the Peel ministry. (Kipperman 190)

As it was principally the later group who were to serve as teachers to the next generation of Shelley readers, their political discomfort impacted how Shelley was presented and read: Shelley's politics was downplayed.

Moreover, Kipperman argues that, as they became more and more detached from the politics of Shelley's day, critics and poets were subject to "actual institutional and ideological forces" that significantly affected their evaluation of the political appeal and efficacy of Shelley's poetry in their efforts "to interpret his relevance for vast numbers of new readers, the working and middle classes of the nineteenth century" (188). Among such forces, Kipperman identifies the establishment of English literary studies at Oxford (the very university from which Shelley was expelled) (193), the development of an English canon to foster nationalism (in which Shelley could be characterized as an enthusiastic participant, rather than a political rebel) (193, 195), the pedagogical development of theories of literary periods that focused on "a set of ideas and rhetorical forms" (198), and propagation of the idea that literary history is "detached from any political or historical context" (201). Under pressure from these forces, critics and poets,

such as Edward Dowden and Matthew Arnold, sought to diminish the political dimension of Shelley's poetry in any real sense of the term, and to "absorb him into an idealist view of history" that transcended any particular political context, much as the skylark flies above the clouds (201). To them, Shelley was a transcendentalist, disconnected from the particular concerns of his day. Across the century, then, any question of the politics of Shelley's poetry was more and more dismissed or neglected by critics and teachers. Kipperman's assessment of Shelleyan scholarship is limited to the nineteenth century, but it does effectively highlight how difficult it is for literary critics to assess questions of the political efficacy of literary works.

In 1950, Kenneth Neill Cameron published The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical. Through careful biographical contextualization, Cameron reread Shelley's works, from his juvenilia forward, and thereby reintroduced the question of Shelley's politics and placed the real and immediate political dimension of his writings as of central importance. Not surprisingly, his reading of "The Mask of the Anarchy" in the second volume of his biographical study, Shelley: The Golden Years (1974), asserts that it is the political dimension that "animates" the poem:

> His purpose in writing the poem was not so much to expose the oppressive nature of the rulers of England as to propagate, according to Mary Shelley, 'the great truth that the many, if accordant and resolute, could control the few.' This purpose animates the whole work. (346)

He goes on to explain the history of the events that inspired the poem and to explain the poem's allusions. It was a significant moment in Shelleyan scholarship because Cameron

effectively reopened speculation about the political efficacy "The Mask of Anarchy" might have had.

More recently, however, Susan Wolfson has called into question the pervasive estimation of Percy Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy" as "the epitome of political poetry," a belief which she suggests is widely held (Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism 195). She argues that Shelley was aware of the unlikelihood of its publication and thus the poem is "ultimately self-addressed, a masque in the mind of a poet dreaming about being a political orator and projecting this figure as a fantastic epipsyche" (196). The poem's "very extravagance of forms" - "allegorical modes worked into ballads and broadsheet stanzas" - may simply be "a merely aesthetic self-satisfaction" (196). Despite the poem's "proto-Marxist stings," she argues that Shelley's "political" and "didactic poetics" have a "perplexed logic" in "proffering poetry as the thing to be 'done' in political crisis" (197-8). Moreover, this "perplexed logic" is compounded by "the poet's quiescence and self-imposed isolation from the distant political scene" at the start of the poem:

> As I lay asleep in Italy
> There came a voice from over the sea,
> And with great power it forth led me
> To walk in the visions of Poesy. ("The Mask of Anarchy" Shelley's Poetry and Prose 1-4)

She argues that this dreaminess and removal of the narrative voice from the audience it addresses are never overcome in the poem and that "Shelley's rhetoric is both tentative and ambivalent" (201):

> The central agency, the "Shape" (its visionary status marked with the capital S) is elevated and limited to an intangible, phenomenal "presence" that finally produces "empty air" – in other words, visionary poetry itself, rather than an analysis of how material change might be realized in the historical moment of 1819. (201-2)

As a result, Wolfson concludes, the poem's political efficacy is a "fantasy," which turns inwards towards "self-arousal" (203).

Kipperman objects to this critique of the poem on several levels in "Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820: Shelley, Adorno, and the Scandal of Committed Art." First, he rejects Wolfson's formal reading of the poem, arguing that the political efficacy of the poem, and of "the political role of a visionary poetry" in general, remains an open question because it has "a moving target, and it will be defined only *historically* within the ideological modes and even literary forms, like satire, in which particular classes express their aspirations and fears" (4). Secondly, he argues that far from an inward-oriented fantasy,

> the dream vision of an aristocrat may perhaps constitute a more incisive political analysis than a ballad about the rebel framebraker, General Ludd […] because it can envision the oppressed collectively seeing what the visionary sees, the unmasking of anarchy as the rule of monarchy and the death of tyrants on the bloody field of their own creation as the beginning of a new call to class solidarity and courageous resistance. (4)

It is from such a vision that the oppressed can awake with a new and shared consciousness, which may in turn prompt advances in social amelioration. Third, drawing

on Steven Jones' Shelley's Satire: Violence, Exhortation, and Authority and Michael Scrivener's Radical Shelley, he accounts for the detachment of the poet, as the

> invocation of popular iconology [that] grounds [Shelley's] satire not in an ideal realm from which the powerful are merely lampooned but rather within the actual and bloody struggle of the oppressed both to free their understandings and to appropriate for themselves their land, labor, and nation. (4)

Kipperman concludes that "the real conflict and contradiction of this poem," if there is a tone of hesitancy in "The Mask of Anarchy," is in fact "over the revolutionary violence that might follow the new comprehension and the new demands of the oppressed" (4). The question is, according to Kipperman, How does one free a people but avoid the violence that may ensue, violence which may only subjugate them further?

Not coincidentally, William Godwin, Shelley's early mentor and subsequent father-in-law, had expressed this very anxiety in letters to Shelley over his activist work in Ireland and over Shelley's "An Address to the Irish People" (1812) pamphlet in particular. Godwin wrote of the pamphlet, "it will be ineffective to its immediate object, or [it will have] no very remote tendency to light again the flames of rebellion and war" (Letters 1: 261). Sympathetic with the Irish, Godwin advised gradual reform and education as the way to bring about social change, and saw Shelley's endeavors, and particularly his rhetoric, as much too inflammatory. And, as Kipperman demonstrates (although he does not address this explicitly), this anxiety can be found not infrequently in Shelley's poetry: the influence of Godwin's advice. Nor is it surprising to find in Shelley's poetry anxiety about social violence; Shelley was himself very much concerned

with both historical models of social evolution as well as his own political agency in relation to these models. It is important to note too that, although influenced by Godwin's advice, Shelley would never be wholly governed by it. He returns, for example, to much the same rhetoric in "The Mask of Anarchy" as he employed in "An Address to the Irish People"; Kipperman may overstate the intensity or sincerity of the anxiety he identifies in the poem.

This dissertation returns to the question of the political efficacy of Shelley's poetry, but from another perspective, Shelley's. Shelley's own attitudes about a poet's political function and efficacy are much more complicated and convoluted than has been recognized to date, even considering how frequently the final line of his "Defense of Poetry" is quoted: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (Shelley's Poetry and Prose 535). Shelley's own estimation of the poet as a political agent oscillates widely throughout his writings, but this dissertation argues that this oscillation is directly correlated to Shelley's avid interest in and extensive borrowings from diverse, often revolutionary, histories. And, Shelley's acute interest in history has received too little critical attention to date.

This dissertation, however, is not an assessment of the extent to which Shelley borrowed passages or collected factual information from historical sources, although it does touch upon these issues. Of course, Shelley did dramatize histories, such as his historical drama, "The Cenci," and he did borrow scenes, details and figures from famous histories in such poems as "Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude," much as Shakespeare used Plutarch. But this is not the main concern of this dissertation. Rather, it is an assessment of how Shelley was inspired by diverse, even contradictory, historical

frameworks and meta-narratives of social development, and how they affected the ever-modulating worldview expressed in his poetry. Of course, the histories that Shelley read varied widely in their politics, from classical histories, to eighteenth-century national and world histories, to contemporary historical accounts, particularly of the French Revolution, not to mention that he read them in English, Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.

As a result, from his juvenilia to his final unfinished "The Triumph of Life" (1822), Shelley's poetry demonstrates an acute consciousness of the politics of historical representation and, although not an historian himself, Shelley's poetry frequently offers some didactic presentation of history, drawn from the history he was reading as he composed his verses and typically geared to expose tyranny and oppression. But even when it does not address history directly, Shelley's poetry always betrays some attitude towards history; and this attitude, in turn, affects Shelley's estimation of the political agency of poets, sometimes great, sometimes negligible, and often somewhere in between. It is this dimension of Shelley's poetry that this dissertation explores.

A profound influence on Shelley in many regards, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is critical to this dimension of Shelley's thought. There has been much scholarship investigating Rousseau's impact on Shelley. Studies have investigated the literary and philosophical influence (Kenneth Cameron's two volume biographical study of Shelley is notable), the influence of Rousseau's linguistic theories on Shelley's thought and poetry (Monika Lee's <u>Rousseau's Impact on Shelley: Figuring the Written Self</u>), how Shelley responded to the political impact of both Rousseau's writings and his iconic status in England (William Duffy's <u>Rousseau in England</u>), to mention only a few. What is critical

to this dissertation, and what has not been addressed in depth before, is the impact of Rousseau's style of argumentation, specifically his frequent use of historical frameworks in a politically-charged manner. Like Shelley, Rousseau was not a historian, but his argumentation, be it on social inequality, language, pedagogy, drama, often appeals to conjectural histories that he himself reasons out. For example, his "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts," for which he won much popular fame and political infamy, challenges the Enlightenment belief in social progress, by presenting an historical model of inevitable social decline.

Although their politics and political climates were far from similar in many regards, Shelley learns from Rousseau how history can be put to use to challenge the *status quo*. In his recent book, On Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Considered as one of the First Authors of the Revolution, James Swenson explores the question of the political efficacy of Rousseau's writings. To what extent did they bring about the French Revolution? In a detailed account of the critical debates in historiography over "the relation between the Enlightenment and the Revolution," he argues that historical argument always hinges on a "fundamental discontinuity in narrative logic," that is, the continuous story of a "radical transformation of ideas" (15-6). The contradiction between a narrative or causal history and the requirement of fundamental discontinuity is paradoxical and this contradiction, he argues, was felt even during the Revolution: "the Revolution needed to negate its own origins even as it constructed its legitimacy on their basis" (15-16). To that end, it is exceedingly difficult to write a causal history of any revolution. Swenson reasons, then, the question of whether the writings of Rousseau prompted the revolution cannot be answered through an intellectual history alone.

Swenson suggests that this problem is only a problem if it is framed as a question of intellectual history. His solution is to look to sociology; he looks to the theoretical model that Jürgen Habermas developed in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquirey into a Category of Bourgeois Society, and that Dena Goodman employed in The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment. He reviews Goodman's discussion of the breakdown of the monarchical domination over the social exchange of ideas, with the simultaneous rise of the Salons, dispersed around the city and governed by women. Although in theory the monarchy maintained that it was the socio-cultural authority, in practice it was more and more displaced and abandoned. Swenson suggests that this

> cultural-sociological approach [...] displaces this temporal discontinuity [of intellectual history] into a synchronic mode, where it appears as a growing incompatibility between the form and content of Enlightenment sociability, between the theory and practice of the public sphere. (52)

This "growing incompatibility" would produce the conditions in which there would be an inevitable and radical transformation of ideas and of society. That is, Swenson proposes that to consider the question of the political efficacy of Rousseau's writings in relation to the French Revolution, it is essential to consider the actual social structures through which his ideas were disseminated.

Swenson's argument takes one further step. He draws attention to how Rousseau's own texts are characterized by the kind of narrative discontinuities and reversals, paradoxes and "growing incompatibilities" that become apparent in all attempts to define Rousseau's connection to the Revolution; Rousseau's texts are riddled with

them. Swenson points to moments of inspiration in his autobiographical writings that prompt personal revolutions, such as the moment of inspiration of the "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts" (54-9). He points to moments of revolution in Rousseau's theoretical arguments about social history, such as humanity's transition from the state of nature to an agricultural community (84-85). Even Rousseau's ubiquitous arguments about natural *amour de soi* and the social development of *amour-propre* along with his corresponding accusation of the duplicity of society, provide conceptual models for understanding and seeking social change based upon a sudden rupture (103-5). Such examples lead Swenson to his ultimate conclusion: "Rousseau is 'one of the first authors of the Revolution' not because he was one of its causes but because he provided the terms in which the logic of events could be interpreted" (x).

Swenson's reading of Rousseau and, more importantly, his approach to reading Rousseau, has considerable value to the study of Shelley, particularly for the critical debate over the political efficacy of Shelley's poetry. As in Swenson's work, this dissertation examines not the actual social structures through which Shelley's ideas were disseminated, but the models of dissemination Shelley himself figures within his poetry, so as to demonstrate that Shelley's writings maintain a powerful, politically charged, potentiality that may be realized within real socio-economic contexts to this day. Shelley found in Rousseau the example of an author who rejected and debated politically dominant meta-narratives about social progress, and who explored and developed alternative historical models as a means of resistance to political coercion.

The first chapter of this dissertation begins with Rousseau. Ostensibly about the influence of learning on public morality, Rousseau's "First Discourse" is ultimately a

reflection on writing social history. Its central argument is cast in historical terms, examining whether the arts and sciences have fostered morality in the past, and it arrives at an historical paradigm, universally applicable, of inevitable and inescapable social degeneration brought on by learning. In his prefatorial comments (and in his later biographical writings), however, Rousseau reflects on his moment of inspiration for this argument; his genius, accordingly, has resisted social assimilation and has allowed him to transcend social malaise (a posture popular among the Romantics and Shelley in particular). In other words, this biographical frame complicates his universal paradigm because it introduces the possibility of individual transcendence. The opposition of universal social degeneration with personal transcendence through an historical awakening (his recognition of the history of moral erosion that learning has repeatedly initiated) is a politically tense one. Anticipating a negative reaction from the public, Rousseau's prefatorial comments aim both to prevent being ostracized and to maintain his moral independence. (Never satisfied that he has achieved this aim, he will spend the rest of his life rewriting his historically framed arguments, the history of his own texts and their reception, and his own biography.) In this regard, the history of the "First Discourse" itself – its genesis, its publication and reception, and the public controversy it stirs – serves in Rousseau's later texts as an example of the essay's core argument: learning does not contribute to the moral improvement of society, itself a paradox, as it is this lesson the essay seeks to teach.

The second chapter turns attention to Shelley's early poetry. A voracious reader of histories, Shelley adopted various historical frameworks to frame the arguments of his poems. Shelley's interest in history has been repeatedly over-looked and, since Godwin

advised him in a letter to read more histories, he has often been mischaracterized as uninterested in history. Too frequently critics reconfigure Shelley's interest in history as an interest in philosophy (Earl Wasserman's Shelley: A Critical Reading), genre (Tilottama Rajan's "The Web of Human Things: Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*"), or linguistics (Paul de Man's "Shelley Disfigured" and William Keach's Shelley's Style) and thereby obscure Shelley's lifelong interest in historiography and, perhaps even more so, in the politics of historiography. In "Alastor," Shelley adopts various historical modes, which he found in C. F. Volney's revolutionary history, Edward Gibbon's history of decline and degeneration, and William Godwin's doctrine of historical necessity. Searching for some way in which to conceive of history, the poet-protagonist of "Alastor" wanders through the ruins of history, unable to comprehend it or find relevance. He eventually removes himself to the Caucasus to die beyond human memory. Although the influence of all three of these historians is evident in Shelley's historical landscapes, the poem fails to reconcile their various perspectives in a single vision of history. What "Alastor" does reveal is that Shelley read histories voraciously, adopted their frameworks diffusely in his poetry to structure various visions of history, and remained open to other historical modes. This openness to diverse historical perspectives, perhaps a product of his skepticism, would come to serve Shelley's revolutionary politics, for which he always sought an historical grounding, in his subsequent poetry.

Chapters three and four address the radical political history that Rousseau initiated in response to Danial Defoe's novel, Robinson Crusoe, and which would have a profound impact on the way Shelley conceived of history and how he conceived the political role of the visionary poet. Rousseau and Shelley both substantially contribute to

the intellectual history that links corn, or large-scale agriculture, with imperial histories. Where Defoe celebrates corn as Providence's prompt for Western colonial expansion in Robinson Crusoe, Rousseau argues in his "Second Discourse" that the planting of corn (*blé*) has always been the moment of social debasement and corruption in a nation's history. Shelley's father-in-law, William Godwin, delineates in his historical novel, St. Leon, the process by which governments have repeatedly subjugated populations through subsidizing large-scale agriculture time and time again. Shelley adopts these radical arguments, and the historical frameworks in which they are set, in such melancholy reflections on social degeneration as "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" and "Ode to the West Wind." Mary Shelley recounts that, when composing these poems, Percy Shelley "believed that a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable, and he eagerly ranged himself on the people's side." When Shelley reflects in these poems upon whether a poet should act through a retreat from social ills and corruption or through a self-sacrificing summons to revolutionary action, his choice is configured within agricultural metaphors, is prompted by his radical agrarian politics, and is made in response to his historical sensibilities.

Shelley's radical politics recur in his "The Cenci," and in many respects they culminate in it. This historical drama is not only a critique of the degeneration of popular theatre, following Rousseau's Letter to D'Alembert, but also a radical recasting of theatrical poetics that agitate for a political response from the audience through a reenactment of social history, anticipating the arguments of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Building upon Jerrold Hogle's reading of the play in Shelley's Process as a critique of spectator passivity, this final chapter argues that "The Cenci" critiques the

social function of Aristotelian *catharsis*, condemns the association of wealth and theatre, and suggests a progressive alternative, much as Rousseau offers an alternative to theater in his Letter to D'Alembert. However, where Rousseau's alternative is conservative and proscriptive, particularly in terms of gender roles, Shelley's alternative theater is not. Not only is "The Cenci" politically radical, it is also a work of progressive feminism. Shelley draws from Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which directly criticizes Rousseau's social vision. In sum, "The Cenci" can demonstrate the potential political power that comes from the representation of history, a lesson Shelley learned largely from Rousseau.

Chapter 1: The Historical Framework of Rousseau's First Discourse

In 1750 at the age of 38 Jean-Jacques Rousseau wins the prize of l'Academie de Dijon for his first philosophical essay "Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts", or "First Discourse." To a delighted and scandalized France, he announces in this essay (first published in 1751) what will be a central theme in many of his subsequent publications, that "our souls have become corrupted in proportion as our Sciences and our Arts have advanced towards perfection" (<u>The First and Second Discourses together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages</u> 7). In 1749 the Academy had announced the topic in *Mercure de France* for its essay competition: "Whether the restoration of the Sciences and Arts has contributed to the purification of morals" (1). Rousseau's negative response, however, is arresting and provocative. The Academy awards first place to Rousseau, but includes a political qualification because it is weary of "the republican tone" of the discourse (296). In the ensuing years, Rousseau's prodigious and controversial publications win him international fame, which outlives his death in 1778; "Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts" is the first blue ribbon of his tremendous literary career and his first great success with the public.

The "First Discourse" is without doubt deliberately provocative. Rousseau's response to the Academy's question is not merely a negative one. As Gourevitch points out in his introduction to his translation, Rousseau alters the question slightly, shifting it from a yes/no to an either/or question. He does not address whether or not there is a relation of the sciences and the arts to moral progress, as the Academy's question asks. He assumes the relevance and questions instead whether learning and culture either foster or spoil moral development. In other words, his negative response is not merely to assert

the irrelevance of the sciences and the arts to moral development but, bolder still, to declare their direct opposition to it.

In return the "First Discourse" provoked adversative responses from contemporaries despite its immediate popularity. Rousseau's thesis was bound to antagonize those who had pursued either the sciences or the arts. In the early 1750s, Rousseau was confronted by refutations, including one from the Enlightened King Stanislaus of Poland, one condemning him from Calvinist Geneva, one from his close friend in Paris, Charles Bordes. Voltaire's position was one of outrage. Rousseau anticipated this stir ahead of time, adding to his essay an ironic and preemptive epigraph drawn from Ovid: "Here I am a barbarian because no one understands me." Nevertheless, in the early 1750s, he proceeded to respond to his critics in a more immediate manner: he wrote letters that refuted their refutations. It is not until the summer of 1753 that he decided – perhaps arbitrarily, perhaps because the task of responding comes to be too repetitive – to move on to other projects. In addition to his fame, Rousseau laid out many of his basic philosophical principles in these initial and turbulent years of his career as an author. In his second autobiographical letter to M. de Malesherbes, dated January 12, 1762, Rousseau says that "the criticism of scribblers threw me completely into the career" (The Confessions 576).

There is in the discourse something even more provocative if less apparent than its general proposition regarding the corrupting influence of culture; it offers a secular and systematic prototype for a sociological history. When Rousseau alters the Academy's question, he does so to put the question into explicitly historical terms. He will look at the relationship between socio-cultural advancement on the one hand and the advancement of

morality on the other. To this end, the either/or question is to be understood as either an historical progress or an historical degeneration in a process “á épurer ou á corrompre” (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvre Complètes III: 1). Not only at the beginning but again half way through the discourse, Rousseau insists on this historical response to the question at hand:

> Let us, therefore, consider the Sciences and the Arts in themselves. Let us see what must *result from their progress*; and let us no longer hesitate to grant all the points where our reasoning shall be found to agree with *the historical inferences*. (12)

With these terms, the “First Discourse” claims to offer not so much a psychological or theological argument as an historical one. And this is critical: Rousseau means his essay to be a history, with historical proofs, even though the proofs he offers are more speculative than empirical. It is his historical argument that makes his thesis truly provocative: if we as a whole are more enlightened and cultured than our predecessors, then we must accept that we are proportionately more corrupted and weaker than they. In other words, the corruption of morality by the advancement of culture is to be understood as a general, historical inevitability. This historical rule of degeneration subsumes any relationship between morality and individual action.

Instead of a theological consideration of morality, Rousseau’s history of moral decline is a distinctively secular history, much closer to a modern social science. As Ernst Cassirer observes in The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, Rousseau “is the first to carry this problem [of morality] beyond the sphere of individual human existence and to turn it expressly toward the problem of society” (154). In doing so, Cassirer continues,

Rousseau “has in fact placed [the] problem [of morality] on an entirely new footing, removing it from the sphere of metaphysics and making it the focal point of ethics and politics,”(158) and, I would add, their correlative history. Rousseau indicts not the individual, but human culture as a whole in this decline: human culture is the corrupting influence and culture is ultimately responsible for the morality of individuals. This distinction between the general body and any given individual is subtle but critical to understanding the secular character of the *First Discourse*: whether we are virtuous or not depends not so much upon our particular and individual grace, merit or will, the traditional seat of virtue in both the Protestant and Catholic theology with which Rousseau was familiar, but more generally upon when we are born in the cultural progress of a civilization. According to Rousseau, then, if we are born earlier, when culture is nascent and has little homogenizing power, we are among the more virtuous; if later, then we are among the corrupt. Such a thesis may indeed produce gross generalizations, but it also offers a systematic understanding of history in a framework that is not theological, though it has a relation to theological myths of the Fall. Indeed, Rousseau develops a secular and systematic prototype for a sociological history so popular in nineteenth century Romanticism.

In 1750, Rousseau may or may not have considered the “First Discourse” to be systematic in nature, but years later and after he has built upon it, he does. Twelve years later, in his second autobiographical letter to M. de Malesherbes dated January 12, 1762, he asserts that the “First Discourse,” the “Second Discourse” (“Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité”) and Emile “are inseparable and form a whole” (The First and Second Discourses 575). The “First Discourse” is both a preliminary outline as well as the

foundation for a much larger and multifaceted, historiographical project, what Jean Starobinsky refers to as "a speculative reconstruction of human history" (14). Indeed, when Rousseau discusses in the Confessions the inspiration for his "Second Discourse," he once again stresses that it came through a reflection on history:

> Deep in the forest, I sought, I found the image of the first times whose history I proudly traced; I made a clean sweep of the petty falsehoods of men, I dared to strip naked their nature, to follow the progress of time and things that have disfigured it, and comparing the man of man with the natural man, to show them the genuine source of his miseries in his pretended perfection. (326)

Rousseau begins his grand, revisionary history in 1749 and he continues to develop it in the years to come.

If the "First Discourse" offers a secular and systematic history of morality, it is also possible to deduce from it a novel philosophy of history. The discourse offers two principles for a philosophy of history. First, that all histories are political in character. And second, that all histories become dated.

First, as an historical assessment of civilization, the "First Discourse" stands in contrast both to the liberal histories of the Enlightenment that stress human progress and amelioration, and to those conservative Catholic and Protestant histories still prevalent and influential in the eighteenth century that celebrate a fixed and immutable, metaphysical order, governing the fate of humanity. Unlike either of these historical visions, Rousseau's essay introduces an unprecedented vision of history, and does so in a polemical manner. His extensive use of hyperbole and irony in the discourse, such as his

claim to be a barbarian in French society, and the implication that his contemporaries are all corrupt, evince a playful consciousness of how his history is novel; his style is histrionic and touts the novelty of his account of history in such a way that it makes clear the point that historiography is always political.

In the "First Discourse" Rousseau the self-proclaimed barbarian who lives beyond civilization authorizes for himself a position allegedly apart from the history he recounts. He exempts himself from the history of France's moral degeneration, finds himself unable or unwilling to identify himself with the times he characterizes, and asserts that he like a genius is a bystander to the times, a solitary figure of his own time. If the morality of others is determined by the cultural moment, he "shall find it in the depths of my heart" (3), uncompromised by the movement of history; he walks with "few men […] who feel the strength to go forth alone in their footsteps [and] to raise monuments to the glory of the human mind" (25-6). Then, after the discourse's publication and until death, he repeatedly reassesses the "First Discourse," and he does so with regards not only to its content but also to the occasion of its inspiration in 1749 (the January 12, 1762 letter to Malesherbes cited above being only one instance of many such reflections). Similar to his position in the discourse, Rousseau subsequently is never able to reconcile himself with either that career-defining occasion or with what he had written in his first, prize-winning essay. He recurrently returns to reassess the meaning of both to his life. As a result his *oeuvre* is nothing less than a layering of historical reflections and reassessments on historical reflections and reassessments. Writing does not provide immortality or timeless monuments. And, a sense of loss and nostalgia come to surround 1749 in Rousseau's later works. The "First Discourse" offers a history, is a part of history as a *written* text,

and is self-conscious of doing and being both. Rousseau begin his extravagant conclusion to the "First Discourse,"

> Go, famed writings of which our Forefathers' ignorance and rusticity would have been incapable; go to our descendants in company with those still more dangerous works that exude the corruption of our century's morals, and together transmit to future centuries a faithful history of the progress and the benefits of our sciences and our arts. If they read you, you will leave them in no doubt regarding the question we are examining today; and unless they are more devoid of sense than are we, they will raise their hands to Heaven and say with a bitter heart: "Almighty God, you who hold all Minds in your hands, deliver us from the Enlightenment and the fatal arts of our Forefathers, and restore us to ignorance, innocence, and poverty, the only goods that can make for our happiness and that are precious in your sight." (25)

That "faithful history of progress," which future generations may read (if they find it even still relevant), will provide a reading that will separate that generation from both Rousseau's contemporaries and their visions of history. The second principle, then, of Rousseau's philosophy of history is that histories are as well subject to time, even if they attempt to encompass their own historicity. Histories become dated.

A history that both sets itself apart from other histories and is self-conscious, even ironic, about its own historicity poses a particular problem for readers: what attitude toward history should we adopt in regards to such a text? Insofar as we *read* what *has been written*, we assert some tacit historical framework, arbitrarily or not. It is an

inevitable structural requirement of reading. Rousseau is aware of an essential relationship between himself and the history he writes, yet the definition of this relationship he also understands to be ambivalent: what will those who call him a forefather read in his history? What "faithful history" will they find? Decidedly ambivalent in his expectations, Rousseau implies that his essay may be misunderstood or made irrelevant, but that nevertheless "One ought not to write for [contemporary] Readers when one wants to live beyond one's century" (2). From our perspective as readers how do we respond to these suggestions? Certainly, the "First Discourse" isn't shy about prompting a political influence on historiography and it is much in line with the original and self-conscious project Hayden White lays out for contemporary historians in his collection of essays that review post-modern questions in historiography: "to provide a vista onto a new and more fruitful activity for the intellectual historian, to authorize a posture before the archive of history more dialogistic than analytic, more conversational than assertive and judgmental" (186). If the "The First Discourse" is an example of such a project, then so should be our historical relation to it.

Offering his novel history half-way through the century, Rousseau stands apart from the past, present, and future principles of the Enlightenment. The "First Discourse" challenges in spirit all of the works of the eighteenth-century champion and popularizer of science, Fontenelle, secretary of l'Académie des Sciences in 1750 when Rousseau composed the discourse. "The First Discourse" says much that would preemptively denounce the collective project of the *Encyclopédie* in anticipation of its first publication in the following year (even though Rousseau contributes several articles on music to it in the ensuing years). As Cranston points out, the warm reception it received from

D'Alembert and Diderot is curious given its thesis. Kant, who draws heavily from Rousseau's thought, could not be further from the thesis of "The First Discourse." For Kant, morality accompanies and advances with enlightenment, and is certainly not corrupted by the progress of civilization. The thesis of the "First Discourse" anticipates and rejects the central idea of both William Godwin's Political Justice (1793) and the Marquis de Condorcet's Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain (1795), that through the arts and sciences humanity enjoy the possibility of limitless amelioration. Simply put, if the notion of progress is near-synonymous with the Enlightenment, then Rousseau in contrast presents a contradicting history of humanity – a history of moral degeneration, a process in which individuals have little hope or agency. The "First Discourse" offers a broad-ranging critique of various Enlightenment principles in a series of propositions, such as its attacks on the duplicity of society, the banality of social conventions, the sophistry of philosophers, and the deliberate abstruseness of learned theologians. It does not locate a utopian society in the near future as many in the eighteenth century do, but in some time past, if at all. Rousseau's fundamental innovation, however, is to conceive anew -- and in terms wholly other than those of the Enlightenment -- the movement of history.

Though he opposes progressive Enlightenment thought, Rousseau does not return to a traditional, conservative, theological model either, as one might expect. George Poulet offers that "there is no doubt [that] Rousseau had in mind, in order to define his own state, the definition of the divine eternity such as had been formulated by the Neo-Platonists and the Church Fathers, with which he was very familiar" (171). That is not to say, however, that Rousseau adopts ecclesiastical doctrines in his opposition to the

Enlightenment. In fact, Rousseau opposes the orthodox historical thought of the Church as much as the idea of historical progress. Poulet places Rousseau's conception of history in a greater tradition of French authors, beginning with Descartes and culminating with Proust, who depart from Catholic doctrine. Rousseau does not, for example, accept the Edenic genesis of humanity in his philosophy, nor are his references to the fall of humanity to be understood as a universal event; he abandons the cosmological ambitions of orthodox histories. He does not acknowledge in his philosophy any doctrine of divine teleology, eschatology, or cosmic apocalypse (although he does invoke the idea of a natural catastrophe to explain the end of the state of nature). He rejects quite openly in the "First Discourse" any metaphysical history that would attempt to reconcile the temporal body with the eternal soul (15). He rejects the metaphysical doctrine of a fixed providence, structured by those immutable laws set by God to govern time and space, (though in later years he does give some credence to an ultimately benevolent providence). Rousseau does share with the eighteenth century progressives the concept of a movement of history, governed by human activity on a broad scale, rather than by preordained and fixed laws, but for Rousseau, this movement is one of decline.

To challenge the traditional and contemporary conceptions of history, Rousseau returns to basic principles. Within the first pages of the "First Discourse," he states that the essence of history is a natural sequence, a natural succession by a series of degrees, "natural" to be understood as "rational" (4). In other words, history is the sequence of one thing following another in an implicitly logical order. Of course this is not an original notion, having both ancient and contemporary currency. However, Rousseau then

suggests that he has discovered a particular, repeating pattern within this order, one which "has been observed in all times and in all places" (7).

Cranston argues that "in his rejoinder to the criticisms of the King of Poland, Rousseau explained how he visualized the several stages of the process by which culture had destroyed men's natural goodness," which Rousseau himself labels not a history but a…

> 'genealogy,' [which, Cranston continues,] indicates the logical character of his enterprise. He was not writing history; and hence the reproach of such a critic as Gautier [another of those who wrote responses to the *First Discourse*] that his historical facts were wrong was of minor significance. Rousseau's sights were directed rather towards pre-history; he was concerned to develop a philosophical (and necessarily speculative) anthropology to explain how human society had reached its present corrupt state from an original condition of innocence, a process which must date from an earlier period than recorded time or written chronicles. This same enterprise, begun in response to the critics of his first *Discours*, was to dominate Rousseau's intellectual labours in the coming years (Cranston 243).

I would be happy to concede to Cranston that 'philosophical, anthropological genealogy' may be a more accurate term than 'history' to describe the "First Discourse," but I do not agree with Cranston's reason for the distinction. It is not so much because Rousseau is handling an unwritten prehistory that his proofs are not 'factual.' Rather, it is because his

history does not aim to be 'factual' in the first place. His history aims to be paradigmatic in kind; he attempts to identify a sequential logic in the history for all civilizations.

Rousseau describes the historical pattern he has discovered as having three parts, which are ordered in a particular sequence: a prehistory, a rise, and a fall. This invariable order lends Rousseau's history a tragic aspect insofar as it is reminiscent of an Aristotelian tragic plot, with a beginning, middle, and end. (This pattern is not to be understood, I should note, as some indication of providence or divine design as far as Rousseau is concerned.) So, after the general introduction of the first part of the discourse, in which he introduces his version of the Academy's question, Rousseau lays out this discovered plot of history in three successive paragraphs.

Switching from the present to the past tense in a conspicuous manner, Rousseau begins with the first part of the pattern: the period of prehistory. Here, he employs a nostalgic tone, perhaps more typical of the opening of a fairy tale than a work of history. And, because he is describing an historical pattern and not history itself, he provides no chronological specificity other than the time "Before."

> Before Art had fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak in ready-made terms, our morals were rustic but natural; and differences in conduct conveyed differences of character at first glance. Human nature was, at bottom, no better; but men found their security in how easily they saw through one another, and this advantage, to the value of which we are no longer sensible, spared them a good many vices. (6)

The first part of any given peoples' history is a primitive period, when humanity has yet to begin accumulating knowledge of the arts and sciences. In this original, prehistoric

state, humanity enjoys an incomparable transparency with regards to itself, what Starobinsky calls "the time of transparency […] in which one consciousness recognizes another at a glance" (11), as well as an "original freedom," a spontaneity, and a natural vigor. However, this time, like childhood, is subsequently lost, along with its natural advantages.

It would be tempting to identify this primitive period with Edenic time: Rousseau imagines the period to be a time of simplicity and nakedness, innocence and health, and what it lacks in technology it makes up for in vigor. There are, however, two significant dissimilarities. First, Rousseau ascribes no date to this "Before" not because it is in some sense mythic, but because of his understanding of history as a pattern that recurs. He defines this "Before" as the antecedent period from which all cultures have emerged, each in their own time. Rousseau does not assert a universal history (of which Eden is the original time), nor does he imagine a world-spirit that encompasses the rise and fall of all cultures in a unified world history, as Bossuet had in Discours sur l'histoire universelle (1681) or as Hegel will in his Philosophy of History (compiled from 1830-1831 lectures). Rather, Rousseau is less ambitious and does not synthesize a world history. Instead, he suggests that the indigenous peoples of the Americas are just emerging from their primitive period. To this extent, Rousseau is in line with Fontenelle's skeptical pluralism in Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes (1686), which he had read as a child. Fontenelle suggests that it is just as likely as not that there are other worlds that are developing without any contact or relation to contemporary France: we should be skeptical of our conception of cosmological order as there may be more than one. Although less grandiose and more terrestrial in scope, Rousseau similarly attempts no cosmological

synthesis. He does not associate prehistory with the dawn of time itself or with the beginning of all temporal existence, as Eden is associated with the Creation narrative. Instead, these primitive periods of humanity are within time, part of a recurring pattern in various locations.

The second dissimilarity between Rousseau's prehistoric time and Edenic time is that he does not introduce a prelapsarian naïveté in respects to death; in place of the momentous Fall brought about by human sin, Rousseau discusses a gradual and imperceptible decay of morals. Indeed, Rousseau develops an entirely different psychological drama in regards to the passage of time, which he intimates in his description of the rise and fall of civilizations.

Switching to the present tense in the next paragraph, Rousseau addresses the second period: the rise of a culture. He sees contemporary France as an example of this part of the pattern. Consistent with his thesis, he takes a critical and disparaging tone in describing both the present situation of both France and the rise of culture in general. Accordingly, the fostering of the arts and sciences, which had yet to begin in the prehistory of a civilization, now binds a society together by providing an emergent common interest: culture. As this culture develops, the society that fosters it grows proud of having overcome its antecedent, primitive and natural existence, which it now views with disdain. Striving to become more and more distinct from these beginnings, the society embraces a culture that is more and more conventional, independent of anything natural. Contemporary France, in an exemplary fashion, has achieved a complete victory of social convention over primitive humanity, a victory that defines the character of its culture and has become the subject of its celebrations.

Rousseau proclaims that this celebrated artificiality during the rise of a culture is inevitably experienced as a monotonous duration without definition.

> Today, when subtler inquiries and a more refined taste have reduced the Art of pleasing to principles, a vile and deceiving *uniformity* reigns in our morals, and all minds seem to have been cast in *the same mold*: *constantly* politeness demands, propriety commands; *constantly* one follows custom, never one's own genius. One no longer dares to appear what one is; and under this *perpetual* constraint, the men who make up the herd that is called society will, when placed in similar circumstances, all act in similar ways unless more powerful motives incline them differently. One will thus never really know with whom one is dealing: in order to know one's friend one will therefore have *to wait* for great occasions, that is, *to wait* until it is too late, since it is for these very occasions that it would have been essential to know him. (My emphases 6)

This second period of the historical pattern is quite different in character than the first. The spontaneity of the primitive time, which seemed wholly fresh and regenerating at every moment, is replaced by a "uniformity" of days, constant and perpetual. Neither individual "genius" nor "great occasions" provide true relief from the one activity that begins to define this period: "to wait" in a fatal constraint. So, bound and out of touch with what is "essential," morality degenerates.

Switching to the future tense in the third of these paragraphs, and with France still as his immediate example, Rousseau describes the third period: the fall. He now employs a prophetic if not apocalyptic tone where other Enlightenment thinkers would employ

utopian rhetoric. As with the triumph of culture over nature during the rise of a culture, the third and final period comes about with the triumph of uniform conventionality over culture itself. Rousseau offers his vision of the inevitable future of all civilizations: the utter degeneration of morality, set in motion from the beginning but now closing on completion. Even those virtues that might have been fostered by society, at least in its nascent days, such as communal piety, patriotism, public disdain of ignorance, are corrupted by the duplicity dictated by the homogeneity of social conventions:

> No more sincere friendships; no more real esteem; no more well-founded trust. Suspicions, offenses, fears, coolness, reserve, hatred, betrayal, will constantly hide beneath this uniform and deceitful veil of politeness, beneath this so much vaunted urbanity which we owe to the enlightenment of our century. (6)

It is an ominous banality: pervasive duplicity, brought about by the conventionality of culture, leads to increasing uncertainty and haziness. Uncertainty and haziness, in turn, lead to indifference and paranoia, an opposition that will result in social dissolution and ruin. These are the final and fatal moments in the history of any civilization.

Rousseau gives more definition to this final part of the historical pattern when he moves on in the subsequent paragraphs to other examples: Egypt, Greece, Rome, Constantinople, and China. The histrionic parataxis of his initial paragraph on the third period is somewhat toned down when he turns to these examples, but is still dramatic. His example of Greece is representative…

> Consider Greece, formerly peopled by Heroes who twice vanquished Asia, once before Troy, and once by their own hearths. Nascent Letters had not

> yet carried corruption into the hearts of its inhabitants; but the progress of the Arts, the disintegration of morals, and the Macedonian's yoke closely followed one another; and Greece, ever learned, ever voluptuous, and ever enslaved, thereafter experienced, throughout its revolutions, nothing but a change of masters. All of Demosthenes's eloquence never succeeded in revivifying a body which luxury and the Arts had enervated. (8)

Rousseau's discussion of the fall of civilizations emphasizes two different characteristics. On the one hand, and as we have seen, there is the overwhelming and deadening monotony, despite the mounting threat of social dissolution (the series of revolutions in Greece that he mentions, for example). This acute uniformity or monotony of life is the culmination of the second period. Now, however, Rousseau speaks of the corruption (of morality by the development of culture) becoming an enervating enslavement: the Greeks became insensible to their own revolutions before their civilization fell, their culture having deadened their perceptions of life. On the other hand, and what separates the third from the second part of the historical pattern, Rousseau speaks of the moments before social dissolution as a climax of cultural development, a pinnacle of cultural glory. Here, Rousseau's ironic tone is most acute: when a civilization reaches its cultural zenith, it has a tragic reversal of fortune. At its very height, a civilization stands precipitously before its fall.

The third part of Rousseau's pattern is indeed tragic in character. Except for a few moments of glorious but utterly corrupt distraction, a vague fatality now accompanies the apathy of the second period: time seems to be coming to an end. He says of aging Egypt that "She became the mother of Philosophy and the fine Arts, and soon thereafter was

conquered by Cambyses, then by the Greeks, by the Romans, the Arabs, and finally by the Turks" (7-8). As seen already, Demosthenes' glorious eloquence brought about the enervation of aging Greece, insensible to its own fate. In regards to Rome, "This Capital of the World finally succumbs to the yoke it had imposed on so many Peoples, and the day of its fall was the eve of the day on which one of its Citizens was given the title of Arbiter of good taste" (8). These and all other civilizations, accordingly, did not fall because they were overcome by foreign enemies, but fell because they were weakened within by the progress of arts and the sciences.

Rousseau insists repeatedly that this sequence of prehistory, rise, and fall is recurrent throughout the world and throughout history. In fact, the proliferation of his examples implies that there is no moment in the history of any civilization that cannot be identified with one of these three stages. As a result, this archetypal pattern may be used not only to understand the past of a past civilization, but also to predict the present and future course of civilizations, as Rousseau does with his example of France. It is a paradigm and it is portable. Rousseau identifies this pattern with history itself, but at the same time he is not interested in any specificity of time or place; the various historical proofs in first part of the "First Discourse" serve to elucidate the more important general pattern. In other words, he presents an archetypal pattern, which is determined by an internal, dialectical logic, not by external circumstance or particulars. It is a systematic history.

Rousseau does not try to make sense of a given chronology to arrive at a history, but rather works with a systematic understanding of history to which the chronology must be fit. There is no empirical or 'real' reference upon which his history is built (his

historical evidence is at best scanty) in the same way as there is no empirical or 'real' reference in Freud's model of the sexual development of children; the general model determines each and every patient's condition. Every civilization will pass through the pattern of pre-history, rise, and fall, though dates and durations will vary. As a result, Rousseau's history has an aspect of inevitability not dissimilar to providence or a divine teleology. On the other hand, there is no reference to, or necessary inference of, a guiding deity or a unified cosmological movement ending with an apocalypse in the "First Discourse." So, the moral, psychological development of a civilization is predictable but not predestined.

Of course Rousseau was by no means original in asserting that there is a pattern or certain principles evident in history from which we can learn about our fate, nor would he have believed himself to be. In his biography of Rousseau, Cranston points out that as a child and then again as an adolescent, Rousseau principally read histories. He quotes the list of authors Rousseau offers in The Confessions: "Le Sueur's *History of the Church and the Empire*, Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Nani's *History of Venice*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. La Bruyère, Fontenelle's *Worlds* and *Dialogue with Death*, […]" (24). All of these authors mean to instruct by historical lessons, and to do so they deduce principles. Plutarch and La Bruyère, for example, offer the lives of great men as discrete narrative patterns for readers to emulate or to avoid, according to their merits. The historical principle Ovid deduces, mutability, could not be further from that asserted by Bossuet, the immortal continuity of Christian authority, but both authors find instructive patterns in history. (In this sense, history does not repeat itself; rather the historical patterns are repeatedly imposed upon history.) The "First

Discourse" no doubt means to instruct in a similar manner: progress has in every case led to error.

Alone, the lesson offered by the *First Discourse* is controversial; in combination with the idea that the author excuses himself from the historical determination that he condemns all others to suffer it is infuriating. Because he is critical of progress, Rousseau suggests -- not without a hint of condescension -- that he stands outside of his time, which has been defined by the general will and not by an individual:

> There will always be men destined to be subjugated by the opinions of their century, of their Country, of their Society [….] One ought not to write for such Readers when one wants to live beyond one's century. (2)

Or again, and this time by a striking periphrasis, Rousseau stands outside of time:

> But let us cross the distance of place and time, and see what has occurred in our lands and before our own eyes; or rather, let us set aside repugnant depictions that would offend our delicacy, and spare ourselves the trouble of repeating the same thing with different names. (13)

Poulet refers to the separate position as a "a detachment, a withdrawal inward, to the center of the sphere, into solitude, which perhaps implies an effort, but which seems, however, less the effect of an heroic determination of wisdom than the transference of the center of gravity of the spontaneous being" (165). A person in such a position lives independent of social influence. Setting aside the self-aggrandizing ethos of Rousseau's statements, what emerges is a supplement to his model of history. Rousseau adds a reflective, philosophical position, "fixed in the present" as Poulet suggests, and independent of the schedule of prehistory, rise, and fall (165). Rousseau hints that it is

individual genius – an original mind – that holds open this freedom from history; genius provides an alternative life, autonomous in relation to the culture in which it is born and self-directed in its course.

This supplemental position, however, is both enabling and disabling. On the one hand, from this position Rousseau may survey all of history, assess the present, and forecast the future. Moreover, if he can outline the inevitable history of civilizations, he is likewise able to add reflections that are determined neither by history nor by conventional consciousness. On the other hand, in this supplemental position Rousseau seems both at odds with everything that is contemporary and removed from the very time in which he lives, or rather, removed from the contemporary France at which he takes aim. Starobinsky notes that in the "First Discourse," Rousseau momentarily is "the role of the accuser," but when he meets with contradiction after publication he resumes "the role of the accused" (8). That is to say, his history first alienates his contemporaries, and then it alienates Rousseau himself.

Consequently, there is another sort of history inscribed in the "First Discourse": the author's own history. White discusses in highly succinct terms structuralism's distinction between discourse and narrative (citing Jakobson, Benveniste, Genette, Todorov, and Barthes); this distinction is relevant here insofar as it helps illustrate the two modes of history in the "First Discourse." On the one hand there is the impersonal anthropological history Rousseau lays out, which in structuralist terminology would be a narrative history. One the other, Rousseau discusses his relation to history, what in structuralist terminology would be a historical discourse. Quoting Todorov, White summarizes…

> This distinction between discourse and narrative is […] based solely on an analysis of the grammatical features of two modes of discourse in which the "objectivity" of the one and the "subjectivity" of the other are definable primarily by a "linguistic order of criteria." The "subjectivity" of the discourse is given by the presence, explicit or implicit, of an "ego" who can be defined "only as the person who maintains the discourse." By contrast, the "objectivity of narrative is defined by the absence of all reference to the narrator." In the narrativizing discourse, then, we can say, with Benveniste, that "truly there is no longer a 'narrator.' The events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. No one speaks. The events seem to tell themselves." (White 3)

As mentioned above, when Rousseau offers his anthropological history, he makes use of the three tenses -- past, present, and future -- as an organizing principle. However, the tenses are not correlated to any particular subject; they have no referent, but may be used to organize the history of Egypt, Greece, Rome, France, or any other civilization. Rousseau's anthropological history is "objective" because of its particular grammatical structure, with a logic independent of any subject. However, when Rousseau discusses himself, the tenses he uses are self-reflexive, coordinating time to his act of writing the discourse in 1750. In other words, the past tense refers to times preceding the "First Discourse," the present tense to France in 1750, and the future tense to his own future. It is as if he alone enjoys subjectivity in history. The two kinds of history are at odds. On the one hand Rousseau suggests there are no active subjects in the history of civilizations because individual agency is subordinated by cultural forces; on the other hand Rousseau

fully enjoys his agency in defining and maintaining his own place in history in his critique and rejection of culture. This doubling of historigraphical modes within the very language of the "First Discourse" is never more acutely ambivalent than when he discusses the present: people are lost in history, unable to perceive their own degeneration or place in a process much greater than they, but Rousseau has his own personal history, meaningful to him because it refers in particular to him.

There is a relevant if not poignant precedent in Rousseau's biography for such posturing. In April of 1728, Cranston tells us, a precocious Rousseau enters Turin and converts to Catholicism before his sixteenth birthday (Cranston 52-5). During his formal conversion, he, along with other children roughly his age, meets with various Patristic authorities who oversee their conversion. He recounts in The Confessions, "For my comrades this meeting was a catechism rather than a controversy, and he had more to do in instructing them than in resolving their objections. It was not the case with me" (54). Not only does he raise many objections, but he claims to have drawn extensively from Le Sueur's Protestant history, which he had read as a child, in the mounting conflict:

> The next day, out of fear that my indiscreet objections might scandalize my comrades, they took me aside into another room with another priest who was younger, a fine talker, that is to say a maker of long phrases, and self-satisfied if ever a Doctor of the Church was. However I did not let myself be too overwhelmed by his imposing appearance, and feeling that I was holding my own after all, I began to answer him with enough assurance and to batter him on all sides the best I could. He thought he could knock me down with St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and the other

> fathers, and with unbelievable surprise he found that I handled all those fathers almost as nimbly as he did; it was not that I had ever read them, nor perhaps had he; but I had remembered many passages drawn from my Le Sueur; and as soon as he cited one to me, without disputing about his citation I retorted with another from the same father, and which often perplexed him very much. (55)

As the editors of Rousseau's Oeuvre Complètes, Gagnebin and Raymond, comment, this contains "an improbability. Le Sueur's work is eight volumes; its layout and form do not favor memorization: it is strictly a year-by-year chronology" (I: 1261 n. 1, my translation). Nevertheless what is relevant about this reported incident is that Rousseau understood at a young age that there are two (at least) contending histories, Catholic and Protestant. Furthermore, he can set them against each other both to achieve dramatic effect (perplexing the fathers) and to set himself apart from others (making a scene). And his social distinction is hardly imaginary; the following day the fathers physically separate him from them so as to keep him from influencing them. If we accept his account, then Rousseau from a young age is a philosophical historiographer, alienated from both his superiors and his peers.

Rousseau is the first to reassess the history of his thought and so it is perhaps fitting to begin with one of his many reflections when we consider our own historical relationship with the "First Discourse." In his second autobiographical letter to Malesherbes, dated January 12, 1762, Rousseau describes the moment of inspiration that brought about the "First Discourse" and, subsequently, much of his later work:

> I was going to see Diderot, at that time a prisoner in Vincennes; I had in my pocket a *Mercury of France* which I began to leaf through along the way. I fell across the question of the Academy of Dijon which gave rise to my first writing. If anything has ever resembled a sudden inspiration, it is the motion that was caused in me by that reading; suddenly I felt my mind dazzled by a thousand lights; crowds of lively ideas presented themselves at the same time with a strength and a confusion that threw me into an inexpressible perturbation; I feel my head seized by a dizziness similar to drunkenness. A violent palpitation oppresses me, makes me sick to my stomach; not being able to breathe anymore while walking, I let myself fall under one of the trees of the avenue, and I pass a half-hour there in such an agitation that when I got up again I noticed the whole front of my coat soaked with my tears without having felt that I shed them. (575)

And, he continues.

> Oh Sir, if I had ever been able to write a quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, how clearly I would have made all the contradictions of the social system seen, with what strength I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions, with what simplicity I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is from these institutions alone that men become wicked. Everything that I was able to retain of these crowds of great truths which illuminated me under that tree in a quarter of an hour has been weakly scattered about in my three principal writings, namely

> that first discourse, the one on inequality, and the treatise on education, which three works are inseparable and together form the same whole. All the rest has been lost, and only the prosopopeia of Fabricius was written on the very spot. (575)

The passage in the "First Discourse" to which Rousseau refers here, "the prosopopeia of Fabricius," is remarkable not only for its rhetorical flair but also as a figure for what Rousseau sees as a principal task in writing history: the dead must be made to speak.

It is not coincidental that the Fabricius passage was the only one Rousseau wrote immediately after the hallucinatory ecstasy of his inspiration. Having gone off the common road, Rousseau was overwhelmed, "dazzled by a thousand lights, "by crowds of lively ideas"; "these crowds of great truths" carry him out of body, time and place. Although this celestial vantage is only momentary, from it he was able to see, like the dead watching over us, the historical order of all human societies. Then, having returned from this ecstatic journey, Rousseau -- moved to write history -- tries to hold onto his vision by speaking with Fabricius, a ghost who enjoys the celestial vantage; writing history is to keep company with ghosts and, from time to time, to make them speak. As he admits in the "First Discourse," prosopopeia is the historiographical device *par excellence*: "My invoking Fabricius's shade was not haphazard; and what did I have this great man say that I could not have put into the mouth of Louis XII or of Henry IV" (13)? And perhaps in turn the voice of Rousseau in the "First Discourse" is not altogether different from that of Fabricius's: Rousseau's voice today is a prosopopeia.

Rousseau's reflections on his own work reveal that writing history, for him, is much more about visions and voices than about the marshalling of research and evidence.

Looking back, the authority of the history of the "First Discourse" relies largely upon allusions to well-known classical figures who would be sympathetic to his thesis, such as Socrates, Lycurgus, Fabricius, Plutarch, and Cato, rather than upon factual evidence. He consistently privileges the authority of the figure of the witness. And, in the skeptical tradition he favors, the self is the primary witness; Rousseau is always the principal witness in his histories. His is an egocentric historiography, which always produces a concomitant autobiography.

In his study of the "First Discourse," Starobinsky focuses on the dichotomy of appearance and reality, which he argues is at the core of all of Rousseau's texts though in various manifestations: "the scandal of deceit was the driving force behind all his theorizing" (5). He asserts that "a true feeling of *division* is established and maintained" by the discourse:

> The clash between appearance and reality is echoed in a series of other conflicts: between good and evil (and between the righteous and the wicked), between nature and society, between man and his gods, even between man and himself. Finally, history itself is divided into a *before* and an *after*: before there were fatherlands and citizens, now there are none. (4)

Starobinsky subordinates Rousseau's interest in history to a more primary interest in the division between appearance and reality. The "First Discourse" is Rousseau's first attempt to throw off appearances so as to be truthful. This reading, however, has two principal problems if we are considering Rousseau's thinking about history and historiography. First, the history Rousseau charts in the "First Discourse" is not clearly divided into two parts, but into three: past, present, and future. However, because the

governing premise of his work is the dichotomy of appearance and reality, Starobinsky reads Rousseau's history as only a two-part history: "a before and an after" (4). Starobinsky sets in opposition the "before" and the "now," leaving out the middle period of Rousseau's history all together. To this end, he characterizes what for Rousseau is the long monotonous process of social conforming (which elapses over the extensive period, from the introduction of the arts and sciences to the triumph of convention over nature) as a spontaneous revolution, what he refers to at one point as the drama of the fall" (12). This characterization is misleading insofar as it implies that the responsibility for the decline of morals lies with individuals rather than in a social collective (why, for example, he can suggest that Rousseau believed "history sets us the challenge of resisting and thwarting" the decline of morals (13)). In other words, this simplified, two-part version of Rousseau's history is more in line with the Church and the Enlightenment assertions of the importance of individual will, of human agency, in moral questions than is true. Starobinsky's investment in a binary history overlooks those dynamics in Rousseau's history that are strictly speaking social: the gradual rise of conventionality over nature.

Second, Rousseau does not relate himself to history in quite the manner Starobinsky suggests. Where Starobinsky suggests that the "First Discourse" is Rousseau's first attempt to "negate the negation" of civilization, to stand in opposition to the present like a figure rising from the prehistoric past in hopes of an alternate future, I would argue Rousseau opens for himself the more detached position and attitude of a skeptic. Starobinsky does say that,

> Beyond this, there is a fundamental uncertainty in Jean-Jacques's desires: sometimes his wishes are directed toward the past, sometimes to the most immediate present, the refuge of the self-sufficient mind, and other times – more rarely – to transcendence in the future. At first he harbors "Arcadian" dreams of a return to the primeval forest. Later he argues in favor of a conservative solution, a stable compromise in which the soul and society maintain what remains pure and original in each of them. Still later he sketches "the idea of mankind's future happiness and constructs his atemporal ideal of the virtuous city in *Institutions politiques*. It is difficult to reconcile in a fully satisfactory manner so many dissimilar designs. One common feature is worth noting, however: the unity of intention, which is to preserve or restore a compromised state of transparency. (13)

Starobinsky acknowledges the diverse modes of historiography in Rousseau's work, but sees little virtue in them.

George Poulet's reading of Rousseau's *oeuvre* in *Studies of Human Time* explores Rousseau's interest in history in relation to the psychological experience of time, what he terms 'human time.' He describes "the temporality of Rousseau" -- how his thought presents "the drama of time as it has been lived by an individual being whose sufferings and effort are a worthy example" (163). To this end, he is not as interested in the larger and social historical assertions Rousseau offers, but in Rousseau's individual embodiment of his judgments about history. Although Poulet guides much of Starobinsky's admittedly more extensive and detailed readings, Poulet's broader treatment of Rousseau offers a view Starobinsky's does not: Rousseau as an innovative

philosopher in the history of historiography. Indeed Poulet's overall project is an intellectual history of both the conception and experience of time in French literature and philosophy from the Middle Ages through to the early twentieth century.

By appealing to a larger historical framework, the historical assertions Poulet puts forward in regards to the "First Discourse" attempt to overcome any historiographical questions posed in the text itself. Rousseau's thought belongs to the eighteenth century, being both an inspired response to the thought of the seventeenth century response and an inspiration for the thought of the nineteenth century. For example, Poulet discusses how Rousseau's psychological investigations into the experience of time, specifically the transience of being, emerge from earlier largely Christian investigations (though the influence of Descartes and Montaigne is also pronounced):

> Appropriating methods by which the devout thought of the preceding century sought to establish a Christian duration in the continual renewal of the heart, the secular thought of the eighteenth century conceives and tries to realize a philosophical duration which would be the continual renewal of a thought, sentient in its origin and continuously sentient, by regaining touch with its origin and the past. (24-25)

Without question he identifies Rousseau with his century. Poulet does so by a neat synecdoche: Rousseau is one among many of the eighteenth century. There is no room ultimately for Rousseau to stand independent of his contemporaries in any politically threatening sense. Poulet does proceed to describe in much greater detail Rousseau's radical thought in regards to time and history, assigning an entire chapter to Rousseau.

In his chapter on Rousseau, Poulet makes a choice of what to emphasize: the independent genius in its "withdrawal inward" and away from social history (165). He asserts that Rousseau, along with all of his eighteenth century contemporaries, discovered and proclaimed that "my existence is only a psychological existence" (20). He emphasizes Rousseau's proto-psychological history rather than his general, anthropological history because he is interested in lining Rousseau up in a particular intellectual history. He is willing to neglect Rousseau's own characterizations of his contemporaries and his ambivalent relationship with them. Starting with the line "that Man is born to act and to think, and not to reflect" and from Rousseau's correspondence, Poulet asserts:

> If one of the essential traits of the thought of Rousseau is a centrifugal motion, of expansion outward and toward the future, there also exists in him, and more and more pronounced with the years, an inverse motion, centripetal, oriented inward: 'feeling that I would never find among them a situation that could bring peace to my heart, I withdrew it little by little from the society of men….' A detachment, a withdrawal inward, to the center of the sphere, into solitude, which perhaps implies an effort, but which seems, however, less the effect of an heroic determination of wisdom than the transference of the center of gravity of the spontaneous being. (165)

"Spontaneous being" is a descendent of the Cartesian skeptical *Cogito* (the subjectivity that discovers itself in doubting all else). That is, it is a subjectivity immanently present to itself while independent of the external world. It is an anti-social consciousness that

lives only in the moment of doubt, uncertain of both its own past and future. Poulet suggests that Rousseau embodies this "spontaneous being" in the *First Discourse* as the genius who stands alone and apart from the general population subject to cultural deterioration.

Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man engage the historical and historiographical questions raised by Rousseau's *oeuvre* in a different manner. The broad scheme of their projects is to debunk the commonplace and pervasive notion that the act of reading can function as an historical bridge connecting writer with reader across time; they see Rousseau's work, with all of its temporal layers, as an ideal subject for such a project. In looking back at that moment of inspiration in 1749, Rousseau initiates in his writings what becomes, in Derrida's words, "an infinite chain [of] ineluctably multiplying […] supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception" (157). In other words, for the rest of his life Rousseau tries but always fails to recapture an imagined initial moment of inspiration. Consequently, Rousseau adds attempt on attempt, authoring a body of work that ever tries but ever fails to return him to some imagined moment, ever-projected into the past. And, de Man agrees, this "repetition [of attempts to return to the original moment of inspiration] is a temporal process" (108) but not one that will provide "the possibility of an appropriation or a reappropriation of being (in the form of truth, of authenticity, of nature, etc.) as presence" (114). Simply put, these critics not only argue that each attempt to recuperate the past propels us further into the future, removing us still further from what we seek, but also they question the reality of the past imagined.

Prompted by Starobinsky's work, Derrida finds in Rousseau the very human desire to overcome this dilemna by means of supplements. As he explains,

> The supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself. (145)

Derrida's theory of the supplement does much to unpack Rousseau's attempt in the "First Discourse" to overcome his alienation from history by authorizing an adjunct position for himself. Rousseau introduces his own personal history to the "First Discourse," which runs concurrently with the social history he lays out. It is the history of the critic of society, who lives along side of social life, but never as a positive part; Rousseau's personal history will never unite with his social history. He supplements his social history, one in which his presence would be utterly negligible, with his self-aggrandizing personal history so that he can feel his own presence, his own historical significance. Derrida's theory also explains why Rousseau kept returning later in life to rewrite these 'texts.' The supplement requires continual supplementation: Rousseau keeps needing to sense his own historical significance.

What is specifically Derridian in this reading, however, is how it redefines Rousseau's historical alienation. It is no longer a question of a social alienation from the monotonous progress of cultural homogenization, as it is laid out in the "First Discourse." For Derrida, we experience historical alienation in our futile but all too human attempts to control the very language we use, which ever escapes us in time. Rousseau must rewrite his autobiography time and time again throughout his life.

In his review of Derrida's reading of Rousseau, de Man's principal objection is that Derrida reads Rousseau's texts as philosophical ("literal") texts, not as literary ("figural") texts (de Man 138-9). As a result, Derrida misses that particular ambivalence in Rousseau's language, that "rhetoricity" (to use de Man's terminology), which is open to, even invites, misreadings:

> How then does Derrida's text differ from Rousseau's? We are entitled to generalize in working our way toward a definition by giving Rousseau exemplary value and calling "literary," in the full sense of the term, any text that implicitly or explicitly signifies its own rhetorical mode and prefigures its own misunderstanding as the correlative of its rhetorical nature; that is, of its "rhetoricity." (136)

In being ambivalent about its own communicative effectiveness, Rousseau's language does not attempt to resist that "infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying" of which Derrida speaks, but invites them, much as an allegory opens an interpretive space and beckons interpretations. Where Derrida takes Rousseau's works to be philosophical and presumes that there is a philosophical rigor in Rousseau's language, de Man asserts that Rousseau is ultimately a literary author whose relationship with language is ultimately literary. De

Man places Rousseau the author, with his histrionic style and literary consciousness, over and above Rousseau the philosopher. Even more pronounced in de Man's work than in Derrida's is this notion of history as being an inevitable sequence of misreadings, which only invite further misreadings.

As discussed above, Rousseau calls forth the sympathetic spirit of the austere and incorruptible Roman, Fabricius, to be witness to the decline of Roman civilization and to condemn with Rousseau those practices that brought about its ruination. The passage is the only one Rousseau claims to have written immediately after his revelation in 1749: "All the rest was lost, […] only the prosopopeia of Fabricius was written on the very spot" (575). Fabricius plays a key roll in the argument as Rousseau calls upon him to confirm his judgment:

> O Fabricius! What would your great soul have thought if, unhappily recalled to life, you had seen the pompous countenance of that Rome which your arm rescued and your good name adorned more than did all of her conquests? "Gods!" you would have said, "what has become of the thatch roofs and the rustic hearths where moderation and virtue used to dwell? What fatal splendor has replaced Roman simplicity? What is this alien speech? What are these effeminate morals? What is the meaning of these statues, these Paintings, these buildings? Fools, what have you done? You, the Masters of Nations, made yourselves the slaves of the frivolous men you vanquished? Do Rhetoricians govern you? […]" (12)

The appeal to this classical authority makes for a striking passage and, as discussed above, it does serve as a supplemental authority; drawn out of history, the voice of

Fabricius authorizes Rousseau's condemnation of late Roman culture. And, as Derrida would suggest, Rousseau makes use of this prosopopeia in hopes of doubling the authorial strength of his own voice, to reassert the presence of his own voice by imitating a past voice (Fabricius is to Rome what Rousseau would like to be to France). Yet, Rousseau's voice in the "First Discourse" shares precisely the same fate as the supplementary authorial voice that Rousseau imitates: never a presence, always a prosopopeia, a linguistic animation called upon to testify about history. The voice of Fabricius and that of Rousseau's are not profoundly different as both are ghosts of history ever tormented by language. De Man would add that far from innocent, Rousseau makes conscious use of this literary device to comment on his own relation to history, his own position as author in relation to text. Such devices only complement the irony that runs throughout the essay, perhaps never more apparent than in Rousseau's remarkable recusation: "Let us not run after a reputation which would escape us and which, in the present state of things, would never restore what it would have cost us, even if we had every title to obtain it" (26).

The content of the "First Discourse" and the counter-cultural position it thrust Rousseau into, however, would win him a reputation despite this assertion, and he became a major political figure in the coming decades leading up to and into the French Revolution. And no doubt Rousseau was acutely aware of the provocative politics of his counter-cultural history.

Chapter 2: "Alastor": A Study of Shelley's Historical Attitudes

During his formative years Percy Shelley read with great passion many famous historians of the eighteenth century. In1812 Shelley wrote to Thomas Hookham, his early publisher and book supplier, "I am determined to apply myself to a study that is hateful & disgusting to my very soul, but which is above all studies necessary for him who would be listened to as a mender of antiquated abuses. – I mean that record of crimes & miseries – History" (Letters I: 340-2). As Donald Kelley has argued, in Shelley's day "history was the cynosure or target of all parties – whether to worship, escape from, control, or remake entirely,"[1] and Shelley like many of his contemporaries sought to understand the questions of his day within an historical framework. Appended to the Hookham letter, Shelley placed a book order, which included volumes of the French Encyclopædie, Vertot's Histoire de la Rome, the ancient histories of Herodotus, Thucidydes [sic] and Zenophon, Gillie's History of Greece, and Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. In addition, he asked Hookham to add others he thought appropriate, and received several from him, including Plutarch, Hume's History of England, and Adolphus's Continuation of the History of England. Despite his dubious claim in this letter to Hookham to have a youthful aversion to the study of history, Shelley's history syllabus was remarkably ambitious.

When Shelley wrote to Hookham in December of 1812, he was in the midst of composing his first epic, "Queen Mab, A Philosophical Poem" (1813), an encyclopedia of his radical, liberal thinking to date. Nearly three years earlier, in a letter to his father, dated Februrary 6, 1811, Shelley justifies his expulsion from Oxford in political terms,

[1] Donald Kelley explores the extraordinary diversity of historiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its various developments during the Enlightenment and the attempts by all parties to appropriate and direct it towards the furtherance of their own ends during and after the French Revolution. 27.

alluding to Locke, Voltaire, Lord Kames, David Hume, Rousseau, Adam Smith, and Benjamin Franklin, and elaborates on Gibbon's historical understanding of Christianity (from Chapter XV of The Decline and Fall) (Letters I, 50-1). From a young age Shelley was intrigued by the historians of the eighteenth century. Four historians were more influential than the rest: in David Hume's and Godwin's histories of England, Edward Gibbon's history of Rome and C. F. Volney's history of empires, he discovered comprehensive historical surveys, couched in diverse styles, philosophies and political orientations. The influence of these four historians is evident in his first long works: "Queen Mab; A Philosophical Poem" (1813), "Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude" (1815), and "The Revolt of Islam" (1817). In another letter to Hookham Shelley announced the framework for "Queen Mab," his first epic: "The Past, the Present, and the Future are the grand and comprehensive topics of this Poem"(Letters I: 324-5), then, amusingly, "I have not yet half exhausted the second of them."[2] The order for more histories was to come several months later.

Years later, in his preface to "The Revolt of Islam," Shelley lists the subjects critical for the composition of poetry, placing the study of history alongside the study of poetry, philosophy, and nature:

> I have considered Poetry in its most comprehensive sense; and have read the Poets and the Historians and the Metaphysicians whose writings have been accessible to me, and have looked upon the beautiful

[2] Quoted in Cameron, The Young Shelley, 239.

scenery of the earth, as common sources of those elements which it is the province of the Poet to embody and combine. (Complete Poems 36)[3]

Throughout his life Shelley returned to the themes of eighteenth century histories: the rise and fall of tyrants and empires, the moral causes of wars and political revolutions, the pervasiveness of corruption and oppression, the effects of social conformity and social alienation, the potency of ideas and inventions as instruments for social change. All of these themes are central to Shelley's three early epics.

Although "Queen Mab," "Alastor," and "The Revolt of Islam" are allegories, their themes and conceptual framework are largely historical in character. That is, all three attempt to account for a contemporary political climate (or public torpor) by turning an eye to the past and all three attempt to identify patterns of human error for the betterment of the future, like the histories with which Shelley was familiar. "Queen Mab" and "The Revolt of Islam," for example, survey political history and social evolution in broad terms. And, both offer to the English during the counter-revolutionary period an explicitly revolutionary program set within this historical framework (like the French historians had for the Enlightenment). In this chapter I will address Shelley's attitudes in regards to historical writing, an aspect of his poetry which recent critics have tended to neglect, simplify or generalize, and then demonstrate how "Alastor," ostensibly the least historical of his first three poems, may be read as a meditation on history alongside other revolutionary and post-revolutionary histories. If read in this light, "Alastor" reveals that Shelley's attitudes towards history are varied and inconsistent.

[3] All quotes from Shelley's poetry have been drawn from Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat's second edition of Shelley's writings published by W. W. Norton, with the exception of "The Revolt of Islam," for which I have used the Complete Poems.

Indeed, Shelley's interest in history has been widely ignored or relegated to marginal notes in recent years in large part due to the enduring influence of Paul de Man's critically arresting, 1979 essay, "Shelley Disfigured." Addressing the tendency of criticism to historicize its subject or to assign a fixed meaning to a text, De Man's essay attacked the notion that criticism could establish either a standard, "monumental" reading of Shelley's poems, or any definitive reading of Romanticism in general. De Man identified a continual and unconquerable process of figuration and disfiguration in language, a process which criticism cannot bring to an end despite its ambition to set the meaning of texts in stone (122).[4] De Man argued that Shelley's last poem, "The Triumph of Life" (1822) identifies and even "thematizes" this profoundly autonomous linguistic process, presenting various self-reflexive figures of "repetitive erasure" (119). So, his reading of the poem does not attempt to "fix" a particular meaning, but to identify a process that "happens" when we read (122); "The Triumph of Life," he argues, dramatizes a process of deconstruction that happens in all texts (including, presumably, all of Shelley's earlier poems).

Not only did it challenge the readings of other critics, de Man's thesis also called into question the adequacy of language, critical or otherwise, as a medium for historical record:

> "The Triumph of Life" warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything

[4] This dynamic process, he explains, is brought about by the inevitable divergence of referential and grammatical configurations: "language posits and language means (since it articulates) but language cannot posit meaning" (117). Although momentarily united in the figure, reference and grammar operate in a disparate manner, thereby undoing, or "disfiguring," whatever previous coordinated significance they may have produced in a single reading (just as the pronoun "I" refers to and coordinates a subject in the present at the same time as it necessarily disfigures all of its previous referents and their grammatical coordination) (120).

> that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence. (122)

His argument is that, like all modes of writing, historical writing is a set of linguistic relations, defined in and by language. Although it may make claims to transcend time, to be a permanent record, historical writing remains subject to the dynamic operations of language: the fundamental instability of referential language over time and the process of continual figuration and disfiguration that comes into play when we read. Moreover, de Man suggested that Shelley was not "naïve" about the process of deconstruction (122): Shelley was conscious of it enough to provide us with a warning about it.

In de Man's reading Shelley's interest in history is overshadowed by this more immediate awareness about the insidious, alienating and uncontrollable activities of language; de Man's Shelley expresses a strikingly modern attitude regarding historical writing, an attitude which, if de Man is accurate, would be dismissive of the historical thought preceding and during the Romantic period. In fact, de Man's characterization has remained unchallenged in recent criticism. As Cathy Caruth points out, de Man, along with other post-structuralists, fostered a critical belief "that these linguistically oriented theories of reading deny the possibility that language can give us access to history" (193).

Criticism on "Alastor" since de Man's essay has tended to follow one of two routes, both of which pass over Shelley's interest in history. There are critics who follow de Man's thinking by pairing an autonomous, disseminative process in the poem's language, in which the poem's meaning endlessly unravels of its own accord (similar to de Man's process of disfigurement), with an abstracted, reflective, and poetic

consciousness: William Keach's "Reflexive Imagery," from Shelley's Style (1984), and more recently Tilotama Rajan's " 'The Web of Human Things': Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*"(1994) are examples of this course. Keach reads "Alastor" as an allegory for the psychological condition that drives the Romantics "to search despairingly for [self-] completion through self-reflection and self-projection" (94). He argues that this fluctuating psychological tension is mirrored in the poem's self-reflexive imagery, which endlessly confounds itself, imagery "that negates the efficacy of imagery" (87). That is, Keach identifies a process of projection and erasure in the imagery of the poem with a poetic consciousness, which, in a parallel manner, "becomes increasingly solipsistic, and finally self-annihilating" (87). Similarly picking up on questions of identity, Rajan discusses a fluctuating tension in "Alastor" between transcendent lyric and sequential narrative. These antithetical modes of representation, accordingly, inevitably confound each other: "Alastor" is "the story of the Narrator's failure to write his text as lyric" (35). Like de Man and Keach, Rajan offers that "Shelley senses in language a dissemintive potential" (27), thus associating a linguistic process with a poetic consciousness. Such criticism avoids questions of historical context, historical reference, and historiography, by transposing them to questions of linguistic coherence, narrative structure and reference, and poetic irony. In other words, history is to be considered as one genre under the more general heading of referential language, of which Shelley was poetically skeptical. Without fixing a particular reading of the poem, as de Man warned against doing, such criticism argues that "Alastor" ultimately presents a process of deconstruction, and that Shelley was aware of this process, alerts his readers to it, but ultimately could not control it. These critics argue that by prompting readers to take note

of this process, “Alastor” is as relevant today as it was during the Romantic period: it presages the transience of meaning, historical or otherwise, and makes plain the naïveté of those who would attempt to record meaning or treat writing as a static record. If somewhat less dire than his, Rajan concludes her reading with a message not entirely different from de Man’s Shelleyan warning: “Whether one can find meaning in the web of differences and displacements that constitutes speech, life, and all systems of representation is a question that preoccupies Shelley for the remainder of his career” (48). In other words, Rajan argues that Shelley’s “preoccupation” is with questions of language, not with questions of history.

The second divergent, but related route recent critics have taken is to identify the “monumental” readings of preceding critics as not so much naïve, as did de Man, but rather as ideological: Jerome McGann’s reading of Shelley in Romantic Ideology (1983), Jerome Christensen’s Romanticism at the End of History (2000), and Paul Hamilton’s reading of “Alastor” in “A French Connection: The Shelleys’ Materialism” from Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory (2003) are examples of this approach. Such criticism avoids (or surpasses) questions of historical context, historical reference, and philosophy of history, by characterizing such concerns as manifestations of ideological conformity, distinct from history insofar as they are conditioned by it. In these texts, Shelley’s attitude towards history (invariably understood to mean the discourse of tyranny’s self-justification) is characterized as politically resistant and disobedient. Shelley’s resistance is characterized in various ways. For McGann, it is manifested in Shelley’s recurrent projection of a naïve and utopian futurity of a different political order, but now quite dated (McGann 122-3). Similarly, Christensen finds it in

Shelley's projection of a "phantomized political existence" that holds out a hope (but which remains unarticulated, and thus resistant to deconstruction) for something better within the context of post-revolution hegemony (Christensen 12). Hamilton locates Shelley's resistance in his materialism-oriented critique of ideological formulations that would attempt to account for and thereby alienate from us "our physicality in order to keep us in fearful thrall to an alternative, unjustifiable authority" (Hamilton 155). In Christensen and Hamilton, Shelley's poetry does not yield 'readings' in any traditional sense, but rather puts readers to work dismantling ideological propositions, first Shelley's and then our own as readers. That is to say, such criticism returns to de Man's notion that Shelley's relevance today is not to be found in terms of a fixed meaning, but as a prompt to a process: read carefully, "Alastor" prompts us to recognize and break from the ideologies that govern our relations, to the world around us as much as to Shelley's poetry. In sum, since de Man's essay, not only have critics marginalized Shelley's interest in histories, but also Shelley's own attitudes concerning history have been largely ignored, simplified or misrepresented.

Shelley's attitudes concerning history if anything are complex, at times even contradictory. However, in his longer poems, particularly his early ones, Shelley presents three pronounced attitudes, which I will name engaged, reflective, and withdrawn. By 'attitude' I do not presume to diagnosis a particular psychological disposition Shelley may or may not have been in while composing. Rather, I mean a generic framework or mode configured within the text, which correlates a loose philosophy of history, a political vision, a rhetorical style, and a pronounced *pathos*: in other words, by 'attitude,' I mean a settled and mannered mode of thinking about history. (To that end, by 'Shelley,'

I mean to refer as much to the implied author, who adopts and is thereby loosely characterized by these attitudes, as to the historical person.) To an extent, these attitudes are derivative of those developed by the eighteenth-century historians Shelley most admired: Volney, Hume, Gibbon, and Godwin. As each of these historians had a remarkably different approach to and appreciation of history, so too are each of Shelley's attitudes distinct from each other. Each of Shelley's attitudes has its own grounding philosophical principles and political vision. Moreover, each attitude involves a different style and set of rhetorical strategies based on a distinct estimation of the political capabilities of language. This diversity, however, does not stop Shelley from shifting between attitudes in his early epics, as often as he shifts between poetic genres. In this chapter, I will define and provide examples of Shelley's principal attitudes -- engaged, reflective, and withdrawn -- and discuss each in "Alastor," where they appear in their most subtle and integrated manner during his early years.

Shelley is most engaged by history when it addresses political tyranny. As a political activist, he identifies with the French *Philosophes* of the past century, and becomes animated by the idea that history is urgently progressing on a global scale towards a liberal and enlightened revolution, in which people around the world will overthrow their despots and found anew human institutions on more rational grounds: "a great and important change in the spirit which animates the social institutions of mankind," as he calls it at the end of his preface to "The Revolt of Islam" (39). Such an idea could be lifted straight from the Marquis de Condorcet's "The Future progress of the human mind," in Sketch of a Historical Picture of the Human Mind (1795): "Once people are enlightened they will know that they have the right to dispose of their own life and

health as they chose; they will gradually learn to regard war as the most dreadful of scourges, the most terrible of crimes…."[5] The project of a liberal and enlightened future inspires the activist vein in Shelley's writings, which aim to encourage a social revolution through – in theory -- the dissemination of reasoned arguments. In practice, however, Shelley is so taken with the idea of exciting contemporary fervor and political discontent (in a manner similar to propaganda) that reasoned argument is often replaced by hyperbolic and polemical rhetoric. In this spirit, the first epigraph affixed to "Queen Mab" is Voltaire's motto: "Ecrasez l'infame!"

There is no want of examples of Shelley's political activism in his early years. His early prose pamphlet, "The Necessity of Atheism" (1811) is entirely in this polemical vein.[6] In its attack on evangelical history on the grounds of reason, this pamphlet draws heavily from Locke and from Hume's refutation of the doctrine of revealed truth in his essay "On Miracles" (1748)). Although Shelley argued that "they only are reprehensible who willingly neglect to remove the false medium [of tradition] through which their mind views the subject," the resistant faculty of Oxford (who undoubtedly understood Shelley's general "they" as specifically addressing them) saw fit to expel Shelley for inappropriate conduct.[7]

In his poetry (or passages within his longer poems), his rhetoric is entirely of the moment: he is simply (though animatedly) responding to the activities of tyrants and their opponents, even when they are removed by considerable time and distance from him.

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[5] Shelley orders the Marquis de Condorcet's works on December 24, 1812, from the bookseller Clio Rickman (Letters I: 343).
[6] See Murray's editorial commentary for a discussion of the philosophical sources for the argument of Shelley's pamphlet (Prose 324).
[7] For a fuller discussion of Shelley's expulsion, the controversy about Shelley's account of it, and how Shelley modified "The Necessity of Atheism" to work as a footnote to a passage in "Queen Mab," see Richard Holmes 54-5.

That is, he reports in broad strokes some recent history of tyranny or conditions resulting from it, and then censures tyrants in the most vitriolic terms he can manage. Examples can be found throughout his early Esdaile Notebook, a collection of poems from his adolescence, but "The Monarch's Funeral: An Anticipation" (on the anticipated death of George III) and "To the Republicans of North America" (a tribute to the new and inspiring Republic of Mexico, aimed to spite European monarchies) are particularly clear examples. In "The Monarch's Funeral" Shelly employs a series of indignant and sarcastic questions to express his political discontent:

> Who *now* shall public councils guide?
>   Who rack the poor on gold to dine?
> Who waste the means of regal pride?
>   For which a million wretches pine? ("The Monarch's Funeral: An Anticipation" 37-40)

In "To the Republicans of North America," Shelley personifies mountains, waters, and winds as the opponents of Old World corruption:

> Cotopaxi! bid the sound
>   Thro' thy sister mountains ring
> Till each valley smile around
>   At the blissful welcoming.
> And O! thou stern Ocean-deep,
> Whose eternal billows sweep
> Shores where thousands wake to weep
>   Whilst they curse some villain King,

On the winds that fan thy breast

Bear thou news of freedom's rest. ("To the Republicans of North America" 21-30)

The sarcasm of this poem stems from both the displacement of familiar names ("some villain King" is intentionally disrespectful in its vagueness) by the exotic name, Cotopaxi, and the belittlement of monarchical power by the natural elements. Far from timeless, the irony in both these poems is satirical in nature and is bound to a specific historical situation. The *pathos* is ambivalent: indignant and outraged at tyranny (the English monarchy) as well as optimistic and idealistic about future freedom as the world moves towards a social revolution. The style is declamatory and hyperbolic: invectives, condemnations, and belligerent curses on the one hand, glorifications, panegyrics, and sublime promises of future freedoms on the other. To polarize the oppressors and the oppressed at every opportunity so as to agitate fervor, Shelley even teases his audience (the oppressed) with utopian speculations about the future: who (or what) will take the place of the King upon his death? What lies ahead for the Republic of Mexico, free from the tyranny of Europe's despotism?

In "Queen Mab," such utopian speculations become full blown:

How sweet a scene will earth become!

Of purest spirits, a pure dwelling-place,

Symphonious with the planetary spheres;

When man, with changeless Nature coalescing,

Will undertake regeneration's work,

When its ungenial poles no longer point

To the red and baleful sun

That faintly twinkles there. (39-46)

Passages such as this promise freedom from tyranny and superstition, human societies united by love, a longer life free from disease, and even the correction of the Earth's axis and radical improvement of the Earth's desert ecosystems.

"To the Emperors of Russia and Austria who eyed the battle of Austerlitz from the heights whilst Buonaparte was active in the thickest of the fight" has many of the features of Shelley's engaged writing. As the title alone suggests, Shelley engages with recent history (the 1805 Battle of Austerlitz), addresses the despots (Austria and Russia) who look down on the field and the slaughter, evaluates their reported actions and attitudes (or rather non-actions and indifference), and condemns them: "How sleep ye now, unfeeling Kings!" (Napoleon, however, he lionizes as the herald of "Freedom," though elsewhere Shelley is not so unequivocal about him.) Shelley is engaged politically and emotionally, sympathizing with the revolutionary ambitions of the French (he even translates the *Marseillaise* in his youth). The final, climactic line of the poem closes Shelley's address to the "unfeeling Kings": "[…] Freedom *now* prepares your tomb" (my emphasis). The "now" refers to the moment of the Emperors' defeat by Napoleon, over which the omniscient poet gazes, but also to the moment at which Shelley responds to the news of the battle, as well as to the moments in the future in which the poem will be read by others who share his revolutionary fervor. It is a precipitous but ever-renewable "now." That is, the rhetorical aim of the "now" is to erase any spatial or temporal separation that might make readers feel detached from the historical scene presented; the

aim of the poem is to encourage a sense of participation in social history, to encourage social activism, to be engaged.

When engaged, Shelley often turns his eye to events in world history. He speaks of ancient and modern tyrannies interchangeably, using one to reflect on the fate of the other, as the Fairy tells the Spirit in "Queen Mab":

> "Behold," the Fairy cried,
> "Palmyra's ruined palaces! --
> Behold! Where grandeur frowned;
> Behold! Where pleasure smiled;
> What now remains? – the memory
> Of Senselessness and shame –
> What is immortal there?
> Nothing – it stands to tell
> A melancholy tale, to give
> An awful warning: soon
> Oblivion will steal silently
> The remnant of its fame.
> Monarchs and conquerors there
> Proud o'er prostate millions trod—
> The earthquakes of the human race;
> Like them, forgotten when the ruin
> That marks their shock is past. (II, 109-25)

The Fairy continues on in similar vein, moving from Palmyra to Jerusalem, to Athens, Rome, Sparta, and to Europe of the Crusades, all of which repeat the same "melancholy tale." In "The Revolt of Islam" this tale is "The pattern whence all fraud and wrong is made,/ A law to which mankind has been betrayed" (VIII, 3284-5). A "law," Cythna the heroine of the poem says, because tyrants and their ministers introduce the rule of law to justify their arbitrary power, by which humanity is oppressed and corrupted; in a remarkable stanza from "The Revolt of Islam," Shelley makes clear that the study of history is always set at odds with tyranny's ideological self-justifications, with false histories:

> 'And grave and hoary men were bribed to tell
> From seats where law is made the slave of wrong,
> How glorious Athens in her splendour fell,
> Because her sons were free, -- and that among
> Mankind, the many to the few belong,
> By heaven, and Nature, and Necessity.
> They said, that age was truth, and that the young
> Marred with wild hopes the peace of slavery,
> With which old times and men had quelled the vain and free. (IX, 3586-94)

The lessons power wants to teach us are falsehoods and history – and Shelley will attack the hypocrisies, superstitions, dogma, justifications, and prejudices imposed by tyranny. In developing his attack on Christianity and its opposition to the cause of liberty, Shelley writes in "A Refutation of Deism," a sequel to "The Necessity of Atheism," that

> the doctrine of acquiescing in the most insolent despotism; of praying for and loving our enemies; of faith and humility, appears to fix the perfection of the human character in that abjectness and credulity which priests and tyrants *of all ages* have found sufficiently convenient for their purposes. [...] It is evident that ten highwaymen would suffice to subjugate the world if it were composed of slaves who dared not to resist oppression. (Prose 105, my emphasis)

Implied in this passage is the notion that we must discover patterns across "*all ages*" in order to mount a resistance. History must prompt the revolutionary action tyrants seek to suppress We must understand how the doctrines of Christianity have been set to the advantage of tyranny, and once and for all arrest this oppression. When engaged by it, Shelley views history as the principle instrument for the Enlightenment of humanity: revealing past and present corruption and degeneration as well as prompting a political program for improvement.

As an activist, Shelley embraces the "social engineering" dimension of the French historians of the Revolution, who believed in the development of reason and dissemination of knowledge as the catalysts for social progress (Kelley 34). For example, in speaking of the causes of the French Revolution and the historical role of "D'Alembert, Boulanger, Condorcet, and other celebrated characters" of that period associated with the idea of the historical progress of reason and knowledge, Shelley states in "A Proposal for an Association of Philanthropists" (1812) that "this much is certain, that they contributed greatly to the extension and diffusion of knowledge, and that knowledge is incompatable with slavery" (Prose 51). He goes on to say that, following

their lead, “we are in a state of continual improvement” (52). Such is the Spirit’s response to the enlightening Fairy in “Queen Mab”: “’I thank thee. Thou hast given / A boon which I will not resign, and taught / A lesson not to be unlearned. I know / The past, and thence I will essay to glean / A warning for the future, so that man / May profit by his errors, and derive / Experience from his folly” (III, 4-10). That history offers us patterns from which we can gain experience, continually improve, and better direct the course of our common future is the philosophical foundation of Shelley’s activism.

In “Queen Mab,” “Alastor,” and “The Revolt of Islam,” education (remarked upon repeatedly in all three poems) is principally an education in history, whether it be delivered in a vision by a benevolent spirit (“Queen Mab”) or sought out in secret tomes by an insatiable poet in youth (“Alastor” and “The Revolt of Islam”). In one such passage, characteristic of the others, Shelley describes to “Mary” his own resolve to educate himself in response to being humiliated by thuggish schoolmates and the institution that fostered them:

> And then I clasped my hands and looked around –
> -- But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
> Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground –
> So, without shame, I spake: -- “I will be wise,
> And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
> Such power, for I grow weary to behold
> The selfish and the strong still tyrannise
> Without reproach or check.” I then controlled
> My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold.

And from that hour did I with earnest thought

  Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,

Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught

  I cared to learn, but from that secret store

Wrought linkèd armour for my soul, before

  It might walk forth to war among mankind;

Thus power and hope were strengthened more and more

Within me, till there came upon my mind

A sense of loneliness, a thirst with which I pined.

("Dedication to Mary" from "The Revolt of Islam" 37-45)

These "forbidden mines of lore," the "secret store" which serves as armor against the ideological weapons of the state, he identifies later as "the dark tale which *history* doth unfold," (I, 460, my emphasis) a tale:

  I knew, but not, methinks, as others know,

For they weep not; and Wisdom had unrolled

  The clouds which hide the gulf of mortal woe, --

To few can she that warning vision show—(I, 461-4)

This warning vision is precisely the history Shelley represents in his engaged passages and constitutes the first part of the three-part structure (past, present, and future) of "Queen Mab." In "The Revolt of Islam" the poet of the framing narrative encounters a maiden Spirit, who recounts a mythic history of the world, which he then encounters again painted like monuments on temple walls: "A tale of passionate change, divinely

taught,/Which in their winged dance, unconscious Genii wrought" (I, 595-603). This "tale" of revolution, counterrevolution, and enduring hope for a better future, is not only an allegory of social history that tyranny seeks to suppress, but also the "tale of human power" (I, 648) to be monumentalized as the hope of humanity in the face of perennial oppression.

In reading Shelley's engaged passages as historical narrative, however, it becomes quickly clear that he is more committed to what histories could and should do socially and politically than to the labor of original historical research. When Shelley is engaged, he equates history's moral value with its utility. That is, the degree to which a history empowers and encourages its readers to change -- to resist tyranny, to redirect the course of history, and to advance progress -- is the degree to which it should be esteemed. And, to this end, Shelley's interest in history is manifest in his belief in the possibility of real social change. He states in his preface to "The Revolt of Islam" his rhetorical priorities in composing the poem:

> […I]n the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind. […] For this purpose I have chosen a story of human passion *in its most universal character*. (34, my emphasis)

Instead of attending to particulars, he looks to abstract a universal: "The French Revolution may be considered *as one of those manifestations of a general state* of feeling among civilised mankind produced by a defect of correspondence between the

knowledge existing in society and the improvement or gradual abolition of political institutions" (35, my emphasis). This move towards abstraction to general category (one might even say towards allegory) occurs again in the next sentence: "The year 1788 may be assumed as the epoch of *one of* the most important crises produced by this feeling" (35, my emphasis). Although he read volumes of history, Shelley himself did little of the research of an historian. Little concerned with questions of historical accuracy, veracity, evidence, or even in particulars of time and place, Shelley works with the lessons of history, trusting in the authority of his historians and that the future (when greater freedoms are won) will prove his visions of history right. Earlier, in "Queen Mab," Shelley relegates historical evidence and discussion for the most part to his footnotes (which admittedly are extensive); in "Alastor," the only noteworthy particulars are place names in the ancient world, while a general knowledge of history of civilizations and liberal sympathies are assumed; in "The Revolt of Islam," though so close to the history of the French Revolution, the history offered is entirely allegorical (only in the preface is the link explicit). When Shelley is most engaged with history, he offers very little. In place of facts, he borrows the themes and archetypes of history; in place of particulars, he allegorizes. Years later, he opens "The Mask of Anarchy: Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester" (1819) in precisely the same abstracting manner. He allegorizes the news of the Manchester protest and ensuing bloodshed in St. Peter's Field on August 16, 1819 as a voice from afar, calling for justice:

> As I lay asleep in Italy
>
> There came a voice from over the Sea,
>
> And with great power it forth led me

To walk in the visions of Poesy. (1-4)

When most acute this attitude produces poems that are ideological, insofar as they are defined by a specific political aim, and that mean to serve as propaganda: "visions of Poesy" are a political response to recent history that aims to direct the reactions of others through crafted artistry. When Shelley sets himself such a task, when he is engaged by history, his principle concern regarding language is to make sure it disseminates history's lesson as effectively as possible to its audience. As Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat quote in their preface to the poem, Shelley wrote to his publisher Leigh Hunt in 1819, that "The Mask of Anarchy" along with a few of his other poems might constitute "a little volume of popular songs wholly political, & destined to awaken & direct the imagination of the reformers" (Letters II, 191). Shelley's comment suggests that those who would bring about reform require inspiration that real change or redirection in the progress of society is possible.

Turning to "Alastor," we find Shelley's engaged attitude most pronounced in the passage inspired by Volney's Les Ruines (1791), a French revolutionary history of the Enlightenment in the tradition of the *Philosophes*. The protagonist of "Alastor," the Poet, stands before the site of ancient ruins, reflecting upon their history (107-28). The influence of Volney's work on "Alastor" is extensive and multi-faceted: The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires (the full title of the first English translation, 1802) recounts the walking tour of a young, sentimental historian who surveys the ruins of the civilizations of Africa, the Near East, and into Asia, and reflects on the rise and fall of empires and their religions. Once he has left his home, the Poet of "Alastor" takes much the same route as Volney's historian; Ruins provides Shelley with a map of ancient

empires. Volney's map, however, is more than simply a geographical or historical chart; this map offers a conceptual framework, which Shelley briefly adopts in "Alastor."

Although he does not discuss "Alastor" in "A Major Source of *The Revolt of Islam*," Kenneth N. Cameron documents the extensive influence Volney's Ruins had on Shelley, from "Queen Mab" to "Prometheus Unbound." "So deep" and "so extensive" is this influence that Shelley must have "reread" Volney with great attention and spent "many hours of imaginative speculation on its imagery and philosophy" (175-6; 205). Central to Cameron's argument is that Shelley adopts in "The Revolt of Islam" Volney's particular "chronological sequence" (183) through which an historical revolution develops. That is, Shelley discovers in Volney a "vision of the *beau ideal* of the French Revolution" (177), which he will himself use as a template to describe imagined revolution in "The Revolt of Islam": "the succession of events given in relating the course of the idealized revolution [in "The Revolt of Islam"] is identical [with Volney's account]" (178). Cameron details the parallel imagery and political philosophy that links these two authors, which he also finds elsewhere in Shelley's early writings. Cameron does not stress, however, that Shelley's adaptation of Volney's idealized, historical "sequence," which he so carefully details, is in fact a recurrent and prominent mode in many of Shelley's writings. I would argue that the most significant dimension of Volney's influence on Shelley is his novel way of understanding and presenting history. Even before he composed "The Revolt of Islam," Shelley was following Volney's dramatic, even histrionic, mode of writing history, as I will demonstrate he does in "Alastor."

Similarly, Marilyn Butler revisits Volney's influence on Shelley, with particular attention to "Queen Mab," Shelley's "most Volneyan poem" in her estimation, and the recurrent figure of the "legislator," named in "The Defense of Poesy" (160). She reads Volney as principally a politician and argues that Shelley adopts Volney's political characterization of the East as degenerate, his radical political rhetoric, with its reductionism, invectives and anathemas, and his assumption of the coming ascendancy of "Western intellectuals," or "skeptical Enlightenment comparative religionists," who will bring a more cosmopolitan perspective (160). She points out that this perspective is far from universal but is that of the 1790s *Idéologues*. This perspective "undercuts the ethnic diversity" of the East in a most ignorant manner (159). That is, she recognizes Volney as an historical thinker (in fact, she demonstrates convincingly how Volney was indebted to Rousseau's second Discourse), but her reading is principally a critique of Shelley's debt to Volney's political rhetoric. In response I would argue that "Alastor" may be read as Shelley's self-evaluation as a "legislator" of the East: an enlightened figure who travels there, but who is without any real contact or impact. More important, however, Volney's influence on Shelley should not be limited to a certain political orientation, but should be seen as more encompassing: it offers Shelley a rhetorical mode of writing history.

Shelley adopts Volney's rhetorical style and political aims. For example, in speaking of Christendom during the crusades in his preface, Volney is aggressive and sarcastic: "Behold then, holy and believing people, what are your works! Behold the fruits of your piety! You have massacred the people, burned their cities, destroyed cultivation, reduced the earth to it a solitude; and you ask the reward of your works" (12)! Personifying the vices of humanity, as Shelley does years later in "The Mask of

Anarchy," Volney has Avarice applaud Ignorance in a satirical masque: "'I will oppress the weak, and devour the fruits of his labors; and I will say, it is fate which hath so ordained" (12). This attack against the institutions of Europe is accompanied in Volney, as it is subsequently in Shelley, with utopian aspirations for the future, based on the prospect of historical enlightenment:

> I swear by the laws of heaven and earth, and by the law which is written in the heart of man, that the hypocrite shall be deceived in his cunning – the oppressor in his rapacity! The sun shall change his course, before folly shall prevail over wisdom and knowledge, or ignorance surpass prudence, in the noble and sublime art of procuring to man his true enjoyments, and of building his happiness on an enduring foundation. (12)

That "foundation" is, of course, the enlightenment his history provides, much as the historical visions provided by the Fairy to the Spirit in "Queen Mab" enlightens for the improvement of humanity in the future. It is important to note, however, when Shelley sets about representing the histories he read, it is not a question of putting them into a more accessible or dramatic form: Volney's histrionic and hyperbolic style is as direct, dramatic and clear in its political aim as any passage by Shelley. When Shelley adopts this style and politics, he is adopting a roughly contemporary historian's mode of writing.

In "Alastor" Shelley's scope is more personal and less political than in either "Queen Mab" or "The Revolt of Islam," but Volney's influence is no less extensive.[8] The

[8] I agree with Ferber's observation that Shelley "was to alternate between anguished personal quests and hopeful public prophecies throughout his life" and that "it is not always easy to separate the social poetry from the personal, nor to attribute some poems to emotional outpourings and others to calculated craft"

journey of the Poet in "Alastor" is the same journey taken by the young, wandering historian in Volney's Ruins: Shelley borrows Volney's map of ancient empires. Impressed throughout his travels by the sites of ruins, the wandering historian of Ruins attempts to discover some principle that guides the course of history or at least some moral lesson that would speak to the present, as he explains in the opening chapter:

> My whole attention bent on whatever concerns the happiness of man in a social state, I visited cities, and studied the manners of their inhabitants; entered palaces, and observed the conduct of those who govern; wandered over fields, and examined the condition of those who cultivated them: and nowhere perceiving aught but robbery and devastation, tyranny and wretchedness, my heart was oppressed with sorrow and indignation. […] I saw daily on my road fields abandoned, villages deserted, and cities in ruin. Often I met with ancient monuments, wrecks of temples, palaces and fortresses, columns, aqueducts and tombs. This spectacle led me to meditate on times past, and filled my mind with contemplations of the most serious and profound. (3)

Similarly, the Poet of "Alastor" in the presence of the same locations "lingered, pouring on memorials / Of the world's youth […] till meaning on his vacant mind / Flashed like strong inspiration" (121-8). Both Romantic heroes set out from home without a prescribed itinerary to visit spectacles, and when they encounter them, they attempt to make themselves as receptive and impressionable as possible in hopes of deriving a greater understanding of the world. I should emphasize that Shelley finds as much

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(654). It is important to keep in mind that "Alastor" is both a personal narrative and an (I would argue historical) allegory: individuation and generalization are equally at play.

inspiration in Volney for the character of the Poet as he does for the historical setting; he borrows both the pastoral and gothic details as well as the complementary melancholy and alienation of the wandering historian:

His wandering step,
Obedient to high thoughts, has visited
The awful ruins of the days of old:
Athens, and Tyre, and Balbec, and the waste
Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers
Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,
Memphis and Thebes, and whatsoe'er of strange
Sculptured on alabaster obelisk,
Or jasper tomb, or mutilated sphinx,
Dark Æthiopia in her desert hills
Conceals. Among the ruined temples there,
Stupendous columns, and wild images
Of more than man, where marble dæmons watch
The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men
Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around,
He lingered, pouring on memorials
Of the world's youth, through the long burning day
Gazed on those speechless shapes, nor, when the moon
Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades
Suspended he that task, but ever gazed

And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind

Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw

The thrilling secrets of the birth of time. (106-28)

If "Alastor" shares with Ruins a melancholy tone, it is because both Volney and Shelley embrace the characterization of human history as a catalog of crimes and corruption common among the French *Philosophes*. Volney and Shelley alike passionately accept Rousseau's speculation that vanity and cupidity, the root causes of all human woe, are not natural to humanity's disposition, but were introduced through the socialization of individuals, and the civilization of humanity.[9] The wandering historian and the Poet both discover proof of historical degeneration in their travels: they witness a world wasted by vanity. Shelley finds in Ruins a dramatic way to decry the folly, baseness, tyranny, and corruption of human society: an historical narrative, which totalizes human achievement in the image of ruins, Volney's central image. By the time the Poet reaches Persia in "Alastor," so complete is this self-destructive drive towards desolation that even the ruins are destroying themselves: "the desolated tombs / Of Parthian kings scatter to the wind / Their wasting dust" (242-4). Though bleak, the "picture is not barren of instruction," Shelley announces in his preface.

In addition to this historical lesson, Shelley adopts the *ethos* of Volney's protagonist. The historian of Ruins is of course Volney's Romantic self-portrait. Volney, who inspired and aided Napoleon, traveled extensively as a young man in the Near East, was fluent in Arabic, was committed to revolutionary politics, social amelioration and liberal ideals, and was well versed in the ideas of the Enlightenment (an "*Idéologue* and

[9] Volney's "Chapter VIII: Sources of the Evils of Society" (25-6) and "Chapter XI: General Causes of the Revolutions and Ruin of Ancient States" (32-41) are indebted to Rousseau's early discourses.

reputed atheist," according to Kelley (27)). All of these credentials Shelley would have admired. The wandering historian of Volney's Ruins seems to share a similar biography with Volney, if his travels are somewhat more rapid and fantastic (he is visited, for example, by a instructive Phantom, much as Shelley is visited by the ghost of Rousseau in "The Triumph of Life"). Similarly, "Alastor" may be considered Shelley's first Romantic self-portrait: an idealization of a poet's life by an ambitious, young poet who quit his home and family in pursuit of liberal ideals. However much of Shelley's life we see in the Poet, the Poet is also closely modeled on the protagonist of Ruins, sharing his political sympathies, preference for a solitary life, aesthetic sensibilities, and intellectual proclivities. Standing before the monuments of human ambition, these semi-fictional heroes assert the honesty and naturalness of their emotional response to the folly of ambition, their freedom from the corrupting influence of self-love. They avoid vanity by quitting human society, and win thereby a freedom of judgment. Of course, they immediately turn that judgment back on society, which remains ignorant and cruel. After all, "Alastor" is about a "child of grace and genius" (690), who quests across the world. It is interesting to note too that Volney's footnotes to Ruins and Shelley's preface to "Alastor" are much more staid and less histrionic in tone than the narrative voices of their texts. The *ethos* of both texts is deliberately crafted and Shelley follows Ruins as a model in this regard as well.

Beneath these thematic similarities between Ruins and "Alastor" lies a more profound influence still: Shelley adopts Volney's historical method. Volney is systematic, at least in theory, in his application of three principles in his study of human history. The first principle, essentially skeptical in nature, is to reject all histories to date, and to

witness the monuments of history first hand. So, he begins with "The Journey" (the first chapter of Ruins) to unknown and uncharted lands, as much a metaphorical journey as a physical one. Similarly in "Alastor," the Poet, dissatisfied with his "fireside and […] home," sets out in search of more visceral and unmediated encounters with the world: "to seek strange truth in undiscovered lands" (76-7). Both abandon their native lands and traditions in search of more original, historical knowledge.

The second of Volney's principles is to gather a total impression of each scene witnessed on his journey, to synthesize an idea of history from the sensory and sentimental impressions made by the ruins. Shelley again follows his model: the Poet "lingered" (121) in the sight of the ruins to gather his impressions. Volney speaks of falling into a "profound reverie" and "profound melancholy" when confronted with the ruins, of being "absorbed in [a] meditation" into which "reflections continually pour[ed]" until the "history of former times revived in [his] mind" (5-8); Shelley speaks of a "vacant mind" that "ever gazed / And gazed" on the sites of ruins "till meaning […] Flashed [on the mind] like strong inspiration" (126-7). In these lines from "Alastor," Volney's highly dramatic and sentimental version – a poet's version -- of an unbiased historian reappears. In both, history is witnessed first hand, it makes a profound impression, and leaves a lasting melancholy. Admittedly, neither Volney nor Shelley is patient enough to be strickly empirical in their research. They infuse their descriptions with the conventional detailing and hyperbole of gothic literature. They delight in reverie and poetic inspiration. And they leap to find proof in the ruins of Rousseau's thesis regarding the degeneration of humanity in civilization. Nevertheless, what is important here is that Shelley imitates Volney's highly stylized method.

Volney quickly proceeds to his third principle, to provide a systematic account of what he witnesses: an idealized historical genealogy. He speculates on the secret origins of humanity, antecedent to the ruins on which he gazes, and dedicates the rest of Ruins to various, grand-scale genealogies: of society, evil and tyranny, the revolutions of empires, science and language, and, most comprehensively, religions. In "Alastor," the Poet's visit to antiquity's ruins is similarly brief; like Volney's wandering historian, the Poet too turns in search of antecedent origins. After "he saw / The thrilling secrets of the birth of time" (127-8) amid the ancient ruins, "the Poet wandering on, through Arabie […] held his way" (140-4), without comment or explanation of those "secrets" that had "flashed" so dramatically upon "his vacant mind" in the lines before. It seems that the ruins serve only to spark historical imaginations, prompting grander, if altogether more speculative, world visions. The move away from 'empiricism' is announced in Volney's third chapter by an encounter with an unreal Phantom who promises to reveal the secret springs of history: "Come and confound the declarations of a false wisdom and hypocritical piety, and avenge the heavens and the earth of man who calumniates them both" (9)! The same move away from observation and empiricism to matters that can only be speculative is announced in "Alastor," first by the unheeded arrival of "an Arab Maiden" (129), who attends to the Poet's earthly needs while he is inspired by the ruins, and then by the visitation "in the vale of Cashmire" (145) of "a veiled maid" (151) in his dreams, who speaks to him of "Knowledge and truth and virtue […] And lofty hopes of divine liberty" (158-9). Shelley adopts Volney's pseudo-empirical point of departure and his proclivity for grand, speculative genealogies, which herald a coming era of enlightenment.

Where Volney tries subsequently to systematize his vision into a science of history, however, Shelley abandons the Poet to further wandering in a wholly mythological landscape until he dies. Though intrigued by questions of origins, Shelley does not, perhaps cannot, return to a logic of history or any claims to empiricism. Furthermore, as “Alastor” progresses we encounter a series of primordial scenes, but none seem to make an impression on the Poet. In fact, as the Poet moves further and further into the wilds and away from human society of the sort Volney is interested in, any connection to human history is lost. Environmental forces define the existence of the Poet more than any historical factors. The poem moves away from notions of human agency to explore other ways of thinking about history, and Shelley’s attitude towards history shifts from engaged to reflective.

This shift is common in Shelley’s poetry and is heralded by a change in subject. He turns his attention away from the activities, corruption and cruelty of tyrants, to view the conditions of humanity living under oppression. When he turns his attention so, he cannot maintain his politically engaged attitude. That is to say, Shelley is inspired to social activism by history only so long as its subject and focus is tyranny and its aim is to attack it in its various forms; when history turns its attention to the quotidian activities of subjugated masses, with its widespread ignorance, selfishness and political inertia, Shelley changes attitudes. He becomes reflective, melancholy, and searches for solitude – the attitude that is most prevalent in “Queen Mab,” “Alastor,” and “The Revolt of Islam.” When in this attitude, history seems to support Rousseau’s infamous thesis: the chains of social institutions debilitate the compassionate virtues of humanity. “Custom maketh blind and obdurate /The loftiest hearts” (“The Revolt of Islam” 1486-7) and the poet, so

acutely aware of the crushing weight of conformity, is surrounded by the "selfish, blind, and torpid" thoughtlessness of the "multitudes" ("Preface" to "Alastor"). In "A Refutation of Deism," Shelley speaks of the multitudes as like "cattle" under the control of "anti-social misanthropes," quoting Gibbon's discussion of early Christianity as his historical source (Prose 105). Shelley loses interest in the history of tyranny, in recent political events, and even in his ideal future. His attention turns to the lives of hermits and outcasts. When he reflects on the torpor of the multitudes, Shelley always historicizes it: it is the state of contemporary society, not as it has always been, nor as it will ever be. The aim of those who escape this torpor is to awaken the masses and engage them with their own history.

Although in subsequent poems the insensitivity and hostility of the multitudes is scaled back, nevertheless it is strikingly immediate in his early poem "The Retrospect" (1812). In his early imitation of Wordsworth, Shelley describes the shortsightedness of his peers and his own discouragement when a schoolboy. He stresses his alienation and how he "with this mortal world at strife/ Would yield to the soul's inward sense, / Then groan in human impotence, / And weep" (52-5): it is a sentiment he alone feels and feels most acutely when alone. Indeed "The Retrospect" is an early example of Shelley's exploration of the social alienation of the poet, a dominant theme throughout his poetry. The young poet's peers are shallow and insensitive, conformist and obsequious, and consumed by fashion:

> *They* could not share the bosom's feeling,
>
> Which, passion's every throb revealing,
>
> Dared force on the world's notice cold

Thoughts of unprofitable mould,

Who bask in Custom's fickle ray, --

Fit sunshine of such wintry day!

They could not in a twilight walk

Weave an impassioned web of talk

Till mysteries the spirit press

In wild yet tender awfulness,

Then feel within our narrow sphere

How little yet how great we are!

But they might shine in courtly glare,

Attract the rabble's cheapest stare,

And might command where're they move

A thing that bears the name of love;

They might be learned, witty, gay,

Foremost in fashion's gilt array,

On Fame's emblazoned pages shine,

Be princes' friends, but never mine! (92-111, Shelley's emphasis)

The poet's philanthropy, compassion, and sincerity are set in opposition to society's selfishness, insensitivity, and sycophancy. The young schoolboy longs to escape the opinions of the society and institution around him rather than direct and amplify them; it is an anti-social desire at odds with many of the other early Esdaile Notebook poems written in the engaged attitude. The ambivalence of tone in this poem is not split between outrage (at tyranny of a few over the many) and buoyancy (heralding social liberty like

Shelley's engaged poetry), but between indignation (at the injustice of his peers) and private celebration (of his personal perseverance). The narrator and the protagonist poet of "Alastor" share these ambivalent feelings with the poet of "The Retrospect," as do both Laon and Cythna at times in "The Revolt of Islam." Animosity once felt towards tyrants is internalized as a sense of isolation, alienation, and loneliness, making passages such as this one from "The Retrospect" seem on the one hand disillusioned and dispirited about the future of humanity, and on the other more personal, subjective, and introspective in subject matter.

But this is only half the story. The turn inwards, typically announced by a search for solitude in a natural setting, is prompted and sustained by an aversion to the perennial servitude of the thoughtless and "unforeseeing multitudes" (preface to "Alastor"), unaware of their history, beholden to the powers that be, and ignorant of how to escape them to make a better future. It is not the result of a belief that solitude in itself offers some sort of mystical communion with nature; Shelley's sonnet "To Wordsworth," (1814) a mock elegy for the radical Wordsworth (who seemed to Shelley to retreat from politics in the Lake District), rejects such a belief and its irresponsibility. Though the pivotal image in this sonnet is a natural setting, a storm at sea with Shelley figured as a "frail bark" (8) and Wordsworth as "a lone star" (7) whose light guides the bark to safety, the political allegory is thinly veiled. When he is moved to reflect, Shelley does not turn away from human society because of its cruelty and stupidity, but rather retreats from its malaise and into a scene of nature so as to preserve his independence: an impartial, independent, and rational anarchist, as Godwin might put it. Even in such poems as "To a Skylark" and "Alastor," which feature poets who have removed themselves from society

and become a “Spirit of Solitude,” there remains by implication the characterization of multitudes found in “The Retrospect.”

Retreats into scenes of nature are never politically innocent in Shelley’s poetry. When Shelley is reflective about the psychological condition of society, how tyranny has stupefied them or how conformity has deadened their compassion, he deems direct action against tyranny impossible. That is, once disengaged from the masses and their psychological conditioning under tyranny, Shelley wins a greater historical vision of the effects of tyranny on people. In addition, a retreat from society allows for a psychological rejuvenation. Frequently Shelley depicts these retreats as either an encounter with some “oracular mind” (“The Revolt of Islam” 655) that understands “the human world” and the “secrets of the immeasurable past,” which will rejuvenate political activism (“Queen Mab” 168-9), or the site of some monument in ruins that testifies to the ephemeral character of despotic power despite its claim to permanence (a scene epitomized in the 1817 sonnet “Ozymandias,” but which appears in longer passages in his early long poems, notably in “Alastor” 106-28), or present a thinly veiled, allegory that announces historical change in terms of natural forces (storms being the most common). For example, the celestial voyage through the galaxy at the beginning of “Queen Mab” is not simply a retreat from the world; this fantastic voyage “mocks all human grandeur”(58) so as to escape the torpor and sycophancy of the present. That is, it prepares the Spirit of Ianthe for the more comprehensive view of history provided in the subsequent cantos. In the beginning of “The Revolt of Islam,” a dejected and melancholy poet wanders over rocky cliffs before the coming of a great storm, which he spies off at sea – that is, the storm of counterrevolutionary fury that comes soon after the French Revolution:

When the last hope of trampled France had failed
  Like a brief dream of unremaining glory,
From visions of despair I rose, and scaled
  The peak of an aëreal promontory,
  Whose caverned base with the vexed surge was hoary;
And saw the golden dawn break forth, and waken
  Each cloud, and every wave: -- but transitory,
The calm: for sudden, the firm earth was shaken,
As if by the last wreck its frame were overtaken. (I, 127-35)

The poet describes this precipitous historical moment in terms of a moment of "calm," suddenly shaken by a great earthquake. A coming storm, which he sees gathering out at sea replaces the momentary light of the "golden dawn" as "long trains of tremulous mist" (139) bring a "Darkness more dread than night" (144), foreshadowing the fate of Laon and Cythna once in the hands of their oppressors in the coming cantos. What is important here is that the poet scales the promontory not to escape his despair so much as to gain a vantage on the coming events, to see beyond his "visions of despair," to make sense of the past with an eye to the future. Though reflective, Shelley still has his attention on history and a stake in it, as "the firm earth was shaken" beneath his feet.

Shelley's style changes when he ceases to write as a social activist and assumes a more reflective attitude toward history,. He abandons addressing tyrants in a direct manner, tones back his hyperbole, and uses fewer apostrophes and imperatives. He no longer speaks as the unabashed voice of the people, united by a common history and for common cause of freedom, but as an outcast or solitary (even speaking of the

"multitudes" in a pejorative manner). His allegories become more abstracted, as the titles of his longer works suggest, with fewer historical allusions and contemporary references, though their subject remains broadly historical. Similarly, he describes fantastic and impossible journeys, in which narrative sequence supercedes mimetic coherence. Examples are not wanting: the Spirit of Ianthe flies through the cosmos in "Queen Mab," the Poet climbs vertically into the Hindu Kush aboard a boat on an upward moving stream in "Alastor," and the poet floats with the maiden and the snake to the "Fane […] girt by green isles which lay/ On the blue sunny deep […], such as mortal hand / Has never built, nor ecstacy, nor dream/ Reared in the cities of enchanted land" (556-60). Such trips have little of 'reality' about them. Gone is the satirical irony of his more engaged poems that mocks and taunts tyranny; in its place is an exploration of what language and the imagination can figure.

This move away from clear historical referents marks a shift in purpose: poetry composed in the reflective attitude aims to awaken a general historical consciousness and philanthropic compassion, "To awaken public hope," by stimulating passive reflection on possibilities (no longer to inspire direct action or outright and outraged revolt); in his preface to "The Revolt of Islam" Shelley describes his aim: "the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission" (34). Not active resistance but passive contemplation is the moral way to combat widespread social enervation, stupidity, and cruelty, and poetry should inspire such contemplation. In place of popular songs and anthems to unite people against identified tyrants, Shelley writes

didactic poems that model compassion for human suffering in more detached, at times dejected, tone: poems which he hopes are “not barren of instruction to actual men” (preface to “Alastor”).

If they make fewer references to specific historical events, Shelley’s reflective poems and passages remain as historical in character as his engaged writings. The lessons in compassion he means to provide often take the form of historical accounts that identify the origin and chart the development of political corruption and tyranny, of religion and dogmatism, of wickedness and evil, of political, psychological and spiritual subjugation, or, more intimately, of the tragic sensibility of poets (in the broadest sense) in a morally dead society. Shelley adopts this genre of history, found in Rousseau, Holbach, Condorcet, Gibbon, and Volney, whose accounts of history are often based solely on speculative reason, what Donald Kelley refers to as “conjectural history” (36). Historical accounts of this kind shun research; instead they “inferred patterns and imposed schemes of periodization on the historical process” and, as frequently, “aspired to end the conventional series of ‘epochs’ in a transcendent age of moral, social, and political perfection” (36). Such histories can be found throughout Shelley, from his survey of world history in “Queen Mab,” which promises progress, to the much darker procession of historical figures in chronological order in “The Triumph of Life.” But such historical thinking informs shorter passages on a smaller scale; ‘epochs’ are replaced by more modest developmental stages, but ones which progress toward a utopian ideal or to utter ruin, depending upon how they fit into Shelley’s politics. His historical account of the emergence of “unnatural appetites” in “A Vindication of Natural Diet” (1813) (Prose 77) and his history of poetry in “The Defense of Poetry” are two such examples. On an even

smaller scale, but no less paradigmatic, is Shelley's account in "Queen Mab" of the "unnatural" origins of patriotism and political allegiance:

> Kings, priests, and statesmen, blast the human flower
> Even in its tender bud; their influence darts
> Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins
> Of desolate society. The child,
> Ere he can lisp his mother's sacred name,
> Swells with the unnatural pride of crime, and lifts
> His baby-sword even in a hero's mood.
> This infant-arm becomes the bloodiest scourge
> Of devastated earth; whilst specious names,
> Learnt in soft childhood's unsuspecting hour,
> Serve as the sophisms with which manhood dims
> Bright reason's ray, and sanctifies the sword
> Upraised to shed a brother's innocent blood.
> Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man
> Inherits vice and misery, when force
> And falshood hang even o'er the cradled babe,
> Stifling with rudest grasp all natural good. (104-20).

This developmental account seems hardly historical because Shelley is not interested in specifics (of time or place or person) other than as the occasional dramatic example. Rather, he attributes a cause and then lays out a developmental model that is universally applicable. In his account of the corrupted mindset of soldiers, there is no reference to

soldiers of a particular time, country, or cause. He shows little concern for the assessment of historical evidence, as more modern histories do, but aims for internal coherence to his model (and, of course, rhetorical appeal). Such an account he then claims is a universal truth of history – and, in this case, it is given that status by the narrator, the Fairy Queen herself, who provides the lesson.

Behind this mythical authority of the Fairy Queen, however, lies Hume's principle of historical uniformitarianism:

> … It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nation and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions: the same events follow from the same causes. Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit: these passions, mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises, which have ever been observed among mankind. (Hume 83)

Shelley's reflective poetry is dependent upon this philosophy. His account of the origins of patriotism, for example, lies beyond any specific history (he could find examples in any history, ancient or modern, foreign or domestic) but at the same time it is precisely history at issue: his account is to be used in order to make sense of history and to counter the ideological assertions of the "Kings, priests, and statesmen," in all times and places. Moreover, his account may be used to project the course of future history, as the Spirit suggests in her appreciation to the Fairy. For another example, Cythna of "The Revolt of

Islam" is representative of all subjugated women, her plight being universal. She is a French woman of the Revolution; she is a Middle Eastern woman of a distant time (in the allegorical tale); and, she is a future English woman, who will (read the poem and) fight for her independence from chauvinism.

If Volney's influence is explicit in the passage of "Alastor" describing the Poet beside the ruins of antiquity, it is perhaps more limited than the global influence exerted by Edward Gibbon's discussion of historical Christianity from The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. In his biographical commentary on Shelley, Kenneth Cameron notes that Shelley "took considerable delight in Gibbon's fifteenth chapter," the influence of which Cameron finds as early as the notes to "Queen Mab" (The Young Shelley, 404n.). Shelley condemns Gibbon years later as a "mere reasoner" (530) in "The Defense of Poesy" and he refuses to follow Byron's lead and pluck "acacia leaves […] in remembrance" at Gibbon's house in Lausanne (where Gibbon completed The Decline and Fall), to which Byron and he made pilgrimage in 1816 after visiting scenes around lake Geneva from Rousseau's novel Julie. Both of these slights against Gibbon, however, Shelley admits were simply motivated by a desire to elevate Rousseau (Prose 219-20); Shelley had a life long affection for Gibbon and reread him over the course of many years.[10]

Like Volney, Gibbon presents a genealogical account of civilization and human progress; in "Chapter XV" Gibbon presents a secular account (rather than a miraculous account) of the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire. It is similar to Volney's genealogy of religions in the later part of Ruins insofar as both attempt to see Christianity

[10] For Shelley's account of his visit with Byron to Lausanne and Gibbon's house, and of this touching scene, see Letter III of "Letters Written in Geneva" (1817) (Prose 219-20).

as a development in the history of world religions, in which one set of myths and doctrines succeeds another in a cycle of revolutions. However, in "Chapter XV," Gibbon goes into much greater detail about the particulars of Christian doctrine than Volney ever does; Gibbon's evaluation of the historical impact of Christian doctrine on the Roman Empire is critical for Shelley and is particularly critical for "Alastor," with its apostle of a new Romantic creed, the "Spirit of Solitude." Where Volney remains focused on the history of tyrannies (religion being merely a tool of tyranny), Gibbon grants that ideas, a "state of mind" (523), can redirect the course of human history; Gibbon's history is much more subtle than Volney's, allowing the development and propagation of ideas a significant role in history.

Shelley is inspired by Gibbon's thesis in Chapter XV: that the ascension of Christianity late in the history of the Roman Empire was largely brought about by the introduction of new ideas that reshaped how people understood the past, the present, and the future. "Evangelic history" (523) along with the Christian doctrines of repentance and immortality reshaped an entire empire. Of course Shelley believed that Christianity in his day was no longer tenable as a system of beliefs -- as his pamphlet, "The Necessity of Atheism" makes abundantly clear – but, nevertheless, his reflective poetry suggests he was intrigued by its historical success. Gibbon calls these new ideas, or doctrines, of the early Christians "a new system of truth and perfection" (501), a "state of mind" (523), and argues that they redefined thought and "obtained [a] remarkable […] victory over the established religions of the earth" (488). If "Alastor" is briefly interested in human history in terms of its ruined civilizations, it is obsessed with the possibility of a new, Romantic phenomenology, which, like its Christian predecessor, might be "victorious"

for its day, (but would be, of course, free of superstitions and corrupt dogma). This idea perhaps struck Shelley as he finished "Queen Mab": in his own notes to "Queen Mab," he announces his enthusiastic interest in exploring human perception of time, and the advantages such a study would bring:

> Time is the consciousness of the succession of ideas in our mind. Vivid sensation, of either pain or pleasure, makes the time seem long…. If, therefore, the human mind… should become conscious of an infinite number of ideas in a minute, that minute would be eternity. I do not hence infer that the actual space between the birth and death of a man will ever be prolonged; but that his sensibility is perfectible.[11]

The desire for such a hyperconsciousness, which is hardly appealing, is only reasonable if understood in the context of Shelley's judgment of the multitudes: they have grown oblivious to the passage of time. Hyperconsciousness is as appealing as stupidity is unappealing. More significant about this note, however, is Shelley's comment that time and the perception of time are intimately linked. Although he gives up the naïve notion of a possible immortality of the psyche, Shelley does explore in "Alastor" the perception of time; the first sentence of the preface makes explicit that the poem should "be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind" (72). In other words, "Alastor" is a study not of actual "situations," but rather of the Poet's perception of those "situations," which it offers to readers as a new way of thinking. Although Gibbon outlines the early Christian "mindset," which Shelley may have found in other sources, nevertheless unique to Gibbon is that he presents it within an historical

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[11] Reiman cites the note in his commentary on "Queen Mab," 62.

framework that accounts for it as revolutionary in its day. So does Shelley when he composes the preface to "Alastor," which presents the life and sensibilities of a Romantic poet-martyr.

The first doctrine Gibbon identifies is that of zealous but abstract monotheism: early Christians showed an "inflexible perseverance" in rejecting with contempt the more popular gods of the day to pursue a godhead knowable only through allegory (491). Early Christians "were [all] equally animated" by the condemnation of idols because of their commitment to this abstracted god (503); conversely, this "perseverance," inherited from Jewish tradition, appeared "odious [and] ridiculous" (491) to Roman contemporaries, who sought to contain it. In a surprisingly Shelleyan image, he speaks of how "the current of zeal and devotion, as it was contracted into a narrow channel, ran with the strength, and sometimes with the fury, of a torrent" (491). Gibbon's argument is that this intensification of zeal strengthened the convictions of early Christians and attracted converts. More important for "Alastor," however, is that Gibbon's metaphor speaks of persistence, or zeal, as water in the course of a river: zeal is a bound voyage. In other words, Gibbon suggests that the early Christians, "animated by a contempt for their present existence," perceived the present not as a static moment but as a movement towards a revolutionary end (the second coming of Christ), an immanent future of which they "lived in […] awful expectation" (513). The defining trait of the Poet of "Alastor" (who was disdainful of his present existence), his zealous commitment to his own ideals, is allegorized in his travels that become more and more restricted and intense, like the river of Christian zeal: he quits home and society, crosses desert and ancient lands, passes by the ruins of antiquity to the sea's edge, where he discovers "a little shallop floating

near the shore" (299). This he spontaneously takes to cross the seas, along "a dark obliterating course" (327) through tempests to the "icy summits" of the Caucasus, where he is then carried into a "cavern" of "whirlpools" and "waves" (355). On and on the Poet, this apostle of the Romantic Spirit, this maddened ascetic, this martyr to genius, who never questions the surging course of his travels, persists with what could only be described as an "inflexible perseverance,"—or, a "ridiculous" (as the Romans accordingly deemed Jewish doctrines, 491) conviction:

> The boat fled on, --the boiling torrent drove,--
> The crags closed round with black and jagged arms,
> The shattered mountain overhung the sea,
> And faster still, beyond all human speed,
> Suspended on the sweep of the smooth wave,
> The little boat was driven. A cavern there
> Yawned, and amid its slant and winding depths
> Ingulphed the rushing sea. The boat fled on
> With unrelaxing speed. --"Vision and Love!"
> The Poet cried aloud, "I have beheld
> The path of thy departure. Sleep and death
>   Shall not divide us long!" (358-69)

This passage typifies Shelley's sense of the present: nothing is static, every frantic moment anticipates its precipitation. Poets are those who sense in every precarious moment a greater movement, and who intuit a power on a larger scale, beyond the evidence they can gather from their senses. In these lines, the Poet identifies this *telos* as

"Vision and Love!" The Poet pays no heed to the physical world, passing ancient monuments with near indifference, and remains devoted to the abstracted end of his travels. Here again Shelley's description is congruent with Gibbon's outline of early Christian doctrine: the truth of this grand movement, of this greater power, can only be understood in terms of an allegory. The true perception of any present situation is not of the physical surroundings, dismissed as a mere "phantasmal scene" (697), but rather of the greater, tumultuous movement of history, which propels the Poet ever onwards. Because he maintains that Christianity was a 'revolution,' Gibbon is compelled to differentiate early Christians from Jewish traditions. Accordingly, Christians embraced an allegorical reading of Mosaic law, which was more compassionate to humanity and rejected the "repugnant" readings of "literal sense" (501).

The early Christians, according to Gibbon, introduced a new way of understanding not only the present, but also of envisioning the future. Shelley attempts to do the same for his contemporaries. Gibbon identifies the second doctrine so critical to the ascendancy of early Christianity as "the doctrine of a future life," or more specifically the Christian interpretation of "the immortality of the soul" (491). Although a notion of immortality existed in ancient Egyptian worship and Classical metaphysics, Gibbon singles out the Christian innovation that made immortality dependent upon faith: "When the promise of eternal happiness was proposed to mankind on condition of adopting the faith, and of observing the precepts, of the Gospel, it is no wonder that so advantageous an offer should have been accepted by great numbers of every religion, of every rank, and of every province in the Roman empire" (513). In the new Christian "system of truth and perfection," the future, Gibbon explains, is understood strictly in terms of the ultimate

judgment of their faith. Contemplation of this future judgment (which Christians will come to or which will come to them in a millennial revolution) completely overshadows any worldly concerns or anxieties; the future prompts declarations of faith and acts that "give weight and efficacy to that important truth" (489) that God will judge the faithful. In other poems Shelley provides grand visions of the future, worldly and otherworldly, some apocalyptic, some utopian, some offering both depending on the course chosen by present society. But in "Alastor," he does not. Rather, he describes the Poet's way of thinking about the future. The Poet's is a new faith; that is, there is no future other than the possibility for immortality, the desire for which is manifest in his fervid travels. His future, fate and faith are indistinguishable in his longing for the end of his travels and life:

"O stream!
Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
Whither do thy mysterious waters end?
Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulphs,
Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
Have each their type in me: and the wide sky,
And measureless ocean may declare as soon
What oozy cavern or what wandering cloud
Contains thy waters, as the universe
Tell where these living thoughts reside, when stretched
Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs shall waste

I' the passing wind!" (502-14)

The poet is made in the image of the waters, which flow from a "searchless fountain," along an "invisible course" to a "mysterious […] end," for which the Poet longs with suicidal intensity. The description of the environment in "Alastor" is not mimetic, but allegorical, and that allegory is primarily defined by an abstract fatality. The Poet embraces this fatality to the point of being a martyr to it. Gibbon describes early Christians' " contempt for their present existence" (513) in what was surely "an expiring world" (517); the Poet too is blind to, or at least takes no interest in, the happenings around him "I' the passing wind!" He sees his future not in earthly terms.

Shelley's particular formulation in "Alastor" of the doctrine of the immortality of artists draws on Gibbon: the more the Poet zealously sacrifices to his ideals, the more his story becomes that of a martyr. Indeed, the Poet of "Alastor" is a martyr, though not of the Christian faith. This proposition, that the Poet's immortality is dependent on what we might call 'faith,' is all the more remarkable when we realize that the Poet sings on occasion but never produces poetry that is subsequently disseminated. In following early Christian thought closely, Shelley is forced into making the awkward claim that it is the spirit of the Poet that has claims to immortality, not his poetry. However, it is important to remember that it is not the immortality of the poet that is important, but the attitude assumed by the Poet in regards to his own future. The Poet models a way of thinking that Shelley hopes is new and revolutionary, as Gibbon described the thought of early Christians within the context of the Roman Empire. Where early Christians were revolutionary in regards to polytheistic Rome, Shelley's Poet seems to resist any political affiliation, particularly to those empires through which he passes.

The early Christians, Gibbon continues, introduced not only a new way of understanding the present and the future, but also a new history, "evangelic history." Their history concerned only the early era of "the primitive church" (491), when it had "an uninterrupted succession of miraculous powers" (519) because of its relationship with the supernatural. Gibbon argues that this history became the only past relevant to the Christian mind, which imagined this history stretched to their present lives.

> Christians perpetually trod on mystic ground, and their minds were exercised by the habits of believing the most extraordinary events. They felt, or they fancied, that on every side they were incessantly assaulted by dæmons, comforted by visions, instructed by prophecy, and surprisingly delivered from danger, sickness, and from death itself, by the supplications of the church. (523)

Thus "exercised," their minds were ready for:

> […] the divine inspiration, whether it was conveyed in the form of a waking or of a sleeping vision […] When their devout minds were sufficiently prepared by a course of prayer, of fasting, and of vigils, to receive the extraordinary impulse, they were transported out of their senses, and delivered in ecstasy what was inspired, being mere organs of the Holy Spirit, just as a pipe or flute is of him who blows into it. (520)

In other words, the conception of history propagated by early Christians was intended to attune their minds to the supernatural, to intensify their credulity in such a way as to make ready for divine inspiration; the purpose of the "evangelic history" was to inspire

piety, and to ready their minds for "visions [of] the future history" or how to administer their church (520).

Shelley seems to dramatize many aspects of Gibbon's argument. The Poet of "Alastor" certainly encounters "an uninterrupted succession of miraculous" turns during his travels, and he strives, through appeals to the elements and through starvation, to prepare his mind for possible inspiration. Our credulity is not strained when the Poet finally collapses and dies; it is strained throughout his perilous adventures when at each turn he, "obedient to the light / That shone within his soul" (492-3), miraculously discovers a path onwards. Even more fantastically, along the way he is visited both in sleep and awake by a variety of dæmons and visions: a feminine "vision on his sleep," who speaks to him of "knowledge, and truth and virtue" (149-191), a "swan" that seems to become a "fiend" who tempts him to suicide (274-98), and the retreating "Spirit" of a rivulet who "beckon[s] him" through the wilds to where it seductively "fell into that immeasurable void, / Scattering its waters to the passing winds" (479-570). Nevertheless, there is no doubting that his prayers, in which he addresses himself to the forces that motivate him, the "Beautiful bird" (280-90), "Vision and Love!" (366-9) and "O stream!" (502-41) are an invocation. The Poet's inattention to his own physical needs as he wastes away and become little more than a "spectral form" (259) is much like Gibbon's explanation of how prayers, fasting, and vigils prepared Christians for visions. Moreover, the Poet's ever-burning desire to reach his end, to abandon himself to what ever lies beyond, make clear his intentions to be "the pipe or flute" (Gibbon 520) for the greater forces to play upon, to be carried by the forces that propel everything onward, to be what the narrator calls a "lyre":

… as a long-forgotten lyre
Suspended in the solitary dome
Of some mysterious and deserted fane,
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
May modulate with murmurs of the air,
And motions of the forest and the sea,
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man. (42-9)

Although the metaphor of the musical instrument awaiting the breath (for the disciple awaiting inspiration) is a commonplace of Romanticism, it is noteworthy nevertheless that it appears in "Alastor" in the same religious diction as in Gibbon (quoted above). Moreover, it is the narrator who, having the requisite perspective to be calm and reasoned, articulates the ultimate aim of the utterly desperate and maddened Poet in these lines: inspiration and release from this world.

Looking back on the Poet's life, the narrator of "Alastor" treats the Poet with what can only be considered the most reverential awe: "Art and eloquence, / And all the shews o' the world are frail and vain / To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade" (710-2). The Poet's life inspires the narrator, who in imitation of him prostrates himself before nature and death and calls upon the "Great Parent" for inspiration. The only history relevant to the narrator is the miraculous journey of the Poet over whose grave he gives the final eulogy, with the piety of a sermon.

Gibbon's discussion of early Christian thought is embedded within the context of the decline of the Roman Empire. He is interested in determining what brought about the

ascendancy of Christainty and, ultimately, he argues that there was a revolution in thought. By working with Gibbon's historical analysis of the emergence of Christianity, Shelley develops in "Alastor" a Romantic phenomenology, attempting to awaken the "unforeseeing multitudes" from their torpor. [12] In so doing, the Poet of "Alastor" becomes prophet-like and his journey carries the *ethos* and *pathos* of a religious pilgrimage.

To return to Shelley's attitudes in regards to history: Shelley is more skeptical about the future of humanity when he is reflective than when he expresses univocal optimism in his engaged poetry. Often he looses confidence in his millennialism and expresses ambivalence about the fate of humanity: can we possibly know the direction of human morality? Will it improve or degenerate? When he stands aloof from society, Shelley's position is much more ambivalent, and flirts with misanthropic disregard for society, a blanket dejection and withdrawal of care. Indeed, there are moments of dejection, crisis and despair in his poetry, beyond the parameters of reflection. They are moments of Shelley's third attitude, that of someone who has withdrawn his or her compassion for the fate of humanity.

The best examples among his early poems of Shelley's shift from a reflective to a withdrawn attitude, at least in terms of their thematic development, are "The solitary" and "The wandering Jew's soliloquy," both composed in 1810 and included in the Esdaile Notebook. In "The solitary" an unidentified narrator addresses an unidentified misanthrope who lives amid society, but who has utterly withdrawn his sympathy for it.

> Darest thou amid this varied multitude

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[12] Some of Gibbon's other points about early Christian doctrine make their way into "Alastor," such as the perpetual virginity and chastity of the Poet and his apparent ambivalence to nationalism, but none of these points is particularly relevant to Shelley's greater project in the poem. It is interesting that Shelley does condemn virginity in "A Refutation of Deism" and, in doing so, cites Gibbon's discussion of early Christianity (Prose 105).

> To live alone, an isolated thing,
>
> To see the busy beings round thee spring
>
> And care for none? – in thy calm solitude,
>
> A flower that scarce breathes in the desart rude
>
> To Zephyrs' passing wing? (1-6)

This solitary life is so entirely introverted that it remains insensitive to inspiration: he "scarce breathes" the divine winds about him. Instead, "that poor wretch who cannot, cannot love" (10) is quietly consumed by an inner longing for death: "He acts like others; drains the genial bowl; / Yet, yet he longs, altho he fears, to die. / He pants to reach what yet he seems to fly, / Dull Life's extremest goal" (15-8). The irony of the poem lies in the possibility that the narrator himself is the addressee, that there is no other to whom he speaks, but rather that it is the narrator who gives voice to his own misery, alienation, and death drive in the guise of a chastisement of these emotions in another. In other words, without identifying the addressee, without marking dialogue with quotation marks, the poem reads as an internal monologue, in which the reflective narrator comes to accept his own misanthropic view of life's dullness. In this light, the narrator's chastisements are nothing more than weak self-denials, which, in their rhetorical contradiction (chastisement becomes fantasy), dissolve into the "Dull Life" of a "poor wretch," withdrawn and dejected, at the poem's end. More striking still, the irony transforms the narrator's implied chastisement into a dark fantasy of escape -- from society, from human sympathy and love, and from any care for life (including his own). The language of this poem, to follow Keach's terms, is "self-reflexive" and "becomes increasingly solipsistic, and finally self-annihilating" (87). Cameron notes in his commentary on the Esdaile

Notebook poems that "The solitary" is a forerunner to "Alastor" in its theme ("the 'isolated' poet who 'cannot love' and contemplates suicide" (200)). I would add, however, that the social alienation of the poet is more explicitly addressed in this poem than in "Alastor," in which the Poet has from the start quitted society. That is, "The solitary" demonstrates in a more immediate manner the progress from social alienation to reflection, from reflection to dejection, and from dejection to a longing for death. Far from rejuvenating an engagement with society and social interests, Shelley's reflective attitude, figured in the narrator's voice in the first stanza, here shifts to an attitude of listless withdrawal: Shelley in his most dejected state.

Unlike "The solitary" that does not address history *per se* (because the misanthrope cares so little for society in the present, let alone its past or future), "The wandering Jew's soliloquy" is much more concerned with the subject of history. Shelley reworks several times in his formative years the myth of Wandering Jew, the man condemned by God to physical immortality in this world for refusing Jesus charity before his crucifixion.[13] In this soliloquy, Shelley develops a monologue of Satanic rhetoric, in which the man decries God's tyranny, makes evident his own worldly alienation, and pleads for death, admittance to "Annihilation's pyre" (10).

> Is it the Eternal Triune, is it He
>
> Who dares arrest the wheels of destiny
>
> And plunge me in this lowest Hell of Hells?
>
> Will not the lightning's blast destroy my frame?
>
> Will not steel drink the blood-life where it swells? (1-5)

[13] For a fuller discussion of Shelley's interest in this myth, see Cameron, The Young Shelley, 34-5, 306-13.

In many respects, this rhetoric is similar to that of Shelley's engaged attitude: it is hyperbolic, sarcastic and vitriolic, it addresses tyrants, features aggressive rhetorical questions, and makes use of parallel structure and simple rhyme schemes. And, it expresses profound indignation. The final line, addressing God, reads "Drink deeply – drain the cup of hate – remit; then I may die" (29). However, what sets the poem apart from the poetry of Shelley's political activism is the manner in which it engages history in the body of the poem. Shelley does indeed rewrite Biblical history as a survey of oppression and injustice to draw attention to the arbitrariness of power. Yet, far from inspiring a call to others for social revolution, this revisionist history is uninspiring and betrays the narrator's despondency.

> Where is the noonday pestilence that slew
> The myriad sons of Israel's favoured nation?
> Where the destroying minister that flew
> Pouring the fiery tide of desolation
> Upon the leagued Assyrian's attempt?
> Where the dark Earthquake demon who ingorged
> At thy dread word Korah's unconscious crew?
> Or the Angel's two-edged sword of fire that urged
> Our primal parents from their bower of bliss
> (Reared by thine hand) for errors not their own,
> By thine omniscient mind foredoomed, foreknown? (16-26)

This brief list of God's crimes against humanity, "designed to show the inhumanity and destructiveness of the Biblical God" (Reiman, "Commentary," Esdaile Notebook, 286), a

chronology which Shelley could undoubtedly extrapolate, is not accompanied by any ambition to redirect the course of history, to set right a history of injustice, or to bring about a social revolution against the "Tyrant of Earth" (11). Rather, the wandering Jew, like the misanthrope of "The solitary," longs only for death: the revisionist history is merely a rhetorical strategy to win self-annihilation. The ultimate example of a pariah, he has utterly withdrawn from human history to wallow away his life (dramatically extended in his case), without regard for greater historical, political, social, or even theological concerns.

The wandering Jew's dismissal of history and turn to the desire for his own death is a dramatic representation of the philosophical underpinnings of Shelley's withdrawn attitude to history. A product of his study of skepticism, empiricism and materialism, Shelley ever returns to the concept of Necessity in his poetry. Although he read diverse versions of Necessity (including Lucretius, Hume, several of the French Materialists, Drummond), Shelley's most immediate source was William Godwin, his father-in-law, whose Political Justice was grounded in the notion. Necessity aims to be an objective concept of time, calling into doubt all human histories (as possibly false histories), asserting the imperative to build from immediate sensory impressions a chain of cause and effects (as the groundwork of understanding), and orienting reason to causality rather than to evaluating the particulars of human perspective. Unlike concepts of history which aims to present the past as comprehensible, Necessity, as it is conceived, reminds us of the incomprehensible and crushing force of time, much greater than our understanding, our selves, and even human history. This aspect of Godwin's philosophy is key to Shelley's withdrawn attitude: Necessity trumps history. In other words, the fall into a

withdrawn attitude towards history is typically expressed as a belittlement of human history, if not utter dismissal of its significance, by an appeal to a greater and unknowable, fatal impetus.

> Methought I sate beside a public way
>
> Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great stream
>
> Of people there was hurrying to and fro,
>
> Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,
>
> All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
>
> Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
>
> He made one of the multitude, and so
>
> Was borne amid the crowd, as through the sky
>
> One of the million leaves of summer's bier;
>
> Old age and youth, manhood and infancy,
>
> Mixed in one mighty torrent did appear [...] ("Triumph of Life" 43-54)

This passage is from Shelley's last poem, but it contains several key figures which are thematic in his poetry even from the early days of the Esdaile Notebook: the "multitude" and their ignorance regarding their own fate, the poet who stands "beside" and witnesses this vision of human life, and the unseen and unknown power that drives them on toward death (figured here as commonly elsewhere as an autumnal wind). Esdaile Notebook is filled with similar figures for Necessity: Time the Avenger, Time the Equilizer, Time the Conqueror. Later, his famous sonnets "Mutability" (1816) and "Ozymandias" (1817)

address time in the same vein: human life and its history are overcome by a more sublime sense of the past, present and future in which “Nought may endure but Mutability” (“Mutability” 16). In “Ozymandias,” like in “The wandering Jew’s soliloquy,” the past plights of humanity are of no present interest to the narrator, who seems listless at the poem’s conclusion: “Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away” (12-4). There is no history to be recuperated, no future ambitions for society, no cause to be addressed.

Shelley’s treatment of Necessity is much more dramatic than Godwin’s dry summary. Godwin’s presents the philosophy in two short, expository essays on Necessity, “Of Freewill and Necessity” and “Inferences from the Doctrine of Necessity,” appended to Political Justice (1793). (Although Shelley read widely on the subject of Necessity, Godwin’s essays are fine summaries of the points relevant to Shelley, to say nothing of Shelley’s high estimation of Godwin in his youth.) Godwin explains that the principle of causation governs the universe, that any given substance exists and acts only in a causal relation to other substances (161). He argues that all sound knowledge is derived from an observation of this principle, that any given phenomenon must be understood in terms of causal relations. He even carries this notion into the mind: any thought exists and acts only in a causal relation to other thoughts (165). There is no single thought that is beyond the succession of thoughts, which produce it. Equating causality with reason, he argues that it is the same principle that governs both the universe and the mind. This leads him to the conclusion: “Where all is constant and invariable, and the events that arise uniformly flow from the circumstances in which they originate, there can be no liberty” (161). This is, of course, empirical determinism. Sound knowledge is a

question of observing causal patterns in nature, which constitute the great chain of history: "all that strictly speaking we know of the material universe is this succession of events," or Necessity (162).

There is more to the doctrine of Necessity than its basic empirical philosophy, and Godwin has more to say. He introduces skepticism to the discussion, insisting that the principle itself can never be fully understood (162-3):

> No experiments we are able to make, no reasonings we are able to deduce, can ever instruct us in the principle of causation, or show us for what reason it is that one event has, in every instance in which it has been known to occur, been the precursor of another event of a certain given description. Yet we reasonably believe that these events are bound together by a perfect necessity, and exclude from our ideas of matter and motion the supposition of chance or an uncaused event. (164)

As a universal principle, Necessity remains hidden and obscure. We can only intuit it from particular experiences, and the mind, as with everything else, remains subject to it: "Mind is a real cause, an indispensable link in the great chain of the universe, but not, as has sometimes been supposed, a cause of that paramount description as to supersede all necessities and be itself subject to no laws and methods of operation" (179). In other words, thought takes place only within the universe, is never independent of it and can never encompass it. Moreover, Godwin argues "we cannot take a single step upon this subject which does not partake of the species of operation we denominate abstraction" (164). That is to say, we do not know what is a "cause" and what an "effect" in history, but merely ascribe them by abstraction; our knowledge is "based merely upon an

arbitrary association of limited, sensory experiences of natural successions" (164-5). In sum, if sound knowledge must be deduced empirically from the physical world, the accuracy of such knowledge remains suspect. Godwin's skepticism, needless to say, inspires little faith in human understanding.

Shelley's interest in this philosophy is well documented.[14] He returns to it time and again in his prose, and much of his poetry may be read as an allegorical exploration of the power of Necessity. When he invokes in "Queen Mab" the "Spirit of Nature! All-sufficing Power, / Necessity! Thous mother of the world! the power of Necessity" he appends a lengthy summary on Necessity, which repeats Godwin's account (VI,197-8). In the passage, however, Shelley hits upon what are his main issues.

> Unlike the God of human error, thou
> Requirest no prayers or praises; the caprice
> Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee
> Than do the changeful passions of his breast
> To thy unvarying harmony: the slave,
> Whose horrible lusts spread misery o'er the world,
> And the god man, who lifts, with virtuous pride,
> His being, in the sight of happiness,
> That springs from his own works; the poison-tree,
> Beneath whose shade all life is withered up,
> And the fair oak, whose leafy dome affords
> A temple where the vows of happy love

[14] Stuart M. Sperry provides a detailed survey of Shelley's interest in and handling of the concept Necessity and reads the character of Demogorgon in "Prometheus Unbound" as a personification of Necessity.

Are registered, are equal in thy sight:

No love, no hate thou cherishest; revenge

And favoritism, and worst desire of fame

Thou knowst not: all that the wide world contains

Are but thy passive instruments, and thou

Regardst them all with an impartial eye,

Whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel,

  Because thou hast not human sense,

  Because thou art not human mind. (VI, 199-219)

This alien and inhuman power, of which humans are but "passive instruments," renders moral distinctions irrelevant, lays waste human achievements, and mocks human understanding. When listless in this manner, Shelley looses a sense of his own subjectivity, feels carried on by this power, and longs for destruction at its hands. Perhaps the most striking example of this desire for self-annihilation at the hands of a greater, unseen power that animates the natural world is "Ode to the West Wind."[15]

"Alastor" too has passages of Shelley's withdrawn attitude, and much of its tone pervades the story of the Poet. Moreover, in "Alastor," Shelley explores the possibility of the doctrine of Necessity as an antithesis to reflection. Necessity posits a universal agency, or causality, that determines the course of life but that lies beyond any epistemological determination; as a philosophy of mind, it asserts that the mind is determined by something greater than and exterior to it, which it addresses as the 'real.'

[15] As Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat point out in their preface to the poem, "Ode to the West Wind" is in large part a reworking of a passage from "The Revolt of Islam" (XI, 3649-792). Shelley's reworking, I would argue, involves transposing a reflective, even hopeful, invocation of Necessity, envisioned on a grand, even millennial scale, to a much darker and despairing invocation in the ode, which emphasizes the utter annihilation of the poet, not his possible legacy or the future amelioration of humanity.

Of course, Shelley's notion of the 'real,' of the nature of that Power over the course of human life, varies throughout his poems: sometimes it is Necessity, others it is Love or Nature or nothing at all. But what remains the same is that in all cases, awareness, concern, and compassion for human history is dismissed and a desire for self-destruction by submission to this Power is embraced (although in his later poetry, this attitude becomes one through which political resistance can be heralded, as will be discussed in the fourth chapter).

As a child the Poet is a model scientist. Without being schooled in prejudice and error, the Poet learns all from Nature, which he perceives unmediated and with all of the naïveté of a purely empirical and passive observer: "By solemn vision, and bright silver dream, / His infancy was nurtured. Every sight / And sound from the vast earth and ambient air, / Sent to his heart its choicest impulses" (67-70). For a spell the earth and the air are his source of knowledge; the Poet gathers sensations and "impulses," suffers them, and discovers knowledge innocently: "The fountains of divine philosophy / Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great, / Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past / In truth or fable consecrates, he felt / and knew" (71-5). The Poet even seems to have an innocent understanding of history, as it is recorded in nature. As he grows, so does his sentimental affection for Nature, his first female muse, whom "like her shadow" he continues to pursue in "love and wonder" (81-2; 98). This affection, however, soon demonstrates separation from "the fountains of divine philosophy" rather than his connection to nature. He longs to rediscover such springs. This loss happens without comment, but is evident when the Poet begins to wander and observe the ruins of human history (107). (Perhaps it is Volney's genealogical history that pulls the Poet's attention away from Nature.)

As a man the Poet encounters a second female muse, a vision of a “veiled maid,” who rekindles his desire for the intimacy with nature he enjoyed in his youth by sharing with him poetry of “Knowledge and truth and virtue” (158). In the opening stanzas of “Alastor,” the narrator addresses the “Mother of this unfathomable world” (18) and again as the “Great Parent” (45), female personifications of Nature like those of the Poet, but less erotic and more maternal. The narrator’s personifications recall the personifications of Necessity, “Spirit of Nature” and “mother of the world,” in “Queen Mab” (VI, 197 & 198). But to the grown Poet, Necessity – or Nature, or Love -- appears as an alluring “veiled maid,” who “flushed his cheek” (151). She appears in a “vision,” as Nature did to the infant Poet, and her message is described in a word that links it to Nature’s education of the child: “solemn” (152). However, this time the encounter is allegorical, erotic and elusive; Shelley’s skepticism about whether knowledge of this sort can be known in any positive sense. Indeed, nothing is positive about her appearance “beneath the sinuous veil / of woven wind” (176-7), about her “ineffable tale” that flows like blood through the Poet (167-8), or about her “Strange symphony,” which breaks off as erratically as it begins, “subdued by its own pathos” (165-7). Everything that the Poet’s senses might apprehend slips away in “streams and breezes” (155) in an ever-shifting process, dramatized in Shelley’s repetition of gerunds : “shifting” (157), “permeating” (163), “sweeping” (166), “branching” (167), “beating” (169), “bursting” (174), “floating” (178), “bending” (179), “quivering” (180), and finally “dissolving” (187). She is the spirit of transience, of mutability, of succession without identity. She is inscrutable, as is the power she personifies, but she is also undeniable: the Poet’s encounter changes him, as if he has lost his virginity. To make it manifest, to make it carry the weight of the ‘real,’ the

Poet's visionary experience is represented as a sexual experience. She is not simply a projection of his imagination, which remains entirely passive, because her departure leaves him spent and inane: "blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night / Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep, / Like a dark flood suspended in its course, / Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain" (188-91). And when he recovers, he no longer identifies this ever-retreating figure, who tore herself from him so cruelly, with sexual renewal; his pursuit is now for "lone Death" (305).

After such an encounter, the poet has not lingering interest in the ruins of human history, but plunges onward in a desperate and fatal manner. He encounters the "rivulet" on its "invisible course" (506) to its own death, crying (a line used again in reference to the alien and unconquerable course of time in "Mutability") "'I have beheld / the path of thy departure. Sleep and death / Shall not divide us long" (367-9)! The narrator explains that "led / by love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death, / he [the Poet] sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank, / Her cradle, and his sepulchre" (427-30). Necessity, unknowable in principle, is yet as undeniable as our desires and our own mortality, and the Poet finds intimations of its dominion everywhere, particularly in the inevitability of his own death.

The narrator closes the poem by completing the eulogy, with which he opens the poem. He describes the "unremembered" (671) death of the Poet as an event without consequence or memorial (51). His own commemorative song is "frail and vain" (711), compared to the power of time that wastes all human endeavors. The narrator deifies this power both in the beginning and at the end of the poem; he strives to be its instrument in the opening stanzas, as he claims the Poet was in his life at the end of the poem. That is,

the narrator strives to be a "lyre / suspended in the solitary dome," awaiting the "breath [of the] Great Parent, [so] that my strain / May modulate with murmurs of the air, / And motions of the forests and the sea, / And voice of living beings, and woven hymns / Of night and day, and the deep heart of man" (42-9). Then, in closing, he describes the Poet in death as "A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings / The breath of heaven did wander" (667-8) and then song-like, as a "frail exhalation" (687). As a theory of inspiration, the narrator seems to put aside all reflection and open himself to the intimations of Necessity and this, he claims, was the great achievement of the Poet in his death:

> … he lay,
> Surrendering to their final impulses
> The hovering powers of life. Hope and despair,
> The torturers, slept; no mortal pain or fear
> Marred his repose, the influxes of sense,
> And his own being unalloyed by pain,
> Yet feebler and more feeble, calmly fed
> The stream of thought, till he lay breathing there
> At peace, and faintly smiling […]. (637-45)

Any perception of the past, present, or future are no longer of any significance. If Shelley's engaged attitude is characterized as a direct and active resistance to tyranny, and his reflective attitude is characterized by a more passive and retreating resistance, his third attitude is welcoming of death. The Poet's mind abandons its own subjectivity and dissolves into the great chain of history, peacefully if uncomprehendingly. It is difficult,

however, to concur totally with the narrator that such an experience is a positive achievement.

If the Poet searches for some higher principle, for Necessity, for some reconciliation with his own thoughts as he hurries on and on, his failure is absolute. Without any clear perception of world through which he is passing, the Poet hurries frantically to an end, which he anticipates but does not comprehend. He remains blind to others, who ambivalently neglect and attend on him. He remains powerless to identify the force that compels him. He remains unable to discover any origin that might give him some account of life. Perhaps it would be fair to say that the Poet's life is one of unprecedented alienation.

In "Alastor" Shelley's principal attitudes toward history are interwoven with subtlety. Although they are in essence contradictory in their visions of human history, there does emerge a coherent scheme to his thinking if we look a at what the object of historical attention is. In the first case, when Shelley is engaged, the object of historical attention is human tyranny, which must be actively opposed. In the second case, it is the inert masses, who cannot be stirred and in relation to whom the poet can only assume a reflective distance, one which is no longer active but also which does not submit to the apathy of the masses. In the third case, it is Necessity, an overwhelming power to which the poet has no choice but to passively submit (in contrast with the tyrant's power which must be resisted, or at least opposed). The poem touches upon a long history of tyranny that has laid waste to humanity, but very lightly. The narrator of the poem tells the tale of an alienated poet, a solitary wanderer, who shunned human society (the "unforeseeing multitudes" long oppressed), but whose songs had inspired -- and whose life story might

awaken – humanity, stirring it from its political torpor and moral insensitivity. And finally, the poem is one of submission to Necessity. "Alastor" strives to be a universal tale, universally relevant and useful to humanity. It offers a philosophical meditation on temporal experience and a quasi-religious Romantic gospel of a poet to be emulated. At the same time, it showcases how history itself is inevitably overcome by the driving but ever-changing force of time. If nothing else, this remarkable diversity of ideas demonstrates Shelley's passion for the writings of eighteenth-century historians.

Moreover, this diversity of ideas and attitudes demonstrates the range of Shelley's thinking about referential language, about what can and should be conveyed by his poetry, and about the relationships between language, history, and time. "Alastor" has ideological commitments, prompts both reflective conjectures and skepticism, and conveys a sense of crisis, alienation, and dissolution. The challenge it poses for us is to discover as readers this diversity of attitudes towards history and to interpolate it into our own reading practices.

Chapter 3: Corn and Imperial History: Defoe, Rousseau, and Godwin

Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture and later Vice President under Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Second World War, wrote in 1956,

> The Indian [Native American] method of growing corn was more fixed and stable, for the Indian did not have to depend on gasoline, on machinery, companies, or railroads; on trucks, on fertilizer factories, or seed companies. The Indian did everything himself, therefore the price he paid was one hundred to two hundred times as much labor as is spent today. The Indian was part of a small tribe. The Corn-Belt farmer is part of a vast civilization to which he contributes mightily, and from which he receives, month by month, that which is absolutely essential to his labors. He and the civilization of which he is a part go up and down together.
>
> The rapid transition of American civilization westward from Ohio to Nebraska, beginning in 1800, was the greatest pioneer achievement the world has ever seen. The motive power of this irresistible surge of land-hungry folk westward was corn. (Corn and Its Early Fathers 12)

The American Corn-Belt farmer is not an independent individual, Wallace proclaimed with enthusiasm, but a part of the great machine of civilization. It should be noted that in 1926 Wallace founded the Hi-Bred Corn Company, now Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., owned by DuPont, which, according to their website, has become "the world's leading developer and supplier of advanced plant genetics to farmers worldwide" ("About Pioneer"). Farmers, Wallace celebrated, have become entirely dependent, and national companies (now international corporations) have become so integral to our subsistence that our fate

is entirely bound to them. A half century later, the scene is not much different; American dependence on corn promises to become only more profound. On July 27, the House of Representatives passed the 2007 Farm Bill, granting $1.6 billion to the development of biofuel to power the nation: a testament to the ever-renewing significance of corn in the American diet and health, land management and ecology, global economy and politics, and national psyche (United States. USDA.). That the "motive power" of corn, to use Wallace's words, fuels the economic and political machinery of state, which in turn subjugates a population and spreads ever-outwards, has long been recognized: long before American expansion into the west, the famous castaway, Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, built his island empire on corn, subjugating the cannibal Friday, and those who followed him, to labor in his corn fields. Crusoe planted barley rather than the maize of which Wallace speaks, but I am drawing here, as the English do, on the more general but perhaps less familiar definition of 'corn' as referring to the principal cereal of a culture, be it wheat, oats, barley or maize.

If Wallace celebrated corn and American dependence upon it, there are, and have been, numerous critics around the world who have decried its awesome "motive power." Not all have celebrated this power. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his "Second Discourse: Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men" (1754) blames corn for ruining humanity, and William Godwin explores in <u>St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century</u> (1799) how large-scale agriculture only serves to enslave a population and prop up tyranny. Although it is largely overlooked today, <u>St. Leon</u> was a favorite of Percy Shelley's, and he put it before Godwin's philosophical writings in importance (see Shelley's letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, <u>Letters</u> 1:195).

Defoe, Rousseau, and Godwin were fascinated with the politics occasioned by the production of corn. Robinson Crusoe explores the role of corn in the expansion of empire through colonial plantations as well as how the production of corn can serve as a justification for cultural and economic expansion and domination. Although he praises Defoe's novel in Émile, famously suggesting that it is the only book of any educational value, Rousseau's "Second Discourse" decries the agricultural development and imperial progress Defoe celebrates. Godwin, who read both Defoe and Rousseau avidly**,** explores large-scale agricultural projects in his historical novel, St. Leon. This novel was written during a time when the English Bread Riots of 1795-6, sparked by food scarcity resulting from the wars in Europe, had drawn widespread attention to the production and trade of corn. Indeed, Hobsbawn relates in his history of the English Industrial Revolution how "the hard times of the middle of the 1790s brought [the agricultural crisis] before the most short-sighted eyes" (99). The demand for corn translated into a demand for a reorganization of rural life for greater efficiency, a project that served already wealthy landowners and debased independent cottagers:

> […] one class was undoubtedly a heavy loser by enclosure: the marginal cottages and smallholders, eking out the produce of their little plots perhaps with wage-labour and certainly with the various petty -- but to them crucial – advantages of common rights: pasture for animals and poultry, firewood, building material, timber to repair implements, fences and gates, and so on. Enclosure might well reduce them to simple wage-labour. More than this: it would transform them and the labourers from

> upright members of a community, with a distinct set of rights, into inferiors dependent on the rich. (102)

In assessing the extent of the crisis across Britain -- "the whole country was affected" (169) -- Walter M. Stern stresses that "many contemporaries were convinced that high bread prices resulted from human wickedness" (174). The politics of corn were as fierce as they were diverse. Thomas Paine was quick to publish Agrarian Justice a year later in 1797, arguing that the island of Britain belongs to all its inhabitants and thus landowners should pay rent to the disenfranchised people of England; his proposal was in essence an early proposal for a large-scale, government-run, public welfare system for a people denied land on which to produce their own subsistence (perhaps not an entirely radical idea in the 1790s as minimum wage was determined by the price of corn (Hobsbawn 104)). Alluding to Robinson Crusoe, Paine reasons that, "separate an individual from a society, and give him an island or a continent to possess, and he cannot acquire personal property" (485). Arguing, then, that wealth of the upper classes of society was artificially derived from an inequitable social system and that the poor were entitled by natural right to their share of the land's yield, he asserts that the redistribution of agricultural surplus is not charity but a duty. In the following year, Thomas Malthus's essay An Essay on the Principle of the Population (1798), which famously condemned Pitt's Poor Laws for encouraging over population and perpetuating poverty, asserted that the true wealth of a nation should be measured by the comparison of gross agrarian production to population (not by the accumulated wealth of its upper classes). Poverty, he argued, was the result of population growth that outpaced agricultural production; government corruption or greed among the wealthy is hardly to blame (Shelley dubs him "the apostle of the rich," Letters

2: 261). For the amelioration of the conditions of the poor, he recommended conservative measures: tillage over pasture (as yielding more sustenance) and agrarian work houses for the poor. Malthus's essay leveled a direct attack on Godwin's utopian social aspirations and attacks on government in Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness (1793). In St. Leon (1799), however, Godwin responded to the contemporary politics of corn, and specifically to Malthus's attack, by returning to the simple economic model he found in Robinson Crusoe. Although this novel no longer has the utopian optimism of his Political Justice, nevertheless Malthus's attack served only to sharpen Godwin's critique of large-scale agriculture.[16]

Neither Rousseau nor Godwin thought lightly about Defoe's novel, but examined it as an economic model (one that addressed questions of the cultivation of corn and property rights), as a political allegory, as a study of the psychology of isolation, as a commentary on the fundamentals of pedagogy, and as a treatise on metaphysics and theology, all of which are, in their thinking, explicitly tied to the production of corn. Moreover, both reworked the argument of Robinson Crusoe: a quasi-historical account, advanced by a single but cosmopolitan perspective, of social development that begins with an uncultivated, primitive state that is transformed by agriculture, and finally arrives at the political institutions of the present day.

In "Robinson Crusoe as a Myth," Ian Watt argues that the popularity of Defoe's story far outstripped the readership of the novel; in the nineteenth century it became a pervasive cultural myth in Western Europe , alongside "Faust, Don Juan and Don

[16] Later, in 1820, Godwin published a lengthy treatise, Of Population, to counter Malthus's attack on Political Justice, but it was St. Leon that had the greater influence on Shelley; Shelley read Of Population in 1821 and, in a letter to Claire Clairmont, dismissively judges it "a dry but clever book, with decent interspersions of cant and sophistry," Letters 2: 303).

Quixote" (158). The story is simple: a British youth abandons his home and country, forsaking paternal guidance and moral rectitude, in pursuit of the dissipated life of a sailor. After a series of ill-fated misadventures that teach him little, he finds himself cast ashore on a tropical island, alone (save a companion dog and some wildly propagating cats) and without hope of rescue. He falls desperately ill, brushes up against his own death, has a vision of a reprimanding angel, and repents his past life. Miraculously, he recovers from his fever and, having salvaged from the wreckage of the ship food, weapons, some trunks of gold, and tools necessary to cultivate the island, he begins life again, reformed and enlightened. In this new life, he is prudent, industrious, tireless – and successful. He cultivates corn (barley and rice) and vines, breeds goats, and builds himself two fortified residences. Finally, after capturing and converting to Protestantism a cannibal and establishing a Western-style plantation on the island, Crusoe is rescued and returned to civilization, to become a wealthy merchant, taking with him his new work ethic. Such is the essential story of Defoe's "culture-hero" or "*homo economicus*," who has remained in the popular imagination ever since (Watt 176; 171).

There are two principal themes in the myth of Robinson Crusoe that are particularly important to Rousseau and Godwin: isolation and providence. The first is that of Crusoe's social isolation on an uninhabited island. Beyond the resources he gathers from the ship, Crusoe lives for years independent of civilization. Because they cannot be said to be a response to immediate social conditions, restraints or customs, Crusoe's actions are seen to be natural and inevitable. Watt argues that this "back to nature" theme, with its "simpler economic structure and its associated rural setting," did much to elevate Crusoe to his status as a "culture-hero" in the eyes of the nature-loving Rousseau and the

Romantics (160): Crusoe returns to what seems to be a simpler and more honest way of life insofar as it is a manner of living defined by nature rather than custom. Rousseau's politics, however, are more complicated and, as this chapter will demonstrate, his estimation of Robinson Crusoe is not as clear-cut as Watt's essay suggests.

I would further Watt's point: Crusoe's separation from any society lends the story a sense of historical transcendence or timelessness. That is, Crusoe lives not only spatially apart from civilization, but also temporally apart from civilization -- seemingly; he lives beyond the turbulence of contemporary politics, beyond the influence of government, and beyond subjugation to either secular laws or organized religion (why, incidentally, Crusoe was already by the mid-Victorian period, according to Karl Marx in Capital, a "favorite theme with political economists" who employ the myth as a discrete and uncomplicated economic model (Marx 88-91)). Simply put, world history is of little if any significance to Crusoe as he lives alone on his island and this lends him, as Watt would phrase it, mythic status. His withdrawal from human history makes Crusoe appear to be, as Coleridge remarks, "a representative of humanity in general," who faces the bare challenges of survival; Crusoe has little by way of distinguishing personality, but is "the universal representative, the person for whom every reader could substitute himself" (Coleridge 299-300). Simply put Crusoe's social isolation seems to open up on the one hand the possibility of cultural transcendence, and on the other, a mass appeal that can touch everyone.

Coleridge's opinion is, of course, willfully naïve, for it takes little to see beyond this "universal representative" of humanity to the set of historically defined (and appalling) social relations with which Crusoe is complicit. Far from being natural and

inevitable, many of Crusoe's actions are defined by the politics and religious dogma he is popularly imagined to have quit. That is, where Crusoe is seemingly outside of society and history, saying the same of his creator – Defoe – is much more difficult. It is hard to deem natural and inevitable, for example, Crusoe's enthusiastic participation in the African slave trade, in the colonization of the Americas, and in the exploitation of natives, best exemplified by his subjugation, renaming, and conversion of the cannibal, Friday. Much of recent criticism on the novel rejects any naturalization of Crusoe's narrative. Citing Defoe's own comparison of his "'allusive allegoric history'" to The Pilgrim's Progress, Leopold Damrosch, Jr. has argued that far from universal, Defoe "draws on" seventeenth century Puritan traditions, specifically "the genres of spiritual autobiography and allegory" (373-4). Watt lays bare how the myth of Robinson Crusoe naturalizes the "irresistible teleology of capitalism" (162) and that, far from depicting natural and simple motivations, the myth is most "sinister" when we consider the hegemonic progress of nineteenth and twentieth century capitalism (176). Addressing both the religious and economic dimensions of the novel, Michael McKeon brings into focus Crusoe's "ability to spiritualize his situation," which provides "a crucial and complementary religious element" to his utopian economics (410-13): "What is crucial about Robinson Crusoe's achievement of social success is not the degree of his elevation but his capacity to justify each station to which he attains as the way of nature and the will of God" (422). This religious dimension, he argues, "does not prevent Robinson from continuing to behave like a capitalist; it effaces the moral consequences of that behavior." In a fascinating aside, McKeon points out that much of Crusoe's rhetoric "is disturbingly evocative of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century agrarian conflicts" over

British land enclosures (410-413). In short, modern criticism of the novel has entirely discredited any suggestion that Defoe's novel presents a "universal representative" of humanity. That the novel is an allusive political allegory, to borrow Defoe's own words, is not a new critique. The complementary themes of isolation, a return to nature, and historical transcendence in the myth of Robinson Crusoe fascinated Rousseau in the mid eighteenth century and Godwin at the turn of the century. Far from accepting Defoe's treatment of these subjects, however, both Rousseau and Godwin reworked the myth to their own political ends.

The second theme associated with Robinson Crusoe and that is particularly important to Rousseau and Godwin is that of Crusoe's relationship with providence. While modern day critics see the treatment of providence in the novel as ambiguous and multivalent, Rousseau and the Romantics were impressed by Crusoe's eventual acceptance of his divinely sanctioned social station: a finite and determined life, governed by reason and sustained by labor. In the beginning, as a dissipated youth, Crusoe disregards the workings of divine providence and wastes his life in directionless pursuits. He resists obvious signs of God's displeasure, first figured in his father's reprimands for Robinson's "wandering inclinations" and his failure to follow a career in "law" (27), but then more dramatically in both the sublime storm that stranded him, and a "stupefying" earthquake that shook him (96). Either because of his skepticism or because of his youthful and rebellious nature, he is unable to recognize the workings of providence. That is, until a powerful "feaver" takes hold of him on the island and makes his own death palpable to him.

> […] When I began to be sick, and a leisurely view of the miseries of death came to place itself before me, when my spirits began to sink under the burthen of a strong distemper, and nature was exhausted with the violence of the feaver, conscience, that had slept so long, begun to awake, and I began to reproach my self with my past life, in which I had so evidently, by uncommon wickedness, provoked the justice of God to lay me under uncommon strokes, and to deal with me in so vindictive a manner. […] 'Now,' I said aloud, 'my dear father's words have come to pass: God's justice has overtaken me, and I have none to help or hear me: I rejected the voice of Providence, which had mercifully put me in a posture or station of life wherein I might have been happy and easy; but I would neither see it my self, or learn to know the blessing of it from parents […] and now I have difficulties to struggle with, too great even for nature itself to support, and no assistance, no help, no comfort, no advice.' Then I cry'd out, 'lord, be my help, for I am in great distress.' (105-6)

It is not simply the power of God to take his life away that impresses Crusoe, for both the storm that sank his ship and the earthquake that shook his cave failed to awaken his conscience. Rather it is the quiet recognition of the finitude of his own life and how it has been "misspent" (107) that defines Crusoe's epiphany. The metaphor is economic (*spending or misspending* one's life in a profitable manner), and his conversion has as much to do with an awakening of class consciousness as it does with a spiritual awakening. Now, he is going to apply himself whole-heartedly "to the works proper for my preservation and supply" (104). He had "a posture or station of life," granted to him

by God, but which he had rejected; in his epiphany, he realizes that he must return to the life his father had described for him. Crusoe's epiphany transforms his thinking from a reckless pursuit of whims in an ill-defined world, figured as life on a limitless sea, to careful deliberation and dedication aimed at industry and agriculture on a discrete island – the symbol of his limited dominion and stewardship. In Defoe and the Defense of Commerce, an essay that attempts to counter today's "innumerable literary challenges, ranging from best-selling attacks upon industrial safety, pollution, and organizational life to Marxist denunciations" (7), Thomas Meier explains that for Defoe the "Chief virtues" were "thrift and diligence" (79). In short, Crusoe's religious conversion is inseparable from an economic mindset.

With a finite amount of time left, how should Crusoe best spend his life? His father's advice, which he had forsaken as a young man, had been to stick with his station, that being "the middle state […] between poverty and riches" (28). His father extols the middle class for being "not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanick part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part of mankind" (28). When Crusoe recovers from his sickness, he claims to have "acquiesced in the dispositions of Providence, which I began now to own and to believe ordered every thing for the best" (121), and sets to build an estate on the island. McKeon suggests that Crusoe "finds himself in the position not so much of a Brazilian planter as of an English enclosing landlord," concerned with the management of land, to what uses it should be variously put and how best to enclose it, and the strict ordering of labor (411). In the seminal essay on "The Economic Meaning of Robinson Crusoe," Maximillian Novak amusingly comments, "To conjecture whether he

conceived his story first, as a fictional voyage, and only afterward embellished it with various economic themes, or whether he conceived the idea of economic isolation first, would be as futile as to debate over the primacy of the chicken and the egg" (102).

The conversion makes him economical in character. After each of his religious reflections around the time of his repentance, Crusoe sets about quantifying some aspect of his location, be it counting corn (92-3), scheduling his day by assigning a number of hours to each activity (106), or walking the island to learn its finite geography (120-2). These are the first steps he takes to begin what will become his empire. As Watt argues, providence lines up with the "teleology of capitalism" in Robinson Crusoe, and virtue is defined in terms of mercantile economics, efficiency, and the amassing of capital.

The most poignant symbol in Robinson Crusoe of this association of providence and capitalism is corn. Among other things salvaged from the shipwreck, Crusoe discovers a feed sack. After he carelessly empties it out on an incidental plot of land, several unnoticed barley and rice seeds germinate and bring a small yield. Common an occurrence as this may be, Crusoe comes to appreciate it as a "miracle" (143), a testament to the benevolence of providence. There is in this scene a possible allusion to the Biblical story of Onan, who, commanded to impregnate his widowed and childless sister-in-law, refuses his father's instructions, and "spills his semen on the ground" (Genesis 38:9). For his failure to fulfill the duties of a levirate marriage ("he would not give offspring to his brother" 38:9), and his disobedience to his father, God "put him to death" (38:10). If Onan's unfruitful spilling of seed is cursed by God, the fruitful result of Crusoe's spilling of seed (and his desire to redeem himself in his father's wishes) may be deemed conversely miraculous. Cultivation, for Crusoe, becomes a divine mandate, and,

after five years of harvests, Crusoe manages to grow enough "daily bread," for which he always "gives thanks," to feed himself throughout the year (143). Crusoe's belief in his divine-allotment of "daily bread" is another Biblical allusion. In the "Parable of the Sower," Jesus speaks of scattered seeds: some "fell on the path […,] other seeds fell on rocky ground […,] other seeds fell among thorns [, and] other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:1-8). The seeds, Jesus says, represent the word of God, and the arability of the land on which they fall represents receptivity to the faith; those "seeds" that fall "on good soil" will enjoy plentiful harvests. That Crusoe has washed ashore on a fertile island is, in his mind, providential. Although a parable of faith, the agrarian metaphors cannot be treated as simply an arbitrary vehicle. In both Biblical stories, what is most important is the preservation of seeds, because it in turn will produce in a controlled manner an abundance (child or harvest), which in turn will preserve the patriarchal order, be it in terms of lineage, obedience, or faith.

Cultivation, therefore, becomes a divine mandate, and, after five years of harvests, Crusoe manages to grow enough "daily bread," for which he always "gives thanks," to feed himself throughout the year (143). In this manner, Crusoe's shift away from a diet of a hunter and gatherer to that of a farmer over the course of his first years on the island tests his newly pious mindset. Agriculture requires long hours of difficult labor and he must develop the many tools required for such work, but he regards this labor as tasks set to reform him (130-1). To counter Watt's economic reading, George A. Starr writes,

> Industry […] has no intrinsic merit; it becomes valuable only when coupled with an acknowledgment of God's ultimate power to further or thwart it. (103-4) [… Crusoe's triumph] is less through sheer labor than through acquiring a sense of dependence; and it is this sense of God's concern and provision for him that keeps such a triumph from being, as Mr. Watt finds it, "a flagrant unreality." (106)

Starr identifies dependency on divinity as the morale of the story (and extols it himself). Later in the novel, when Friday, the cannibal Crusoe condescends to civilize, discusses cannibalism, Crusoe rejects such a diet on the grounds that it is outside of God's favor. Friday consequently learns to parrot in pidgin English that, if he returns to his own people, he should "'tell them to live good, tell them to pray God, tell them to eat corn-bread, cattle-flesh, milk, no eat man again'" (226).

The connection between corn and providence runs deeper. The corn Crusoe discovers is, of course, not native to the island or that part of the world, as, he notes, the "climate […] is not proper for corn" (though apparently this does not inhibit the growth of the crop or its yield under his care); not only is it "European" corn that has sprung up unexpectedly, but more specifically it is "English" corn (a distinction that editors have wondered at, as there is no known difference between "English" and "European" corn) (93, 316 n.28). The distinction is symbolic: that English corn may be grown on the island is precisely the divine sign for the English Crusoe to cultivate and thereby take possession of the island. This has little significance so long as he is the sole islander, but with the arrival of Friday, Crusoe assumes the title of landowner, with complete rights over the land. That is, his agriculture is the basis of his politics.

Crusoe's becomes a political agent when he subjugates Friday by shifting his diet to a corn-based diet. First, he forbids cannibalism and lures Friday with corn bread (208-9). Second, he introduces him to the labor necessary to produce the bread, which Friday, obliged to Crusoe for saving his life, willingly takes up as servant under a master: "[…] in a little time Friday did all the work for me, as well as I could do for myself" (215). Third, Crusoe doubles the size of his cornfields, which Friday obligingly seeds, so as to feed both of them, and, with the leisure time Friday's labor affords, he turns his attention to educating Friday, an education that culminates in Friday's conversion to Protestantism, which, of course, espouses salvation through the labor that providence, or in this instance Crusoe, "an instrument under Providence," dictates (222). When two more people arrive on the island, Friday's father and a Spaniard, the political structure simply expands; Crusoe's authority and leisure increases, as he assumes the role of a monarch of divine right.

> My island was now peopled, and I thought my self very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own meer property; so that I had an undoubted right of dominion. 2ndly, my people were perfectly subjected: I was absolute lord and lawgiver; they all owed their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me. It was remarkable too, we had but three subjects, and they were of three different religions. My man Friday was a Protestant, his father was a pagan and a cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist: however, I allowed liberty of conscience throughout my dominions. (240-1)

Despite the satirical lightness of this passage (considering that Crusoe espouses religious freedom immediately after converting Friday), Crusoe's political agenda is transparent. He has founded a colony, subjugated a population by introducing a corn-based diet and inducing them to labor, and instituted himself as their master, instructing them as to his, and their, proper place in the social structure. Having achieved this plan on the island, once rescued, he goes on to be a successful English merchant by applying this system again and again.

Defoe's intricate handling of these two principal themes, isolation and providence, fascinated Rousseau, but his response to the novel is ultimately ambivalent, complaining in Émile that there is much "rigmarole" ("*fatras*" in the original French, defined in Le Robert as "*amas confus, hétéroclite, de choses sans valeur, sans intérêt*"). in it (185). Watt points out that, although Crusoe demonstrates many of Rousseau's "favorite ideas," such as "radical individualism," nevertheless their philosophical orientations are ultimately "contradictory" (Watt 162)**.** On the other hand, in his "Second Discourse," Rousseau argues that the discovery of "iron and wheat" was the pivotal moment in the history of civilization: "it is iron and wheat which have civilized men and ruined the human race" (152). Agriculture brings about the end of the "robust" and "independent" nomadic life of the savage and gradually makes men "weak, fearful, servile" and "effeminate" (111). In Émile, Rousseau praises Robinson Crusoe, making it the sole book on which a young mind should be educated: "The surest means of raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one's judgments about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man and to judge everything as this man himself ought to judge of it with respect to his own utility" (185). Rousseau, however,

only discusses those aspects of it that demonstrate his own ideas (185). His praise for Crusoe is limited to the period that he remains the sole inhabitant of the island, free and independent.

Rousseau's politics depart from Crusoe's at the moment when Crusoe subjugates Friday and puts him to agricultural labor. Indeed, agriculture, Rousseau argues in the "Second Discourse," inspires the ideas of property and self-interest:

> The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared by someone who, uprooting the stakes or filling in the ditch, had shouted to his fellow-men: Beware of listening to this imposter; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the earth to no one! (141-2)

Because the savage lacks foresight, a faculty that develops only with agriculture according to Rousseau (143), this "first person," or rather this first landowner, operates unchecked; he instigates an irrevocable revolution in the state of humanity and initiates a chain of events that ultimately culminates in a "reign" of social inequality in which "a handful of men [are] glutted with superfluities while the starving multitudes lack necessities" (180-1). When placed next to the passage from Robinson Crusoe in which Crusoe fancies himself a king with his population "perfectly subjected" (241), Rousseau's position becomes entirely distinct. That is, Rousseau identifies the pre-historical transition from nomadic gathering to settled agriculture as the source of present social inequality: "slavery and misery […] germinate and grow with the crops" (152).

The "Second Discourse" offers a narrative account of the role of agriculture in civilization that contradicts many of the economic, political and moral ideas of Robinson Crusoe.

The "Second Discourse" poses the same questions as Robinson Crusoe: how does a man in the state of nature survive, what character must he acquire, and how does he move beyond a natural existence? And, as did Defoe's answer to these questions, Rousseau's argument takes the form of a mimetic narrative account, which "assemble[s] from a single point of view [a] slow succession of events and knowledge in their most natural order" (142). That is, both Defoe's novel and Rousseau's discourse imagine an uncultivated setting, imagine a male character in a state of nature, and, plot out in as convincing a manner as they can what happens to this man and the society with which he eventually interacts. Neither Robinson Crusoe nor the "Second Discourse" is exactly a history, but both claim an accuracy akin to an historical account. The fictional editor of Robinson Crusoe offers a preface in which he claims, "The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it [...]" (25). Rousseau even goes so far as to dismiss factual history, "forgetting times and places," so that his narrative is not built upon actual events but on more universal, "hypothetical and conditional reasonings" (103), as if this will bring him closer to the truth than any particular, factual account might. And both claim to be for "the instruction of others" (Robinson Crusoe 25), "suited to clarify the nature of things [to] man in general" ("Second Discourse" 103). Rousseau defends his method in part by suggesting that his discourse transcends time and place, and takes "the human race for an audience" (103), an appeal that is as literary in character as it is philosophical. As a result, his argument

reads as an allegory, a network of intertwined themes that develop along a hypothetical sequence of events, not much different from Defoe's novel in that regard. The speculative character of his argument gives the "Second Discourse" the feel of fiction that claims to be truthful; the less we see of the artifice in its plotting, the more convinced we will be that it is in fact "natural."

More importantly, the "Second Discourse" and Robinson Crusoe share a fascination with a set of ideas connected to corn. Both explore the connection between planting corn and the induction of property, labor, and regulated security and between the harvesting of corn and larger ideas about providence, necessity, and social regulation. Both authors explore this network of ideas, but where Defoe celebrates corn and all it occasions, Rousseau decries it.

Rousseau argues that the act of planting, specifically of planting corn (*blé* in the original French, which Masters and Masters translate as "wheat" (152), but which is in fact closer to the broader sense of the word corn), inspires the idea of property. He suggests that simple garden plots around a dwelling would not be sufficient to inspire the idea of property, but that the idea arose only from "large-scale agriculture," in which a man is required "to devote oneself to that occupation" (153). In Émile, Rousseau asserts that, "The first and most respectable of all the arts is agriculture" because the manual labor it requires provides for our most immediate necessities (188). Here, however, he is referring to independent, small-scale, subsistence agriculture. The idea of property, he argues in the "Second Discourse," arises only when farmers plant and harvest in excess of what they need for themselves and their families. Implied too in the difference between subsistence farming and large-scale agriculture in Rousseau's argument is the

shift from the cultivation of a variety of crops, which are harvested at various times, to more efficient and higher yielding, mono-cultural practices, in which a single crop is mass produced. (This distinction is still operative today in America, with family farms barely managing under the pressure of corporate agribusiness production efficiency). With surplus, large-scale farmers can begin to provide for a "common subsistence" (153), necessary because large-scale planting requires tools, the production of which requires labor in metallurgy (which he identifies as of "second rank" importance in Émile, 188). So the farmer provides the "common subsistence" in order to allow others to pursue other arts, specifically metallurgy, to produce the needed tools (153). (Rousseau admits that there is a chicken-or-the-egg paradox at this point in his argument, but it is interesting to note, as Watts points out, that Crusoe does not start with nothing but arrives on his island with the basic tools he needs for agriculture (Watt 168).) In return, the metal worker would manufacture tools "in order to multiply foodstuffs" so that the yield of the farmer is sufficient to support him as well (153). In sum, both farmer and metal worker shift from the diet of the robust and healthy nomadic gatherer, to a diet of corn and corn fed animals, and, as a result, they are no longer, either of them, free, but are chained by their mutual dependency.

Rousseau does suggest that there exists in this partnership a political equality and an economic balance, but he argues that it cannot be sustained in society and is

> … soon broken; the stronger did more work; the cleverer turned his to better advantage; the more ingenious found ways to shorten his labor; the farmer had greater need of iron or the blacksmith greater need of wheat;

> and working equally, the one earned a great deal while the other barely had enough to live. (154-5)

Although Rousseau admits that rising population may have made the greater yield necessary, it comes at a terrible price. First, "large-scale cultivation" requires much forethought, changing the essential carefree, innocent, and independent nature of the savage (153). Second, it requires a labor force of mutually dependent workers (some to smelt iron, others to tend to animals, while others provide all with food, and so on), who soon become enslaved to their dependencies (153-4). And third, inequalities in wealth, born from inevitable differences in soil quality, talents, and the like, engenders social awareness, which in turn prompts envy and duplicity (154). Political inequality, born from economic disparities, produces both tyrants and poverty.

> […] As long as [people] applied themselves only to tasks that a single person could do and to arts that did not require the cooperation of several hands, they lived free, healthy, good, and happy insofar as they could be according to their nature, and they continued to enjoy among themselves the sweetness of independent intercourse. But from the moment one man needed the help of another, as soon as they observed that it was useful for a single person to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, labor became necessary and vast forests were changed into smiling fields which had to be watered with the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow with the crops. (151-2)

This process is irreversible as society is too physically enfeebled to return to the fields and a natural diet, though he does urge a vegetarian diet (n. 192). Rousseau even suggests that "the history of human illnesses" was initiated by the shift away from a natural diet (109-10), and even if humanity mustered the strength to return to a more robust diet, the forests that once provided for it have been cleared away. Furthermore, if it brings about the physical degeneration of humanity, planting a single crop to generate significant capital also destroys humanity's innocence. Decades later, Shelley follows this logic to its end, describing the generic tyrant as smiling "At the deep curses which the destitute / Mutter in secret[…]" as they try "to save / all that they love from famine […]": "a sullen joy / Pervades his bloodless heart when thousands groan / But for those morsels which his wantonness / Wastes in unjoyous revelry, […]" ("Queen Mab," III, 34-40). Of course, it is not tyrants who labor, but the destitute "[…] who build their palaces, and bring / Their daily bread" (III, 121-2).

As in Robinson Crusoe, Rousseau argues that agriculture prompts a psychological transformation. Waiting from seed to flower, farmers become reflective, calculating, and fearful, and as a result their relations to others are poisoned. In time, this poison spreads to others and the multitudes become reflective, calculating, and fearful. In such a state, they are easily convinced by the wealthy that they must establish laws to protect property and must establish a government to uphold these laws; the multitudes are unable to see that they are "subjecting themselves to a universal dependence and obliging themselves to receive everything from those who do not obligate themselves to give them anything" (128). Thus, they "rush into slavery" (163). Further, the harvest appears to make corn agriculture self-justifying. Though corn is responsible for feebleness and disease, poverty

and enslavement, fear and moral degeneration among the multitudes, its harvest presents the illusion of health, abundance, and moral superiority. "Avarice and ambition" among the multitudes blind their better judgment (159); presented with the illusion, they forget "their right to renounce their dependence" and become obedient workers (170, 173). The wealthy use this illusion of harvest to gain security, establish a government and laws to their advantage, and even to initiate wars, which only further degrade the state of the peoples. In his survey of agricultural transformation during the English Industrial Revolution, Hobsbawn lays out a history that follows Rousseau's prescient argument.

> The inhuman economics of commercial and 'advanced' farming strangled the human values of a social order. What is more, the very wealth of the increasingly prosperous farmers, with their piano-playing daughters, made them ever more remote, even in spirit, from the pauperized labourers. The growing luxury of the landlords, symbolized in the new practice of preserving game for competitive massacre and the increasingly savage laws against poaching, widened the chasm between the classes. […] Meanwhile, however, agricultural output and productivity rose. (105)

As William Duffy has demonstrated, however, Rousseau's arguments were not popular in England after the Terror and during the Napoleonic Wars and would largely fall on deaf ears.

In addition to describing the moral degeneration of humanity that starts with large-scale agriculture, Rousseau outlines another mental faculty that develops: foresight. He insists that foresight is not a faculty of the savage mind and that it is developed only with the shift to agriculture. He links foresight to economic thought, using the example of

“the Carib,” a representative savage: “in the morning he sells his bed of cotton and in the evening he comes weeping to buy it back, for want of having foreseen that he would need it for the coming night” (117). Thus, with the development of agriculture comes the faculty of foresight and economic speculation. Because economic thought does not speak to the conditions of natural man and therefore is of no use to him, Rousseau suggests that it inspires among civilized humanity only false and artificial cares, but which nonetheless replace those of natural man (Émile 82-3). In other words, natural man has no capacity to perceive his economic condition or how best to capitalize upon it. That capacity, as well as the requisite *amour-propre*, is acquired through socialization. And, this development is tragic. In addition to inspiring criminal thought (82), foresight and speculation about the future, about what are in essence artificial cares, undermine the enjoyment of the present and the sense of being: “We no longer exist where we are; we only exist where we are not” (83). That is, economic necessity replaces natural necessity, and as a result, “health, gaiety, well-being, contentment of mind are no longer anything but visions” (83).

As a result, the misery of civilized man has no natural counterpart: “I ask if anyone has ever heard it said that a savage in freedom even dreamed of complaining about life and killing himself” (“Second Discourse”127). Rousseau even argues that, far from contemplating suicide, the savage has no “knowledge of death and its terrors” (116). Rousseau pushes this idea further in Émile, arguing that fear of death is taught, is artificial, and does not afflict “natural man”: “It is doctors with their prescriptions, philosophers with their precepts, priests with their exhortations, who debase his heart and make him unlearn how to die” (55). Unlike Crusoe who was spiritually reformed by the anticipation of his own death in illness, Rousseau argues that the anticipation of one’s

own death only leads to "slavery, illusion, and deception" as the mind is pulled away from the present necessities into wild and fearful speculation (83). For Rousseau, then, fear of death and economic speculation are connected, as they are for Crusoe, but produce only misery. Far from divine or natural in man, they are entirely artificial and lead "people to buy imaginary repose at the price of real felicity" (102).[17] In short, for Rousseau, thinking in finite terms about economic advantages or about one's own life does not prompt people to a virtuous life, but quite ruins them.

The production of corn, then, is the first shackle in the chain of humanity's material and psychological enslavement. Far from being a symbol of a divine covenant or of benevolent providence as it is in Defoe, the planting of corn is much more akin to Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. Rousseau highlights the artificial character of economic thought and decries the notion that it speaks to any natural necessity. Moreover, he decries the spirit of self-interest, or *amour-propre*, it inspires. And, he argues that the agricultural industry drives a way of thinking that everywhere tries to obscure what we should do: throw off our dependency upon it and return where possible to a more local diet and small-scale operations.

Similarly fascinated with Robinson Crusoe and likewise repulsed by its politics, Godwin reworked the central themes of isolation and providence in his novels, and in St. Leon, he addresses large-scale corn agriculture. William Brewer's "Introduction" to the Broadview edition of the novel asserts that the "model for Godwin's first-person narrative technique in his novels is Rousseau's Confessions" and Brewer explores

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[17] It is interesting to note that Rousseau read in translation and was much impressed by Salomon Gessner's epic, The Death of Abel (*Der Tod Abels* 1758), in which an appreciation of death is painfully learned by the innocent parents recently expelled from Eden over the course of five (rather saccharine) books. That is, far from natural instinct, not only the meaning but also the occurrence of death for Gessner is a lesson hard learned. For Rousseau's appreciation of Gessner, see Cranston's The Solitary Self 87.

Rousseau's stylistic influence on Godwin (23-25). In this novel, however, the connection runs much deeper. In "Romanticizing Adolescence: Godwin's *St. Leon* and the Matter of Rousseau," Anne Chandler argues that St. Leon should be considered as a part of Godwin's "ongoing dialogue with Rousseau as educationist and cultural critic" (400). She demonstrates how the novel recasts aspects of Rousseau's pedagogical theory as enervating and overly constrictive to healthy social development. The novel may be read as a satire of Rousseau, built upon Godwin's objections to the "radical sequestration" of tutored students (401), the exclusivity and power dynamics of the tutor-pupil relationship (403-7), the repression of adolescent sexuality (407-10), and the notion that human development can be understood as "phased" in any clear cut manner (411). Chandler's argument does much to demonstrate that *St. Leon* carries much "Rousseauvian influence" (413), but it misses the greater political influence. In chapters thirty five through thirty seven, Godwin develops a political allegory about governmental regulation of agriculture; it is a sustained and multifaceted critique of both unchecked capitalism and an imperialistic approach to developmental economics.

The eponymous protagonist of the novel establishes himself, under the name of the sieur de Chatillon, in war-torn Hungary as a philanthropic foreigner, with the design to revive among the people "the spirit of industry" (363). He would take "the welfare, perhaps the existence, of a great and heroic nation under his protection" (372). His is a project not of charity but of economic development in a country where the "arts were neglected [and] civilization was destroyed" (362). In his survey of Godwin's philosophy, Godwin's Political Justice, Mark Philp emphasizes that Godwin's "fundamental doctrine in the main body of Political Justice is one in which it is the intrinsic justice of an act

which obliges and motivates us; the individual's interests are consigned to a conceptual void since they can play no part in an account of our motive for acting morally" (52). St. Leon claims to be free of self-interest. In possession of the philosopher's stone, which grants him eternal youth and limitless funds, he brings to this development project resources that equal those of any empire. And he knows this; upon first receiving the stone, he proclaims, in a manner quite similar to Crusoe's when he proclaims himself monarch of his island,

> He [who holds the stone] holds the fate of nations and of the world in his hand. He can remove forests, and level mountains, drain marshes, extend canals, turn the course of rivers, and shut up the sea with doors. He can assign to every individual in a nation the task he pleases, can improve agriculture, and establish manufactures, can found schools, and hospitals, and infirmaries, and universities. […] The whole world are his servants, and he, if his temper be noble and upright, will be the servant of the whole world. (187)

Such is the capital power he wields, or so he imagines. Unaware of his own egoism or even of his stated desire to subjugate "the whole world," he deems his project "proper" (360) for someone of his resources, a sentiment which echoes the philosophy of Political Justice. Reaching Hungary, he immediately applies his capital to employ laborers to build shelters for the "hopeless [and] lifeless" population and to plant corn for their subsistence (365). Having been foiled in previous projects by those who sought after the source of his moneys and his motives, he decides this time "to silence all objectors by the display of a more than princely magnificence [and] to pour the entire stream of [his] riches, like a mighty river, to fertilise these wasted plains, and revive their fainting inhabitants" (359-

60). And it works, for a while; the Hungarians welcome and honor their "generous benefactor," awed and mystified by his wealth (366). As they unfold, however, St. Leon's plans slip away from his control.

St. Leon picks Hungary for his project for both personal reasons and because of its political and economic conditions. Up to this point in the novel, St. Leon has led a life both dissipated and persecuted. He has lost his fortune, his family estate, and the love of his family due first to a gambling addiction, and subsequently to his coveted acquisition, which compels him to dissemble at all times. Despite all of his attempts to keep the stone secret, however, he has been hunted across the countries of Western Europe, having been discovered in every locale to be a magician. So, Hungary presents "a scene where no encounter with any one [he] had ever known might abash [him], and no relation of any adventure [he] had ever met should follow [him]" (360). In short, he seeks to escape the moral censure and social judgment he met in the western European countries, and start again, by means of his capital, as "a new man" in a place with no connection to his past (360). To this extent, it mirrors Robinson Crusoe's island, and St. Leon means to colonize the natives in the manner laid out by Crusoe. Both Crusoe and St. Leon feel that they can take control of the land without much reflection because they judge its prior usage as morally reprehensible, be it as cannibal feeding grounds or a theatre for religious wars.

At the point he arrives in Hungary in 1560, the character of this "new man" is a paradoxical mixture of the characters of Rousseau and Crusoe. Throughout the novel, St. Leon expresses both his frustration with having to live behind a "system of falsehood" (206) and a desire to escape into solitude, to live in a place "as much out of the world as [he] should have done in the remotest island of the Atlantic ocean" (172), which Hungary

offers him. This alone is perhaps enough to suggest that the popular figure of Rousseau, the reclusive hermit, is a prototype for Godwin's character. At the same time, however, St. Leon, ever reflecting on money, or what he calls "the true science of the use of riches" (304), conceives of redemption only in terms of financial success, and, as a result, is drawn to wildly speculative economic ventures. His reckless and self-destructive gambling at the novel's beginning anticipates his largest and most reckless venture, his project in Hungary. In other words, economic enterprises enthrall St. Leon's ambition with quasi-religious fervor and prompt him to rash and single-minded activity. Such a disposition is much more akin to that of Crusoe, who in his own words was "born to be my own destroyer," and who ever seeks to redeem himself in the eyes of the father he disobeyed by achieving financial success. After risking his own plantation in Brazil to pursue a slave trading enterprise, wholly superfluous to what he requires but promising to be highly advantageous to him, Crusoe looses nearly everything including his life in the shipwreck that lands him on his island (<u>Robinson Crusoe</u> 59-60). Indeed, Hungary beckons St. Leon as Guinea beckons Crusoe. St. Leon's personal motivations to pick Hungary as his destination consist of this paradoxical pair, the desire for a retreat and the desire to risk his capital to redeem himself.

As island-like a retreat it might be, Hungary also offers conditions that, St. Leon claims, are ideal for testing his model for economic development. As with each new location in the novel, Godwin adds extensive historical information to St. Leon's narrative. St. Leon explains, "Hungary had been now, for upwards of a century, the great frontier of the Christian world, -- the theatre upon which the followers of Mahomet contended against the followers of Jesus for destruction and for empire" (359). After

identifying several prominent figures on both the Turkish and Austrian sides of the conflict and discussing the impact of several key historical battles, he goes on to discuss the bleak conditions and despair in which the Hungarians themselves live, noting especially the impossibility for pursuing agricultural development under such conditions.

> […] the stern and haughty baron, free from restraint, would sally from his castle, sometimes in pursuit of plunder, sometimes of private resentment and revenge; the starving peasantry gladly enlisted in the band of a ferocious partisan for bread; the gangs of robbers, which the vigilant policy of better times had almost annihilated, rose again in importance, and swelled into regiments; and, while they assumed at pleasure the denomination of adherents to Ferdinand or to Solyman, perpetrated every species of excess with impunity. When a reflecting spectator surveys a country in a condition like this, he is tempted to wonder that the inhabitants still retain the courage to bestow on their fields any sort of cultivation, and that the licensed or the unlicensed robber still finds something over which to extend the fangs of his rapacity. (362)

St. Leon's plan is simple: to stabilize the state of Hungary by returning the people to agricultural production, "with the least practicable violence upon the inclinations and freedom of the inhabitants" (304). Once their spirit of industry is revived, he anticipates, they will awaken from their torpor caused by oppression and despair, and return to simple labor. This will prompt them to take interest in their immediate conditions, to be excited to enterprise by a thriving market, to find value once again in personal cultivation, and to resist militarism, both domestic and foreign.

It is with a deliberate plan, then, that St. Leon sets about his project. He hires a labor force to construct shelters and others to plant corn, as he "felt that the first claimants in the present emergency were the peasant and the cultivator" (363). His plan is radical in character insofar as it locates the primary concern not in the well-being of an aristocratic or middle-class culture, but in the interests of the common people: "I was more desirous that the rustic than the prince should be well lodged and accommodated, provided with the means of rest after fatigue, and secured against the invasion of ungenial seasons" (364). To hire a labor force was his first initiative, as…

> there would be, in the mildest and most salutary mode, a continual influx of money into the market [which in turn] would give new alacrity to the operations of traffic; the buyers would come forward with double confidence; the venders would be eager to meet the activity and spirit of the demand. Ardour and hope would revisit the human mind; and the industry I created, and the accommodations of one kind at least to which I gave birth, would inoculate the other departments of the community with a similar industry. (366)

In addition, self-conscious that his position in this large-scale developmental project under a centralized authority was necessarily despotic in character, he offered small loans and discrete charitable gifts in order to preserve a spirit of independence among the Hungarians (367). St. Leon claims that he is entirely altruistic in this venture, that his intentions were to develop a free and eventually independent Hungary, and that his reward, "the balsam of [his] life, and the ambrosia of heaven" (367), was simply their appreciation. Of course, St. Leon is not an entirely trustworthy narrator of his own life for

he elsewhere admits that, in possession of the philosopher's stone, he is always concerned with "the wisest methods for lulling the suspicions and controlling the passions of mankind" (304) – an interest that undermines his claims to altruism.

For St. Leon's project, the cultivation of corn is of central importance and as such it becomes the symbol of Hungary's independence and future. As the savior of Hungary, St. Leon assumes the occupation of "an architect and corn-dealer" (365). To alleviate immediate shortages, he "engage[s] in the importation of corn from Poland, Silesia, and other neighbouring countries" (364) as a temporary measure. He arrived in Hungary when seeding should begin, but "some time […] must necessarily elapse between the period of impregnating the soil, and that of the future harvest" (364), "till the season of plenty should arrive" (368). Despite all of his attempts to stabilize this burgeoning economy and to moderate the effects of his imports, however, the time lapse between the seeding and the harvesting of the corn creates an opening for impatience, discontent, distrust, and, ultimately contempt among the Hungarians. The fields of corn they see do not inspire patience. "Fortitude is not the virtue of a populace," St. Leon admits in melancholy retrospection (368). Although Godwin was determined to refute Malthus, this narrative comes surprisingly close to Malthusian sentiment. Malthus writes:

> The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished, reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul. […] The corn is plucked before it is ripe, or secreted in unfair proportions; and the whole black train of vices that belong to falsehood are immediately generated. (80)

In this manner, the Hungarians are capricious as a people. Malthus did believe in the miraculous character of corn, as one of the "successive Revelations of God to man," and, after Hobbes, identifies humanity's innate baseness as the source of evil (Malthus 101 n1). Godwin's reading of the symbolism of corn is darker. Far from being deemed a figure of a divine covenant or assurance of fortune (in both senses of the word), the period of time extending from germination to harvest draws out the vicissitudes of fortune. And, it is this time lapse, "this unexpected delay and retrogression" of optimism (368), that unravels all of St. Leon's plans. Simply put, the corn will not grow fast enough. The period of germination announces the absence of any benevolent providence or god and the people in despair are rendered destitute. Corn comes to symbolize the false promise of governments and the vulnerability of the people.

Godwin published St. Leon three years after the English Bread crisis of 1795-6. During the years of war with France, corn prices rose dramatically across the country and eventually hit crisis levels (Stern 168). With population growth exceeding domestic corn production, England began to import more corn than it exported during the war. Nevertheless, prices soared and riots broke out across the country (172). Within the country, price fixing, hoarding, price manipulation by enterprising middlemen (known as "jobbers"), to say nothing of looting during riots, pushed the crisis to a head (174-6). And, the importation of corn did little to relieve the crisis, with poor harvests abroad in 1794 and 1795, pirates on the seas, and the prevalent mismanagement of government-sponsored ventures spoiling hopes (176-181). Political debates over corn raged, covering such topics as the introduction of government storehouses to fix corn prices, military protection for corn importers, government recommendation of healthy additives to flour

for the poor, the quality of foreign corn, and the restriction of liquor production. However, as quoted above, "many contemporaries," Stern asserts, "were convinced that high bread prices resulted from human wickedness" (174) and E. P. Thompson points out that the government in 1795 saw "the benefits of reducing the poor to a cheap basic diet" even though "war-time necessity" was no longer a pressing argument (314; for a survey of British attitudes about symbolic importance of corn among the working class, 314-8). At the same time as the shortage prompted "a popular rallying cry" to sacrifice luxuries for the good of the nation, Stern insists that there was no rationing among the rich and that it was the poor who suffered under famine, corruption, and oppressive regulations (181-7). Stern concludes by offering that "The real outcome of these crises was a general conviction that population was increasing too rapidly and pressing on food supplies – a thesis which found expression three years after the 1795-96 crisis in *The First Essay on Population,*" Malthus's attack on Godwin's early optimism about historical progress towards widespread social amelioration.

Godwin draws upon the English Bread crisis in his accounts of what happens among the Hungarians while they await what St. Leon anticipated would be "the season of plenty." With every step towards this "season," his project slips away from him. Because the Hungarians as a population neither see nor understand the project as a whole, they become more and more alienated from the progress of the crop that is to provide their basic sustenance, corrupting their political judgment: "Unqualified to trace the wheels and combinations of the great machine, if prosperity is their lot, they willingly ascribe it to their protectors and governors; and if they are unfortunate, it is against them that the storm of their resentment is directed" (368). In their impatience for the promised

abundance at harvest, the Hungarians grow more and more skeptical of St. Leon's benevolence and grow more unruly. They lack that foresight Rousseau identifies with the mind of a farmer and return to the state of the "Carib Indian," who sells his bed in the morning. Grain is bought up early and hoarded, straining supply and fueling fears of scarcity; "anticipating famine, they felt the mischiefs of it before they arrive," he complains (369). Hoarding creates artificial strains on the food supply at precisely the time when equitable distribution is already in trouble because of scarcity. Then, a growing panic arises among the populous and preempts "moderation and frugality." Those without employment envy those with employment and turn on St. Leon, and those with employment see St. Leon's importation of corn as rendering their labor less profitable, and disgruntled, abandon it (370). People abandon their industry, horde what they can before their money is rendered useless, and turn to violence. Hobsbawn discusses how the English government's responses to the food shortages in the 1790s only "pauperized, demoralized and immobilized the [agricultural] labourer," a phrase that well describes Godwin's Hungarians (105). Having left work, people gather in large crowds, protest the corruption they imagine, accuse St. Leon of blasphemy and avarice, and threaten "to destroy the mills, the markets, the places of sale, the means and materials by which their wants were to be supplied" (369).

Fearing such self-destructive violence among the multitudes, as well as fearing for his own person, while at the same time being unwilling to give up on his enterprise simply because of some "hazard and peril," St. Leon decides to call "in the interference of the government under which [he] lived" (371-2). The military must be employed to protect the peoples' "magazines of corn" (379), because "it was necessary that the

resources of national subsistence should be defended from the wanton spoil of those who, when they were annihilated, must inevitably perish" (372). Such was his tragic line of reasoning. The local "bashaw" is as corrupt a politician as one could find, using his power to extract as much as he can from St. Leon by way of bribes and extortion. (When Shelley wrote of life in Wales in Orientalist terms in 1812, his description matches that of this passage in St. Leon, describing the misery of the poor, "lodged worse than pigs" and grinded by the rich, and the despotism of the rich, "tyrannic as Bashaws" (Letters v.1, 210).) Only by means of gifts does St. Leon gain access to him, and then only by further gifts does he escape the accusation of having been a rebel against the Sultan's authority by operating outside his purview. Only then did

> … we perfectly under[stand] one another; and it was apparent that I had to do with a man, who, for what he deemed an adequate consideration, would willingly lend me the authority and countenance of his office, and suffer me to guide him in any of the functions I might conceive necessary for the execution of my projects. (379)

Indeed, he is able to secure military support for his project after paying into the corrupt political structure. This recourse to military protection, however, is precisely the moment he becomes what the people believe him to be. His compromise with tyranny means the annihilation of his idealistic plans. Pamela Clemit captures the irony well in The Godwinian Novel: "St. Leon's desire to benefit the species through his scientific powers leaves a trail of human devastation" (92). She goes on to argue that "St. Leon's isolation registers the catastrophic effects of trying to break free from the past," a desire produced by "alienated selfhood," itself prompted by "a retreat from public issues" (92-3). This

argument makes good sense when we read St. Leon as a critique of the Robinson Crusoe myth and its justification of Western colonialism.

In attempting to rejuvenate Hungary, to transform it into a thriving economy, St. Leon returns it to a war-torn and "wasted" land -- an oppressed people under tyranny. "When the corn was first committed to the earth, it was out of the reach of military devastation," but now he had brought a mercenary force around that very crop (379). In place of a free and independent state of a proud people, he had only created enmity among the people, bolstered the power of the bashaw, developed resources that were entirely "at the mercy of his [the bashaw's] caprice" (380), and utterly alienated himself. This is Godwin's initial response to Malthus: that large-scale, government run agricultural projects are not the solution to poverty. Having seen all his plans unravel, St. Leon asks himself bitterly, "what advantage was it to be the depository of wealth without a bound? […] I had no bonds of alliance but those which money afforded, the coarsest, the meanest, the least flattering, and the most brittle of those ligatures, that afford the semblance of uniting man with man" (381). Hungary has come full circle, returning to the conditions that St. Leon sought to alleviate. Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley put it in a nutshell in their introduction to the Broadview Edition of Fleetwood: St. Leon offers a "political allegory of how established power can turn popular sentiment against the reformist projects of Enlightenment philosophy" (14). And indeed, the results of St. Leon's experiment could not be more different that Crusoe's, who left his island a thriving and growing colony. Far from invigorating the population, St. Leon's agricultural development served, as Rousseau argued, to prop up tyranny and subjugate the multitudes to a labor both debasing and debilitating.

Godwin entirely rejected the doctrine of Christian Providence in his essay "On Providence." The doctrine, he argues, serves "to favour the unhallowed designs of certain misanthropical and malignant individuals […] and hundreds and thousands of poor victims have, on this score, been sacrificed, in different ages of the world, at the altar of human credulity and folly" (118). What he has in mind, he adds, is the use of providential rhetoric in the colonization of the Americas, quoting from Dugald Stewart, a contemporary historian,

> the "conquest of the New World was effected, on a low estimate, by the murdering of ten millions of the species." […] Is it possible to conceive atrocities more horrible than those, or that more irresistibly called for the divine vengeance on the authors? With a view to varnish over and extenuate the ways of heaven in such cases, God has been said to be "long-suffering," waiting till the iniquities of man be full, and then pouring out the fierceness of His wrath in a way as overwhelming as was His "strange apparent" clemency. But almost two centuries and a half have passed over, and we are yet to learn how the unexampled sufferings of these innocent people have been repaid. (124-6)

Godwin's rejection of the doctrine of providence speaks directly to the "myth of Robinson Crusoe." Godwin would have deemed Starr's suggestion, that Crusoe's greatest achievement is to discover a dependency on God, as pernicious, perhaps even malicious.

In 1817 Godwin published his next historical novel, Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England, in which he again identifies corn as the primary instrument of colonization. The protagonist, a young British noble, witnesses his parents

slaughtered at the hands of insurgent Irish in occupied Ireland: “The British had made for themselves comfortable and pleasant habitations, *abounding with corn*, cattle, and every other accommodation, that an industrious people could draw out of a picturesque country and a fertile soil” (my emphasis 15). Second on their list of accommodations, after habitations, is corn fields; it is the same order of accommodations that Crusoe developed: shelter, corn, livestock, and then other sundry goods. That the Irish were subjugated to labor and weakened by famine, that the British claimed property rights and right to defend them by military force, and that the British amassed considerable wealth in the process, are tied to the planting of corn. “The motive power of this irresistible surge of land-hungry folk westward was corn” as it supports a “vast civilization” of which everyone can be made “a part”: Wallace’s words have historical precedence. The planting of corn is part of a system, one which Godwin with irony calls “pacific”:

> [Although] no people were ever more proud of their ancestry and their independence than the Irish, or more wedded to their old habits of living [nevertheless] the policy of the English administration […] had conduced much to the enfeebling of their military strength; and the pacific system of James seemed, for a long time, to be no where attended with so much success as in this island. His system in Ireland, was that of colonization, of placing large bodies of civilized strangers in every great station through the country, and undertaking, by a variety of means, to reclaim the wild Irish from what might almost be called their savage state. (9)

The tyrannical character of this “system” is only thinly veiled.

Godwin the political anarchist did not approve of any centralized authority supervising or consolidating the cultivation of subsistence crops, nor would he grant that government, no matter how independent of interest it claims to be, has the power to inspire a people who in the first place were enslaved and debased by government. The chapters from St. Leon offer a speculative economic development model, a theoretical history, which is entirely critical of the power of capitalism to bring about wide-spread social amelioration. In fact, St. Leon's limitless reserves of capital only serve the corrupt government and redouble the inhabitants' misery and oppression. His model, anticipating Marx, highlights how the alienation of the population from the agricultural production required for their subsistence only makes them dependent upon government, which in turn inevitably leads to militarism and further and more encompassing oppression. Despite his early efforts to maintain and stimulate a spirit of independence among the people, his efforts collapsed under the coercive power of the government and the need to resort to military force.

On the whole, Godwin's political philosophy is optimistic, because of his doctrines of rational progress and human perfectibility. His novels, however, frequently explore social and partisan behavior, which, in Godwin's view, is necessarily a dark matter. In his philosophy, congregation causes partisan prejudice; in his novels, congregation inevitably leads to violent riots; in his letters to Shelley, Godwin advises that the only virtuous way to lead people to reform is through the quiet cultivation of reflective reasoning. During the anti-Jacobin period of the 1790s, the Terror always haunts Godwin's radical endeavors. The allegory in these chapters of St. Leon offers a model, a speculative history, which is entirely critical of governmental supervision or

participation in agricultural affairs. It echoes the model Rousseau develops in his first discourse of inevitable social corruption, although the catalysts are different.

In place of large-scale agriculture, Godwin repeatedly presents in his novels the same self-sustaining and independent cottage that Rousseau extols. In St. Leon, the protagonist's moment of greatest contentment comes when St. Leon moves with his family to a cottage in Switzerland; in Fleetwood, the moment of greatest contentment comes when Fleetwood arrives at Ruffigney's cottage, where he, with an allusion to Crusoe's island, "felt as if I were in the wildest and most luxuriant of the uninhabited islands of the South Sea" (126); in Mandeville, the protagonist's moments of contentment come when he stays at the cottage of the Willises in Beaulieu, Hampshire, which he describes as a "fairy-land," an "obscure and solitary retreat," that enjoys nature's natural abundance (72-3). In such places, "Just men [are] made perfect," being equal "member[s] of a community" (Mandeville 75).

Finally, in Mandeville, Godwin outlines the character of a brilliant, vivacious, and virtuous youth, Clifford, a youth with the potential to influence the politics of England; Clifford embodies, as much is as possible, Godwin's radical aspirations. Clifford provokes misanthropic Mandeville with anti-establishment orations on the nobility of poverty, the corruption of "mortal man in every civilized climate," the virtue of independence, the vigor and healthiness of rural life, and the injustice of inherited property (83-9). And what particularly irks Mandeville is that, "there was something in the very nature of [Clifford's] sentiments, calculated to waken a responsive chord in every human bosom; and the melody of his voice, and the sportive gaiety with which he

uttered them, made them altogether irresistible" (89). The power of his message is like that of St. Leon's in the early months of his development project:

> […] it was as if the mellow and spirit-stirring blast of a trumpet had wakened their sleeping souls. Their eyes lightened with intelligence; the tear of anguish was wiped from their faded cheeks; the smile of hope slowly expelled, and faintly succeeded to, the bitter expression of despair. (St. Leon 365)

In effect, Clifford, who "talked like one inspired," is a poet, himself proclaiming, "It is inspiration, that makes the generous mind, the inventor of the arts, the legislator of the mind, the spirit formed to act greatly on the theatre of the world, and the poet who records the deeds of such spirits" that constitutes true nobility (Mandeville 80). Such a character was not lost on Shelley, who read Godwin's novels avidly and who would rework the figure of the poet to be, not merely the secretary of inspiration, but the "spirit-stirring" clarion to awaken a people. Unlike the ubiquitous Aeolian harp figure in English Romantic poetry, which presents the poet as a passive instrument on which some external force plays to produce an elusive lyric, this figure of the blasting trumpet presents the poet as a sentinel on guard against tyranny, awakening the masses with clear and shrill calls.

Chapter 4: Fighting Against History: Shelley's Radical Agrarian Politics

In "Shelley as Agrarian Reactionary," Donald H. Reiman argues that Shelley was "unconsciously swayed in his social, economic, and political theories by inbred class prejudice" (595), asserting that the poet's place of birth and the social standing of his family significantly influenced his mature thought. This parochial influence, Reiman claims, is manifest in Shelley's political writings in the form of "agrarian and aristocratic biases" and agendas (596) that neatly correlate with contemporary Whig politics of the 1790s, which "hoped to rally a coalition of the food-farming interests in the populous agricultural areas of the south and east of England, small merchants, craftsmen, and professional men, and ideological humanitarians who opposed slavery and the bloodshed of war" (592). Shelley shared their opposition to the Tories of the day, who had "deep personal interests in foreign trade, the colonial empire, and open markets throughout the world" (592). If the Tories identified "British national interest with defeating French expansion, controlling the seas, and seizing new colonies and overseas markets," then Shelley was with the Whigs in resisting such progress (592). Reiman proceeds to argue that, far from a "radical" cry for social change, "many of [Shelley's] ideas must be judged 'reactionary' by virtue of their emphasis on forms characteristic of and beneficial to the agricultural estate system of the eighteenth century and earlier" (590). Although he does emphasize that the terms liberal and conservative are hard both to define and to ascribe during the transformational 1790s (589-90), nevertheless he maintains that "Shelley never quite outgrew his predisposition to think of social, economic, and moral questions from the viewpoint of a landed aristocrat" (589). In sum, by drawing contextual connections between contemporary Whig politics and Shelley's political pamphlets and

"The Mask of Anarchy," Reiman seeks to complicate if not entirely upset the popular characterization of Shelley as an iconoclastic radical, free of inherent political bias, so that "we can come to terms with Shelley's inevitable limitations without condescending to him" (599). In terms of method, what is at stake in Reiman's argument, and why it is so provocative, is that it tests the extent to which Shelley's thought can be defined by comparisons to a political creed of his day.

Reiman's essay is one instance of a much larger trend in British Romantic criticism over the past three decades. The trend is to question whether the iconoclastic potential of the poetic projects of that period endures in the present, or whether the projects are essentially ideological in character, offering now little more than a conventional and dated line of thought with, in Reiman's terms, "inevitable limitations." That is, can the personal histories and musings of a poet two hundred years ago escape from, and be an effective critique of, the culture of the day, as so many of the Romantics themselves believed? Or, are the Romantics' projects vehicles for the propagation of contextually determined perspectives and agendas, largely if not entirely derived from their class situation? And, if so, would not their projects lose their poignancy in a modern context? Although he offers several qualifications regarding Shelley's benevolence, altruism, and a tendency toward Godwinian anarchism (which, despite Reiman's casual dismissal, has much to say regarding the management of land), Reiman tends toward an affirmation of the second position in his essay, "Shelley as Agrarian Reactionary." That is, Shelley is more ideologue than iconoclast, at least when it comes to his agricultural and land-management politics.

In the final analysis, Reiman's argument does not determine whether Shelley's writings are those of an ideologue or an iconoclast. And, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate, nor do the factors he considers entirely determine Shelley's agricultural and land-management politics. Shelley himself was particularly aware of this kind of debate, ideologue or iconoclast, in his own day. Accusations of partisanship or ideological bias were as commonplace in the Romantic period as they are prevalent in criticism on Romanticism today; although the terms have changed, the debate has been ongoing.[18] There is no more striking example of such accusatory rhetoric than the ideological warfare in post-Revolutionary England surrounding the legacy of Rousseau, as William Duffy has carefully charted in Rousseau in England. Duffy documents the English reception of Rousseau during and after the Revolution and how Shelley's acquaintance with Rousseau's writings evolved with time. Early on, Shelley was influenced by the "Second Discourse" and Emile, or On Education, drawing upon them for "A Vindication of Natural Diet," an extended note to "Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem" (1812) (Duffy 91). As he read more, though, Shelley attempted something more ambitious: to counter the conservative vilification of Rousseau as an instigator of revolution that held the popular imagination, and to revitalize the figure that had been celebrated among the 1790s Radicals. Duffy argues that Shelley was conscious of the politics at stake, as well as the possibility that his own endeavors might be deemed ideological and, by that judgment, dismissed; and with "The Triumph of Life" (1822), Shelley sought to counter the widely accepted Anti-Jacobin accounts of Rousseau that were pervasive in the decades after the Revolution (106). Where Reiman's argues that Shelley simply inherited

[18] In fact, it may be fair to say that the question of ideological determination is itself a part of the legacy of Romanticism, as Jerome Christensen does in Romanticism at the End of History.

certain political prejudices, Duffy argues that Shelley was acutely self-aware of those with whom he shared political views. Moreover, this example of Shelley and Rousseau is relevant to Reiman's argument on another level: Shelley's agrarian and land-management politics developed in large part from his early acquaintance with Rousseau's "Second Discourse."

Reiman's argument that Shelley was "unconsciously swayed" by "agrarian and aristocratic biases" is surprising considering the extent to which Shelley mounted deliberate and systematic battles against partisan and prejudicial thinking on such diverse issues as militarism, education, environmental conditions and diet, to say nothing of his activities in Wales to reclaim lands by embankments. In a letter from Wales to Thomas Hookham, dated December 3, 1812, Shelley wrote of the corruption and moral bankruptcy of the agrarian life under the landed aristocracy; Cambria…

> […] is the last stronghold of the most vulgar & common place prejudices of aristocracy. – lawyers of unexampled villainy rule & grind the poor whilst they cheat the rich; the peasants are mere serfs & are fed & lodged worse than pigs, the gentry have all the ferocity & despotism of the ancient barons without their dignity & chivalric disdain of shame or danger. The poor are as abject as Samoyeds the rich as tyrannic as Bashaws. (Letters 1: 210)

On the same day, Shelley wrote to his college friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, that "The society in Wales is very stupid. They are all aristocrats and saints: but that, I tell you, I do not mind in the least: the unpleasant part of the business is, that they hunt people to death, who are not so likewise" (Letters 1: 212). When Shelley turned his attention to agrarian projects, he was not falling back on his upbringing, but looking towards a total social

reformation; although he may have been critical of the Tories, he was far from identifying with the Whigs. And his interest was not short-lived; in 1820, he writes to his friends, the Gisbornes, with extraordinary enthusiasm: “I have been thinking & talking & reading Agriculture this week” (Letters 2:182). Agriculture is not a set of traditional practices taught to him at a young age, but warrants rigorous study and discussion, alongside other forward-looking topics such as “Steam Engines” and “the hunting of buffaloes” (Letters 2:182). In sum, Percy Shelley took considerable and deliberate interest in agricultural matters.

Reiman’s argument focuses on the influence of the political history of the Shelley’s immediate context. In so doing, however, he ignores a literary tradition and intellectual history in which Shelley deliberately participated and significantly advanced: the literary critique and reënvisioning of what Ian Watt has termed the “Robinson Crusoe myth” (Watt 158). Indeed, a week after the Gisbornes visit, Mary read Robinson Crusoe; the connection between this novel and Percy’s interest in agriculture cannot be overlooked (Journals 315). Moreover the “Robinson Crusoe myth,” which is very much concerned with land and agricultural management on a microcosmic scale, fascinated two of Shelley’s principle influences, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and William Godwin. Read within the context of this tradition, of Defoe, Rousseau, and Godwin, Shelley’s politics may appear in a different light. In fact, when read in relation to this tradition, Shelley’s politics not only are far from reactionary, but also remain relevant and radical today. Shelley engages with the ideas that emerge from Rousseau’s and Godwin’s responses to Robinson Crusoe diffusely in much of his poetry, and pointedly so in “Lines written among the Euganean Hills” and “Ode to the West Wind.” In Shelley and the Revolution

in Taste, Timothy Morton reports that "the notebook in which Shelley wrote 'Ode to the West Wind' is also full of agricultural notes dating from this period" (232). It is to Shelley's poems that we must turn in order to discover the radical side of Shelley's agrarian and land management politics and articulate Shelley's relationship with the politics of his day.

Writing in outrage to Elizabeth Hitchener from Dublin on March 10, 1812, Shelley decries the horrors of the English occupation of Ireland in a description not far from that offered in Godwin's novel Mandeville:

> I am sick of this city & long to be with you and peace. The rich *grind* [Shelley's emphasis] the poor into abjectness & then complain that they are abject. – They goad them to famine and hang them if they steal a loaf. (Letters v.1, 271)

He witnesses famine and poverty, and identifies the cruelty of English laws and their constables as their source: "unrestricted & licensed tyranny" (270). In this letter he declares that "this nation shall awaken" and that, although "prejudices are so violent in contradiction to my principles that more hate me as a freethinker, than love me as a votary of Freedom, [nevertheless] I have at least made a stir here, and set some men's minds afloat" (270-1). That "the rich *grind* the poor" like a miller grinds corn is not a coincidental figure. Nor is the nautical figure of "minds afloat," unanchored from the weight of self-interested economics. Early in his career, then, Shelley engages agrarian politics and begins to develop a set of corresponding themes and figures derived from the "Robinson Crusoe myth," "The Second Discourse," and Godwin's novels.

In this way, Shelley's interest in agrarian politics is not a marginal one; the vocabulary of this intellectual tradition provides him with a set of themes and figures that

are essential to many of his poetic works. “Lines written among the Euganean Hills” (1818) and “Ode to the West Wind” (1819) feature isolated figures afloat or isle-bound, who contemplate sea storms in terms of senseless forces that propel the fate of peoples, figured in both as grains, seeds, leaves, or corn. Both are reflections on political history and reveal Shelley’s radicalism; as Mary Shelley wrote in an editorial note on Shelley’s 1819 poetry, Shelley “believed that a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable, and he eagerly ranged himself on the people’s side” (The Complete Poems 626). These poems question, as so many of Shelley’s poems do, whether a poet should act through a retreat from the corrupt world, governed by the interests of consolidated wealth, or through a self-sacrificing summons to revolutionary engagement to liberate and revitalize the oppressed and dispossessed. And Shelley found in agrarian politics the terms in which to pose this question.

If Shelley writes Hitchener about the connection between agriculture and tyranny in 1812, his position did not change over time; agrarian politics is a principal theme in Shelley’s minor poetry of 1819, the year after he composed “Lines written among the Euganean Hills.” A short lyric of eight stanzas, “Song to the Men of England” begins: “Men of England, wherefore plough / For the lords who lay ye low? / Wherefore weave with toil and care / The rich robes your tyrants wear” (The Complete Poems 1-4). It is essentially an anti-government and anti-aristocratic song, composed in agrarian terms:

> Sow seed, - but let no tyrant reap;
>
> Find wealth, - let no imposter heap;
>
> Weave robes, - let not the idle wear;
>
> Forge arms, - in your defence to bear. (The Complete Poems 21-4)

A celebration of simple labor, the fragment denounces capitalism and extols independence in simple phrases. He begins another fragment, most likely another version of the same song, with a rejection of the estate-labor system: "People of England, ye who toil and groan, / Who reap the harvests which are not your own […]" ("Fragment: To the People of England"). In "An Ode" to the Spanish before they "had recovered their Liberty" from French incursion (Mary Shelley's explanatory note), Shelley cries: "Arise, arise, arise! / There is blood on the earth that denies ye bread" (1-2). Agricultural usurpation, be it a harvest or of the land itself, is among Shelley's most recurrent symbols in 1819 for political corruption because it works both figuratively and literally. On the hand, it works as a metaphor for all of the crimes against the poor, from taxes, to evictions, to compulsory to military service; on the other hand, it works literally, as the principal means by which the government creates capital and a dependent labor force. In "Sonnet: England in 1819," which addresses the Peterloo Massacre, he draws attention to the painful irony of "A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field" (7). The antecedent to these poems is "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," where Shelley develops an image of a beleaguered peasant farmer.

In "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," the poet of the poem sits in dejection upon a "solitary hill" (89) contemplating Lombardy at sunrise. Despite the poem's title, which suggests a series of connected hills, this "solitary hill" is an isolated spot. The poet calls it a "flowering island […] / In the waters of wide Agony" (66-89), developing on the "boat-sea-voyage-island complex of symbols" (Reiman, "Structure, Symbol, and Theme," 405 n3) that opens the poem. In effect, the location detaches the poet from the social and political world around him, lifts him above its oppressiveness,

and, as the section unfolds, grants him an ostensible independence of moral judgment. Though not shipwrecked, he is, like Robinson Crusoe, isolated from society, beyond its influences and prejudices, able to see historical developments with a spirit of independence. From this vantage the poet surveys the city of Venice and the environs of Padua with a spirit as independent as the sunlight that spreads over the land.

In his chapter, "Boats. Isles," in Shelley at Work: An Inquiry (1969), Neville Rogers follows the imagery of boats and islands throughout Shelley's writings. He identifies his juvenile poem, "The Voyage," from the Esdaile Notebook, as Shelley's initial treatment. Rogers suggests that in this poem "the Boat is a means of conveyance away from the evil landman's world, […] towards an ideal world of unspoiled humanity patterned by Rousseau" (92). I would add that the idea of a voyage to an island of "unspoiled humanity" belongs to a literary tradition which for Shelley begins with Defoe. Shelley's flight in "The Voyage," Rogers continues, is strictly from "social evils," and "the sea across which the escape takes place as […] 'the wide ocean of intellectual beauty'" (Rogers quoting from Shelley's translation of Plato's Symposium), but in his subsequent writings, each of these figures -- boats, seas, and islands -- assumes further and more complex symbolic meaning. The boat, the most significant of the three, becomes a "bearer of knowledge" (96), "a vehicle for conveyance of the disembodied spirit" (96), "a vehicle of Shelleyan love," (99), through the mysterious intermediate space […] in which there seems to be no very clear distinction between 'the ocean of water' and 'the ocean of air'" (96). In short, the sea and the islands that haunt the dreams of weary mariners are often metaphysical in Shelley's poetry, as spaces in which dreamers escape from political tyranny. Hilltops, for example, become islands of escape,

such as the "solitary hill" (89) surrounded by a "broken mist" on which birds "sail" (85) and "spread like a green sea / The waveless plain of Lombardy" (90-1) in "Lines written among the Euganean Hills."

Having escaped from the social reality of Venice, the poet of "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" reads in the landscape a history of moral degeneration under political oppression. Venice, he laments, was born from the sea, with the promise of a great future (115-6). The Venetians, however, were blinded early on by their own self-interest and ambitions, advancing leaders who would expand their empire. This mistake presages "a darker day" (117): having allowed themselves to be subjugated by military despots, they became, like Godwin's Hungarians in St. Leon, dependent upon them. Debased for ages by a servitude that disfigures them (their dependence marks them with a "conquest-branded brow" (122)), their resistance to the tyranny of Austria could only be meager and ineffective. Their fall was inevitable. The enduring architecture of Venice, which once testified to the glory of the people who lived within it, now only serves as a "labyrinth of walls" (95), as "sepulchers" (146) and "dungeons" (153) containing the oppressed multitudes. Moreover, the poet, like a prophet, anticipates that the city, annihilated, will ultimately sink back into the waters that gave birth to it. The mythological references in his description (the poet calls Venice "Ocean's Child" (116) and remarks that Venetian architecture once challenged Apollo (114)) might suggest that the poet's vision is mythical in character. But, his speculations on the region's political history undermine any such abstraction as he turns his attention next to Padua to identify the initial folly of the people. His is a bleak historical vision, which he admits "Darkened" his poem (312).

In his darkest, most misanthropic moment, the poet offers a radical revision of the body politic metaphor. He likens the lives of the Venetians to "pollution-nourished worms, [who] To the corpse of greatness cling" (146-7). Driven by self-interest, the Venetians handed themselves over to military despots, who so debased them that they grew utterly dependent upon them. When those despots fell, so did the will of the people, such that they live at present in utter depravity, "trampled" (268), unable to govern themselves or muster the strength to reject their oppressor. They can no longer judge or determine their best interests, but press on in a monotonous stupor, feeding on the poison of oppression, which Shelley identifies elsewhere as meat and liquor, the principal products of large-scale agriculture of Padua (see below), like addicts and becoming themselves "the polluting multitude" (356).

In "Percy Bysshe Shelley and Revolutionary Climatology," Alan Bewell explores at length Shelley's connection between disease, socio-political relations, and place. He argues that Shelley saw "physical environment itself as a social product" (627), and that disease was the result of environmental degradation, brought on by the excesses of tyranny and exacerbated by the "social stasis" of a population so downtrodden that they are incapable of changing course. Although he does not link this idea to Rousseau or Godwin, both of whom identified the source of diseases as unnatural social relations (Shelley's vegetarianism owes much to Rousseau's "Second Discourse," as mentioned above), Bewell does connect the notion of disease to Shelley's agrarian politics: for Shelley, "ecology and politics are inseparably allied" (635). His argument addresses how Shelley used "colonial space," which by "misuse of power" was everywhere rendered a "pathogenic space," as "a means and a vocabulary for understanding European society

(628). The prevalent theme of disease in Shelley's poetry is linked to political and social corruption. I would add, however, that this argument is in fact a reënvisioning of the Robinson Crusoe myth, in which political domination is not disguised as the design of providence, but is exposed as corruption and self-interest. In place of abundance, Shelley reads excess, overindulgence, and glut.

The poet of "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" elaborates upon this figure of the polluting-effect of tyranny in more literal terms when he turns his attention from the city of Venice to the "the harvest-shining plain" (217) surrounding Padua. There he sees peasants bent by agrarian exploitation. Again what might be a pastoral vision of an abundant corn harvest is perverted by the decadence of tyrants: "the peasant heaps his grain / In the garner of his foe, / And the milk-white oxen slow / With the purple vintage strain, / Heaped upon the creaking wain, / That the brutal Celt may swill / Drunken sleep with savage will" (218-24). The very abundance of corn and grapes that nature yields and the peasants harvest, and which should insure their preservation and well-being, is either denied to the people or, as the poet explains further, made noxious: "many a lord, / Like a weed whose shade is poison, / Overgrows this region's foizon" (226-7). The central proposition of Shelley's radical agrarian politics, which mirrors Godwin's politics, is captured by this pollution-poison theme; the corn and grapes that would, and should, provide for the subsistence, independence, health and vigor of the population is appropriated and spoiled by tyrants, who amass it as capital, so as to make the population insecure, dependent, fearful and obedient. The abundance is hoarded away "in the garner of the foe," and left to waste, except for that which is processed into indulgent and superfluous luxuries for those in power, such as for the despot's swill. In addition, those

who labor are denied both the fruit of their own labor as well as the leisure and time for learning that their work should grant them: "In thine halls the lamp of learning, / Padua, now no more is burning" (256-7). For Godwin, leisure and time for learning were essential prerequisites for social reform; without them, people would remain ignorant and foolishly selfish, letting their independent spirit, as Shelley writes, be "trampled out by tyranny" (268). Scrivener observes, "Like Godwin, Shelley wants to simplify the economy in order to increase the leisure of the poor and to shorten the working day. Such a society has to be agrarian, but cannot permit capitalist farming for profit. Agriculture must be freed from Commerce, the real culprit" (73). Scrivener's distinction between agrarian society and commercial agriculture is in essence Rousseau's distinction between subsistence farming and large-scale agriculture.

In "Queen Mab" Shelley denounces commerce as it is born from selfishness, itself "The cause and effect of tyranny" (V, 31). Following Rousseau's denunciation of *amour-propre* that social existence and commerce artificially inspire, Shelley conceives of commerce as an "all-enslaving power" (V, 54) and a poison to our natural, "boundless love, / For ever stifled, drained, and tainted now" (V, 42-3). Commerce, he proclaims, is responsible for moral degeneration, social debasement, and a deadening of the mind and passions:

> The weight that drags to earth his towering hopes,
>
> Blighting all prospect but of selfish gain,
>
> Withering all passion but of slavish fear,
>
> Extinguishing all free and generous love
>
> Of enterprise and daring, even the pulse

> That fancy kindles in the beating heart
>
> To mingle with sensation, it destroys, --
>
> Leaves nothing but the sordid lust of self,
>
> The groveling hope of interest and gold,
>
> Unqualified, unmingled, unredeemed
>
> Even by hypocrisy. (V, 83-93)

When farmers are subjugated by despots, as they are in "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," they have lost their pastoral and political status as independent, subsistence farmers. Dispossessed, they have little choice but to join the labor force for large-scale agriculture that supports the military campaigns alleged to protect them, but which only lead to great disparities of wealth.

In his essay on Shelley's agrarian politics, Bewell complicates the opposition between independent farmers and large-scale agriculture in many of Shelley's poems. Reading some of the more optimistic and fervent passages of "Queen Mab" and recollections of Shelley's one-time friend at Oxford, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Bewell explains that Shelley wanted to reclaim these degraded lands, rendered deserts by tyrants, and, using scientific advancements, including chemical fertilizers, rejuvenate them in "a total ecological transformation" (629-30). And, in an unexpected reversal, Bewell suggests,

> We make a serious mistake if we treat his notions about ecological revolution as simply visionary. They also express many of the ideas that led to the radical transformation of the landscapes of England and that informed the engineering megaprojects of later nineteenth-century colonialism. An anti-imperialist on one

> level, Shelley nevertheless shares with the promoters of empire the "technotopian" belief that European science should contribute to the transformation of global environments. (630).

Shelley's youthful enthusiasm for scientific progress and utopian rhetoric, which tempered with time, may indeed line up with later large-scale, imperialist agricultural projects, but we should be circumspect about what Bewell implies by "shares." For Shelley, such science promised to empower the downtrodden by giving them the means to wrest wealth from the rich and to throw off the burden of their maintenance; he would have objected to being associated with imperialist "megaprojects." In that it had no limits, such science was a brilliant counter to Malthus, who argued that humanity was unable to surmount the principle of population growth and therefore some quarter would remain in poverty always. And, finally, such science would abolish scarcity and thereby free humanity from the constraints of economic thought and self-interest. The philosophical and political framework in which Shelley considers the role of agricultural science is quite different from that of capitalist designs of "the engineering megaprojects of later nineteenth-century colonialism" (Bewell 630). Shelley was a student of Godwin, who, Scrivener clarifies, was not the supporter of "large-scale industrial production" to "abolish scarcity": "rather than accept the teleology of capitalist technology (that is, assume that the evolution of the machine must proceed without interference, as though it were an operation of nature), Godwin insists upon the priority of certain values: leisure, equality, sharing toil, direct democracy" (20). Such priorities becomes apparent in Shelley's later works.

The poet of “Lines written among the Euganean Hills” does offer a saving hope for Lombardy in the brief residence of a “tempest-cleaving Swan” (177), an English poet (whom Reiman identifies as Byron), who flees persecution in England and stays in Venice for a spell. This Swan, it is hoped, may uplift the people and bring about a moral reformation. The Ocean, parent of Venice, “Welcomed him with such emotion / That its joy grew his, and sprung / From his lips like music flung / O’er a mighty thunder-fit, / Chastening terror […]” (174-83). And so, flying from persecution, this “Mighty Spirit” (204), this supreme and archetypal poet, blasts forth over Lombardy what is in effect his swan-song. In its dying beauty, carried forth by nature, the song both chastens the corruption of tyrants and the degradation of the multitudes as well as attempts to awaken a more compassionate spirit of rebellion and love among the people. In the previous stanza, the narrating poet muses in a similar but more passive vein,

> But if Freedom should awake
> In her omnipotence, and shake
> From the Celtic Anarch’s hold
> All the keys of dungeons cold
> Where a hundred cities lie
> Chained like thee, ingloriously,
> Thou and all thy sister band
> Might adorn this sunny land,
> Twining memories of old time
> With new virtues more sublime […]. (150-159)

What is called for in the poet's reveries and then in the swan's song is a general awakening of political consciousness, a desire for freedom and independence as well as a selfless compassion for others. Because it is a figure of self-sacrifice, of the abandonment of self-interest and self-preservation, the "tempest-cleaving Swan" becomes the ideal herald for this awakening.

There is, however, no dramatic political awakening in Lombardy in "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," and the poet abandons his fantasy of the "tempest-cleaving Swan" for a more peaceful fantasy. The poet closes the poem by imagining that waves will "pilot" his "bark" along, "across "the sea of Life and agony" to "some calm and blooming cove" (335-41)…

> Where for me, and those I love,
>
> May a windless bower be built,
>
> Far from passion, pain, and guilt,
>
> In a dell 'mid lawny hills,
>
> Which the wild sea-murmur fills […] (343-7)

He imagines an island retreat, a "sweet abode," that is self-sustaining, independent and renewable. It is a near-Edenic, social paradise, in which the melody of his soul can find harmony in both "mild brotherhood" and nature:

> While each breathless interval
>
> In their whisperings musical
>
> The inspired soul supplies
>
> With its own deep melodies,
>
> And the love which heals all strife

> Circling, like the breath of life,
>
> All things in that sweet abode
>
> With its own mild brotherhood:
>
> They, not it, would change; and soon
>
> Every sprite beneath the moon
>
> Would repent its envy vain,
>
> And the earth grow young again. (362-73)

Despite seeming to be an abandonment of his political convictions, this planned retreat is not entirely misanthropic or anti-social in spirit. That "every sprite [...] Would repent its envy vain" and that "They [the polluted multitude] would change" suggests the sort of social and political awakening the poet hoped the Swan would provoke in Lombardy. In his essay-length note to "Queen Mab," "A Vindication of Natural Diet," which he published as a pamphlet in 1813, Shelley writes of an agricultural revolution:

> the spirit of the nation that should take lead in this great reform, would insensibly become agricultural; commerce, with all its vice, selfishness and corruption, would gradually decline; more natural habits would produce gentler manners, and the excessive complication of political relations would be so far simplified, that every individual might feel and understand why he loved his country, and took a personal interest in its welfare. (85)

To abandon large-scale agriculture and return to "natural habits," in other words, is a highly political act. And to this end, Shelley declares with revolutionary fervor that "the labour requisite to support a family is far lighter than is usually supposed. The peasantry work, not only for themselves, but for the aristocracy, the army and the manufacturers"

(86); once relieved of this additional burden, peasants might enjoy greater freedom and leisure. In "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," Shelley envisions social change brought about by a retreat from life in an empire, with multitudes, to small-scale communal living, comprised of independent individuals on an "island paradise." The "mild brotherhood" found in such an abode echoes the earlier desire for a resistance through a collective, of Venice with "thy sister band" (157). Following Raymond Williams's general reading of Shelley (79), Scrivener suggests that the poem is "aristocratic in structure […] because social renewal is tied to the poet's fate" (152), which would complement Reiman's argument that there are certain enduring class prejudices in Shelley's poetry. Be that as it may, the intention of the poet is to inspire, through apostle-like "spirits of the air" (352), others to such a life; unlike the swan-song, this fantasy "[…] may even entice / To our healing paradise / The polluting multitude" (354-6), where they might awaken and find solace.

Shelley is more concerned with the propagation of this vision, with the arousal of the multitudes and the overthrow of tyranny, than with the celebration of an elite or his social standing within it, which at most would be that of a land-owning cottager or, in his more romantic visions, a co-inhabitant of an independent bower. In charting Shelley's thinking about the deleterious effects of tyranny on climate and the possibility of environmental amelioration, Bewell remains skeptical about the scope of Shelley's vision. Drawing upon a line from "Queen Mab" (VIII, 76), he states "the centrality of 'Corn-fields, pastures, white cottages' in this renovated earth shows how difficult it is, even for the most radical of English anti-imperial poets, to avoid using English landscape as the measure of utopia" (636). Although the identification of this landscape as

particularly English rather than as a more generic pastoral image is unconvincing, nevertheless Bewell does highlight Shelley's ideal of small-scale communal living.[19]

In sum, "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" offers a complete picture of Shelley's agrarian and land management politics. More specifically, he explores how tyranny exploits agriculture. Under the auspices of expansionism, despots appropriate land so as to alienate peasants from the fruit of their labor and to subjugate all those who live on the land. Then, exploiting this obedient labor force, the despots appropriate agricultural abundance and transmute it into capital, which only further debases the people. Without control over their own basic subsistence, the moral judgment of the people is impaired and they remain ignorant of what is in fact in their best interests, poisoned by self-interest and greed that their oppressors have inspired in them. The conclusions are in large part derived from Godwin, but, as Scrivener suggests, "the

[19] In Shelley's writings the retreat from the larger world, corrupted by politics, may indeed be presented in idealistic terms, but William Cobbett put forward a similar vision in very practical terms in his 1821 booklet, Cottage Economy. Condemning "*the system* of managing the affairs of the nation" (his emphasis 6) that has led to wide-spread oppression, with its "mock-liberality, mock-humanity, and mock-religion" (120), Cobbett turned his hopes, with "all love for independence" (7), to the management of family matters among the laboring classes in a rural setting, "*cottagers* [with] some land" (his emphasis 25). Although it is a practical handbook on how to grow corn, brew beer, weave clothes, and raise livestock (a list that might be derived from Robinson Crusoe's efforts, with the exception of the home brew, which, incidentally, Cobbett extols as vastly preferable to imported tea, 22-5), the politics of Cottage Economy are not masked: poverty among the laboring classes is brought on by, and serves the interests of, tyrants (6); the greatest virtue is to bake your own bread from corn you yourself have cultivated (it is even more virtuous than learning the Bible by heart and is the measure of an honest wife, 62-3); and, mercantile economy and government regulation ever seeks to monitor, control, and redistribute subsistence crops to empower the nation, but to the detriment of those who cultivate the crops (68-70). Reminiscent of Godwin's condemnation of the brutal English colonization of Ireland in Mandeville and Shelley's accounts of how the English denied the poor Irish bread in his March 10, 1812 letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, Cobbett's fiercest attack in Cottage Economy is against government led efforts to move the laboring classes off of a corn diet and onto a potato diet, which he saw as iniquitous and exploitative: "This has a tendency to bring the English labourers down to the state of the Irish," he argues, "whose mode of living, as to food, is but one remove from that of the pig, and of the ill-fed pig too" (51). Shelley made the same comment about the debasing of the poor to pig-level subsistence in his letter (quoted above); though Cobbett may have been more practical, the two share much in common in terms of their agrarian politics. Although Shelley often found Cobbett's writings to be vulgar and spoke ill of them in his youthful correspondence, he came to identify with his politics: "Cobbet [*sic*] still more and more delights me, with all my horror of the sanguinary commonplaces of his creed. His design to overthrow Bank notes by forgery is very comic" (Letters 2: 99).

critical difference between Shelley and Godwin is this: the former is much more activist than the latter, more eager to intervene socially with philosophical insights, and more willing to risk the dangers of revolution" (36). Indeed, Philps discusses how, throughout his revisions to the first edition of Political Justice, Godwin became more and more conservative about any "coercive redistribution of property" and quotes from the 1798 revision, "'private fortunes cannot cease to exist, till a spirit of sobriety and reflection hitherto unknown, has been infused into the great mass of mankind'" (194). Shelley was not always so patient. Nevertheless, "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" laments that there is no easy remedy to this condition, and suggests that a retreat to small-scale, independent farming is the appropriate ethical choice, and perhaps the first step towards progress.

Shelley explores related dietary issues in "A Vindication of Natural Diet," where he asks,

> How can the advantages of intellect and civilization be reconciled with the liberty and pure pleasures of natural life? How can we take the benefits, and reject the evils of the system, which is now interwoven with all the fibres of our being? – I believe that abstinence from animal food and spirituous liquors, would in a great measure capacitate us for the solution of this important question. (79)

Of course that the cost of meat, beer, and some liquors is dependent on the cost of corn would not have escaped Shelley, aware of the changes to the "political economy" that a dietary change may affect. By rejecting the consumption of animal food and spirituous liquors, Shelley is advocating for opting out of large-scale agricultural production and a return to a more natural state: "The monopolizing eater of animal flesh would no longer

destroy his constitution by devouring an acre at meal […]" (85). Certainly, Godwin would have approved of this choice of a withdrawal from participating in any state-regulated system of agriculture over that of the "tempest-cleaving Swan," as the more measured and responsible choice. The retreat to an isolated and independent cottage has all the charm of Crusoe's idyllic island – but is an island on which no person shall plant corn on a scale for economic exchange and capital production.

After composing "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" but before beginning "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley began but never finished a poem entitled "Marenghi."[20] Although it is only a fragment, this poem marks a significant shift in Shelley's attitudes between the two greater poems. The inspiration for "Marenghi" was drawn from Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi's Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Âge (1807-9), which Shelley along with Mary eagerly read in January of 1819 (The Journals of Mary Shelley 246-8). In the Swiss historian's history, Marenghi is an exile under threat of capital punishment, who finds redemption among his fellow Florentines by single-handedly sinking a supply galley filled with corn destined for their adversaries, the Pisans. Looking to expand their empire, the once peace-loving Florentines had laid siege to Pisa, but were unable to break through its walls. In response, Pisa sent to Sicily galleys to acquire corn. Marenghi, who has been living in exile, has the fortune to spot one of the galleys at anchor and swims out to it, torch in hand. Despite being shot by several arrows, he manages to hold the flame to the prow until it lights. For this, he is redeemed and celebrated in Florence; weakened by starvation, Pisa is conquered.[21] In "Future Uncertain," Michael Rossington characterizes Shelley as generally "drawn to that

[20] For a discussion of the name of the poem and of the character, and Shelley's variants, see C. D. Locock.
[21] For the relevant passage from Sismondi and a translation from the original French, see Michael Rossington's "Future Uncertain: The Republican Tradition and Its Destiny in *Valperga*."

moment when, within one influential model of Enlightenment historiography, the trajectory of republican history from decline to fall is precipitated" (109), which is reasonable, considering Shelley's passion for the histories of Gibbon and Volney. The narrative of Marenghi, Rossington explains, is "set at the point when Florence itself, venerated by Sismondi as the most democratic of the Tuscan city-states in the middle ages, has become corrupted by aggressive, imperial ambition" (109). Shelley writes of the moment: "[…] As death to life, / As winter to fair flowers (though some be poison) / So Monarchy succeeds to Freedom's foison" (12-4). Alan Weinberg describes the story of Marenghi in Shelley's Italian Experience as taking place at the moment in which "the ideals of Republican Florence and Humanist Italy degenerate: Florence, protector of civil liberties, becomes a liberticide, while Rome, locus of the revival of learning and ancient culture, is yet a city of ruthless despots" (100).

> Another scene ere wise Etruria knew
>   Its second ruin through internal strife,
> And tyrants through the breach of discord threw
>   The Chain which binds and kills. […] ("Marenghi," The Complete Poems, 9-12)

The implication of both critics is the same: Shelley draws (once again) from an historical source, and develops his narrative in correspondence to a greater historical framework. The poem, however, offers more.

Although accurate, Rossington's translation of the passage from Sismondi overlooks one critical detail: the Pisans "envoyèrent quelques galères chercher *des blés* en Sicile" (my emphasis). It is the very word Rousseau used in his "Second Discourse,"

and is better translated as corn (in the older sense of that term), not the more general "supplies" Rossington's translation offers (108). Regardless of what may have been the actual diet of Italians, to Shelley the relevance and poignancy of this detail would have been acute. Shelley was familiar with and had argued for years that corn is essential to consolidating and maintaining political and military power, be it used offensively or defensively, as in the case of the Pisans. It seems likely that this very detail in Sismondi is what caught Shelley's interest (it is the only passage that inspired a poem;: what is at stake is at root a control of food capital. In order to "subdue" Pisa, to "reduce[…] it to a province," to borrow from Mary Shelley's editorial comment on the poem, Florence needed not greater force, but rather to arrest and control Pisa's food supply.

The corrupt character of Florence's ambition is made apparent in the culminating stanza of the poem's opening frame:

> Was Florence the liberticide? That band
>
> Of free and glorious brothers who had planted,
>
> Like a green isle mid Aethiopian sand,
>
> A nation amid slaveries, disenchanted
>
> Of many impious faiths – wise, just – do they,
>
> Does Florence, gorge the sated tyrants' prey? (23-8).

The controlling metaphor of the stanza is the metaphor of diet. Where once "free and glorious brothers" joined together to "plant," to create "a green isle" independent of the "slaveries" and "impious faiths" of the greater world, and to live off of what "green" they planted, Florentines now seek to be meat-eaters, to "gorge the sated tyrants' prey," to conquer and subjugate. It echoes Robinson Crusoe's narrative: a self-sustaining, isolated,

and independent farmer with time comes to need additional labor, in his case, slave labor. The control of food runs throughout Shelley's poem. Marenghi himself, Shelley suggests, was likely a farmer before he was driven off his land for crimes not recorded (55). "A penalty of blood on all [Florentines] who shared / So much of water with him as might wet / His lips […]" (66-8) was decreed. For months he felt "like a hunted beast" and suffered "hunger" until a Spring "strawberry-tree" (74) announced a change of fortune.

Marenghi's fortune changes with the Spring. He regains primitive independence, befriends the beasts and sprites of the wilds: "He had tamed every newt and snake and toad […] And the marsh-meteors, like tame beasts, at night / Came licking with blue tongues his veined feet" (107, 111-2). In the mornings, he "awakes" and "feel[s] liberty" (124-9), and he "Communed with the immeasurable world; / And felt his life beyond his limbs dilated, / Till his mind grew like that it contemplated" (133-5). Largely responsible for this rejuvenation is his diet:

> His food was the wild fig and strawberry;
>   The milky pine-nuts which the autumn-blast
> Shakes into the tall grass; or such small fry
>   As from the sea by winter-storms are cast;
> And the coarse bulbs of iris-flowers he found
> Knotted in clumps under the spongy ground. (136-41)

This subsistence gathering, without cultivation or capital, requires that Marenghi be open to what nature actively provides, which is why Shelley uses the passive voice repeatedly in this stanza. Meat-eating is rejected, with the exception of small fish, flung dead cast

out from the ocean. It is a dramatic diet, but that is precisely the point; it represents the opposite diet from "the sated tyrants' prey."

What develops in Shelley's fragment, then, is a pronounced opposition between Marenghi's independent and peaceful existence as he lives in exile in the wilds, and the military-agricultural tyrannies of the world about him. The poem breaks off when Marenghi spots the "black ship." The opposition Shelley has developed so far defies the reconciliation Marenghi wins in Sismondi's narrative, where his act of military sabotage furthers the imperial expansion of Florence. To sink the ship of corn, in other words, would not win him his independence, but surrender it. Rossington argues that Shelley's intent was to illustrate how patriotism can overtake human compassion, that Marenghi's "sympathy for the starving Pisans, is eventually overwhelmed by 'the thought of his own country,'" the poem's last line (109): "The defining moment, and tragic fall, of the hero lies in his assumption of a political identity, where previously the scene had been remarkable precisely because it had been empty of the possibility of any humanly defined identity whatsoever" (109). The problem with this reading is that Marenghi has a politically defined identity, that of a Florentine exile, and is recognizable as such (otherwise "the penalty of blood" for those who were charitable to him would be pointless). The dramatic interest of what Shelley did write largely consists of his inversion of this identity from an oppressive imposition into a liberating self-awakening. Nevertheless, Rossington's point, that the poem implies a tragic turn and this is an "assumption of a political identity," is compelling if we consider this to mean a violent and self-sacrificing re-engagement with imperial powers. Shelley abandoned the poem,

but what is in the fragment is a clear indication that Shelley's interests were turning away from the interest in an island retreat, to more confrontational politics.

If "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" ultimately recommends withdrawal to an island retreat over following the model of the "Tempest-cleaving Swan," "Marenghi" seems to suggest a growing ambivalence with that choice. Then, Shelley completely reverses his position the following year in "Ode to the West Wind." Scrivener captures well Shelley's ambivalence, arguing that Shelley

> never fully resolved the tension, which is embodied in his concept of the poet-prophet or philosophical reformer, who exists between actuality and potentiality […], between an enlightened rationalist, sensitive to the particulars of historical evolution, and a Dionysian anarchist, whose world-view is Manichean. (36)

In the ode, the "Dionysian anarchist" quits any notion of retreating from the world, and throws himself into a revolutionary summons to action in a self-sacrificing plea. The poet asks the coming winds to carry his swansong "among mankind" when the gusts overwhelm him so as to "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth! / And, by the incantation of this verse, / Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes, and sparks, my words among mankind" (63-7)! In short, Shelley abandons his proposal for a quiet cottage retreat and returns to the fantasy of the "tempest-cleaving Swan," the poet who abandons self-interest and sacrifices himself in order to awaken with a dying song the compassion of the multitudes.

As in the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," a poet imagines the "Pestilence-stricken multitudes," now figured as dead leaves, driven on towards their graves (5). The leaves are a common enough figure, as Reiman and Fraistat note in their

editorial comments on the poem (Shelley's Poetry and Prose 298). In this case, however, it has an additional historical and political dimension to it. In the third sonnet of the ode, the poet meditates over the sight of "old palaces and towers" in Baiæ's bay (33), sunken beneath the waters. He ponders how these ruins, preserved but forgotten, might bear witness to the glorious past long departed, as the Venetian architecture did in "Lines written among the Euganean Hills." This allusion to past history provides the poem with its tenor, and reveals Shelley's attitude at the time of its composition. Shelley writes in a letter from Italy to Thomas Love Peacock in December of 1818 about his travels in and about Rome and Naples, describing with awe Roman monuments and the scene of the bay he draws upon for the ode (Letters 2: 57-64). Throughout this letter he also insists on how the "external nature in these delightful regions contrasts with & compensates for the deformity & degradation of humanity" (60). He describes the traffic of children, having witnessed a murder in the streets, and a general depravity throughout:

> Behold the wrecks of what a great nation once dedicated to the abstractions of the mind. Rome is a city as it were of the dead, or rather of those who cannot die, & who survive the puny generations which inhabit & pass over the spot which they have made sacred to eternity. (60)

Shelley presents the Italians as the people who live at the end of Gibbon's history: mere shadows who live only to "pass over" the ruins of history. The figure of the "pestilence-stricken multitude" in the "Ode to the West Wind" captures this characterization: the contemporary Italians are dead leaves, each "a corpse within its grave" (8), "driven, like ghosts" by an "unseen presence" (2-3). Furthermore, this figure is not of dead leaves, but of "pestilence-stricken" leaves. In "A Vindication of Natural Diet," Shelley repeatedly

identifies meat and spirits, the principle products of large-scale corn production by "commercial monopolies," as the "certain poisons" that enervate the multitudes (84), the same poisons he identifies in "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" as the source of tyranny. The degradation of the Italians by a history of tyranny is virtually complete; the poet of the ode imagines that this "unseen presence," the "breath of Autumn" (1), will decimate the decayed world under "the dome of a vast sepulcher" (25). Again in "Ode to the West Wind," the tyranny-corruption-sickness theme continues, but with greater urgency: the multitudes are on the threshold of the grave.

If it begins with the image of wind-blown leaves, "Ode to the West Wind" culminates in an image that Shelley drew from Godwin and returns to throughout his career: the trumpet that heralds a coming revolution. This is not Gabriel's trumpet heralding the Day of Judgment in which the dead shall arise. Rather, this is a trumpet heralding a political and social revolution, as terrestrial as the cycle of the seasons. The poet's desire "to quicken a new birth" (64) speaks more to the repeated metaphor of sleep in the poem than any kind of rebirth or resurrection; the poet's hope is not that the seasons will cycle, but that by his death, his poetry may wake the "dreaming" (10) earth to a more compassionate future. At the poem's climactic end, the poet cries to the winds, "Be through my lips to unawakened Earth / The trumpet of a prophecy […]" (68-9)! Earlier in the opening stanza of the poem, he speaks of the Spring's wind, who "[…] shall blow / Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill/ (driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air) / With living hues and odours plain and hill […]" (9-12). This gentle horn announces the arrival of a new season, of a renewed earth, after a season of death. Not so the trumpet of the fall, the "Destroyer and Preserver" (14). Although the poem offers the

seasons as a cycle of death and renewal, there is no indication that the poet himself will be reborn. Rather, he objectifies himself: "Make me thy lyre" (57); he proudly identifies with the death he sees in the forest about him: "What if my leaves are falling like its own!" (57), a line anticipated by "If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear […]" (43); he wishes to be dispossessed of his own spirit: "Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!" (60-1); he identifies his thoughts as not living but "dead thoughts" (63); and, he dreams that the wind will replace his own breath: "Be through my lips to unawakened Earth / The trumpet of a prophesy" (69). It is a martyr's fantasy of bearing witness (to the historical suffering of humanity under tyranny), of suffering ("I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" 54), of dying as a willing sacrifice, and of ascribing to that death the value of advancing a greater cause: "O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind" (69-70)? The revolutionary may not see the Spring, being some months away, but he is willing to sacrifice himself in order to be instrumental to its eventual victory.

Unlike the early poetry of 1818, "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," and "Marenghi," the "Ode to the West Wind" does not directly address any material agrarian politics. Nevertheless, this fantasy of martyrdom is in several respects a refutation of the definition of humanity modeled by Defoe in Robinson Crusoe and rearticulated in more philosophical terms by Malthus. The poet of "Ode to the West Wind" lacks any self-interest, does not think in finite terms or limit himself to the pursuit of the practical, and abandons any interest in self-preservation. In short, there are none of the defining traits of *homo economicus* in the poet's character. Morevoer, seminal imagery remains pervasive in the ode and comes to represent not divine providence and the virtue of prudent economics, but just the opposite, the poet's selflessness. Instead of counted and

cultivated, seeds are blown recklessly about by the West Wind in the manner in which he himself wishes to be ("If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear […]" 43). Indeed, in his essay "History's Lyre," James Chandler argues that after some early belief in rational social amelioration (during which time he considered large-scale agricultural improvement through science and technology), Shelley sought to define "poetry against the rational will, and [to align] it with the spirit of the age, precisely because this alignment lifted it clear of the calculating faculty, and indeed of the entire utilitarian calculus […]" (721). The poet lacks all self-interested calculation. His desire "to quicken a new birth" (64) is not to celebrate the perennial cycle of the seasons, but to call for a single revolution, one in which social and ecological regeneration will commence. That is, the poet's hope is not that the seasons will continually cycle, but that his swansong may wake the "unawakened" (68) and "dreaming" (10) earth once and for all.

Where Shelley elsewhere talks of seeds and corn, the pairing in the "Ode to the West Wind" is of seeds and leaves; leaves are treated as seeds insofar as they are presumed to have generative power. In Robinson Crusoe, the generative power of corn is taken as a testament to the benevolence of Providence and its mandate for colonial expansion through the enclosure and cultivation of common lands. Essential to such expansion, however, is not only the cultivation of seeds, but also the propagation of a culture of imperialism. In "Ode to the West Wind," however, Shelley speaks not of corn but of leaves. Chandler discusses Shelley's recurrent botanical misunderstandings about the role of leaves in plant reproduction, which first appear in "Queen Mab" and "The Revolt of Islam" and that appear again in the ode. He argues that the misunderstanding may be deliberate. If the poet is identified at once with leaves ("If I were a dead leaf thou

mightest bear […]" 43), a fortuitous metaphor considering the association of leaves with pages, and with the element of fire (his words are likened to "Ashes and sparks" 67), he is effectively sacrificing what is material, his body, to the life of his thoughts, his poetry: "Fire is the element that is itself preserved only at the expense of destroying something else, and wind is the power that sustains this twofold process at the same time, in the same breath" (721). In so doing, Shelley challenges "the very metaphor of cultural seminality in social regeneration." In other words, Shelley is rejecting those economic models of growth that are couched in natural or agricultural language by providing an alternative set of figures, which are figured around self-sacrifice rather than self-interest.

What remains ambiguous about the trumpet image in "Ode to the West Wind" is the character of the wind that will blow through it. The wind may be the forces of necessity, elsewhere celebrated by Shelley, or the "Uncontroulable" (47) forces of history, but it is certainly not the force of a benevolent divinity, overseeing providence, as Crusoe came to believe of the storm that shipwrecked him. What is clear is that of the two options explored in "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," Shelley came to prefer one. The cottage retreat, inspired by Godwin, is an attempt to escape social corruption and political oppression, whereas the trumpet choice is a desire to be instrumental in the forces that drive human destiny, if however briefly. In "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley sets aside Godwin's advice and becomes, as Scrivener puts it, the "Dionysian anarchist."

The famous line from his "Defense of Poetry," that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," may be understood not merely as a celebration of poets but also as an insult to existing legislators, whose authority would be displaced

were this statement true. Existing legislators, according to Shelley, fail to improve humanity and only keep the multitudes in a state of torpor. In "On Life," he responds to this problem by arguing that "the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions [is] to leave […] a vacancy." Curran in "Shelley and the end(s) of Ideology" (604) and William Keach in *Shelley's Style* both address this notion of 'vacancy' in terms of a resistance or rejection of ideologies, with liberty as its aim. They claim that this 'vacancy,' though of a clearly utopian character, remains resistant to definition. Certainly, where Crusoe converted from a life of indefinite dissipation on the open seas, to a life of finite calculation and production, and propagated this desire in others, Shelley attempted to counter and reverse each aspect of that project.

If we recognize Shelley's poetry as reflections on political history and the agency of poetry in social reform, Shelley's politics may seem reactionary. From his early writings in Ireland to his mature work in Italy, Shelley's writings overtly decry the progress of colonial imperialism, the folly of those who allow themselves to be subjugated by a centralized government, and the subsequent rise of militarism, poverty and slavery, sickness and ecological devastation. These may very well parallel radical Whig politics of the 1790s, as might Shelley's frequent calls for a simpler, non-commercial, agrarian-based lifestyle.[22] These calls, however, were not for people to

[22] Reiman argues that in addition to sharing the political platforms of the Whigs, he also 1) ignored the Corn Laws (590), 2) took advantage of laws protecting estates in debt from confiscation (590), 3) condemned the growth of the *nouveaux riches* (594-5), and 4) laid forth a program for social change that was softer on the "landed and commercial aristocracy" in "A Philosophical View of Reform" (1819-20) (594). That Shelley fails to make mention of the Corn Law does not make Shelley complicit with Whig politics, but only obscures his philosophical engagement with the connection between agricultural production and political tyranny, as this chapter discusses. That Shelley took economic advantages of laws that protected landed gentry does not necessarily prove a class prejudice or a desire to uphold in a conservative manner his father's country estate, especially when we remember that Shelley was financing social reform efforts in Ireland, Wales, and England and supporting Godwin. Shelley's frequent attacks on the rapid growth of the *nouveaux riches* did not stem from his aristocratic upbringing, but from careful

return to the English country estate system, or some nostalgic celebration of imagined pastoral England. When Shelley looks to history, from his early "Queen Mab" to "The Triumph of Life," it is always as a record of tyrannies, of suffering and exploitation. Moreover, he combats mystifications and romantic notions of political power throughout his life by reading diverse histories that attempt to describe the actual historical processes by which tyrannies have maintained power. One of the processes that captured Shelley's imagination and inspired several of poems is the recurrent appropriation and control of agricultural production – a political process about which both Rousseau and Godwin wrote extensively.

Shelley rejects large-scale farming, seeing farming as a small-scale operation that grants independence and moral and political consciousness. In "Lines Written among the Euganean Hills," Shelley is suspicious of any amassing of corn in storehouses, which transforms it from subsistence crop into capital. More specifically, he is against the appropriation and use of land by would-be protectors who seek to amass capital. Such capital, he argues, only supports militarism, wide-spread dependency among the populous on government (which becomes a wide-spread moral dependency), and decadence. Such conclusions become clear in the thematic contradictions of "Marenghi," abandoned at the moment when dramatic resolution becomes impossible. Although abstracted from the material dimension of agrarian politics, "Ode to the West Wind"

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study of the social ills brought about by *homo economicus*, as this chapter discusses. Reiman's final argument relies on one of Shelley's visions of social change, which suggests that Shelley had a set framework, but Shelley explored various visions, read history voraciously to discover models of change. Far from prejudicial or historically determined, Shelley's visions and versions of history and social progress are much more dynamic that Reiman allows. Reiman asks incredulously, "Did Shelley actually believe that a knowledge of science and poetry would make the poor content in their relative poverty, even if they possessed an adequate supply of food, fuel, and clothing 'in neat and happy home […]" (596). The answer, as this chapter will discuss, is yes – in some moments, Shelley did believe this, with one caveat: where Reiman says poor, Shelley would say a free and independent people.

directly challenges the self-interested mindset of the Crusoe planter, who calculates for advantage and profit, who seeks political power, who aligns himself with providence so as to rationalize his authority, while ignoring the consequent human misery.

Is Shelley's critique potent today or is it *passé*? Michael Pollan's scathing exposé on American agribusiness in "Industrial: Corn," in The Omnivore's Dilemna: A Natural History of Four Meals (2006) draws upon all of the same themes found in Shelley: the disappearance of independent farms, the deterioration of public health and the rise of new diseases (such as E. Coli), the destruction of the environment through agricultural pollutants as well as the replacement of sustainable biodiversity with petroleum-fed monocultures, the meteoric rise of corporate wealth and political power at the expense of those who work the fields, and the celebration of efficiency and profit in the place of compassion and cooperation. Moreover, Shelley teaches us to see that the "motive power" of corn, to return to Henry A. Wallace's words, prompts imperial aspirations, and that the rhetoric of nationalism that surrounds it is not coincidental but essential to convincing the public of their need for governmental regulation and protection. And, of course, this regulation and protection, laid out in the 2007 Farm Bill for example, is largely defined by the very corporations (Cargill, ADM, and the like) that profit from large-scale agriculture (Pollan 63). Bewell concludes his reading of Shelley's interest in climatology: "Revolution is ecological reclamation, the recovery of a nature produced by human labor and love that has been destroyed by social degradation" (636). Although Morton does not speak of corn in his study of Shelley's interest in diet, he captures well what is at stake in Shelley's thinking about corn.

> Global flows of money, symbolism, happiness and misery may congregate in one's acts of consumption. Mapping the linkages of these acts involves a teasing-out of figurative streams which serve to activate prescriptive norms – in short, ideology. One eats ideology while consuming a McDonald's Hamburger; and ideology is not just a matter of corporate image but of millions of cattle […] (4)

…cattle, I would add, that are now largely fed on government subsidized corn. Shelley's agrarian and land-management politics are radical, and emerge from his deliberate engagement with a complex intellectual history over the course of his life.

Chapter 5: "Make them actors themselves"; Shelley's "The Cenci" as Romantic Radical Theater

By the time he settles in Italy, Percy Shelley reveals in his poetry two pronounced but conflicting attitudes towards the perennial tyrannies that direct the course of human history. On the one hand there is the desire, often expressed through a melancholy and muted tone, to win independence from the historical world by retreating passively into isolation, to cottage life, to quiet and loving relationships. Such a life, Shelley dreams, might serve as a model of passivity to others and in time bring about gradual, social amelioration. On the other hand Shelley also expresses the more active desire to redirect history, to break the chains of oppression through a direct political challenge. Such a challenge is often expressed in a fantasy of some spectacular scene of martyrdom, where the death of a poet inspires an enervated multitude to political revolution. By questioning the role a poet should adopt, Shelley explores various attitudes in such lyrics as "Lines Written among the Euganean Hills" (1818) and "Ode to the West Wind" (1819). But there remains in his poetry an ambivalence as to which is more compassionate and socially responsible. It is not until he composes his politically provocative drama, "The Cenci," that Shelley finds some reconciliation between these attitudes. Having been raped by her politically powerful father, Beatrice challenges the political order, crying out for the audience to be not passive in the world, but actors themselves who respond to the call for social justice.

In certain works, Shelley seems to avoid political history, in other poems by some evasion. For example, there are poems, such as "Alastor" (1815), "Ozymandias" (1817) and his 1820 sonnet, "Ye hasten to the grave!," in which a traveler appeals to a greater historical framework, one which subsumes the political histories of any particular ruler or

nation: a rhetorical strategy aimed to render political power impotent by placing it in a larger often natural scheme of things. And, there is a series of reflective poems, culminating in "The Triumph of Life" (1822), that address necessity, mutability and universal mortality so as to undermine any enduring significance of political history. Such is the appeal of a fragment from 1820 entitled "Death":

> DEATH is here and death is there,
>
> Death is busy every,
>
> All around, within, beneath,
>
> Above is death – we are death.
>
> Death has set his mark and seal
>
> On all we are and all we feel,
>
> On all we know and all we fear
>
> * * *
>
> First our pleasures die – and then
>
> Our hopes, and then our fears – and when
>
> These are dead, the debt is due,
>
> Dust claims dust – and we die too. (<u>The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley</u>, 1-11)

The tyranny of personified "Death" over all might serve as a political allegory for despotic power, but Shelley asserts "we are death" in line four, preempting any simple allegorical reading of the imposition of Death's power. Rather, the fragment prompts reflection on those forces that shape our understanding, but that remain beyond our complete comprehension or control. Similarly de Man argues that reading "The Triumph

of Life" dismantles the very historical frameworks we necessarily impose on the poem to make sense of both it and its relevance to us ("Shelley Disfigured" 122). Be that as it may, these poems tend to be about people who "grew weary of the ghastly dance" of the historical world and "have fallen by the way side" (Shelley's Poetry and Prose, "Triumph of Life" 540-1) – a passive and melancholy attitude that can be identified with Shelley's recurrent desire to retreat from direct political engagement and to remain detached, like a skylark. It would be a mistake, then, to take such poems as wholly defining of Shelley's politics, interest in history, or even of his views on a poet's political function.

The desire to retreat from the political world and the conflicting desire to confront it are the defining themes in Shelley's historical drama, "The Cenci" (1819), and this conflict constitutes much of its dramatic tension. Throughout the play, Beatrice Cenci suffers to discover the more virtuous attitude to assume in the face of a merciless, paternal order, most immediately embodied by her father, Count Francesco Cenci, but that ascends through the government and the Church, to the Pope and, ultimately, to the Catholic God. After she is raped by her father in the third act, she rejects fantasies of flight and assumes the more dramatic attitude of defiance, not only of her father, but of this entire patriarchy. Her defiance is taken as a significant challenge, as Cardinal Camillo's report of the Pope's anxiety reveals: "[…] Parricide grows so rife / That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young / Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs" (V, vi, 22-22). The Pope dismisses any concern for justice, rejecting Beatrice's pleas in an offhand manner as "some just cause no doubt"; that Camillo does not attempt to soften the Pope's brutal condescension, but reports it verbatim, only demonstrates the inescapable despotism of the Pope. Beatrice's choice to have her father murdered results,

of course, in her execution, necessary to maintain the *status quo* of the Church's historical authority, and she becomes another figure of the poet-martyr common in Shelley's writings.

"The Cenci" offers much more than a thematic treatment of Shelley's attitudes towards perennial tyranny throughout history. Through relentless meta-theatrical allusions, the play critiques the political function of theater. It draws attention to the repressive political ends to which *catharsis* can be put, offering a critique of what Augusto Boal much more recently has called in Theater of the Oppressed Aristotle's "extremely powerful poetic-political system for intimidation of the spectator" (xiv). In Shelley's Process, Jerrold Hogle asserts that the play is a political exposé, laying bare the theatrical methods by which tyrants achieve their domination over complicit audiences. The "stagings of domination" (685), he argues, are dependent upon passive audiences; far from being a guiding chorus, the audience figured within "The Cenci" do not model an appropriate response to what they witness. Their passive response is identified in the play as a "wicked farce" of justice (V, ii, 38). The result is an acute meta-theatrical irony designed to alienate and aggravate the political and moral conscience of any live audience. In his explanation of Shelley's intentions, Hogle quotes from the play's preface, explaining that Shelley sought to shed "light [on] some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart" (141): people's complicity in their own domination. Hogle's reading is strong, but the play is designed to be much more than an exposé. "The Cenci" reconfigures the political function of theater so as to open up the possibility of a theatrical experience that calls attention to the inevitable social injustice and malaise brought about by political hierarchies, it calls attention to the underlying economics that

maintain these hierarchies, and it calls for actual change. In short, the poetics of "The Cenci" are politically radical.

Shelley designed "The Cenci" so that it might work as a live confrontation with the economic forces that stratify society. Shelley's class consciousness is acute in his preface to the play, where he repeatedly touches upon the broad social relevance of the story: "all ranks of people [in Rome] knew the outline of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart" (141). The story has a "national and universal interest […] among all ranks of people" in Rome (141), much as the stories of Shakespeare and Sophocles "existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest" (142). Moreover, he explains his use of "the familiar language of men": "it must be the real language of men in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong" (144). Behind these assertions about the universality of the story, of its appeal, and of his language lies a revolutionary agenda: "The Cenci" undermines Aristotle's tenet that the goal of tragedy is to achieve a *catharsis* of fear and pity. Instead Shelley seeks to agitate audiences to question the righteousness of the *status quo* in which they find themselves and to find the "resolution to convert" others to moral independence and virtue.

"The Cenci," then, is Shelley's ultimate synthesis of a poet's two choices. It allows him to engage with political history through the swan-song of the inspirational poet-martyr, Beatrice, whose long speeches cry for the awakening of a political consciousness among the people. At the same time, the staging of the play within a theater allows Shelley the opportunity to withdraw with an audience from the immediate political world and to reflect on political history, in this case the history of the Cenci

family during the Pontificate of Clement VIII (141), in a morally independent fashion. This retreat is neither a lasting escape from politics nor an antidote to social discontent, but precisely the opposite. It is, in the words of Boal, a "rehearsal for revolution" (122), an exercise in which people may rehearse political defiance. This theatrical training for revolution combines both of Shelley's political attitudes; it combines both a retreat from society and a confrontational engagement with existing power structures.

The inspiration for Shelley's theatrical experimentation may be found in Rousseau. In February of 1758, Rousseau fiercely responded to the 1757 article, "Geneva," that his once friendly associate Jean le Rond d'Alembert wrote for L'Encyclopédie. In the article, d'Alembert recommended that Geneva lift its laws prohibiting theater and establish a theater so as to refine and enlighten its citizens. In his response, Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre, Rousseau raised three objections to d'Alembert's recommendation. First, he argued that theater would be detrimental to the republican values celebrated in the state. Second, it would undermine the economic independence of a free people. And third, it would displace democratic activities that are more appropriate for a strong republic. In sum, Rousseau's response is an analysis of the deeply political character of theater and his conclusion is that its introduction to Geneva would radically alter the course of its history – for the worse. Rousseau composed his response while working on Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse, begun in 1757 but not published until 1760, and his theses from his Letter reappear as themes in the novel; although there is no evidence that Shelley read Rousseau's Letter, he read Julie voraciously in 1816 in the Swiss Alps and was sensitive to its political themes.[23]

[23] For a discussion of the dates of composition of Rousseau's works, see Philip Stewart's "Introduction" to his and Jean Vaché's translation of Julie (xii); for Shelley's reading of Julie, see Letters, 483.

There is, of course, an essential difference between Rousseau's evaluation and ultimate rejection of the theater and Shelley's highly theatrical tragedy that denounces contemporary theater, but that in the end remains a play. Undoubtedly this difference is connected to each one's immediate political situation and their political agendas. A citizen of Geneva at the time, Rousseau sought to maintain the republican virtues of Geneva through a socially conservative resistance to French innovation and cultural hegemony. He identified political freedom with cultural independence from such foreign and corrupting influences as the Parisian theater. For Rousseau, maintaining the *status quo* of Geneva would be a means of political resistance against foreign tyranny. Shelley, on the other hand, was a radical liberal in exile who pursued a revolutionary agenda for English society from Italy. For Shelley, then, political resistance against tyranny meant overturning the domestic *status quo*, and to do such, it was necessary to return to the common forms with which people were already familiar, the five act Shakespearean tragedy.

The first of Rousseau's objections to theater in his Letter to d'Alembert is that its establishment in Geneva would be detrimental to the republican values it celebrates. At the core of this objection is an anxiety about the political function of *catharsis*. He rejects the Aristotelian argument that *catharsis* works "to purge the passions in exciting them" (20), and argues that "the only instrument which serves to purge [the passions] is reason" (21). Moreover, because *catharsis* relies upon identification – through fear and pity – with the protagonists in peril, audiences come to identify with their heroism and excuse their faults. As a result, Rousseau argues, *catharsis* "purges the passions that one does not have and foments those that one does," such as xenophobia, a thirst for revenge or piracy,

or anti-Semitism (21-2). “Heroism,” he concludes, “overwhelms us even more than it moves us, because, after all, what has it to do with us? Would it not be desirable if our sublime authors deigned to descend a little from their customary great heights [,] and touched us sometimes with simple suffering humanity […]” (32)? But the insidious effects of *catharsis* do not arise from the difference between fictional heroism and the daily life of everyday people alone.

There is a recurrent problem in Rousseau’s republican arguments: where he extols the virtue of independence for all men, he maintains that women should be subordinate to men and that there are distinct virtues for each gender. For example, in Emile, Rousseau argues that Sophie, the ideal companion for his ideal pupil, “ought to be a woman as Emile is a man - that is to say, she ought to have everything which suits the constitution of her species and her sex in order to fill her place in the physical and moral order” (357). Inevitable contradictions emerge in his arguments as the republican values he extols stand in opposition to this abstract notion of a “physical and moral order” when it comes to the sexes. In her 1792 rebuttal of Rousseau’s argument in Emile for two education systems, one for boys that encourages independence and rigor and one for girls that encourages dependency and subservience, Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of Mary Shelley, is curt: “What nonsense” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 87)! And she lists the contradictions in his argument, some of which are addressed in Shelley’s “The Cenci.” Although evidence is scant that Shelley read the Vindication, he ordered a copy of it in 1812 from Hookham (Letters 1: 319) and Mary read it twice, once in December of 1816 and again in May of 1820 (Journals 684). Nevertheless that Wollstonecraft’s reading of Rousseau influenced Shelley’s reading of Rousseau is manifest in, and key to, the

character of Beatrice. To return to Rousseau: Rousseau's sexism permeates his rhetoric of the Letter as he develops further his critique of *catharsis*.

Rousseau's critique of *catharsis* also involves a contrast in values between the independent and manly life of the Genevans and the corrupt and effeminate life of Parisians. He identifies the ascendancy of romance plots in contemporary French theater (in which love is held to be the highest virtue) over the more political plots of Classical theater. "Love," Rousseau insists, "is the empire of women" and contemporary drama makes much "effort to increase the ascendancy of women" over men (47). In romances, men and their reason are subjugated by women (56), men's duty to the state is forsaken (53), the old are misrepresented, spurned and condemned ("older people are tyrants and usurpers in tragedy" 50), and female simplicity and modesty, too dull for the stage, are replaced by seductiveness and deception (55). With such "permissible loves" (52), frequently "criminal" in character (54), theater "excites us, enervates us, enfeebles us, and makes us less able to resist our passions" (57). The intensity of "immoderate passions" in theater, with which audiences identify and for which they subsequently thirst (54), undermines the Aristotelian aim of *catharsis*. Rousseau insists that audiences have only a sterile reaction to the reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) essential to *catharsis*: "We take from the passion that part which leads to pleasure, and put aside that which torments. No one thinks he is obliged to be a hero; and it is thus that in admiring decent love one abandons oneself to criminal love" (55). In other words, audiences identify with the romance of love affairs they see on stage, but ignore the moral consequences that they may entail. In this way, the reversal of values (and of gender roles) intrinsic to all romances remains uncorrected in the minds of the audience. Rousseau concludes that

"the sterile interest taken in virtue [on stage] serves only to satisfy our vanity without obliging us to practice it [and] those of my compatriots [in Geneva] who do not disapprove of the theater in itself are in error" (57). In sum, the values of fortitude, duty to the state, simple contentedness, and independence – values Rousseau praises - are compromised by the theater.

Boal's critique of Aristotelian *catharsis* in Theater of the Oppressed can serve to highlight the radical implications of Rousseau's argument at the same time as it can pare away some of its inessential prejudices. Like Rousseau, Boal rejects any claim that theater lies outside of politics or that its functions operate in an apolitical manner (39). Where Rousseau objects to the introduction of French theater to Geneva on the grounds that the French and the Swiss have different values, Boal decries the importation and imposition of Western European theater by the wealthy, "ruling classes" in Latin America (*x*). And, like Rousseau, Boal argues that theater's political function is directly connected to *catharsis*. In conventional theater, Boal explains, audiences identify with a protagonist through "definite, accepted values" (46); without this identification, *catharsis* will fail as audiences will find no purchase on the play (34-5, 38). For this reason, theater must appeal to the prevailing set of social values already in existence (Rousseau 18-9; Boal 46). Humorously, Rousseau suggests that vicious audiences such as are common in French theaters identify best with vicious characters, deeming them good in relation to their values; a robust and independent republican would strike them as a villain (20). In any case, both Rousseau and Boal draw the same conclusion: "the general effect of theater [on the audience] is to strengthen the national character" (Rousseau 20) and to

reinforce a particular "social ethos" (Boal 42). As a result, both argue that traditional theater does not have the power to change in any positive way these values.

Rousseau's and Boal's political critiques of *catharsis* go even further. Rousseau questions what is purged by *catharsis*:

> At London a drama is interesting when it causes the French to be hated; at Tunis, the noble passion would be piracy; at Messina, a delicious revenge; at Goa, the honor of burning Jews. If an author shocks [or strays from] these maxims, he will write a very fine play to which no one will go. And then this author must be taxed with ignorance, with having failed in the first law of his art, in the one which serves as the basis for all the others, which is, to succeed. Thus the theater purges the passions that one does not have and foments those that one does. (21-2)

Catharsis only serves, Rousseau's comments imply, to promote the prevailing character of a society, particularly its ignoble aspects. Far from purging audiences of fear and pity, it encourages vice and reinforces prejudice.

Boal arrives at the same conclusion. In his Poetics, Aristotle proposes that the events in a tragedy must unfold as a causal chain that links the protagonist's *hamartia*, or tragic flaw, to the character's eventual misery (238). Tragedy should represent "a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment" (238). Aristotle also requires that the hero be from the upper most caste of society: "those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families" (238). Shelley's Beatrice breaks from these precepts both in being a woman,

rather than a man, and in her anticipation of consequences of her decision to have her father murdered: hers was a calculated risk rather than "an error of judgment." Aristotle adds, "the perfect Plot, accordingly, must have a single, and not (as some tell us) a double issue; the change in the hero's fortunes must be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error in his part" (238-9). Like Shelley, Boal interrogates Aristotle's notion of error, arguing instead that the protagonist's *hamartia* is the hero's "only trait that is not in harmony with what society regards as desirable" and that it "causes the conflict" that defines the drama. To this end, it is always and necessarily an "antisocial" characteristic or tendency (34). The "great error," accordingly, is the hero's departure from and conflict with the prevailing social order, as the hero will eventually come to understand through an epiphany, or *anagnorisis* (36-7). Boal asserts that this *anagnorisis* is critical to Aristotle's concept of *catharsis*, because the audience, who have identified with the hero, must discover too an antisocial tendency within themselves. It is this tendency that they purge from themselves through tragedy: "the spectator, terrified by the spectacle of the catastrophe, is purified of his *hamartia*" (37) and retreats to the moral *status quo*. Boal argues that at its root, Aristotelian catharsis is a "coercive system" of social intimidation used by people who take part "in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity" to preempt any challenge to existing social values. Although he did not share Boal's enthusiasm for social change, Rousseau concludes himself that theater "keep[s people] fearful and immobile in silence and inaction" (125).

Rousseau makes a similar argument in Julie. The protagonist St. Preux acerbically describes the Paris Opera in a letter to an intimate friend, and claims to have written "a

little treatise" on the subject (236, his description draws heavily upon the Letter to d'Alembert):

> French music is supported by a very stern inquisition [the Royal Academy of Music], and the first thing that is whispered by way of instruction to all foreigners who come to this country is that all foreigners agree that there is nothing so beautiful in the rest of the world as the Paris Opera. Indeed, the truth is that the more discreet keep silent about it, and dare to laugh only amongst themselves. (230)

St. Preux, himself a foreigner and so able to shrug off social conformity, is more penetrating and forthcoming. He describes the Academy with sarcasm as a "fine political institution" (234) because "the noble members of this Academy owe no respect to the public [;] it is the public that owes it to them" (233). As a result, "each individual is not as free as you think to state his own opinion on this grave subject [and it] is dangerous to want dissimulation on this single point" (230); that is, everyone must pretend that the theater is amazing, even though the reverse is in fact the case. Pressure to conform to the public opinion, propagated by the Academy, is, he insists, intense – at least, to conform to it in public. He points out that while "it is said to be the grandest monument of Louis XIV's magnificence" (230), it is in fact "the most boring spectacle in all existence" (236) and has brought about "a false taste for magnificence" (236). It is a "false taste" because the political pressure exerted by the Academy has promoted a duplicity characteristic of the Parisians, as they find it "more agreeable to mock [the theater] when they are no longer there than to enjoy it while they are" (236). In short, his arguments parallel those found in Rousseau's Letter. He insists that, far from *cathartic*, the productions are very

artificial and overproduced, from the theater's excessive machinery and staging, to its cacophonic singing and chaotic dance, to its trite plots and garbled subject matter, rendering the impression of the whole "imbecilic" and "childish" (236). In sum, these productions serve only to maintain the status of those in power (the Academy), while reducing the public to infantile sycophancy. Unwilling or unable to participate, St. Preux is bored by the Parisian theater and longs to quit Paris for the country. Nonetheless, what he claims to have discovered is that there is no moral purpose or social benefit to such theater.

On the 12th of July, 1816, Shelley wrote his friend, Thomas Love Peacock, about his tour through the Alps. In the letter he speaks of the "Genius" of Rousseau, manifest in Julie (Letters 1; 482), and how "the scenes" of the Alps before him enrich his appreciation of the novel. Citing specific letters from it, Shelley describes his visits to locales featured in the novel; he interacts with mountain folk, who could be characters in Julie; and, he blends his reading of the novel with description of the world about him:

> I read Julie all day; an overflowing, as it now seems, surrounded by the scenes which it has so wonderfully peopled, of sublimest genius, and more than human sensibility. Meillerie, the Castle of Chillon, Clarens, the mountains of La Valais and Savoy, present themselves to the imagination as monuments of things that were once familiar, and of beings that were once dear to it. They were created indeed by one mind, but a mind so powerfully bright as to cast a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality. (485)

Far from casting a shade on his own perceptions, however, Shelley takes interest not only in the physical beauty and peaceful retreats, but also in the actual conditions of the "deformed and diseased" in the mountains (481) and the ruins, prisons, and hidden gallows -- historical "monuments [of the] cold and inhuman tyranny" of Caesar to the gendarme -- that are scattered across the land (485). His enchantment with Julie is not quixotic in character, but rather demonstrates attentiveness to the political history of countries he passes through. He describes, for example, his arrival in Hermance: "a beautiful little village, containing a ruined tower, built, the villagers say, by Julius Caesar," but that subsequently the "Genevese destroyed" in 1560, but which fell too, under the "inhabitants of Berne, who burnt and ravaged everything they could," leaving it now "an inconsiderable village inhabited by a few fishermen" (480). That is, Shelley adopts not only Rousseau's appreciation of the beauty of the land and the charm of its characters, but also Rousseau's political sensibilities.

In this same letter to Peacock, Shelley draws a political comparison that echoes Rousseau's central fears in the Letter:

> The appearance of the inhabitants of Evian is more wretched, diseased and poor, than I ever recollect to have seen. The contrast indeed between the subjects of the King of Sardinia and the citizens of the independent republics of Switzerland, affords a powerful illustration of the blighting mischiefs of despotism, within the space of a few miles. (Letters, v. 1, 482)

The degradation of poor mountain inhabitants under "the blighting mischiefs of despotism" and its contrast with conditions in the "independent republics of Switzerland"

is the central anxiety of Rousseau's Letter. In speaking against avarice and the "system of prescriptive religion" – which he, in a Rousseau-like manner, characterizes as "inimical to natural sensibility" – Shelley continues,

> I know that an isolated man is sometimes restrained by shame from outraging the venerable feelings arising out of the memory of genius, which once made nature even lovelier than itself; but associated man holds it as the very sacrament of his union to forswear all delicacy, all benevolence, all remorse; all that is true, or tender, or sublime. (487)

The juxtaposition of the simple morals and natural sensibilities of the republican Swiss, who venerate both their freedom and their connection to nature, to the false and belligerent patriotism common to (French) urban society, is a theme largely derived from Rousseau, to say nothing of the aggrieved tone and anti-social ethos of the passage. And, this juxtaposition betrays the undercurrent of radicalism throughout the letter.

In another passage from that same letter to Peacock, Shelley recounts a remarkable political anecdote in which his radical and democratic politics and their connection to Rousseau are again explicit. Maria Louisa was Napoleon's second wife, whom he married for her Bourbon lineage, but who chose to return to her family in Vienna rather than going into exile with him. As she returned to the Vienna,

> We here heard that the Empress Maria Louisa had slept at Meillerie, -- before the present inn was built, and when the accommodations were those of the most wretched village, -- in remembrance of St. Preux. How beautiful it is to find that the common sentiments of human nature can attach themselves to those who are the most removed from its duties and

> its enjoyments, when Genius pleads for their admission at the gate of Power. To own them was becoming in the Empress, and confirms the affectionate praise contained in the regret of a great and enlightened nation. A Bourbon dared not even to have remembered Rousseau. She owed this power to that democracy which her husband's dynasty outraged, and of which it was however, in some sort, the representative among the nations of the earth. This little incident shows at once how unfit and how impossible it is for the ancient system of opinions, or for any power built upon a conspiracy to revive them, permanently to subsist among mankind. (Letters 1:482-3)

Shelley celebrates Maria Louisa's quiet victory over Napoleon's imperial ambitions, contrasting the "wretched village" with "the gate of Power." She is able to find in the poverty of Meillerie the "common sentiments of human nature." She has been long removed from such sentiments by a "system" of prejudice and oppression that supported Napoleon's suppression of democracy. And Shelley notes the irony that it was French democracy in the first place that gave Napoleon his power and was, however briefly, a model for other nations. In short, Shelley celebrates Maria Louisa's victory of independent sensibility and spirit of democracy, over the false loyalty and partisanship essential to "the ancient system of opinions." In Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime, Cian Duffy argues that this anecdote "turns on the connection it establishes between Rousseau's novel and 'democracy'" (94). Once this connection is made, Duffy argues, it becomes clear that the "real object of Shelley's apostrophe [extolling the Empress] is the power of Rousseau's imagination" to inspire political dissent (94-5). Read in this way,

"the anecdote encapsulated, for Shelley, the power of the 'cultivated' imagination to effect genuine and lasting political change" (95). Duffy concludes, then, that it is in this letter that Shelley draws the profound "connection between imagination and social progress" (95).

Duffy's larger argument is important as it suggests specific parameters – derived from this letter to Peacock – of Rousseau's influence on Shelley's radicalism. Duffy asserts that Shelley in 1816 is engaged with reconfiguring the tradition of the sublime in English literature so as to counter the "culturally dominant" "religious 'records' of Alpine sublimity" (97). Shelley is seeking, accordingly, to develop a revolutionary sublime, which involves among other things democratization, "a progressive and instructive 'peopling' [of the landscape], with the power to counteract the pervasive anthropomorphism of the theistic discourse on the sublime" (97). Rousseau's Julie provides Shelley with an alternative vision of the Alps that is, borrowing Shelley's words, "so powerfully bright as to cast a shade of falsehood on the records that are called reality" (97); Julie offers "a skeptical acknowledgment of ideology [through a] recognition of the fact that what frequently passes for 'reality' is in fact only a 'record' produced by the 'mind', and which has gained popular acceptance" (97). To this end, "reading the novel amidst 'the scenes by which it was inspired' provided Shelley with a clear example of the political potency of the 'cultivated' imaginative response to natural grandeur" (97). In essence, Duffy argues that in 1816, a year in which he writes little and spends much in relative isolation, Shelley is theorizing about political potency of the imagination.

Duffy's reading of Shelley's letter is insightful, but perhaps downplays too much how suspect the truth of the anecdote may be: the scene of the melancholy Empress in a rural inn reflecting on Julie seems rather staged. More significantly, however, Duffy's reading downplays too much of Marie Louise's own agency, regardless of the truthfulness of the anecdote's report. The young woman of unparalleled social stature is entirely out of place in this "wretched village," is seemingly alone and without protection, and is entirely at the mercy of those who might have every reason to wish her harm. And yet, her retreat from the political world, or at least its centers, does not prove dangerous, but reveals a place, Shelley supposes, named after honey (which he sampled while there): "Meillerie is indeed enchanted ground" (Letters 1: 353). This dramatic reversal of expectation, "with an alternative vision of the Alps" (Duffy 97), is indeed political, but it is important to recognize that Marie Louise is another instance in Shelley's writings of the poet-figure who retreats from the political world to discover natural bounty long suppressed by tyranny. If it is through this anecdote of how she has partaken in "the common sentiments of human nature" and returned to its "enjoyments" and "duties," that she achieves political redemption, it remains unclear how much she herself did to encourage the story and its propagation. Nevertheless, Shelley suggests that her act was an act of courage (where "A Bourbon dared not") and was "becoming." Isolated women are frequently figures of political defiance in Shelley, and these representations culminate in the character of Beatrice of "The Cenci."

Where the anecdote of Marie Louise tells of her solitary withdrawal from urban politics into the countryside, Beatrice Cenci has no such option. Act I of "The Cenci" opens in the dark, oppressive, and utterly corrupt court of the Cenci Palace, a seat of

Italian political power. Beatrice, the daughter of Count Cenci, along with her submissive stepmother, Lucretia, and a younger brother, Bernardo, have been kept cloistered by the Count in the palace. A gothic villain, the Count dreams of the death of his other children, who have become financial burdens on him. This animosity towards his own family only mounts as the play unfolds: he celebrates the unfortunate death of two of his sons, he rapes Beatrice, and he so torments the three of them that Beatrice resolves to have him murdered. In Roman mythology, the rape of Lucretia and her subsequent public suicide incited revolutionary fervor that brought down the monarchy that had so injured her; Shelley's Beatrice, however, directs her actions not against herself, but responds more directly against her oppressor. She hires two sympathetic mercenaries. When the act is done, she, along with Lucretia and Bernardo, are put on trial by the very administrators of justice who failed to arrest the Count's brutality. Sentenced by the Pope, Beatrice and Lucretia are sentenced to death for parricide and are led off as the play comes to a close. Throughout the play, Beatrice refuses to quit the palace and flee to the country in order to protect as best she can her step-mother and brother; she claims she has no choice in the matter.

The play opens in the Cenci palace, a stronghold of Italian political power. Cardinal Camillo presents the Count with the Pope's proposal to hush up a murder in exchange for a "fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate" (I, i, 3). After this has been settled, the Count, knowing the fear his power inspires intimidates even the Cardinal, announces without qualm,

> A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter –
>
> He was accustomed to frequent my house;

> So the next day *his* wife and daughter came
>
> And asked if I had seen him; and I smiled:
>
> I think they never saw him any more. (I, i, 61-5)

The awed Cardinal can only offer a weak rebuff: "Art thou not / Most miserable" (I, i, 92-3)? In this place, the Cenci Palace, the Count is able to command authority and vye with the Church. The Palace is an unusual setting in Shelley's writings, as he more typically writes of political life from a removed locale, observing from afar. With all its gothic gloom, however, the Cenci Palace allows for no escape. Trapped along with her stepmother Lucretia and her half-brother inside, Beatrice desperately struggles against her tyrannical father, unable to flee to some remote hilltop or island. Ever-fearful of the Count's intentions, she refuses the offer of marriage from Orsino, a Prelate, whose intentions are also far from pure (he is excited by lust and the Cenci fortune), because she is determined to shield as best she can her other family members.

Their confinement is not unknown in the city; gathering all the nobles of Rome to celebrate the death of two of his sons in the third scene, the Count makes a public declaration of his paternal authority. With caustic irony, he states, "I hope my good friends here / Will think of their own daughters – or perhaps / Of their own throats – before they lend an ear / to this wild girl" (I, iii, 129-131). The claustrophobia of their confinement, the purity of Beatrice's motives (Camillo says of her in the opening scene, "methinks her sweet looks, which make all things else / Beautious and glad, might kill the fiend within [the Count]," I, i, 45), the repeated threats and occurrences of death and murder, and the hyperbolic character of the despotic Count, are of course all pronouncedly gothic in character. But more importantly, by placing Beatrice in such a

situation, Shelley preempts the possibility of any retreat from political life into the country. The story of the Cenci family presents Shelley with the opportunity to explore the character of the politically defiant woman impelled to confront tyranny in a direct manner.

Act I is critical to Hogle's psychoanalytic reading of the play. He argues that the opening scenes are filled with episodes of "theatrical mirroring" that are "key to Count Cenci's will to power" (150):

> He is so much a theatrical character that his very significance – and certainly his continued power over others – depends on the reaction of an auditor to his aggression, on a reflection that appears to recognize his self-assertion and so allows him to seem a figure who causes fear instead of one who might feel it himself. (150)

His opening scene with Camillo is one example, but it is in the third scene of the Act I, when the Count has called for a much larger audience to gather in the Hall of the Cenci Palace, that the theatricality of his power is fully developed (150-1). Resentful for having to maintain two of his sons, the Count prays for their death and by the third scene, he has been sent word of their deaths. Exuberant at his good fortune, the Count calls for a celebration at which he announces the news to the nobles of Rome with affected joy and pomp:

> […] I do hope that you, my noble friends,
> When you have shared the entertainment here,
> And heard the pious cause for which 'tis given,
> And we have pledged a health or two together,

Will think me flesh and blood as well as you. (I, iii, 8-12)

Horrified when they learn “the pious cause,” the guests remain incredulous, allowing the Count to deliver a perverse and bombastic oration that mocks Christian oratory before the very Church figures who might censure him with it: “God! / I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform, By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought” (I, iii, 40-2). Through this performance, the Count is able to “feel himself to be what he seems” by “reading” the fear in the faces of his audience; in expressing this fear, they in turn reflect back to him the power he has over them and thereby become complicit in the corrupt power structure he dominates (Hogle 150). Wollstonecraft argues along the same lines about the nature of patriarchal power, asserting that “the desire of dazzling by riches, the most certain pre-eminence that man can obtain, the pleasure of commanding flattering sycophants, and many other complicated low calculations of doting self-love, have all contributed to overwhelm the mass of mankind, and make liberty a convenient handle for mock patriotism” (16), or in this case obedience to the Count. Indeed, when the guests stir to arrest him, the Count has merely to threaten them to dissolve their ambition: “Beware! For my revenge – Is as the sealed commission of a king / That kills, and none dare name the murderer” (I, iii, 96-8). And, they are obedient.

Defiant Beatrice, however, refuses to be passive or to provide the Count with the expression of fear he demands. Hogle argues that “this possibility is terrifying to him because it exposes the merely staged, rhetorical, and dependent basis of his power” (151). Attempting to hijack the Count’s audience, Beatrice delivers a speech of her own, in which she pleads for rescue: “Shall we […] find no refuge in this merciless wide world?

[…] Take us away" (I, iii, 106-9)! She implores them not to be passive, but to come forward and rescue her:

> Dare no one look on me?
>
> None answer? Can one tyrant overbear
>
> The sense of many best and wisest men?
>
> Or is it that I sue not in some form
>
> Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit? (I, iii, 132-6)

Though somewhat sympathetic, several in the audience mutter to those around them that they would be willing to assist the person who would aid Beatrice, but would not themselves be that person as "Count Cenci were a dangerous enemy"(I, iii,141-2). Hogle continues that even though she fails in her appeal to the audience, the anxious "Count attempts to appropriate his daughter's judgmental dominance by making her appear the 'insane' violator of social order to the others (I, iii, 160)," and calls for the scene to end. Her defiance so shakes the Count, Hogle argues, that he then decides it is necessary to rape her to instill the requisite fear and the act comes to a close.

Hogle identifies these psycho-social power dynamics as "stagings of domination" (150), and argues that as such they constitute a powerful meta-theatrical dimension to the play. "We onlookers," he conjectures, "are forced into 'self-knowledge' [quoting Shelley's preface to the play] by a confrontation with striking enactments of the most extreme and conflicting potentials in us" (148). In other words, the implied audience in the play performs for the live audience the manner in which audiences become complicit in their own political domination. To return to the terms of Boal's argument, the third scene of Act I does indeed model how theater can be used to intimidate those who might

challenge the *status quo* of power relations and thereby effectively purge the audience of any antisocial behavior; the scene offers a sharp critique of the political ends to which theatrical *catharsis* can be put. The Count means to completely overwhelm his audience, to intimidate them, to assert his domination over them, and to crush any challenge to it. In Rousseau's words, he aims to "keep [people] fearful and immobile in silence and inaction" (125). The passivity of the Count's guests serves only to intensify sympathy for Beatrice and should agitate the political conscience of any live audience. That Beatrice challenges the Count on stage through outbursts threatens the *catharsis* he means to effect in his audience.

The theme of audience passivity, embodied by the noble guests in Act I, reappears in Act II. In scene one, Beatrice and Bernardo agree to stay with Lucretia in order to shield her from the Count, only to learn from him that they will be confined in an even more isolating castle, where, as the Count explains, "for men there will be none but those who dare / All things – not question that which I command" (II, i, 165-6): none will help them there. Moreover, in scene two, Camillo informs Giacomo, another of Cenci's sons, that the Pope has proclaimed that he "'will keep […] blameless neutrality'" in the matter and won't intercede on their behalf (II, ii, 40): the Pope "holds it of most dangerous example / In aught to weaken the paternal power, / Being as 'twere, the shadow of his own" (II, ii, 55-6). Shelley explicitly links the reluctance to interfere with the maintenance of the *status quo* of political power.

In Act III, after she has been raped by her father, Beatrice questions the justice of her fate.

> What have I done?

> Am I not innocent? Is it my crime
>
> That one with white hair, and imperious brow,
>
> Who tortured me from my forgotten years,
>
> As parents only dare, should call himself
>
> My father, yet should be! – Oh, what am I?
>
> What name, what place, what memory shall be mine?
>
> What retrospects, outliving even despair? (III, i, 69-76)

These questions are designed to highlight not only the brutality, both physical and psychological, of her father's actions, but also that she has become a pariah, socially alienated and without recourse to justice:

> If I could find a word that might make known
>
> The crime of my destroyer; and that done
>
> My tongue should like a knife tear our the secret
>
> Which cankers my heart's core; aye, lay all bare
>
> So that my unpolluted fame should be
>
> With vilest gossips a stale mouthed story;
>
> A mock, a bye-word, an astonishment: -
>
> If this were done, which never shall be done,
>
> Think of the offender's gold, his dreaded hate,
>
> And the strange horror of the accuser's tale,
>
> Baffling belief, and overpowering speech;
>
> Scarce whispered, unimaginable, wrapt
>
> In hideous hints… (III, ii, 154-64)

Beatrice sees that beyond the crimes of her father lies a society unable or unwilling to intervene, even though justice demands it; people are too beholden to the Count's fortune, power, and single-minded iniquity. And, as she sees this, she comes to the decision that the Count must die: "We must be brief and bold" (III, i, 227). In his preface, Shelley identifies this decision as the error that makes her "a tragic character":

> the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better […]. (142)

Yet surely this is not Shelley's judgment; at no point is "forbearance" a virtue in "The Cenci," but is in fact repeatedly condemned as immoral negligence. Of course, in his subsequent drama, "Prometheus Unbound" (1812), Shelley turned his attention to the virtue of "forbearance," but this virtue has no traction in the entirely corrupt political machinations that define the world of "The Cenci." Along similar lines, Wollstonecraft addresses upon forbearance in the Vindication: "A frail being should labour to be gentle. But when forbearance confounds right and wrong, it ceases to be a virtue; and, however convenient it may be found in a companion – that companion will ever be considered as an inferior, and only inspire a vapid tenderness, which easily degenerates into contempt" (38). Such is Beatrice's realization as well.

Shelley is very much concerned with the question of female virtue. He notes, for example, in his preface to the play that rape does not taint Beatrice's virtue: "no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another"(142). This position matches

Wollstonecraft's: where some mistake chastity as a virtue, she argues that virtue is dependent on a person's will and is not compromised by what is done to one against one's will (79). Along similar lines, Wollstonecraft argues against obedience to the patriarchal rule: when faced with the "indolent propensity in man" to argue that "the rights of kings are deduced in a direct line from the King of kings, and that of parents from our first parent," one must counter that "the father who is blindly obeyed is obeyed from sheer weakness, or from motives that degrade the human character" (168-9). In this light, Beatrice is entirely free of fault, and her lack of forbearance is in fact a virtue.

In the thick of this social malaise, Beatrice longs for annihilation, "something which shall make / The thing that I have suffered by a shadow / In the dread lightning which avenges it; Brief, rapid, irreversible, destroying / The consequence of what it cannot cure" (III, I, 87-91). At first, she longs to kill herself: "- Oh blood, which art my father's blood, / Circling through these contaminated veins, / If thou, poured forth on the polluted earth, / Could wash away the crime […]" (III, i, 95-8). But then Lucretia, suggesting that death may be "the reward of trampling down / The thorns which God has strewed upon the path / Which leads to immortality" (III, i, 123-5), inspires in Beatrice the idea of pulverizing the Count with a "mighty rock" (III, i, 247), perhaps an allusion to the pulverization of Conrad beneath a gigantic helmet in the opening of Horace Walpole's <u>The Castle of Otranto</u>. Her desire for an overwhelming force, "brief, rapid, [and] irreversible," that would purge both her and the world of the pollution brought on by political corruption shares much with the poet's desire to be the instrument of the destroying wind in "Ode to the West Wind." If she has fallen on "the thorns of life" mentioned also in the ode (54), she longs to be instrumental in purging the world of her

father in a suicidal, self-sacrificing manner. This connection perhaps calls into question the sincerity of Shelley's evaluation of Beatrice in the preface to the play.

In Act IV, Beatrice is arrested under the charge of parricide, but hotly asserts her innocence with the rhetoric of a vigilante, condemning those who refused her earlier aid:

> …What! will human laws,
> Rather will ye who are their ministers,
> Bar all access to retribution first,
> And then, when heaven doth interpose to do
> What ye neglect, arming familiar things
> To the redress of an unwonted crime,
> Make ye the victims who demanded it
> Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits! (IV, iv, 117-24)

Once again, Beatrice makes plain the passivity, this time of the "ministers" of the guard, of those about her who might have interceded to protect her but failed to do so, a failure she asserts more criminal than any act of hers. Their past "neglect" (IV, iv, 153) makes their present action hypocritical, linking them to the systemic social corruption that binds the aristocracy, the Church, and the ministers of the justice together. When Lucretia faints upon their arrest a moment later, Beatrice returns again to the same vein, saying with irony, "My Lord, […] She cannot know how well the *supine slaves* / Of blind authority read the truth of things / When written on a brow of guilelessness" (IV, iv, 176-84 my emphasis). Beatrice then adds a comment about the final audience she will stand before: "She [Lucretia] sees not yet triumphant Innocence / Stand at the judgment-seat of mortal man, / A Judge and an accuser of the wrong / Which drags it there […] (IV, iv, 185-88).

Once before the judges, an “obscure and trembling slave” who has been indeed “dragged” there, Beatrice charges Camillo: “You have a good repute for gentleness / And wisdom: can it be that you sit here / To countenance a wicked farce like this” (V, ii, 35-9)? Facing the threat of torture, she proclaims,

> Will you give up these bodies to be dragged
> At horse’s heels, so that our hair should sweep
> The footsteps of the vain and senseless crowd,
> Who that they may make our calamity
> Their worship and their spectacle, will leave
> The churches and the theatres as void
> As their own hearts? (V, iii, 35-40)

Here, the common people of Rome, who spend their lives in the audience of churches and theatres and who have no moral sense, are indicted as well. Their moral sensibilities are like those of Rousseau’s Parisian theater-goers: “the sterile interest taken in virtue [on stage] serves only to satisfy [their] vanity without obliging [them] to practice it” (Letter 78). The meta-theatrical dimension to Beatrice’s comments should agitate any live audience. Despite every effort to awaken the conscience of her audiences, however, Beatrice is in the end sentenced to death by the Pope.

Cardinal Camillo reveals that the Pope’s decision was motivated by his concern over growing unrest among the young:

> […] Parricide grows so rife
> That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young
> Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs.

> Authority, and power, and hoary hair
>
> Are grown crimes capital. (V, iv, 20-4)

It does not matter whether or not Beatrice's actions were prompted by "just cause." What is perhaps surprising is that we learn from the Pope that such actions are becoming more and more common. That is, the Pope identifies that the number of those who would "strangle us all," presumably referring to everyone in the paternal social structure of which he is the figure head, is growing, the implication being that Beatrice's actions are of a class rather than unique. Shelley's cynical attitudes about power are thinly veiled behind the Pope's sarcasm: when so used, authority and power should be considered "crimes capital." Her execution then is an act of political suppression to intimidate those not entirely beholden to "authority" and "power," and perfectly parallels the efforts of the Count. At the play's end, Beatrice is put to death for the murder of her father, but the injustice that she faced has no resolution. No one in Rome is held accountable for their immoral, self-serving neglect.

"The Cenci" is a political *exposé*, as Hogle argues, in that it demonstrates how passive audiences become complicit in their own domination. Moreover, it offers a critique of the political ends to which *catharsis* can be put and models how one might resist *catharsis*: interruption of and direct action against the *status quo*. Given the profusion of meta-theatrical allusions and the repeated association of passive audiences and complicity with political corruption, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which Shelley means the death of Beatrice to be *cathartic*. In his preface, Shelley speaks of the story's "capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success" (142); this "capacity for awakening" strongly suggests a political dimension to

his poetics that is explicit in much of his other writings. In any case, Beatrice's sentence coupled with the Pope's final comments can only leave live audiences agitated about the *status quo* in Rome, and, if the story is at all of "universal interest" as Shelley claims, skeptical about the justice of their own society. To better estimate the politics of Shelley's poetics, however, it is necessary to return to Rousseau.

The second of Rousseau's objections to the theater in his Letter to d'Alembert is that it would undermine the economic independence and social fabric of the Genevans. He frames this argument as a conjectural history: what would happen to a small, mountain town if a theater were established? He argues that first, there would be a "slackening of work," as people would not only lose "real time" at the theater, but also be distracted by the thoughts it would provoke when they were at work (62-3). Moreover, people would be imposed upon to pay not only the cost of admission but also for the costs of making themselves more presentable at the theater (63). As a result of "less assiduous work and larger expenses," prices on locally produced goods would inflate. In turn, "many merchants, driven off by this increase, will leave the Mountaineers and supply themselves from the neighboring Swiss [causing a] decrease in trade" (63). Compounding this, the theater will require public works and urban development to stay open year round. Roads, for example, may need to be paved, cleared in winter, and lit at nights (63). As a result, taxes would be established. With these developments, simple taste will be replaced by "competition in dress" and an acute desire for superfluous luxuries (63). Rousseau concludes, "all the rest is easy to imagine" regarding the "inevitable consequences" (63-4):

> [the establishment of a theater] would only serve to destroy the love of work; to discourage industry; to ruin individuals; to inspire them with the taste for idleness; to make them seek for the means of subsistence without doing anything; to render a people inactive and slack; to prevent it from seeing the public and private goals with which it ought to busy itself; to turn prudence to ridicule; to substitute a theatrical jargon for the practice of virtues; to make metaphysic of all morality; to turn citizens into wits, housewives into bluestockings, and daughters into sweethearts out of the drama. (64)

In time, the mountain community would loose the core values of a free republic: a "love of work," a direct connection to the "means of subsistence," and an autonomous local economy. Of course, Shelley, who married a "bluestocking," would have found Rousseau's comment prejudicial, but at the same time Shelley was very much concerned with the loss of independence in Switzerland. Traveling through the Alps in 1816, he wrote: "The contrast indeed between the subjects of the King of Sardinia and the citizens of the independent republics of Switerland, affords a powerful illustration of the blighting mischiefs of despotism" (Letters 1: 482).

In addition, Rousseau argues that the theater serves to blind a population to its actual conditions, and particularly to the conditions of the poor:

> In giving our tears to these fictions, we have satisfied all the rights of humanity without having to give anything more of ourselves; whereas unfortunate people in person would require attention from us, relief, consolation, and work, which would involve us in their pains and would

> require at least the sacrifice of our indolence, from all of which we are quite content to be exempt. It could be said that our heart closes itself for fear of being touched at our expense. (25)

The economic rhetoric is deliberate; theater is false charity in that we "give our hearts […] without "having to give anything more," without further "expense." Rousseau is after the paradox: we pay money for theater tickets so that we do not have to pay "unfortunate people […] attention" or give them relief:

> Thus the most advantageous impression of the best tragedies is to reduce all the duties of man to some passing and sterile emotions that have no consequences, to make us applaud our courage in praising that of others, our humanity in pitying the ills that we could have cured, our charity in saying to the poor, God will help you! (26)

Rousseau does not distinguish between financial and moral economies, but sees them as inextricable and as corrupted by theater.

These arguments run throughout Julie. For example, in expostulating why beggars should be given charity, Julie attacks the institution of the theatre. She says,

> we suffer […] and maintain at great expense multitudes of useless professions several of which serve only to corrupt and spoil morals. […] If one chooses to consider [begging] with relation to talent, why would I not reward the eloquence of this beggar who moves my heart and inclines me to come to his aid, as I pay a Comedian who makes me shed a few sterile tears? If the latter brings me to love another's good deeds, the former induces me to perform some myself: everything one feels watching

> tragedy is forgotten the moment one exits; but remembering the wretched whom one has relieved gives a pleasure that is forever renewed. (441-2)

The theater is "useless," inspires the false sympathy of "sterile tears" and inaction, all at a "great expense" to a population. In Julie, Madame d'Orbe describes the city as "charming": "the inhabitants are hospitable, the manners are civil, and freedom, which I love above all else, seems to have taken refuge here" (540). However, in a thinly veiled allusion to the arrival of Voltaire in Geneva and his call for the establishment of a theater, she continues,

> [...] Genevans scattered throughout Europe in search of riches imitate the grand airs of foreigners, and after acquiring the vices of the countries in which they have lived bring them home in triumph along with their treasures. Thus other peoples' luxury leads them to scorn their traditional simplicity; they find proud freedom ignoble; they forge for themselves fetters of silver, not as a chain, but as an ornament. (541; see editor's n.38 for the allusion to Voltaire)

If Julie criticizes the economic burden of maintaining a theater, Madame d'Orbe discusses the hidden costs: the introduction of a taste for luxury that supplants more native, traditional, and simple pleasures. It seems to make little difference as to which character presents his arguments in his Letter, Rousseau works them into Julie.

To an extent Boal's argument is parallel to Rousseau's and offers a useful comparison. Suggesting that it once "was people singing freely in the open air," Boal argues that theater has long served the interests of those who profit from existing social and economic inequalities (*ix*). The "ruling classes" have long had a "hold" on the

theater, "including television, movies, circuses, and stage theater," because it reinforces "class barriers" and "bridal[s] the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists" (47). Boal does not suggest that the establishment of a theater has any direct agency in economic subjugation, as Rousseau does, but he does see it as "a tool for domination" in countries that have wide economic stratification (*ix*). Far from uplifting a people or addressing their real interests, theater "functions to diminish, placate, satisfy, eliminate all that can break the balance – all, including the revolutionary, transforming impetus" (47). If Rousseau's argument demonstrates how the establishment of a theater can have a pernicious effect on a republican economy, Boal's argument more clearly underscores that there are those who, to the detriment of social justice, profit from the promotion of the theater.

The power of the Count in "The Cenci" does not merely lie in his domineering personality and theatrics; he has a vast fortune that includes multiple and ostentatious estates. His influence over others is at its core economic, and financial dependency is a central theme of the play. The Count uses his fortune, an "old man's sword" (I, i, 127), to menace and murder his foes, to imprison some and debase others of his family, and to buy "perilous impunity" (I, i, 6) with the Church, all with the aim to make people dependent upon his will. In the opening scene of the play, for example, he pays one third of all he owns, a fief, to the Church for clemency for a murder, and he does so with some relish because the Pope, thereby, becomes dependent upon him:

> No doubt Pope Clement,
>
> And his most charitable nephews, pray
>
> That the apostle Peter and the saints
>
> Will grant for their sake that I long enjoy

> Strength, wealth, and pride, and lust, and length of days
>
> Wherein to act the deeds which are the stewards
>
> Of their revenue. – But much yet remains
>
> To which they shew no title. (I, i, 27-33)

In the Count's cynical but astute estimation, the Pope – as with the Church as a whole - is as opportunistic and self-interested as anyone else. Indeed, throughout the play, the Pope insists on the maintenance of "paternal power" (II, ii, 55), regardless of its justice – why Beatrice is sentenced to death (V, iv, 20). And, as the play unfolds, it becomes clear that the fabric of Roman society is a web of economic dependencies, hierarchically structured around the Church. The Count suggests, for example, that by collecting this clemency from him, the Pope will owe Camillo the fief he has relinquished (I, i, 58); the Prelate Orsino, whose ambition is to marry Beatrice, bemoans that "the Pope / Will ne'er absolve me from my priestly vow / But by absolving me from the revenue / Of many a wealthy see" (I, ii, 63-6). With this in mind, then, the Count engages with the Pope in a rivalry over who is the ultimate patriarch in this system of paternalistic economics. Political power is held by those amass wealth and then grant provisions, and those who are dependent upon those provisions must obey or go hungry. As much as "The Cenci" throws light onto the ramifications of political passivity, it also throws light onto the political designs of those who would wish to feed and clothe others.

Clothing and food are the repeated figures to the theme of financial dependency, particularly in the subplot of Giacomo's family. Giacomo, another of the Count's sons, shares his back story in two conversations, the first with Camillo in the first Act in which he hopes that Camillo will petition the Pope on his behalf, the second in Act III with

Orsino, who informs Giacomo that the Pope will do nothing for him and urges him to murder the Count. Giacomo married "a lady of high birth" but naively lent her dowry to his father "without a bond or witness to the deed (II, ii, 19 -21). His father then "denied the loan" and, though of noble birth, Giacomo was obliged to take "a poor office in the state" to avoid "poverty": "I bought new clothing for my ragged babes, / And my wife smiled and my heart knew repose" (III, i, 301-5). However, wishing to further debase his son out of characteristic malice, the Count used his political influence – Giacomo suggests that the Count has bribed the Pope with "gold" (II, ii, 68-9) – to oust him from the employment and insert a "wretch, whom thus / He paid for vilest service," in his position (III, i, 308-9). To compound this insult, "he coined / A brief and specious tale, how I wasted / The sum in secret riot" to the horror of Giacomo's wife, too innocent to suspect calumny (III, i, 318-20). Her spirits broken, she comes to resent Giacomo. Moreover, she reports the Count's lies to their children, who respond, "Give us clothes, father! Give us better food" (III, i, 328). Because he is without "some mechanic trade" that would grant him economic independence (II, ii, 7), Giacomo first appeals to Camillo, who speaks of "an obsolete and doubtful law / By which [he] might obtain a bare provision / Of food and clothing," but this falls through (II, ii, 1-3). When his suit to the Pope is refused because the Pope does not want "to weaken paternal power" (II, ii, 55), Giacomo is rendered desperate and subject to the manipulation of Orsino, who involves him in the plot to murder the Cenci.

References to food and clothing, and their allocation or lack thereof, run throughout the play. The Count holds a feast to celebrate the death of two of his sons, because "they will need no food or raiment more" (I, iii, 46). When he is instrumental in

starving Giacomo's family, he entertains "Princes and Cardinals" (I, iii, 2) with a "sumptuous feast" (I, ii, 47), offering wine, frequently a figure of excess in Shelley's poetry, to toast his good fortune. For this event, he condescendingly commands Lucretia and Beatrice to dress "in festival array" (I, ii, 59), presumably that his wealth has provided as the Count later lists his "costly robes" prominently among his other riches (IV, i). In Act V, when Orsino realizes that his involvement in the murder has been detected, he thinks he might slip away if he strips to rags:

> But I will pass, wrapt in a vile disguise;
> Rags on my back, and a false innocence
> Upon my face, through the misdeeming crowd
> Which judges by what seems. (V, ii, 85-88)

Throughout the possession of food and clothes are associated with wealth, the flaunting of them with corruption, and their lack with virtue. To this end, Orsino's comment may be taken as a meta-theatrical comment, censuring the audience for its reliance on costumes to determine characters, perhaps even prompting reflection on their own costumes, as Rousseau suggests theater-goers inevitably do.

Food and clothing take on metaphorical significance in the play as well. In his curses, the Count says that he will destroy his fortune so that none of his children will enjoy it, that he will "leave / nothing but my name; / Which shall be an inheritance to strip / Its wearer bare as infamy" (IV, I, 59-62). In his lengthy curses of Beatrice, he says, let "her food be / Poison" and that if she bears his child, let it "from her nursing breast […] Grow day by day, more wicked and deformed" (IV, i, 128-9; 149-51). When Beatrice introduces the idea of murdering the Count to Lucretia and Orsino, she says,

> Peace, Orsino!
>
> And, honoured Lady, while I speak, I pray,
>
> That you put off, *as garments overworn*,
>
> Forbearance and respect, remorse and fear,
>
> And all the fit restraints of daily life,
>
> […] which now
>
> Would be a mockery to my holier plea. (III, i, 205-12, my emphasis)

The stripping of clothes represents the stripping of customary thoughts and habits so as to discover a more virtuous, or "holier," line of thinking. Conversely, when Marzio does finally kill the Count, Beatrice awards him by dressing him with a mantle:

> And, Marzio, because thou wast only awed
>
> By that which made me tremble, wear thou this!
>
> It was a mantle which my grandfather
>
> Wore in his high prosperity, and men
>
> Envied his state: so may they envy thine. (IV, iv, 49-53)

It is a symbolic appropriation of her father's power, the power to dress or strip others of their clothes. But, with cruel irony, it is the robe that "betrayed" (IV, iv, 86) the murderer to the authorities by sparkling in the night which he sought for cover. Compounding this, Marzio's character and the patriarchal cloak of the Cenci so ill-fit each other that he volunteers at his trial that it was not his before the night began: "Olimpio sold the robe to me from which / You would infer my guilt" (V, ii, 6-7). Sentenced by the court, Marzio dies under torture.

Throughout the Vindication, Wollstonecraft repeatedly returns to comment on food and clothing, and their connection to power. When women "are provided with food and raiment," she argues, their "health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange" (62). Like Rousseau who decries fashion, Wollstonecraft asserts that it "is but a badge of slavery, and proves that the soul has not a strong individual character," that it "awes simple country people into an imitation of the vices," that it transforms an individual who should rise on "merit" into "a servile parasite or vile pander," traits that the Count's audience seem to have in the third scene of Act I. Wollstonecraft attacks Rousseau as a hypocrite, however, when in Emile he "advises [women] to cultivate a fondness for dress [because it] is natural for them" (Wollstonecraft 32). Drawing attention to his prejudicial notion of the "natural," she responds: "It is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power" (33). The pursuit of fashion is, she insists, a degrading practice and characterizing it as a female virtue is a means to subordinate women. She recommends simple, practical, and affordable dress without "frippery" (83) so that women can improve themselves in areas that cultivate independence: "Gardening, experimental philosophy, and literature" (83). Wollstonecraft's politics of fashion run throughout "The Cenci," and culminate at its end.

The court scene of Act V, like the banquet scene of Act I, is another "stage of domination" on which political power performs and on which Beatrice is forced to stand. In Act IV, the Count had fantasized about how he "might drag her by the golden hair," then tells Lucretia to fetch her "lest I drag her by the hair," and final yells at his servant, Andrea, to call his daughter or he "will drag her, step by step/ Through infamies unheard of among men," so as to subjugate her (IV, i, 6; 30; 80-1). Defiant of the Court, Beatrice

resists their questioning; to intimidate her, the judge turns on Marzio and commands that he be tortured in the same manner as the Count imagined: “Drag him away to torments; let them be / Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds / Of his heart’s inmost cell” (V, ii, 160-2). Camillo puts a stop to the trial when the judge attempts to have Beatrice herself tortured, which would seem to be the intercession Beatrice desired, but it is instead to consult with the Pope’s will; the rivalry between the Count and the Pope resolved, the Pope asserts his authority as the ultimate patriarch, and to kill with impunity: “They must die” (V, iv, 14). He authorizes what the Count fantasized, reasserting the arbitrary and despotic, paternal power that had long victimized Beatrice.

The connection between wealth and murder is thematic throughout the play. The Count admits to having people killed and to be most willing to do so again to protect his own interests. Giacomo speaks of how he was displaced in his employment by such a character. Orsino knows of mercenaries and introduces Marzio and Olympio, the Count’s murderers, to Giacomo and to Beatrice, saying,

> I know two dull, fierce outlaws,
> Who think man’s spirit as a worm’s, and they
> Would trample out, for any slight caprice,
> The meanest or the noblest life. This mood
> Is marketable here in Rome. They sell
> What we now want. (III, i, 233-38)

Rome, it seems, is filled with hitmen. On the other hand, Giacomo who is suffering in poverty, claims that he will kill the Count “not [for] gold,” but to be free of his slander and “the penury heaped” on him by the Count’s contrivance (III, I, 289-95). The good

Olympio, who along with Marzio, turns out to be a degraded and humiliated victim of the Count's influence as well (and not the villains Orsino initially makes them out to be), expresses similar sentiments: "If one should bribe me with a thousand crowns / To kill a serpent which had stung my child, / I could not be more willing" than to kill the Count (IV, iii, 26-8). However, unlike the Count, none of these characters has sufficient wealth to buy impunity; murder may be pardoned when it supports the economic interest of Church, but when it threatens the Church's interests, the Church's response must be absolute: "They must die." As a result, no one can escape the strict hierarchy that subordinates and dominates the economic world of "The Cenci"; the murder of the Count challenges this hierarchy, which is why it must be summarily punished.

In the closing lines of the play, Beatrice's defiance dissolves and she becomes docile:

> Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
> My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, Mother, tie
> My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
> In any simple knot; aye, that does well.
> And yours I see is coming down. How often
> Have we done this for one another; now
> We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
> We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well. (V, iv, 158-65)

Her consideration of Camillo's unease attests to her self-sacrificing virtue, and the simplicity with which she meets her sentence attests to her exhaustion. Her step-mother becomes her "Mother," her final needs have to do with her simple attire, and in a final act

of dignity, she has Lucretia bind up her hair in "any simple knot" and does likewise for her: no longer shall she or Lucretia be dragged by it by those who would ruin them. These actions gesture to a simpler life, beyond that ruled by paternal economics. It is the life of economic independence, beyond the world of financial intrigue and with "no highborn necessities," that Giacomo makes reference to in his conversation with Camillo (II, ii, 8). In its powerful ending, "The Cenci" condemns wealth and power, with all of its costumes and farces. Wollstonecraft questions, "while wealth enervates men, and women live, as it were, by their personal charms, how can we expect them to discharge those ennobling duties which equally require exertion and self-denial?" (155). To which she responds herself:

> The world cannot be seen by an unmoved spectator; we must mix in the throng, and feel as men feel, before we can judge of their feelings. If we mean, in short, to live in the world, to grow wiser and better, and not merely to enjoy the good things of life, we must attain a knowledge of others at the same time that we become acquainted with ourselves. Knowledge acquired any other way only hardens the heart, and perplexes the understanding. (122)

To remain an "unmoved spectator," to fail to "mix in the throng," are precisely what Shelley condemns; Beatrice should inspire a "REVOLUTION in female manners" (Wollstonecraft 213) amid the audience, and move them to act with the exertion and self-denial of which Wollstonecraft speaks.

If this final Act suggests that theater is an essential agent in the economic subjugation of a population, then Shelley's play on some level is directed against its own

performance. It is a play that challenges its own staging, and in doing so, it calls into question what theater should be. Again, Rousseau's arguments can help clarify the politics of the poetics of "The Cenci."

The third essential objection Rousseau raises is that theater, "a frivolous pleasure," displaces natural and democratic activities (16), and he suggests a radical alternative entertainment: regular social dances throughout the year (16; 130). In simple republican life, a citizen's amusements are "derived from his nature and are born of his labors, his relations, and his needs"; the imposition of an amusement "foreign" to these activities necessarily leads to a neglect of oneself, family, neighbors, and state: "People think they come together in the theater, and it is there that they are isolated" (16-7). He argues that "it is discontent with one's self, the burden of idleness, the neglect of simple and natural tastes, that makes foreign amusement so necessary" (16). Social dances, however, have four distinct advantages for Rousseau. First, they provide "certain and decent meeting places" for the contracting of marriages (131). In this manner, dances provide healthy and virtuous – and supervised – socialization of the young. Second, "individuals in every station […] would have the resources of an agreeable entertainment" (131-2) in which all are involved as families of the community. Love between youths would be an enjoyable spectacle for those more advanced in age. He suggests that "the adornment of […] daughters" would not inspire the envy and competitiveness that theater goers develop because it "would provide diversion for many others" (132); this is, of course, another instance of Rousseau's prejudice Wollstonecraft questions. Third, "these occasions for gathering in order to form unions and for arranging the establishment of families would be frequent means for reconciling divided families

and bolstering the peace" (132). And finally, marriages would be contracted with less attention to "station and fortune" and more to "the inclinations" of those seeking to marry: "these marriages, less circumscribed by rank, would prevent the emergence of parties, temper excessive inequality, and maintain the body of the people better in the spirit of its constitution" (132). Underlying all four of these advantages is an argument for an activity in which all people participate openly in one capacity or another: "these balls [...] would bring the people together not so much for a public entertainment as for the gathering of a big family, and from the bosom of joy and pleasures would be born the preservation, the concord, and the prosperity of the republic" (131). In sum, unlike the theater in which citizens are passive spectators and are drawn away from their circumstances, dances promote active and ongoing engagement of individuals with their immediate society: "Let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united" (126).

Like Rousseau, Boal suggests an alternative to traditional theater, a "Poetics of the Oppressed" (117). Influenced by Bertolt Brecht's Marxist theater and Paulo Freire's radical literacy pedagogy, these poetics reject the separation of actors and spectators (122), the abstraction of subject matter away from present social conditions (112-3), and any sense of closure or finality (142). To these ends, Boal describes such theater as public discourse "in which the spectator-actor creates 'spectacles' according to his need to discuss certain themes or rehearse certain actions" (126). The aim of such scenes is not *catharsis*, but "an awakening of critical consciousness" and practice for social activism:

> The spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonist role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. (122)

Although there are many significant differences between their projects, nevertheless Boal's alternative theater shares much with Rousseau's dances. Both put emphasis on universal participation. Both involve a presentation of social relations of immediate relevance to the people. And both argue that such events provide critical social education, which can and should be ongoing.

Among the many differences between Rousseau's proposal for social dances and Boal's experimental theater, one is of particular significance to Shelley. Even though all are encouraged to participate at his dances, Rousseau prescribes roles for each participant to play, according to gender and age: young men are to act the gallants but be patient and decorous, daughters are to be adorned "object[s] of amusement," mothers are to enjoy the adornment of their daughters, the elderly are to enjoy watching the dancing (128-31). It is a paternalistic social structure that provides no room for deviation from the assigned social roles; it is, accordingly, a scheme close to nature, but designed by God "who wants [people] to fulfill their destinies" through marriage (128). Interested in social change rather than in social conservatism, Boal argues that critical to his alternative theater is, among other things, a constant redistribution of roles, and "without regard to sex" (183):

> […] all the actors interpreted all the characters. The distribution of roles was made in each scene without regard to the continuity; on the contrary, an effort was made to avoid it by not giving the same the same role twice. (181)

The frequent redistribution of roles is essential so that the participants remain critically conscious of social roles and "value structures" (189), to allow them to explore alternative identities to the ones imposed by "class, caste, or estate" (189), and thereby to inspire real social action. On this point, Rousseau's and Boal's arguments could not be farther apart.

Shelley recognized some of the limitations of Rousseau's thinking, particularly about gender. Commenting on Julie, Shelley wrote "tho in some respects absurd & prejudiced, it is yet a production of mighty Genius" (Letters 1: 493). Cian Duffy argues that "there are many reasons why Shelley might have found Rousseau's novel 'absurd & prejudiced' [with] its emphasis on the virtues of obedience to familial – and especially to paternal – wishes" (92). Perhaps the best, however, is Shelley's connection to Wollstonecraft.

In her attack on Rousseau, Wollstonecraft denounces the systematic subordination of women to specific roles that begins with the restrictions placed on their early education:

> Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavor to keep woman

in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a plaything. (29)

Wollstonecraft argues that, when put into practice, Rousseau's principles for the education of women produce - with the regularity of "a system" - debased women (87); instead, women should seek to redefine their roles in society and "pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence" (161). Moreover, she argues that women should read history, "not of particular men" but of manners and customs, of the arts, and most importantly of "political improvements" (162); what history reveals, she bemoans, is "how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man" (39), but it may provide inspiration for progress. That is, such reading is important as Rousseau's principles are not novel, but are a contemporary re-articulation of long-established conventions governing the social and political roles of women. Such conventions permeate "the whole system of British politics, if system it may courteously be called, consisting in multiplying dependents and contriving taxes which grind the poor to pamper the rich" (157). She insists that women should seek to "earn their own subsistence" so as to win independence from this patriarchal system that resists change, and to do so, should look to education (94).

If Wollstonecraft imagines a radical theater in which her revolution might find its characters, it is in her proposal for public schools that integrate both genders. She argues that education indoctrinates "an habitual association of ideas" about gender roles that are "enervating" and that "have smothered human nature (126-7). She seeks to redress this by proposing a place in which people can "attain the vigour necessary to enable them to throw off their factitious character [and where they can] find strength to recur to reason

and rise superior to a system of oppression" (127-8). She rejects private tutoring as an aristocratic practice that indoctrinates inequality and proposes instead a school that is "absolutely free and open to all classes" (185) and that would promote a healthy intermingling of the sexes in both academics and athletics (186-7): "such a degree of equality [would] be established between the sexes [that it] would shut out gallantry and coquetry, yet allow friendship and love to temper the heart for the discharge of higher duties" (187). Unlike Rousseau's country dance, such schools would promote the participation of women, not as essentially objects of interest, but as citizens, who would discover in the process what civic roles they might take on in the future, as doctors, politicians, or women of business (162). Their characters could be explored in an open, unscripted manner in such schools. Likewise, Beatrice explores her own character, rejecting those imposed upon her and exploring how she might participate in determining her own fate.

In his reading of "The Cenci," Hogle rejects "characters" as ever natural, but describes them as rhetorical constructs that emerge through conflict:

> "The Cenci" also explores how desirous beings constitute themselves as "characters" on the stage of the world and how, in doing so, they position themselves in relation to other such performers and finally under the aegis of commanding scripts that force figures with multiple tendencies into the behaviors appropriate to certain roles [and how these are shaped] by the restrictions in the codes dominating the social order. (149)

This self-exploration through rhetorical posturing he goes on to describe as "something of a metadrama," in part because it reveals "how the staged projection of character can be

bound up with the submission to tyranny that often brings tragedy about, on or off the stage" (149). In other words, Beatrice's "character" should be understood as the outcome of the conflict between her desires and the dominating social order. She is defined in and by her opposition to the paternalist discourse that would have her be submissive and obedient. What her character demonstrates then is the struggle against the oppressive paternal social structure, through a constant refusal to play the roles it would have her assume.

The poetics of "The Cenci" are politically charged for a revolutionary theater; they are attuned to Shelley's vision of history as one of oppression and tyranny. On the one hand, Shelley chose to write an accessible tragedy for the general public. Theater provides an escape from daily life, a retreat to a world not defined by the contemporary social norms or strictures. In this abstracted space, however, Shelley introduces Beatrice, whose power to resist the despotic powers that would define her life, oppress her, but who ultimately kill her, draws audience attention to their own situation, and may prompt them to action. "The Cenci" is Romantic radical theater.

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