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City University of New York

PH.D.

1980

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SHELLEY'S QUEST POEMS

by

BARRY JOHN CAPELLA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in English in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

1980

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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To my parents

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E. J. C.

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Chapter I. Alastor: Preface and Invocation

Sol pei colpevoli tremanti cori
 veste la morte orride forme.

A great portion of Shelley's adult life was devoted to a quest for an Ideal love. He early equated that love with a single woman who would embody both physical and intellectual excellence. Shelley's own response to her would be on two levels. As a man, he desired from her a totally fulfilling physical love that would remain unaltered during his lifetime. But he also sought in that same individual a person who would be his intellectual counterpart, who seemed to be a mirror image of all his aspirations, beliefs, and poetic activities. Initially, Shelley believed that the demands that he placed upon his "dream maiden" could be satisfied by his finding "an understanding capable of clearly estimating his own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which ... he has delighted to cherish and unfold in secret." ¹ Shelley at first fully expected to find his idealized maiden here (i.e., in this world) during his lifetime. However, his rather disastrous personal life and relationships with Harriet Westbrook, Mary Godwin, Emilia Viviani, and others attest to his failure to find that unique individual in this world. These searches for one equally sensitive, loving individual and the consequences of those searches became the main sources of three works which I call the quest poems: Alastor, Prince Athanase, and Epipsychidion.

"Alastor begins that series of ideal portraits,--in the main, incarnations of Shelley's own aspiring and melancholy spirit"--that depict his personal longing for Beauty, Knowledge, and Love that impelled him to seek for more of "all that is excellent and majestic in the contemplation of the universe."²

This quotation from the Preface to Alastor is Shelley's comment on the hero of that poem, but it is equally applicable to the author himself. The association of the hero's nature with Shelley's, however, also requires a consideration of one of the major problems in any criticism of the poem: the apparent discrepancy between Shelley's intentions as stated in the Preface to present the hero's "self-centered seclusion" as a warning against the dangers of solipsism and his basically sympathetic treatment of the hero's plight during the course of the poem.

Certain critics argue that Shelley's poem is inconsistent and lacks focus. R. D. Havens, for instance, attributes the problem of interpreting the work to its author's own lack of purpose when he began composition.³ One and a half decades later, Frederick L. Jones maintained that "she [the veiled maiden]⁷ was created as an agent of an avenging 'spirit,' but was used as a symbol of truth and beauty."⁴ What seems to have been generally overlooked is the question of proportion within the Preface itself. That is, Shelley describes the poet's excellences very fully and his negative, self-destructive seclusion rather briefly. Indeed, the difficulties of

reconciling Preface and poem seems to be the single line: "the Poet's self-centered seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." But more significantly, the Preface then proceeds at considerable length to warn those unlike the poet--those "meaner spirits"--that they are doomed to "slow and poisonous decay" precisely because they are so removed from the idealism and aspiration of the hero. Thus, it seems that the focus in interpreting Alastor is not on whether the concept of the hero in the Preface differs from the poet in the poem. On the contrary, Shelley clearly sympathizes with the quest and subsequent plight of the idealist--although he realizes the inevitable disillusionment that results from the quest--and just as clearly condemns "all else, [those] selfish, blind, and torpid...multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world."⁵

By such a strong contrast between the poet and "all else," Shelley accounts for the isolation that seems to be a part of his hero's lot. That is, the youth of "uncorrupted feelings" whose "desires [to] point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured" has been isolated initially from his universe. Consequently, isolation is, to some extent, a given and not to be interpreted as essentially destructive or even totally negative. Only when he "images to himself the Being whom he loves" and then seeks the vision does he experience profound suffering. In a sense he is doubly isolated. The intensity of his quest for the Being obviously distances him

from his fellow men, and it also distances him further from his previous existence. This tension between the two worlds of society and Nature gradually becomes the catalyst for the forces within from which emerge the furies who pursue him to "speedy ruin." Because he must seek the Being whom he loves, this "irresistible passion" ultimately destroys him when he falls in his quest. The hero's inability to resist his own natural impulse to seek his vision arouses Shelley's sympathy. Doomed to exist without human sympathy, the poet at least tries to bridge the chasm between his solipsistic self and the world of Love. Havens states that "in the neglect of human love, the solitary should conceive a being of impossible perfection and die of longing for her,"⁶ thus recognizing (with a different emphasis) the hero's needing the force of Love to survive.

This great dependence upon Love becomes one of the major themes of all three quest poems. Without its presence, the heroes of Alastor and Prince Athanase suffer intense anguish and eventually die. For Shelley's heroes, the force of Love --conceived of as a physically perfect, sympathetic Love in the first two quest poems--is their Life-force. Quite simply, they cannot exist without it, and its absence from their lives vitiates them much as the greater distance of the winter sun from earth kills most plants. Only when we recognize how absolutely essential this singular, idealized love is to the physical and psychological well-being of his heroes can we appreciate the aptness of Shelley's continual reliance upon

images of warmth, light, and Sun to suggest its life-sustaining powers. These images assume especial importance in the most complex of the quest poems, Epipsychidion, in which Shelley completely altered his conception of love--a conception which will be traced throughout this study. Whereas the youths of the earlier works were obsessed by the need to find a human counterpart to their vision of an idealized love, I shall argue that the hero of Epipsychidion identified love with the power of Poetry and Beauty rather than with a single female. Also, it is only in Epipsychidion that the salutary powers of love restored the youth's weakened state--the direct consequence of his former pursuits of love incarnate:

Soft as an Incarnation of the Sun,
When light is changed to love, this glorious
 One
Floated into the cavern where I lay,
And called my Spirit....
I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night
Was penetrating me with living light.

(ll. 335-338
341-342)

Regardless of how Shelley finally conceived of love, one experience is common to all the youths in these poems: each is isolated from society by the intensity of his quest. In Alastor, for example, Shelley warns his readers of two types of isolation: personal and societal. The hero's pursuit of the dream maiden necessitates his rejection of, or at least indifference to, the companionship offered by the Arab maiden (ll. 129-139) and the "cottagers" and "youthful maidens." (ll. 254-271). But we cannot overlook the emphasis on the greater perils of social isolation. In contrast to the

idealists whom the Power enlightens and then destroys, there are "those meaner spirits" who reject the Power. These self-centered individuals choose to isolate themselves from one another, and their ignoble motives pervert their basic human natures. Consequently, they are doomed to an unlamented death and "miserable grave."

The hero and "those meaner spirits" represent man's dual nature. The youth seeks a counterpart who corresponds to his own/ideas of imaginative, intellectual excellence. In the process he spurns those lesser individuals who would love him. But his error is "generous" and his desire for greater knowledge is "sacred." He will suffer for "self-centered seclusion," but the Power's motive is not a vindictive one. Instead, his recognition of his flaw is inevitable when he is awakened to "too exquisite a perception of its [the Power's] influence." Those that deny the Power's dominion, however, suffer a lingering vitiation. Their own psychologically diseased egocentrism destroys them physically, and it also insures their spiritual destruction for want of human intercourse and sympathy. Thus, they are doubly doomed and doubly cursed.

Shelley's Alastor, then, is a mirror in which the reader may behold the two contrary states of human existence. The poem presents the hero's state and one type of isolation. Implicit in the work is another form of isolation, one within a society that is motivated by the basest indifference to other people. Both of these states certainly contain negative aspects, but Shelley clearly sympathizes with the doomed poet.

Alastor begins with the Invocation, which is divided into three sections. In the first, the speaker addresses three of the natural elements and pleads for their continuing inspiration. He advances his plea through the use of the conditional mood. If he should fulfill the obligations necessary for such inspiration, he beseeches his "beloved brotherhood" to favor him again in his composition of poetry.

He begins the Invocation with a direct address to "Earth, Ocean, Air"--a progression which parallels the hero's experience during the course of the poem. What should be stressed is the speaker's assumption of a unity within Nature as a given. That unity encompasses not only the elements themselves, but also the speaker. In addition to claiming the parentage of Nature by his use of the possessive "our," he may also suggest that he is fire, the missing element. As a poet himself, the speaker equates the composition of poetry--which he does in the Invocation--with images of warmth. Sparks, heat, kindling, fire, and the Sun will continually be associated with poetic activity in all three of the quest poems and in A Defence of Poetry.

His use of "our" initiates the first in a long series of conditional expressions:

If our great Mother has imbued my soul
With aught of natural piety to feel
Your love, recompense the boon with
mine....

(ll. 2-4)

Shelley is certainly indebted to Wordsworth⁷ in these lines, but we should not overlook their "Shelleyan" qualities:

He would surprise the unity of being by any means so ever, and this multiple approach to the mysteries of the universe gives Alastor its peculiar significance as a nature poem. Filled with a multitude of impressions from the external world, from books, and from his own experiences of life, it passes far beyond the boundaries of Wordsworthian influence and memorializes the manifold excitement by which his spirit could be swept.⁸

For example, Shelley stresses his own concept of the reciprocity when Nature is in harmony with itself. He thought of reciprocity as the thoughtless giving to other elements or creatures what one has received from Nature. Thus, if the speaker has been blessed by his "great Mother" to feel the power of love, then he ought to respond to that love with his own. This concern for Nature's creatures also characterizes the vegetarian youth of Alastor:

...the doves and squirrels would partake
from his innocuous hand his bloodless food.

(ll. 100-101)

The idea of reciprocity suggests a fountain of love that constantly replenishes itself from itself. Also, the concept of limitless love anticipates those troublesome lines in Epipsychidion about "True Love" (ll. 160-173) which some critics have incorrectly interpreted as Shelley's espousal of promiscuity.

In his mood of supplication, the speaker asks Nature's aid in his composition. He does this in a series of extremely descriptive, increasingly erotic lines that are indicative of his great love for Nature:

If dewy morn, and odorous noon, and even,
 With sunset and its' gorgeous ministers,
 And solemn midnight's tingling silent-
 ness;
 If Autumn's hollow sighs in the sere wood,
 And Winter's robing with pure snow and
 crowns
 Of starry ice the gray grass and bare
 boughs;
 If Spring's voluptuous pantings when she
 breathes
 Her first sweet kisses--have been dear to
 me;

(ll. 5-12)

Within this description and, indeed, within the entire invocation, one is struck by the curious absence of mankind in the speaker's world. His situation parallels the hero's to some extent in that both experience tranquility and serenity only in Nature. One of the themes which Shelley explores in Alastor is the love of Nature--a love which proves inadequate for the idealistic youth. For the speaker, however, love of Nature seems sufficient and his very sensual description of "Spring's voluptuous pantings when she breathes/ Her first sweet kisses" corresponds to his own heightened emotions in his union with Nature. The language also anticipates the erotic element of the youth's dream:

His strong heart sunk and sickened with
 excess
 Of love. He reared his shuddering limbs
 and quelled
 His gasping breath, and spread his arms to
 meet
 Her panting bosom.

(ll. 181-185)

The speaker begins the third segment of the Invocation, which complements Part I and its primary theme of the need for reciprocity:

If no bird, insect, or gentle beast
 I consciously have injured, but still loved
 And cherished these my kindred; then for-
 give
 This boast, beloved brethren, and with-
 draw
 No portion of your wanted favor now!

(11. 13-17)

His hope that he still loved them recalls, of course, his wish to "feel your love," the love of "Earth, Ocean, and Air." In the next line, however, "cherished" has two meanings. First, the speaker realizes the necessity of valuing these creatures. Within that context is the connotation that valuing (cherishing) "these my kindred" is nourishing them.⁹ In short, he "recompenses the boon" with his own giving to Nature's kingdom.

Since he has fulfilled these conditions, he can expect Nature to shower him with poetic inspiration. Actually, Shelley is less uncertain of meriting this inspiration than the Invocation might at first suggest. For one thing, the use of familial terms like "brotherhood," "brethren," and "kindred" conveys the poet's own sense of blood kinship with the whole of Nature. Of equal importance is the last line in which he asks Nature to "withdraw/No portion of your wanted portion now!" Shelley has been inspired previously and has become accustomed to that experience.

To realize more fully the extent of the speaker's sense of himself as a poet, we need only consider the marked shift in tone in the second movement of the Invocation, the appeal to the "Mother of this unfathomable world." In this section the narrator reveals his awareness of the burden of being a

poet and an increasing confidence that he deserves the name of poet. He abandons the use of the conditional mood and attempts to make sense of the world. Again, we ought to note a number of similarities between the speaker and the hero of Alastor. For instance, he is also a student who learns by introspection rather than by social intercourse. He too is a self-involved individual in a very isolated existence. In addition, his decision to remain isolated is an ongoing process, since not only has he "watched/Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps," but his "heart ever gazes on the depth/Of thy deep mysteries." His use of the present tense does distinguish him from the hero of Alastor who once "ever gazed and gazed," and who now lies dead. Thus, one of the reasons for the speaker's narration in Alastor is that he is so very aware of the inevitably destructive nature of such imaginative pre-occupation with the self. He relates a tale that he presumes may foreshadow his own fate, a fate which he certainly recognizes but cannot, at this time, escape. The speaker's own declaration that "I have loved/Thee ever, and thee only" suggests the intensity of a poetic vocation in which he renounces worldly concerns for Poetry. In Alastor, the speaker expresses a profound devotion,--as once did the now dead youth of the poem--but Nature is his Power and the composition of poetry his reward. This intensity and devotion are also characteristic of Prince Athanase and the speaker in Epipsychidion. For the prince, Love in the form of a woman is his divinity, and his devotion to her isolates

his essentially social nature, from his friends and destroys him. A similar devotion impels the hero of Epipsychidion, but he seeks an intellectual force somewhat closer in concept to the speaker's in the Invocation than to the idea of a female divinity that so obsessed the wanderers in Alastor and Prince Athanase.

Returning to Alastor, William Hildebrand's observation about Shelley's intentions in the poem is valuable: "In Alastor, Shelley's purpose was not primarily to expand a theory of love but, rather, to describe a psychological phenomenon he had observed in himself and in his friend Hogg: the process of love in one with an idealizing play of mind."¹¹

In addition to comparing the two figures of the poem, we should consider some interesting analogies between this section and the later "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." Critics like Richard Ackermann and Carlos Baker have observed some similarities between a few lines in Alastor and a stanza in the Hymn."¹² But in fact the relationship between the two works extends beyond lines 20-29 of Alastor and Stanza V of the "Hymn." Instead, the next twenty-two lines describe an almost mystical experience that definitely anticipates similar events in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." One example of these similarities is Shelley's use of the visual in both poems. In one sense he uses sight in a very common way: he watches. But even this experience separates him from the majority of men. For he watches for the "great Mother" in a phantasmal scene that seems as much beneath the earth as on or above it.

The most striking characteristics of this force are her insubstantiality and invisibility, for she passes by as a shadow and her steps are associated not with sound but with sight:

I have watched
Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps.
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries.

(ll. 20-24)

She seems to cast a veil (or to be the veil) over the poet, which impels him to look within for light, for answers to the "deep mysteries." Harold Bloom speaks of this turning in upon the self: ... "The Romantic poet turned away, not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself."¹³

In the "Hymn," the speaker is similarly aware of the Power:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats though unseen among us--visiting
This various world with an inconstant wing.

(ll. 1-3)

What seems characteristic of the world of both speakers is that each one dwells in a world of darkness, whose inhabitants remain ignorant and unenlightened despite the Power's visitations: "All else, selfish, blind and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world."¹⁴ One of the responsibilities of the poet, therefore, is to utilize those moments when the Power does visit and rescue man from the dark. Through his compositions, the poet hopes to enlighten man, to lead him into a world of Beauty and Love, and to correct man's way of viewing his world and himself. Although this idea of the poet

as a source of light remains relatively undeveloped in Alastor, Shelley returned to it in Prince Athanase where he compared the poet to a beacon lighting men's way to safety. In the last quest poem, this idea becomes even more complex because both the poet and man have been limited in their vision and are in need of guidance. Man has remained the "unforeseeing multitudes," but more important for the purpose of this study the poet's perception of himself and the object of his love has been impaired. The histories of the heroes in the other quest poems are the futile pursuits of an idealized love in a mortal form. The Being whom the youth in Alastor imaged to/himself remained elusive and undiscovered. Similarly, the beneficent Prince Athanase failed to discover his feminine counterpart. Both heroes erred in objectifying the creations of their imagination. It is only in Epipsychidion,--especially in the scene in which the poet was "nor alive nor dead" (l. 300)--that Shelley reveals how misguided have been his previous pursuits of love. In that scene, in which Reason and Imagination become complementary forces, the idealist finally understands how he will succeed in his quest.

But that direction was certainly not apparent in the earlier quest poems. One of the dilemmas that Shelley confronted unsuccessfully in both works was whether Death became the ultimate means of attaining love when all earthly efforts had failed. Shelley alludes to this preoccupation with Death in the Invocation, and his own "obstinate questionings" about about the relationship of Love and Death become a central theme

in the three quest poems:

In charnels and on coffins, where black
 death
 Keeps record of the trophies won from
 thee
 Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
 Of thee and thine.

(11. 24-27)

That death records the trophies won from the Power might mean that Shelley was tentatively exploring the idea that we must utilize the force of this Power if we hope to pass beyond death. The phrase "won from thee" is troublesome, but perhaps the Power reveals to us that death is a necessary experience in our attainment of love. Death, then, may allow the poets to consummate their quest in a way that they did not anticipate at the outset. Having failed to find love incarnate, the heroes might experience Love in an afterlife. Unless there can be some hope of an existence after Death, the poet must despond:

Thou--that to human thought art nourishment,
 Like darkness to a dying flame!
 Depart not as thy shadow came,
 Depart not--lest the grave should be,
 Like life and fear, a dark reality.

(11. 44-48)

In both Alastor and Prince Athanase, Shelley failed to resolve this question of an afterlife. Particularly in the 1815 poem, his final attitude about death and its function in the quest remained ambiguous. In Prince Athanase, he seemed to be making a more specific statement about the relationship between Love and Death: "On his deathbed, the lady who can really reply to his soul comes and kisses his lips." But that poem remained a fragment, and we must look to Epipsychidion for Shelley's

resolution of this crucial question.

Regardless of some of his uncertainties, Shelley--in both the "Hymn" and Alastor--awaits and receives the infusion of the Power's presence. When that moment occurs in the "Hymn," it occurs quickly, but Shelley is ready. The religious aspect of this scene suggests a pentecost in which he is inspired so that he not only composes poetry, but is resurrected from his previous state. The movement is "from frost to fire as a mode of renewal for the self."¹⁵ With this moment comes the potential to free "this world from its dark slavery" by the light of Truth and Knowledge that shines through the poet. A similar experience occurs in the Invocation when the poet in a more explicitly sexual context ("those breathless kisses") receives a portion of the light (or in Pentecostal terms, grace) within him. In a sense he has had his real vision restored and no longer exists in darkness. What is stressed in both poems is the poet's own inadequacy in the presence of the Power. Stated simply, he perceives and receives only a portion of her Beauty, Knowledge, and Love--he remains her apostle. He admits that despite his efforts he has failed to penetrate to "thy inmost sanctuary," and in the companion "Hymn" he invokes the "awful Loveliness" to "give what'er these words cannot express."

Following the union with the Power, both speakers become serene and tranquil. Without pressing the idea too far, one could argue that there has been some confusion and a subsequent transformation of sexual identity. That is, each speaker becomes somewhat feminine in nature. This seems especially true

in the last segment of the Invocation in which the speaker describes himself "as a long-forgotten lyre" awaiting the moment when the "Great Parent" will arouse and re-animate him:

...I have mixed awful talks and asking looks
 With my most innocent love, until strange
 tears,
 Uniting with those breathless kisses, made
 Such magic as compels the charmed night
 To render up thy charge.

(ll. 33-37)

He finally yields his rather virginal state (innocent love) to her in a way that anticipates the hero in Alastor who "folded his fame in her dissolving arms." Despite the intensity and perseverance of their quests, Shelley's individuals in the three poems to be discussed are rather strikingly passive and submissive in their relationship with the Feminine Powers/Figures who direct their lives, or at least determine the directions of those lives. Here, as the Invocation concludes, the speaker waits until he has been charged to compose. Shelley's conclusion parallels the last stanza of the "Hymn." Both works describe the poet's desire to produce harmony with Nature and Man. That last word is essential. Indeed, the Invocation ends with it and the "Hymn" concludes with the poet's desire to "love all human kind." Thus, the experience of both speakers has guided them from a somewhat narrow, "self-centred" world of Nature to the desire to interact with their fellow men. It is this new perception that allows the poet to conclude both works in a mood of calm. As the speaker ends the Invocation, he does so in a way that returns us to its opening lines. His rondo takes up the various themes of his address:

I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my
 strain
 May modulate with murmurs of the air,
 And motions of the forests and the sea,
 And voices of living beings, and woven
 hymns
 Of night and day, and the deep heart of
 man.

(ll. 45-49)

In these lines the speaker recognizes the need for human intercourse. Alastor will make clear that loving only "the air," "the forests," and "the sea" cannot compensate for the absence of human love, "the deep heart of man."

Shelley's phrase "the deep heart of man" has two meanings: (wo)man and Mankind. While he often professed his desire to want to effect universal good, to fulfill his passion for "reforming the world," we cannot ignore his preoccupation with a second, equally dominant desire to attain Permanent Love through his union with a single female conception or individual. It is this "other" concern of Shelley's, the quest for a sympathetic, co-respondent love, that obsessed him for a lifetime and inspired some of his most important compositions.

Notes

1
Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley's Prose: Or The Trumpet of a Prophecy, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1954), p. 170. Hereafter, when quoting from this edition, I shall cite Clark, the title of the work, and its page reference. This quotation is from "On Love."

2
Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Poems of Shelley, ed. George Woodberry (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1901), p. 32.

3
Throughout his article, Professor Havens in "Shelley's 'Alastor'", PMLA, 65 no. 4 (Dec. 1930), 1098-1116 devotes considerable attention to what he perceives as discrepancies between Shelley's intentions in the poem as stated in the Preface and in the poem itself. He focuses on the disproportion between the quest mentioned in the Preface and its actual treatment in Alastor. His article has been the most provocative in stirring other critics into praising, disagreeing with or compromising it. Harold Hoffman's An Odyssey of the Soul: Shelley's 'Alastor' New York: Columbia University Press, 1933 deals with the main arguments of Havens.

4
Frederick L. Jones, "Inconsistencies of Shelley's 'Alastor'", English Literary History, 13, no. 4 (Dec., 1946), p. 295.

5
Shelley, The Poems, p. 33.

6
Havens, p. 1102.

7
Hoffman is interesting and exhaustive in his pursuits of influences. Cf. also Paul Mueschke and Earl Griggs' "Wordsworth as Prototype of the Poet in Shelley's 'Alastor'", PMLA, 49, no. 1 (1934), p. 229-245.

8
Hoffman, p. 60.

9
But the speaker remains relatively isolated from general mankind, and thus he shares an existence similar to the hero's.

10

In "The Symbolism of Shelley's Swans," Studies in Romanticism, 1 (1961-1962), Newell Ford expresses the situation thus: "This is the ironic "Fate" which dedicated, disinterested apostles of Love must suffer. They never "attain," yet they can never rest from striving to attain, (p. 178).

11

William H. Hilderbrand, "Shelley's Early Vision Poems," Studies in Romanticism, 8, no. 4 (1969), 208-209.

12

See Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 57.

13

Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest Romance," The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 26.

14

Shelley, The Poems, p. 33.

15

Bloom, "The unpastured Sea: An Introduction to Shelley," p. 110.

Chapter II. Alastor: The Quest

Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte
 Mi guida Amor; ch'ogni segnato calle
 Provo contrario a la tranquilla vita

The speaker begins the tale in the elegiac tradition.

He is a poet mourning the death of another poet who died too young, one "whose untimely tomb no human hands with pious reverence reared" (ll. 50-51). In all three poems, Shelley used the technique of a speaker announcing the death of a poet who had died in pursuit of love. The destructive nature of the hero's quest is a theme common to all three works, but it is only in Epipsychidion that the reader senses that the poet is victorious in death. In the earlier compositions, most noticeably in the concluding portion of Alastor (ll. 672-720), Shelley's own ambiguous treatment of death suggested the seeming futility of the hero's efforts.

At the outset of Alastor, then, we are introduced to a world of isolation and death: "No human hands" built a tomb and "no mourning maidens" scatters flowers over it. But that does not mean that the poet is unmourned, for, in fact, two monuments are being constructed. Nature oversees the completion of the first. It does so with its autumnal winds and their dual purpose. Their "charmed eddies" produce the funeral dirge, and the natural falling of the leaves erects his tomb. The speaker himself constructs the second of the monuments to the youth. Although Nature does construct a pyramid of/leaves, her structure is at best annual. It remains the task of the speaker to erect a lasting tribute to the poet. He does this by composing Alastor, its timeless structure superimposed upon the temporal structure of autumn leaves. Perhaps Shelley was

influenced by one of Horace's Odes which explored the timelessness of poetry and the temporality of life:

Exegi monumentum aere perennius
regulique situ pyramidium altius.¹

In Alastor, the narrator becomes the mourning maiden, and his words of poetic lamentation replace the traditional "weeping flowers" and votive cypress wreath" used in the pastoral elegy.² A rather paradoxical line occurs in the tribute: "no lorn bard/Breath'd o'er his dark fate one melodious sigh." Certainly, this is not literally true because the speaker, a poet himself, has dedicated the "melodious sigh" of Alastor to the memory of the youth. What the line means is that none but Shelley has mourned the dead hero. The wanderer is a projection of one of his own mental states, and the mourner speaks "ex sepulchro."

There is another aspect of this passage that is also important, however, and that is the touching description of the poet as "gentle, brave, and generous." Shelley used exactly these terms in describing his first boy friendship:

I remember forming an attachment of this kind at school. ...The object of these sentiments was a boy about my own age, of a character eminently generous, brave and gentle.³

As Shelley grew older, he sought a woman whose capacity for love and friendship corresponded to his:

The search for an ideal mate is familiar enough in the poetry of the romantics, but in Shelley it acquires the specialized form of narcissism. His lovers are usually like 'one person split in two.'⁴

This particular section of Alastor then concludes with an allusion to the schism that separated poet from society. Despite the presence of Man about him, he remained alone and unaware of his effect/upon others: "He lived, he died, he sung in solitude." Shelley here suggests that however awful the tribulations of the poet, his poetry is never totally ineffectual. But more important is the focus on what will be a central theme of the quest poems: isolation. Although the "passionate notes" of the hero in Alastor may have indeed induced weeping in strangers, they remained strangers to him and he remained estranged from society. Likewise, those virgins who sought to love him were frustrated in their efforts, just as the poet wasted away because "unknown he passed."⁵

And virgins, as unknown he passed, have
 pined
 And wasted for fond love of his wild eyes.
 The fire of those soft orbs has ceased to
 burn.

(ll. 62-64)

This failure to love becomes a plague upon both the lover and the object of his love. Poet and virgins waste away both their youth and their time in a loveless state. Ultimately, death was the fate of the youth in Alastor, as well as of the heroes in Prince Athanase and in Epipsyichidion.

Again, what impresses me in these poems is Shelley's insistence that an Ideal Love was an absolutely vital force in their lives. In each of the quest poems, Shelley altered his conception of this great love and tried to redefine it. In Alastor, love was equated with a female poet whose themes

were "knowledge and truth and virtue." But, originating as she did in the poet's dream, she remained an extremely vague, perhaps illusory figure throughout. When Shelley composed Prince Athanase, he attributed more physical characteristics to the object of the prince's love but did not complete the poem. In both compositions, Shelley unsuccessfully tried to define love in terms of a single feminine entity whom the heroes failed to find in this world. Consequently, each despaired and finally died. Not until Epipsychidion, the only quest poem in which the hero does not search anew for a feminine counterpart to his own nature, does Shelley--to his own satisfaction--have one of his heroes complete his quest. Regardless of their success or failure, none of Shelley's heroes could live in this world without the animating presence of his life-force--the source of Love (and Life).

Commenting on the death of the youth in Alastor, Shelley comes full circle in the elegy and tells us that Silence succeeds the death of the poet. The speaker releases the "mute music" of Silence and thus begins the history of the youth.

One of the most striking aspects of his life is his unique parentage. At no point does Shelley introduce any family of the hero. From the outset the youth exists in solitude, not as his choice but as his fate. Consequently, "his love of nature was rather the result of his isolation from the world of man." Within this solitude the youth experiences a more profound sense of aloneness--imaginative isolation.

That vision and dream nurture him suggests that initially his solitude was a positive force. "The mind of the poet is formed from without,"⁸ and he breathes in all that is beautiful and excellent in existence:

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.⁹
(11. 67-70)

Still, the youth is not totally satisfied and foresakes this existence:

When early youth had passed,
he left
His cold fireside and alienated home
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.
(11. 75-78)

Because his home life is uncongenial, he seeks new human companionship. Being unhappy, he feels chilled for want of sympathy and love. Without these forces, he can no longer remain at home.

Also, the passive nature of the youth has undergone considerable alteration. As an infant he received nourishment, but when "early youth had passed," his passivity seems of a more ominous nature. "Wide waste and tangled wilderness" lure him into an environment certainly alien to his previous one.

Amidst this foreboding landscape--to some extent a projection of the hero's own confused, disenchanted nature--he experiences his first association with a different society.

Prior to reaching these vales, the poet has pursued "Nature's most secret steps," where:

The red volcanic overcanopies
 Its field of snow and pinnacles of ice
 With burning smoke.¹⁰

(ll. 83-85)

But the poet is restless and commits himself to wander and to "seek strange truths in undiscovered lands." This journey-motif becomes one of the major themes of Alastor, as well as of Prince Athanase and Epipsychidion--one which undergoes extensive change until the death of the poet--his final journey. Initially, his travels take him through a landscape of Nature and past civilizations that reflect the dual nature of the hero. Nature is associated with the idea of solitude in the poem. Although the poet does interact with "savage men" and gentle creatures, he experiences no profound love or friendship. When the next part of the journey begins, however, the reader's expectations are not fulfilled. This journey from a primitive environment to ancient civilizations might have been used as the hero's transition from isolation to society. Instead, he continues his quest for greater knowledge by a systematic study of empires past. But the quest is really a continuation of his nurturing "by solitude and bright silver dream" during infancy. His present search compensates for the "cold fireside" that he has left. Shelley implies that Nature and Civilization (Art) serve as his guardian benefactors. Nature's relationship with him is a maternal one since she nourishes and sustains him; Art's relationship

with him seems more paternal since it instructs him. Thinking ahead to Prince Athanase, we realize how much Shelley learned from his composition of Alastor. He realized the limitations of such an isolated existence, and perhaps he created Zonoras as an acknowledgement of the necessity of human influence and companionship. In short, man needs society.

At this point in Alastor, however, the hero clearly lacks this perception about himself and consecrates his efforts to attaining even more extensive learning:

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,
 ...
 He lingered, poring on memorials
 Of the world's youth:
 ...
 ...but ever gazed
 And gazed.

(ll. 106-112, 121-122. 125-126)

The hero's perseverance in attempting to discover truth and to resolve the mysteries of creation are analogous to the speaker's recitation of his endeavors in which his "heart ever gazes on the depth of thy deep mysteries." Actually, the speaker's description of his experiences and those of the youth are projections of diverse mental activities within the same individual. Both take place among scenes of ruin, decay, and death, and both are solitary experiences. The youth's is described thus:

He lingered, poring on memorials
 Of the world's youth: through the long
 burning day
 Gazed on those speechless shapes;...
but ever gazed
 And gazed, till meaning on his vacant
 mind
 Flashed like strong inspiration.

(ll. 121-123, 125-127)

In this mood he experiences a moment of epiphany in which he sees "the thrilling secrets of the birth of time." (l. 128)
 Now the consequence of this moment, it seems, is ambivalent. In one sense, the youth's vision has been enlarged to encompass a much greater perception and knowledge than that of mankind in general. This newly-acquired awareness of truth and knowledge has its precedents in the Preface:

But that Power...strikes the luminaries of the
 world with sudden darkness and extinction by awakening
 them to too exquisite a perception of its influences.¹²

What is at work here is a dual meaning of vision. The more introspective one becomes, and thus more self-involved and self-absorbed, to attain knowledge, the more blind one becomes to the immediate world. Therefore, his intellectual nurturing is at the expense of his humanity. For though "his vacant mind" absorbs knowledge from his rapt contemplation, his need for friendship and love remains unacknowledged and consequently unsatisfied. Hence, despite her humble role, the Arab maiden¹³ --who functions as a part of Nature (human nature) by nourishing the youth--ironically possesses greater knowledge than he. She would sustain the hero through the power of her love, but he remains unaware of her. Because of his indifference to her,

however unconscious, he has alienated the maiden from her home and made her a wanderer like the youth who once forsook "his cold and alienated home":

then, when red

morn
Made paler the pale moon, to her cold
home
Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned.
(ll. 136-139)

In Nature, the sun rises and the moon sets. Because the poet has withheld his love (the Sun's warmth), the maiden's vitality is chilled despite the coming warmth of dawn. Her frustrations somewhat anticipate the frustrations of Athanase's friends who try to understand the source of his unhappiness:

none ever

learned
The cause of his disquietude.
(Part I, ll. 81-82)

Although the Arab maiden remains a stranger to the youth whereas those concerned for the prince are his friends, both the maiden and friends are completely barred from entering the heroes' lives. Thus, by his insistence upon discovering a perfect love, each hero denies himself the love and solace of others that might have partially assuaged his suffering.

The fate of the Arab maiden mirrors the poet's own eventual fate when he wanders companionless and cannot find the object of his love. But we must be careful about the reason of that fate. For example, Frederick Jones speaks of it as a mode of punishment sent to him by "offended sweet human love."¹⁴ Actually, this fate is the inevitable consequence

of the poet's failure to love, the maiden and other persons in the poem. Some critics speak of the youth's intellectual self-absorption--which is the reason for his failure to reciprocate the love of others--as if he were consciously rejecting human companionship. They suggest that his motives are cruel and arrogant ones, when actually his inexperience with and in society makes him unaware of the effects of his actions upon others. He is thoughtless in a childlike way, wounding thoughtlessly and remaining oblivious to others' suffering because of him.¹⁵

Certainly he remains unaware of this because "in joy and exultation [he] held his way." His quest for knowledge blurs his awareness of the world about him, and in his travels East he seeks the sources of the "fountains of divine philosophy." These joyous travels cease when he enters the vale of Cashmire, "the earthly paradise of that name."¹⁶ Upon entering it, he isolates himself further by seeking its remotest place, "far within the loneliest dell." Even here--in contrast to his own situation--there is union "where odorous plants entwine beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower."¹⁷ (ll. 146-147)

As the poet rests,

A vision on his sleep
There came a dream of hopes that never
yet
Had flushed his cheek. He dreamed a
veiled maid
Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.
Her voice was like the voice of his own
soul.

(ll. 149-153)

that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature
of man, a soul within our soul." ¹⁹ In this portion of Alastor
Shelley depicts the process of poetic creation. This "soul
within our soul" serves a dual purpose. First, it kindles and
re-animates the poet's mind:

Herself a poet. Soon the solemn mood
Of her pure mind kindled through all her
 frame
A permeating fire.

(ll. 161-163)

Since she exists within the poet himself, the kindling process
gradually spreads throughout his frame ("a permeating fire")
and creation begins:

 her fair hands
Were bare alone, sweeping from some
 strange harp
Strange symphony, and in their branching
 veins
The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale.

(ll. 165-168)

In creation the mind loves. But if we were to define this
love solely as an intellectual Ideal, we should misinterpret
greatly the succeeding lines. For Shelley clearly conceives
of this love in another way. As the mind creates, it be-
comes increasingly aroused by its activities. The language
corresponds to the heightened excitement of the mind's in-
tensified actions:

"Her dissolving arms" may be interpreted in two ways. One is that the vision is disappearing: the kindling of the poetic mind has ceased, and "blackness veiled his dizzy eyes." The second is that the poet yearns to be dissolved by and absorbed into the dream maiden. In addition to seeking an obviously sexual union, the poet seeks a fusion of their beings. It is as if the hero were searching for his other half--his idealized feminine poetic self--and could not be complete without her. Without this fusion, the youth's aspirations must remain unfulfilled. Only in the dream does Shelley suggest the type of union that the idealist in Alastor desires. In Epipsygidion, however, he develops this idea of fusion more complexly. Shelley departs from his treatment of the quest in Alastor and Prince Athanase and clearly indicates the non-physical nature of poet and beloved--even though he uses extremely erotic language to suggest the unbearable intensity of the experience.

But in Alastor the poet fails to unite with the maiden. Instead, the second purpose of this "soul within our soul" becomes evident. The prototype has been expelled from the poet's imagination, and his journey will be a search for a feminine embodiment of the vision. In The Mind and Heart of Love, Martin D'Arcy makes an interesting observation that we might apply to the general situation in the poem: "the love,²⁰...is always toward an object which remains outside the self."

The hero's situation is completely altered by the dream. Once he has emerged from it, he begins to perceive the objective

world much differently. For instance, Nature's bower no longer seems to correspond positively to the poet's mind. Instead of providing warmth, fire, and security, the atmosphere seems threatening to him or at least indifferent to his presence:

The cold white light of morning, the blue
 moon
 Low in the west, the clear and garish hills
 The distinct valley and the vacant woods,
 Spread round him where he stood. Whither
 have fled
 The hues of heaven that canopied his
 bower
 Of yesternight?

(ll. 193-198)

This sense of alienation from a world that once seemed benign also characterizes Prince Athanase who forsook friends and society to begin his pursuit. In both works--and Epipsychidion comments upon this--the poet's obsession with and devotion to the discovery of a physical embodiment of a perfect love draws him from a relatively beneficent existence into a foreboding one that promises the possibility of fulfillment--and a subsequent return to his former world.

Without his dream maiden, the hero of Alastor can only look out into a vast landscape that may contain the object of his search. But the physical landscape reflects back his existence without Love: nothingness:

His wan eyes
 Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
 As ocean's moon looks on the moon in
 heaven.

(ll. 200-202)

Still, his irresistible desire to discover the veiled maid impels him to plunge into the landscape.

Also, Shelley's use of narcissism is quite complex, and he has re-interpreted it somewhat by utilizing another related myth. It is important to remember that the poet has created within his imagination the being whom he now seeks in Nature. Although he who ignored "the spirit of sweet human love" and who "spurned her choicest gifts" has become enamored of an idealized feminine form who mirrors his own being, he does seek to love another--unlike Narcissus. When he objectifies that vision, he has fallen in love with a concept that he now seeks outside him: "sui operis concepit amorem."²¹ Like a poetic Pygmalion, he has sculpted his beloved mentally, has fallen in love with her, and now desires her human counterpart. Consequently, love in Alastor is to be equated not with self-absorption but with "the virtus unitiva, the power which unites the person with an object which appears to it as beautiful or good."²²

He eagerly pursues
Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting
shade;
He overleaps the bounds.

(ll. 205-207)

Having forsaken the beauty and tranquility of the imagination, he has literally passed beyond the mind's boundaries into a world that appears both limitless and foreboding. With his entry into the physical world, his previous knowledge no longer nurtures him. Instead, he is beset by twin doubts. One doubt

that assails him is whether his imagination has betrayed him. What the poet asks himself at this point is if the mind in creation could be capable of producing an illusory Ideal:

Alas! alas!
 Were limbs and breath and being inter-
 twined
 Thus treacherously. Lost, lost forever
 lost
 In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep,
 That beautiful shape!

(ll. 207-211)

Harold Hoffman comments valuably on the poet's dilemma:

"With the poet, self was to be the nemesis of self."²³ It is from this section on that the poet is pursued and afflicted by "the furies of an irresistible passion [eventually] pursuing him to speedy ruin." The furies are the constant tension between hope and despair that arises from his failure to attain experientially what he has imaged to himself. Since he cannot know whether his imaginings were potentially negative forces within him, he continually falls prey to self-doubt. The concluding lines of the passage quoted above are indicative of the poet's confusion. For they function almost like a chorus responding to his fears about whether he has lost the vision forever:

lost
 In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep,
 That beautiful shape.

(ll. 209-211)

Now he must contend with a second potentially destructive force: Nature. No longer does she nurture him as she formerly

did. When he has overleaped the boundaries of the mind, he discovers himself in an equally limitless expanse that augments his growing sense of futility and hopelessness in his quest. The "wide pathless desert of dim sleep" which has been projected onto the natural landscape confounds him. Formerly, the poet's pursuit of Love was a mental one, but now "the poet of Alastor searches throughout Nature for the object of his imagination."²⁴

During the course of his pursuit, the second of the twin doubts arises. Already beset by self-doubt about the true nature of the beloved shape, the poet in an equally despondent mood despairs about ever being united with her:

Does the bright arch of rain-
 bow clouds
 And pendent mountains seen in the calm
 lake
 Lead only to a black and watery depth,
 While death's blue vault with loathliest
 vapors hung,
 Where every shade which the foul grave
 exhales
 Hides its dead eye from the detested day
 Conducts, O Sleep, to thy delightful realms?
 (ll. 211-219)

Since the poet remains separated from his creation, he is separated from Life itself. Without love he is isolated from both the natural world and the source of re-entry into it. The youth resides in limbo, denied the vision of the veiled maid. This suspension of the self between the physical world and the Ideal world torments the hero and doubly isolates him. As a result of his separation, he ponders whether death may be his means of escape. As he reflects upon the relation

the question of free will becomes almost irrelevant. For the youth cannot act other than he does. He must seek her if he is to be re-united with himself and the world about this:

As an eagle, grasped
In the folds of the green serpent, feels her
 breast
Burn with the poison, and precipitates
Through night and day, tempest, and calm,
 and cloud,
Frantic with dizzying anguish, her blind
 flight
O'er the wide aery wilderness.

(ll. 227-232)

Shelley's use of the eagle-serpent imagery seems especially apt in this situation. The eagle's "blind flight" represents both the poet's vision of the veiled maid and his pursuit of her. Similarly, the poet's vision is paradoxical. It is both the force that rouses him to pursue Love and what vitiates him during the course of that pursuit. Perhaps that is why Shelley's serpent is green, a symbol of (illusory) hope that inevitably destroys the Imagination with increasing despair:

 thus driven
By the bright shadow of that lovely dream,
Beneath the cold glare of the desolate
 night
Through tangled swamps and deep precipitous
 dells,
Startling with careless steps the moon-light
 snake,
He fled.

(ll. 232-237)

The physical description of the landscapes, "symbols of states of mind,"²⁶ becomes increasingly more disordered and suggests the poet's own deterioration for want of love. Despite his steadily weakening condition, the poet cannot cease in his

visionary pursuit. But the more that he seeks this force in his life, the more quickly his physical strength declines. The hopelessness of Narcissus's consuming love is also the hero's in *Alastor*: "flammas moveoque feroque."²⁷

The poet's self-destructive situation has been caused in part by the ambiguous nature of the quest itself. "The ambiguity of the Poet's Vision and its consummation in the dream serve to disorient the Poet completely, for he is unable to make reality conform to the dream and is reduced to the itinerary."²⁸ Not until *Epipsychidion*, when the fusion of the poet's Reason and Imagination allowed him to redirect the nature of his quest, does any hero succeed in his pursuit.

In *Alastor*, the hero is fated to continue his apparently aimless, destructive search for the tantalizingly elusive dream maiden:

wildly he wandered on,
Day after day, a weary waste of hours,
Bearing within his life the brooding care
That ever fed on its decaying flame.
And now his limbs were lean.

(11. 244-248)

Shelley makes the poet's vision and his hope of union with it analogous to a destructive human gestation. The poet bears and nurtures "the brooding care" ("insatiate hope") because he cannot admit that his vision is either illusory or unattainable. As a result, hope also sustains him. "Without knowing it, the Poet seeks the very thing that destroys him."²⁹ As his pursuit continues to prove futile, however, he actually nurtures not hope but the despair that arises from his unful-

filled expectations of union, the doubt of "insatiate hope." The more the poet and hope feed and nurture each other, the more quickly they ensure each other's ultimate destruction. This relationship becomes an increasingly parasitical one, and the youth is drawn "further and more mercilessly toward psychological and physical suicide."³⁰

Another way of interpreting what is happening to the youth is to discuss his situation once more in terms of the Narcissus legend. Like Echo, the youth pines away under the force of an "irresistible passion." That passion and the hero's increasing despair are paralleled by a stark deterioration of the poet's corporeal frame:

his scattered
hair,
Sered by the autumn of strange suffering,
Sung dirges in the wind; his listless hand
Hung like dead bone within its withered
skin.

(ll. 248-251)

In Metamorphoses, Echo wastes away for love of Narcissus, and she is described thus:

sed tamen haeret amor crescitque dolore repulsa;
et tenuant vigiles porpus miserabile curae
adducitque cutem macies et in aera sucus
corporis omnis abit; vox tantum atque ossa super-
sunt; 31
vox manet.

Ovid's line might be revised slightly (if unmetrically) to read "Vox poetae manet." For the voice that remains is the speaker's, and it echoes his lament of and tribute to himself and the pursuit of the dream maiden throughout Alastor.

After describing the poet's physical condition, the poem takes an interesting turn. Until its conclusion, Alastor will describe the youth more as a state of mind than as a physical entity. It achieves this transition by focusing almost exclusively upon the hero's eyes, as if by beholding them we are able to penetrate into his psyche.

Even when the youth is ministered to by the cottagers, the impression upon the reader is of a being who no longer physically exists in this world:

The cottagers,
 Who ministered with human charity
 His human wants, beheld with wondering
 awe
 Their fleeting visitant. The mountaineer,
 Encountering on some dizzy precipice
 That spectral form, deemed that the Spirit
 of wind,
 With lightning eyes, and eager breath, and
 feet
 Disturbing not the drifting snow, had paused
 In its career; the infant would conceal
 His troubled visage in his mother's robe
 In terror at the glare of those wild eyes,
 To remember their strange light in many a
 dream
 Of after times.

(ll. 254-266)

What Santayana in his brilliant Winds of Doctrine has stated about Shelley is certainly applicable to the hero: "In him, as in many people, too intense a need of loving excludes the capacity for intellectual sympathy." ³² Because his vision has become so obsessed by a single concept of love, he blinds himself to the love which exists about him. The cottagers, after all, do act from a spirit of charity, and the "youthful maidens" would offer solace and companionship. That they

"call him with false names Brother and friend" should not suggest that they act deceptively (as in the "blue venomed melody" in Epipsychidion. Instead, the poet, because he cannot respond to or reciprocate human kindness, does not justify his being called "brother and friend." William McTaggart makes an interesting comparison: the youth "becomes so possessed by his own imaginings, removes himself so definitely from the world of human intercourse, that he dooms himself, like some young Werther, to death."³³ At this point, the poet's isolation really seems to have become alienation. In a passage somewhat reminiscent of "Kubla Khan" or Rime of the Ancient Mariner, "the glare of those wild eyes" passes into the vision of others: the terrified eyes of the infant and the sorrowing eyes of the maidens:

the infant would conceal
 His troubled visage in his mother's robe,³⁴
 In terror at the glare of those wild eyes,
 To remember their strange light in many a
 dream
 Of after times, but youthful maidens,
 taught
 By nature, would interpret half the woe
 That wasted him, would call him with false
 names
 Brother and friend, would press his pallid
 hand
 At parting, and watch, dim through tears,
 the path
 Of his departure from their father's door.

(ll. 262-271)

His departure from the cottagers is the youth's final separation from humanity. Throughout the remainder of the poem he, like the other quest heroes, exists totally apart from others. In a sense, this journey also represents his

departure from life itself because the quest gradually becomes a quest for death. The poignant address to the swan as the poet pauses "upon the lone Chorasmian shore" illustrates this. Shelley uses the swan as a converse mirror of the poet's own self. The swan flies to an experience which the poet has only imagined but has since sought unceasingly:

Thou hast a
 home,
 Beautiful bird! thou voyagest to thine
 home,
 Where thy mate will twine her downy
 neck
 With thine, and welcome thy return with
 eyes
 Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.
 (ll. 280-284)

The mutual love that is beheld through "eyes bright in the lustre of their own fond joy" contrasts vividly with the poet's self-consuming lustre that emanates "from his dark eyes alone." But the swan also represents the poet's own creative imagination. Newell Ford interprets this scene somewhat differently. In "The Symbolism of Shelley's Swans" he states that "for a moment Shelley seems to have slipped into the old legend of the swan singing as it dies."³⁵ His reading suggests that the swan symbolizes the poet's own approaching death. Actually, it is because the swan is so living that the poet realizes that his own death is imminent. The swan's notes are dying not because the swan itself nears death, but because he soars so swiftly away from the dying poet who hears the song more faintly. It is that moment when the poet realizes that the hope of communion with the immediate world has already died. Not only

man but Nature seems alien to him:

And what am I that I should linger here,
 With voice far more sweeter than they dying
 notes,
 Spirit more vast than thine, frame more
 attuned
 To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
 In the deaf air, to thy blind earth, and
 heaven
 That echoes not my thoughts. (ll. 285-290)

Again, Shelley uses the twin fury theme but for a different purpose. The wanderer seeks not the veiled maiden in this world but death--which may lead him to her. The poet's hope is poisoned by his despair at not knowing whether death, "faithless perhaps as sleep," might prove to be an illusory means of escape: "A shadowy lure with doubtful smile mocking its own strange charms."

This episode begins the second major journey of Alastor: the poet's pursuit of death. Nothing dissuades the poet from his self-imposed destruction. Shelley has been careful to use parallel structures when he introduces each of the dominant quest themes. Hence, the following line,

Startled by his own thoughts, he looked
 around,
 recalls in language and in syntax the poet's situation after he has awakened from his dream of the maiden:

Roused by the shock, he started from his
 trance.

Interestingly, the veiled maiden appears in neither scene, and this prolonged separation from her leads to his longing for

death. In this mood he fixes his vision upon "a little shallop floating near shore," which suggests the poet's own directionless wanderings. But it, unlike the poet, is not moored and thus promises an escape from the immediate world. Too, the boat may be interpreted as a symbol of the poet himself: "its sides/Gaped wide with many a rift, and its frail/joints" suggestive of his own frailty.³⁶

Once more Shelley works with the theme of an almost fatal allurement when he speaks of the youth as subject to "a restless impulse [that] urged him to embark and meet lone Death." For the poet, this quest is one that he expectantly undertakes. He has now become enamored of Death and seeks it with the same exultation that characterized his attempted consummation with the dream maiden (ll. 181-187):

Following his eager soul, the wanderer
Leaped into the boat.
(ll. 311-312)

This heightened psychological state corresponds to a change in natural conditions, too. Specifically, the land becomes re-animated: "the wind/Swept strongly from the shore, blackening the waves." Of course, the "blackening" waves suggest the poet's tomb, but more important the wind from shore will propel him on his journey. In death the poet is returning to Nature.

Shelley's entire description of the poet's death voyage is masterfully done. Again, he works with contrasting forces. The fierce, tempestuous blasts of Nature are expertly contrasted with the poet's own inner tranquility. The opening seems

reminiscent of the hero's former life before the twin furies
beset him:

As one that in a silver vision floats
Obedient to the sweep of odorous winds
Upon resplendent clouds.

(ll. 316-318)

But the hopeful expectation of approaching death creates its
own aura of peace, and to some extent he is restored to the
innocent joy that was formerly his:

Calm and rejoicing in the fearful war
Of wave ruining on wave...
With dark obliterating course, he sate...
Holding the steady helm.

(ll. 326-327, 329, 333)

Destruction in Nature can be a positive force if it serves
as a release for one "blasted by disappointment." The intensity
of the "fierce gusts, precipitating force, and the white ridges
of the chafed sea" suggests an almost-physical purgation of
the poet's psyche (now a "steady helm"). It is this sense of
purgation that is symbolized by Shelley's use once more of
the bird-serpent imagery. Significantly, the situations of
the creatures have been reversed, and a vulture has replaced
the eagle. Recalling the previous association of the "green
serpent" with illusory hope (which is ultimately despair for
the poet), it seem most useful to interpret this scene as Death
(associated with the vulture) feeding on the poet's despair,
a despair which ultimately destroys him. Only by dying can
the youth escape the furies of "insatiate hope" and despair.

Shelley's understanding of psychology deserves further comment. He suggests through his figure of the poet that there is a limit to the most tormented anguish, and beyond that, serenity must gradually displace one's suffering. Such is certainly the hero's situation. During the length of his day's journey, he passively allows himself and his boat to be driven through an intensifying oceanic tempest:³⁷

On every
side
More horribly the multitudinous streams
Of ocean's mountainous waste to mutual
war
Rushed in dark tumult thundering.
(ll. 340-343)

Nature seems to be a mirror of the youth's past psychological state, reflecting back the tumult of his mind during his quest for the maiden. Perhaps Shelley intended this scene to be read as the poet's own objective reflections on his past. The boat's accelerated voyage could be associated with the mind's rapid review of the many occurrences of his land journey:

The boat fled on...
And faster still, beyond all human speed,
Suspended on the sweep of the smooth
wave,
The little boat was driven.
(ll. 358, 361-363)

This swiftest of boats as last is driven into the womb-like security of a cavern where the poet anticipates the climactic union and end of both quests:

"Vision and
Love!"

The poet cried aloud, "I have beheld
The path of thy departure. Sleep and
death
Shall not divide us long."
(ll. 366-369)

Thus, the poet apparently has decided that Death can become the passageway to a union with the dream maiden. It is clear that for the poet, even if the speaker is not quite so certain, Death functions as more than the mere extinction of life. But Alastor does not offer a final statement about the role of death in the hero's quest. Although the youth seems to equate his anticipated death with the attainment of the vision, Shelley himself remained very ambiguous about this. This uncertainty created difficulties in completing Prince Athanase, and only with Epipsychidion did he clarify the relationship of death and love.

When the youth in Alastor is speeding toward--or so he hopes--his "Vision and Love," his boat is threatened by the "mountains of ocean"³⁸ that rise about it:

the mass
Filled with one whirlpool all that ample
chasm:
Stair above stair the eddy waters rose
Circling immeasurably fast.
(ll. 378-381)

From this fury is created "a pool of treacherous and tremendous calm," a pool that reflects the division in the poet's mind during the journey. With his resignation to death, the poet "calm and rejoicing sate," but his inability to know whether death will unite him with the maiden ("Reflecting yet distorting

every cloud") may lead him again into despondency. Only because he can cry aloud to his "Vision and Love" does his despair subside. This is "the treacherous calm of the pool." In addition, the poet is expelled from the cavern. He discovers himself in another Edenic setting, but because he is still alone his feelings of solitude and isolation return. The youth in Alastor is restored to a potential paradise to which he is indifferent until he finds love. The speaker in Epipsychidion, on the other hand, creates his own vision of Paradise under the guidance and inspiration of love. The only imaginative activity in Alastor for the poet is his dream and creation of the maiden, whereas the hero in Epipsychidion continually creates and pushes that creativity beyond human limitations and dies. Lethargy and passivity are as much characteristic of the youth in Alastor as energy and activity are characteristic of the narrator in the last quest poem. Epipsychidion, in some ways, is as much a departure from the experiences described in the earlier poems as it is a commentary upon them.

In Alastor, Shelley prepares the youth's debarkation from his frenzied water voyage with some care. For instance, just as the pool reflected the youth's mind, so too, on a smaller scale, do the flowers symbolize a resumption of his self-centered quest:

the cove
 Is closed by meeting banks, whose yellow
 flowers
 Forever gaze on their own drooping eyes.
 Reflected in the crystal calm.³⁹
 (11. 405-408)

Like Narcissus, he too peers into the pool of self-love and sees only a presaging of his own destruction. Unlike the flowers that "forever gaze," the poet is subject to mutability and thus disturbs an idyllic pastoral:

His eyes beheld
 Their own wan light through the reflected
 lines
 Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
 Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
 Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
 Sees its own treacherous likeness there.
 (ll. 469-474)

But it is not Nature that rejects the youth; instead, it is the wanderer's obsession with the vision that precludes achieving harmony with her. Once again, Shelley stresses the twin fates of alienation that befall such a solipsistic individual. Permanently separated from humanity, the poet likewise separates himself again from the natural world:

The Poet
 longed
 To deck with their bright hues his withered
 hair,
 But on his heart its solitude returned,
 And he forebore.
 (ll. 412-415)

Nature, however, can offer solace even to the most tormented. With the return of this spirit of solitude, the Alastor of the title, the poem seems to shift again to a pre-occupation with the theme of death:

By love, or dream, or god, or mightier
 Death,
 He sought in Nature's dearest haunt some
 bank,
 Her cradle and his sepulchre.
 (ll. 428-429)

Again, a very crucial change in his situation occurs. First, "Nature's dearest haunt" displaces the cavern as his final abode. That it is "his sepulchre" suggests that death, contrary to his hopes, might not be the means of consummating his quest. Instead, it might very well extinguish the poet and his quest. Alastor now operates on two distinct levels. Unlike the youth who desperately hopes to discover in death his "Vision and Love," the speaker equates "Nature's dearest haunt" only with the hero's sepulchre. But the speaker is, of course, commenting on his own quest and death (that of one of his psychological states). Thus, this difference in expectations between the hero and narrator underscores Shelley's own personal dilemma throughout the poem in defining the purpose of death in the quest. It is a dilemma that he failed to resolve in the poem.

But a key phrase is the reference to Nature's "cradle and his sepulchre," which suggests the seasonal cycle of Nature--birth-death-rebirth--that contrasts with the poet's impending extinction. The youth may perceive the sepulchre as only a temporary separation from the dream maiden; the speaker, however, seems to equate the hero's approaching death as the final cessation of his being. Despite their different expectations, both are aware that death must be the fate of the wanderer: "More dark/And dark the shades accumulate." (ll. 430-431) Even amidst this Edenic tranquility that the scene promises, the youth is possessed by his consecration to his quest and thus cannot yet become a vital part of Nature.

In correspondence once more with the pulse of Nature,

He

heard

The motion of the leaves--the grass that
 sprung
 Startled and glanced and trembled even to
 feel
 An unaccustomed presence--and the sound
 Of that sweet brook that rose from the secret springs
 Of that dark fountain rose.

(ll. 474-479)

The grass that trembles communicates to him an "unaccustomed presence," and he sees, or thinks he sees, the Spirit of Nature beside him. Now this Spirit may be interpreted as a force that offers him tranquility with regard to Nature and within himself:

A Spirit

seemed

To stand beside him--clothed in no bright
 robes
 Of shadowy silver or enshrining light,
 ...for speech
 assuming
 Held commune with him.

(ll. 479-481, 486-487)

What the Spirit of Nature offers to the youth is an unpeopled society, a re-entry into the natural world and into a life without alienation.

The whole of Shelley's preceding description of the forest serves to lure the poet back into Nature, while it also stresses how separated from Nature he has become because of his quest. In Nature, the poet may find the communion that he lacks in society:

The oak,
Expanding its immense and knotty arms
Embraces the light beech.

...

the parasites

...

Fold their beams round the hearts of those
that love.

(ll. 431-433, 439, 443)

Conversely, Shelley later used a similar description of Nature in Epipsychidion as a reflection of the poet's own bond and communion with his "Sweet Spirit" (ll. 499-512). Also, it is the poet himself who--as he creates "anew the universe"--sees in Nature the mirror of his own happiness.

In Alastor, Shelley suggests that any solipsistic obsession ultimately necessitates continued separation from Nature, one that ends only with the poet's death. Alone, the poet seeks union with the dream maiden. Until he succeeds, he will remain alone in Nature as he remained alone in society. But the "irresistible passion" does intrude upon him and the Spirit of Nature. The youth sees, or thinks he sees, "two eyes, two starry eyes,"⁴⁰ that suggest the presence of the veiled maiden or his own reflected in the well of the imagination:
"spectat humi positus geminum, sua lumina, sidus."⁴¹

Although the vision may prove to be false ("two starry eyes seemed to beckon him"), the poet believes in it and resumes his journey. In doing so, he leaves the Spirit of Nature and becomes a wanderer once more. His situation recalls one described in "On Love." In that essay Shelley speaks of meeting "with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own," and "to attain which, it urges forth the power of man to arrest

the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules." ⁴²
 This is precisely the youth's situation in Alastor as "obedient to the light that shone within his soul, he sent pursuing the windings of the dell." His obedience to the "light that shone within his soul" continues his passive acquiescence in the will of the dream maiden. But Shelley also deals once more with the theme of allurements. When the poet resumes his journey, he forsakes the promised tranquility of Nature and is lured to his death. In 1821, Shelley commented even more strikingly on the irresistible nature of the quest when he compared the speaker's situation to that of a "dizzy moth" yielding to the force of its inevitable destruction:

I flitted, like a dizzy moth, whose flight
 Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet light,
 When it would seek in Hesper's setting
 sphere
 A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre.

(11. 220-224)

We could characterize both heroes' quests as almost suicidal, but Shelley approves of their "radiant death."

To suggest how potent is the force in Alastor that leads the poet to his destruction, Shelley strongly emphasizes the visual:

two
 eyes,
 Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of
 thought,
 And seemed with their serene and azure
 smiles
 To beckon him.

(11. 489-492)

But the "two starry eyes...seemed to beckon him;" and thus the reappearance of the veiled maiden may be only another illusion of the poet's mind. Shelley's use of kindling and heat suggests a frenzied state of perception that may mislead the youth and which vitiates his strength:

He did im-
press
On the green moss his tremulous step, that
caught
Strong shuddering from his burning limbs.
As one
Roused by some joyous madness from the
couch
Of fever, he did move.
(ll. 515-519)

Kurtz observes: "Death has always been the shadow threat-
ening love."⁴³ He, however, apparently sees death as an obsta-
cle to the poet's realization of his quest. But while the
speaker would voice similar apprehensions, the youth would not.
He sees death not as a force antithetical to love, threatening
it, but as a force that he hopes will transport him into the
world of Ideal Love that the universe apparently cannot be.
Quite simply, he wants to believe that there is an afterlife
in which he will experience the sublime Love that eluded him
in this life. It is this belief in Death and Love as comple-
mentary forces, counteracting the destructive furies of hope
and despair, that allows him to meet death so tranquilly and
confidently. "Whether the ideal world glimpsed in the forest
is an illusion or actually awaits the poet after death"⁴⁴
becomes somewhat irrelevant because he fervently believes that
his pursuit of death will be both a release from this world

and the means of entry into the world of Ideal Love.

The question of how much the youth really knows leads us into a consideration of the forces dominating his being. During the course of his many journeys, the poet has been pre-occupied with attaining the greatest possible knowledge through a study of Nature and civilization. When he dreamt of the maiden and sought her in the immediate world, he acknowledged to himself a need for love that previously he had only felt. Throughout his entire search, he has finally learned the importance of reciprocal human love, one that surpasses both the speaker's and the youth's reciprocity with Nature. Thus, the knowledge that love is essential to human existence really becomes as strong a motivating force as the dream maiden herself. Perhaps "his obedience to the light" signifies his exercise of free will in choosing between two concepts of love: love of Nature and love of a human counterpart. Since the poet does not question the reality of the maiden, that belief in her determines the course of his life. The question of determinism versus free will really becomes moot then. The poet could not have acted otherwise than he did. Shelley might be indicating how the poet's obsession with his vision has become inseparable from his will. The youth's every exercise of his free will is motivated by his desire for the idealized love that the vision seems to promise. That quest, then, becomes his destiny and assumes an almost fatalistic control over his life. Stated more succinctly, "the poet loves the vision irrevocably, and devotes himself to it."⁴⁵

By again admitting his need for the maiden, the poet has spurred the "choicest gifts" of the Spirit of Nature. Without human love the youth can experience no lasting bond with Nature. Until he loves and is loved, he cannot re-experience that total unity with Nature and himself that characterized his childhood. For the hero, love of (wo)man leads to a total Love of Nature. When the "vital intercourse he seeks is denied him, Nature provides a balm for the youth's despair:

Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state where
we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they
sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the
grass, and the waters and the sky.⁴⁶

But we misread Alastor if we suggest that the presence of the Spirit of Nature can ever fully compensate for the absence of human love. Shelley once lamented that "I have everywhere sought sympathy and have found only repulse and disappointment," but he never ceased in his own quest. As Prince Athanase and Epipsychidion will show, Shelley began to explore other realms where he could discover that essential sympathy.

Like his creator, the youth also seeks realms where he can consummate his longing for the maiden. During this portion of the tale, the image of the stream becomes particularly dominant. Shelley uses the stream as yet another source of knowledge, or at least as the catalyst that activates the mind's questionings:

O stream!
Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
Thou imagest my life.

(ll. 502-506)

At the stream, the poet, like the speaker earlier in the Invocation, seeks nothing less than to know what lies beyond the grave. What he realizes is that the very profundity of his questioning precludes its receiving an answer. The entire catalogue of water images, "thy darksome stillness," "thy dazzling waves," "thy loud and hollow gulfs," "thy dazzling waves," "thy searchless fountain," and "invisible course," reflects his ambivalence about what death truly represents as opposed to what he hopes it signifies. The youth admits the futility of seeking an absolute answer to a mystery which must remain beyond his knowing:

'and the wide
 sky
 And measureless ocean may declare as soon
 What oozy cavern or what wandering
 cloud
 Contain 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!'

(ll. 508-514)

He can only hope that the spiritual nature of man ("these living thoughts") escapes the mutability that destroys his body. That hope was not shared by Shelley early in his life, and in "On a Future State" he argued:

All that we see or know perished and is changed.
 Life and thought differ indeed from everything else.
 But that it survives that period, beyond which we
 have no experience of its existence, such distinction
 and dissimilarity affords no shadow of proof, and
 nothing but our own desires could have led us to
 conjecture or imagine.⁴⁷

As the hero undertakes the last phase of his travels, Nature's landscape assumes a sparseness and somberness that suggest that he has already descended into the sepulchre:

Gray rocks did peep from the spare moss,
 and stemmed
 The struggling brook; tall spires of win-
 dlestrae
 Threw their thin shadows down the rugged
 slope,
 And nought but gnarled roots of ancient
 pines
 Branchless and blasted, clenched with
 grasping roots
 The unwilling soil.

(ll. 527-532)

Interestingly, Nature responds somewhat ambivalently. In one sense, she prepares the grave for the poet. Nature is benevolent because the youth as last discovers "one silent nook--
 a tranquil spot that seemed to smile even in the lap of horror."⁴⁸
 That, of course, describes exactly the poet's state when he finally dies.

But Nature also shuns him because he exists as an alien force within her realm. The "irresistible passion" that destroys his own beauty of imagination and body also menaces the beautiful harmony of Nature:

so from
 his steps
 Bright flowers departed, and the beautiful
 shade
 Of the green groves, with all their odorous
 winds
 And musical motions.

(ll. 536-539)

Shelley's command of description is both impressive and startling. Of course, he might merely wish to present the more

savage aspects of the landscape: "struggling," "thin shadows," "gnarled," and "blasted." But his portrait of the hero whose "hair grows thin and white" and "where irradiate dewy eyes had shone, gleam stony orbs" suggests a fascinating possibility. Is Shelley merely saying that the poet has become like the "gray rocks" and like "tall spires of windlestrae." In other words, has he become a part of this barren landscape? Or is Shelley perhaps suggesting the more radical idea that a portion of Nature has already been withered by the poet's passage to death: "A gradual change was here yet ghastly."? Has he perhaps become a destructive force not only to himself but to the world about him? Shelley seems to have conceived Nature here as being more than just "symbols of the poet's state of mind."⁴⁹ Indeed, the natural world actually appears to be in flight from the poet ("so from his steps/Bright flowers departed") as he himself is altered in death. While he has sought death, his own furies have created from him a fury that threatens and pursues natural elements to "speedy ruin":

so from
his steps
Bright flowers departed, and the beautiful
shade
Of the green groves....
Calm he still pur-
sued
The stream.

(ll. 536-539)

Despite his destructive presence, the hero serenely continues his death voyage and encounters another minutely detailed setting. By this time the reader's serenity may be

considerably less than the hero's. For Shelley's audience may also voice Blunden's complaint that "the theme is so cloaked with description until it hardly moves."⁵⁰ Not only does Shelley present the reader with another rather lengthy depiction of a scene very reminiscent of the poet's earlier trip in the shallop, but the syntax seems as entangled as the wilderness itself. Positively, the setting neatly parallels the storm scene. Here, the mountains surge in tremendous waves of rock:

On every side now
 rose
 Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,
 Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
 In the light of evening, and its precipice
 Obscuring the ravine, disclosed above,
 'Mid toppling stones, black gulfs and yawning caves,
 Whose windings gave ten thousand various
 tongues
 To the loud stream.

(ll. 543-550)

But despite the starkness of his images, Shelley's passage does seem somewhat obscure in meaning. This section has been dissected and interpreted by a number of critics. For those interested in a history of their attempts to deal with these lines, Bertram Dobell and George Woodberry offer a comprehensive cataloguing of various interpretations.⁵¹ Although the passage is obscure, however, it does not defy interpretation. "Its" refers to evening and Shelley conveys the sense of death overtaking and enclosing the hero. As the "rocks lifted their black and barren pinnacles," they seem to meet the

lengthening darkness. In that sense, the darkness would have a precipice which spreads (or appears to spread) over the ravine, thus forming a symbolic natural mausoleum that recalls "the pyramid of mouldering leaves." One obtains the impression of a vast womb, "black gulfs and yawning caves," to which the poet returns to die: Nature's "cradle and his sepulchre."

However we choose to read the lines, the hero's "pursuit of death" still dominates the latter part of the poem. Traveling further amidst a cacophonous music that curiously produces harmony (ll, 564-7), he at last reaches his Eden of Death. For Nature flourishes once more (now that the poet will soon die), and its appearance almost denies mutability. Thus, this cyclical aspect of the seasons, "the children of the autumnal whirlwind" and "the pride of summer," suggests a union of death and life in a way that the poet's own fate does not:

Ivy clasped
The fissured stones with its entwining arms,
And did embower with leaves forever
 green
And berries dark the smooth and even
 space
Of its inviolated floor.

(ll. 578-582)

Again what must be stressed is the almost erotic unity within Nature that contrasts with the hero's division from humanity and from himself. For the poet, the failure to love necessitates his destruction. Yet by dying he will quite literally re-enter the landscape. Shelley's description of the nook's very special power to harmonize the apparently discordant

elements in the physical world anticipates the poet's approaching restoration to Nature and self:

'Tis the haunt
Of every gentle wind whose breath can
 teach
The wilds to love tranquillity.
(ll. 586-588)

Like the haunt, the hero is also unique. A sort of terrestrial Ancient Mariner, he has undergone an experience that necessitated intense suffering and alienation, but which also attested to his uniqueness among man because of that singular experience: he was the first whose "one step/One human step alone, has ever broken/The stillness of its solitude; one voice/Alone inspired its echoes" (ll. 588-591). Such an experience extracted an awesome price from the poet,--in this instance his former idyllic tranquillity and, eventually, his life--but Shelley clearly admires this aspect of his own poetic nature and would not, indeed could not, settle for the banal existence that is "life" for "those unforeseeing multitudes" of this world.

Shelley re-affirms this consecration to his poetic vision in the subsequent quest poems: neither hero ever considers abandoning his pursuit of love, even when that search isolates and ultimately destroys him. It is only the direction of the quest, never the undertaking of the quest, that undergoes any alteration in these works.

As Alastor nears its conclusion, the poem focuses almost exclusively on the youth's imminent death and its implications. Shelley cannot quite assert that the poet will be reunited with

his vision in death--as "On a Future State" makes clear--but neither can he unequivocally accept the possibility that death is the extinction of all life. Instead, Shelley looks to nature as a source of some hope that life continues after death. By dying, the wanderer might at last become a portion of the physical world by being transformed into other natural elements:

And to the damp leaves and blue cavern
 mould,
 Nurses of rainbow flowers and branching
 moss,
 Commit the colors of that varying cheek,
 That snowy breast, those dark and droop-
 ing eyes.

(ll. 598-601)

Harold Hoffman has been an extremely influential source in interpreting this scene both in the context of the poem and of the Narcissus myth. In an especially interesting section of his discussion of these lines he states:

The colors of "his varying cheek," of his "snowy breast," and of his "dark and drooping eyes" will live again when they have been drawn up from mold and decaying leaves into "rainbow flowers and branching moss." Such a transformation is most fitting for one who, though he was for a little while a truant, has returned to nature's breast.⁵²

His use of "breast" is most apt because the youth indeed returns to the source that once nursed him. The poem comes full circle. Interestingly, the youth achieves the reciprocity, through death, that has eluded him since he dreamed in the Vale of Cashmire. Nature's haunt indeed becomes "his sepulchre," but it also represents "her cradle" which creates life anew. In

one way, then, the poet nurtures Nature. Earlier, the youth had borne within "the brooding care that ever fed on its decaying flame." Now, his death will become a part of the renewal of life. Also, by reaching the "silent nook" and accepting his death, he ceases to be a threat to the natural world. Instead, he will restore the "rainbow flowers" to a landscape that he once blighted.

Before the poet finally expires, Shelley utilizes an interesting moonscape that is actually another variation of the stream imagery that dominates much of this poem. When he describes the effect of the moonlight upon the entire scene, he does so by using very liquid imagery:

The dim and horned moon hung low, and
 poured
 A sea of lustre on the horizon's verge
 That overflowed its mountains. Yellow
 mist
 Filled the unbounded atmosphere, and
 drank
 Wan moonlight even to fulness.

(ll. 602-606)

These lines continue the river voyage theme and all the poet's musings on life and death that were associated with it. Here, the moon's position corresponds to the poet's own state, which suggests that the sinking moon and its flood of light represent the youth's declining life. Although the "sea of lustre" overflows, the moon itself pales in the process. As the youth's life ebbs, so does the moon's light. The wanness of the moon becomes a reflection of the wanderer's own pallor. Also, there is the distinct possibility that Shelley might have intended

sight (both physical and imaginative) declines, and he awaits only the approaching stillness of the grave:

When on the threshold of the green
 recess
 The wanderer's footsteps fell, he knew that
 death
 Was on him. Yet a little, ere it fled,
 Did he resign his high and holy soul
 To images of the majestic past.
 (11. 625-629)

In the passage on the moon, the poem takes another of its interesting turns. After describing the almost universal silence that attends the youth's dying, the speaker suddenly intrudes in a very uncharacteristic way. He speaks directly --not through the poet. The parallel to this intrusion would be the concluding lines of Epipsychidion when the speaker personally comments after the poet's death. But in that poem the tone is one of serene anticipation of death, whereas the speaker's tone in Alastor is quite frantic and distraught. The rationale for this desperate tone is that in the failure of the poet's quest for love is a recognition of his own failure:

O storm
 of death
 Whose sightless speed divides this sullen
 night!
 And thou, colossal Skeleton, that, still
 Guiding its irresistible career
 In thy devastating impotence,
 Art king of this frail world! from the red
 field
 Of slaughter, from the reeking hospital,
 The patriot's sacred couch, the snowy bed
 Of innocence, the scaffold and the throne
 A mighty voice invokes thee! Ruin calls
 His brother Death!

(11. 609-619)

A sense of futility permeates this work, and Alastor concludes with the speaker's increasing despondency. He asks if all of the hero's nobility, idealism, and devotion (however misguided in this world) are futile, and he fears that no positive response will be forthcoming. Actually, it is not until Epipsychidion, especially its triumphant climax when the poet dies, that any positive response is forthcoming. But Shelley did not, at the time that he composed Alastor, perceive death as a positive force in the quest and could do little more than offer the poem as "the unheralded tribute of a broken heart."

Beneath a sinking moon, the hero prepares to die. "The great scenes before which the Wanderer dies still his craving and restore his peace."⁵³ The sense of resignation and repose certainly contrasts with the speaker's impassioned protest against the inexorable laws of Necessity. Here, the youth dies in Nature, his cradle and sepulchre:

He
 did place
 His pale lean hand upon the rugged trunk
 Of the old pine; upon an ivied stone
 Recline his languid head.

(ll. 632-635)

To some extent, he finally achieves, albeit one that he never anticipated, a union as a result of his quest. Also, Shelley takes especial care to contrast the dying youth with the old but still vital pine and the inanimate but ivy-covered stone. Perhaps Shelley means that the poet existed after his death, "no sense, no motion, no divinity," in a way similar to that described in Wordsworth's "A Slumber did my Spirit seal":

No motion has she now, no force;
 She neither hears nor sees;
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
 With rocks, and stones, and trees.⁵⁴

As the poet in Alastor declines, Shelley uses stream imagery very skillfully. First, the drinking in of knowledge recalls the very opening of the poet's history (ll. 67-75). Hoffman's relation of "the influxes of sense" to "sensation psychology" and to Locke seems valid.⁵⁵ More fascinating, however, is the association once more of the moon with the poet's vision and imagination. As he dies, "his last great sight was the great moon." To the last, Shelley employs the myth of Narcissus innovatively:

the Poet's blood,
 That ever beat in mystic sympathy
 With Nature's ebb and flow, grew feebler
 still;
 And when two lessening points of light
 alone
 Gleamed through the darkness, the alter-
 nate gasp
 Of his faint respiration scarce did stir
 The stagnate night:--till the minutest ray
 Was quenched, the pulse yet lingered in
 his heart.
 It paused--it fluttered.

(ll. 651-659)

The poet perceives the ebbing of his own mind through the moon which mirrors him and reflects his imagination:

liceat, quod tangere non est,
 adspicere et misero praebere alimenta forori
 ...ille caput viridi fessum submisit in herba,
 lumina mors clausit domini mirantia formam.⁵⁶

Shelley uses a technique here described earlier. He follows

up a description of the moonlight, "with whose dun beams darkness/Seemed/To mingle," with a parallel description of the poet's eyes--literal and imaginative--as "two lessening points of light/Alone/that gleamed through the darkness." The phrase "two lessening lights" symbolizes the poet's dual vision. In one sense, they represent the youth's weakening eyesight. In another sense, he may be seeing the extinction of his imaginative vision, the gradual diminishing of the dream maiden. For this would be consistent with the myth of Narcissus. As the dying poet peered into the pool of the imagination, the image of both beholder and beheld would slowly fade and vanish. In another sense, Echo (the poet) is grieving for Narcissus (the maiden) as the beloved (or the vision of her) dies. That this scene takes place under the moon is interesting for another reason that supports the identification of the poet with both male and female entities, with both Narcissus and Echo. It concerns Plato's contention that originally there were three sexes:

We account for the production of three sexes by supposing that, at the beginning, the male was produced from the Sun, the female from the Earth; and that sex which participated in both sexes, from the Moon, by reason of the androgynous nature of the Moon.⁵⁷

The darkness that envelops the entire scene shuts out the moon's waning light and seals the poet in his landscape crypt. Shelley almost seems to equate his death with earth's plunging into the abysmal void or Chaos of the universe before

its creation:

But when heaven remained
Utterly black, the murky shades involved
An image silent, cold, and motionless,
As their own voiceless earth and vacant
air.

(ll. 660-662)

Against this somber backdrop, Shelley intimates that perhaps the youth might still be in essence a part of the universe. Although the poet's corporeal frame has been eclipsed, his spiritual nature may still survive. These lines may be read as a capsule of the hero's experience. His entire life has been guided by an insatiable desire for knowledge, "fed with golden beams that ministered on sunlight," but the cost extracted may be the almost total annihilation of his being. At best he has become a portion of "earth's diurnal course":

ere the west
Eclipses it, was now that wondrous frame--
No sense, no motion, no divinity.

(ll. 664-666)

But eventually vapors evaporate and sunlight fades, and to assert that Alastor promises life after death would be a misreading of the poem and a contradiction of Shelley's own position. He wants to hope that the youth's being has not been totally destroyed. Even that hope is precarious because during this period Shelley asserted that a belief in the survival of essence is actually a denial of life after death: "To say that the principle of life may /Shelley's stress/ exist in distribution among various forms, is to assert what cannot be

proved to be either true or false, but which, were it true, annihilates all hope of existence after death, in any sense in which that event can belong to the hopes and fears of men." ⁵⁸ In the end, "there is hope perhaps, but no promise of an ideal world beyond what the poet himself creates," ⁵⁹ but the speaker seems to abandon even this consolation. The beautiful, despairing lines that conclude the tale reflect the overwhelming despondency that the narrator experiences.

The "time" words may prove to be the most valuable guides in arriving at a clearer appreciation of Shelley's own attitude toward death in this poem. In employing the stream motif once more, this time as analogous to the thought that flows within the human intellect, he finally argues that death is the extinction of life both physical and spiritual:

a bright
stream
Once fed with many-voiced waves--a
dream
Of youth, which night and time have
quenched forever--
Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered
now.

(ll. 668-671)

Three key phrases deserve special consideration. First, "quenched forever" indicates that nothing of man survives after death. Or, as Shelley expressed it in "On a Future State," "the corpse at his feet is prophetic of his own destiny." Next, this belief that death is the cessation of all life is further re-inforced by the triad "still, dark, and dry," which parallels the "image silent, cold, and motionless." That is, the chaos that the poet's death causes still exists. All of

the above are associated with the absence of vitality, regeneration, or transformation. Death is final. Last, the phrase "unremembered now" invites a reading other than that mankind no longer remembers the youth and his quest. What seems closer to Shelley's meaning is that the poet's dream has been "quenched forever" because his thoughts perished with his bodily nature. As Shelley sensibly asks in "On a Future State," "Why should that substance thought be assumed to be something essentially distinct from all others, and exempt from subjection to those laws from which no other substance is exempt."⁶⁰

However much he wished to believe that some portion of the poet was transformed or changed, Shelley finally and reluctantly decided that only "when you can discover where the fresh colours of the faded flowers abide, or the music of the broken lyre, seek life among the dead."⁶¹

This concession that death may very well mean the total extinction of being is the catalyst for the speaker's final, poignant tribute to the poet. He stresses that the youth's wondrous aspirations and noble failure will not be forgotten by him. Yet, a curious irony is at work in this section. In lamenting the destruction of the hero and the seeming injustice of a universe that permits his death, the narrator ultimately isolates the rest of man from his world. The situation seems somewhat analogous to the end of Hardy's "Shelleyan" novel Jude the Obscure⁶² when death releases the alienated, tormented Jude but refuses to free his alter-ego Sue. Here, the youth

dwells in peace (or so Shelley would like to think). If he can "no longer know or love the shapes of this phantasmal scene," neither can the "Torturers Hope and Despair" re-awaken within him. Such is not the case with the speaker. In a sense, the poet's furies have been exorcised by death, but they now dwell within the narrator. That is, by charting the youth's many quests and admitting that he has succeeded in his quest for death (which of course is a further admission of failure since the poem does not, and cannot, promise re-union with the veiled maiden in death), the narrator is beset by the same contrary states that destroyed the wanderer. What the last section should really be read as is a last desperate attempt to demand and obtain some proof or assurance that the hero's isolation, alienation, anguish, suffering, and death possess value in the frame of things. Such proof or assurance is not forthcoming from within (the poem itself) or from without (the external world and society).

In this last section, the speaker questions the death of the poet and attempts to reverse the natural order of things, to reverse Necessity's rule. By appealing for those powers which he tells us in the Invocation that he sought as a youth, he seeks the mysterious knowledge about death. Considering Alchemy, he recalls Medea's magical power to re-animate life:

at quacumque cavo spumas elecit aeno
 ignis et in terram guttae cecidere celentes,
 vernat humus, floresque at mollia pabula surgunt.63

But he wishes to possess additional powers and restore life

to the youth as she did to Aeson. Next, he appeals for a portion of the elixir that, ironically, Ahasuerus would gladly part with:

Oh,

that God,
 Profuse of poisons, would concede the
 chalice
 Which but one living man has drained, who
 now,
 Vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels
 No proud exemption in the blighting curse
 He bears, over the world wanders for-
 ever,
 Lone as incarnate death!

(ll. 675-681)

The use of the Wandering Jew theme seems appropriate here. For the speaker, mourning the death of a part of himself, must conceive of himself also as a "vessel of deathless wrath" wandering "lone as incarnate death." Like Ahasuerus, he bears a blighting curse--the twin furies within.

Despite all of his intellectual searching, Shelley did not accept death as a necessary experience in the quest for an Ideal love until Epipsychidion. In the concluding lines of Alastor, he yearns for his powers of poetry to reveal existence beyond the grave. From within his imagination, "his visioned cave," he desires to know that death is delusory, that the last decay of man's frame merely creates ashes, "the cinders of a crucible for life and power," whence he will emerge anew like the Phoenix.⁶⁴

But Shelley really does not believe that he can penetrate the enigma of death. The repetition of "Oh" before each address

suggests a feeling closer to desperate hope than to firm optimism. Additionally, his doubts about life after death return,--as they must--and he seems at last to resign himself, if not to accept, the idea that death is indeed the end of life. By contrasting the natural world with the appearance of things in death, Shelley's speaker receives only what James Thomson had called "confirmation of the old despair."⁶⁵

In a scene reminiscent of the end of King Lear,⁶⁶ he observes that even the basest creatures have life, while "the child of grace and genius" lies dead:

and many

worms

And beasts and men live on, and mighty
Earth
From sea and mountains, city and wilder-
ness
In vesper low or joyous orison,
Lifts still its solemn voice:--but thou art
fled
Thou canst no longer know or love the
shapes
Of this phantasmal scene, who have to thee
Been purest ministers, who are, alas!
Now thou art not!

(ll. 691-699)

Thus, the speaker denies himself even the consolation that the youth may have passed beyond death to become a portion of Nature itself. The shapes feed upon the poet, but he is not assimilated as a living entity into the essences which he nurtures. Here, Shelley works against one of the conventions of the pastoral elegy: the moment of apotheosis that allows the poet to assert that the poet mourned is not dead.⁶⁷ If he is to be consoled, it can only be from the calm that

appears to envelop the dead youth:

Upon those pallid lips
So sweet even in their silence, on those
eyes
That image sleep in death, upon that form
Yet safe from the worm's outrage. (ll. 699-702)

The scene recalls Bion's "Elegy on the Death of Adonis," a work which Shelley eventually translated in part:

Thy couch now let him have, let the dead one lie
upon thy couch. ⁶⁸
Lovely in death is he, and like unto one asleep.

"The conclusion of Alastor is, among other things, an elegy for the dead Poet and, like all elegies, it seeks to express both grief and consolation." ⁶⁹ But since the work contains no apotheosis, the conclusion, as well as the entire composition, also departs from that tradition. This break may be seen in the effect of the poet's death upon the speaker and his audience. So profound is the hero's death that all attempts to express some sense of loss are feeble. Language is too limited to convey even a minimal idea of "a woe too deep for tears":

Let not high verse, mourning the memory
Of that which is no more, or painting's
woe
Or sculpture, speak in feeble imagery
Their own cold powers. (ll. 707-710)

Shelley was to return to this question of the efficacy of language in both A Defence of Poetry and Epipsychidion.

When Shelley composed the last quest poem, however, his poet-hero pushed language to its furthest limits trying to suggest to his audience even "a feeble shadow" of what his imagination envisioned and created. In that effort he could not sustain the tension that such a great undertaking placed upon him, and he died in a moment of mounting, almost unbearable climactic intensity and triumph.

The conclusion of Alastor suggests no similar elation. Actually, Shelley's grief is very embittered, and he hurls his final words like a malediction upon the world. What occurs in this final portion is a continuation of and transferral of the Fury motif.

By this time in the poem, the speaker has become prey to the same forces that tormented the hero. But it is also significant that these vitiating forces have been projected onto the external world. Again, the movement is a dual one. Just as the hero seemed to be suspended between two worlds,--the natural and the imaginative--a similar schism exists for both narrator and Universe. The failure of the poet's quest is equally the failure of the speaker's. Consequently, he still yearns for the dream maiden. Conversely, this separation from her also necessitates a continued division from the immediate world, from human society. But Shelley maintains quite strongly that the world also suffers, perhaps even more so.

For the Universe has been alienated from the speaker in the process, too. Thurston has maintained that "unlike other elegies, however, it [Alastor] denies itself the possibility

of doing either"--⁷⁰ expressing grief or consolation. This statement should be applied to general mankind's condition as well as to the speaker's. The conflicting furies within the poet and speaker have become a single force plaguing the world: Despair. Shelley once more uses light imagery to depict the effect of the poet's death upon the physical world. The extinction of his light (eyes and imagination) has subsequently extinguished a vital resource in mankind: its Hope. Thus, the world, in Shelley's opinion, is literally plunged into darkness and chaos:

when some surpassing
 Spirit
 Whose light adorned the world around it,
 leaves
 Those who remain behind, not sobs or
 groans,
 The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
 But pale despair and cold tranquillity.
 (ll. 714-718)

"All are punished."⁷¹ That agony echoes throughout the final lines of Alastor and thus recalls Shelley's observation in the Preface that "the picture is not barren of instruction to actual men."

Alastor concludes in a minor chord, with the last two lines a solemn, tragic intonation of the speaker's "lament on the fate to which he [the youth]⁷² is doomed because of the very sublimity of his mind":

Nature's vast frame, the web of human
 things,
 Birth and the grave, that are not as they
 were.
 (ll. 719-720)

When we take up Prince Athanase--the transitional poem in this study--it is clear that Shelley has not yet escaped the haunting tragedy of "the brave, the gentle, and the beautiful, the child of grace and genius."

Notes

- 1
Horace, Odes, III, XXX, ll. 1-2.
- 2
See Lycidas, ll. 132-151, Adonais, II. 1. 8 and XXXIII. 11. 1-4, and Thyrsis passim.
- 3
Percy Bysshe Shelley, "An Essay on Friendship," in The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1928), VII, 143. Hereafter I shall refer to it as Shelley, The Complete Works with the page reference.
- 4
Hoffman, p. 32. The quotation is originally from Hardy's Jude the Obscure, a most Shelleyan novel.
- 5
The poet who "lived, died, and sung in solitude" was unknown to them. But Shelley may have meant that the hero was unaware of their feelings.
- 6
Cf. Adonais, XV. ll. 1-3.
- 7
Melvin Solve, Shelley: His Theory of Poetry (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 63.
- 8
Hoffman, p. 12.
- 9
Solve makes an interesting observation that serves as a gloss on this passage: "the human mind, though essentially passive when regarding the external world, both renders and receives fast influencings, holding an unremitting interchange with the external world." p. 80.
- 10
See Metamorphoses, XV. ll. 340-343 and Paradise Lost, III. 11. 588-597.
- 11
The setting reminds one of a passage in Constantine F. Volney's The Ruins: Or Meditations on the Ruins of Empires (New York: Calvin Blanchard, n.d.), p. 21:
Often I met with ancient monuments, wrecks of temples, palaces, and fortresses; columns, aqueducts, and tombs; and this spectacle led me to meditate on times past, and filled my mind with serious and profound contemplations.

12 Shelley, The Poems, p. '33.

13 Woodberry notes that Ackermann ascribed the origins of the Arab maiden to a scene from Southey's Thalaba and then proceeds to dispute that reading. Curiously, although he sees Volney's The Ruins as a possible influence for lines 106-120, he does not extend that influence to the scene with the Arab maiden. But it certainly seems a distinct possibility:
I entered the enclosure of a vast edifice, formerly a temple dedicated to the sun, and accepting the hospitality of some poor Arabian peasants, who had built their huts on the arm of the temple, I resolved to stay some days to contemplate, at leisure, the beauty of so many stupendous works, p. 22.
Shelley, of course, alters this scene considerably to portray the poet's self-absorption in knowledge and his indifference to human hospitality.

14 Frederick L. Jones, P. 297.

15 His "sin" is one of omission. For two very opposite views from mine, see Newman I. White, The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and His Contemporary Critics (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 107 and James O. Allsup, The Magic Circle: A study of Shelley's Concept of Love (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1976), p. 49 ff.

16 Shelley, The Poems, p. 615.

17 Cf. Prometheus Unbound, III.iii. 11. 30-32, IV. 11. 272-273, The Sensitive Plant, Part First, 11. 13-16, and Epipsychidion, 11. 509-510.

18 Cf. Queen Mab, II. 11. 202-210.

19 Clark, "On Love," p. 170.

20 Martin Cyril D'Arcy, The Mind and Heart of Love, (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 346.

21 "In his work he conceives love."

22 Joseph Mazzeo, Structure and Thought in the Paradiso (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), p. 114.

- 23
Hoffman, p. 41.
- 24
Ross Greig Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 13.
- 25
See Hoffman (p. 37) for a totally different reading.
- 26
Graham Hough, The Romantic Poets (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1953), p. 131.
- 27
Metamorphoses, III. 1. 464.
- 28
Donald Maddox, "Shelley's Alastor and the Legacy of Rousseau," Studies in Romanticism, 9, no. 2 (Spring, 1970), 94.
- 29
John V. Murphy, The Dark Angel: Gothic Elements in Shelley's Works (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p. 78.
- 30
Ibid., p. 88.
- 31
Metamorphoses, III. 11. 395-399.
- 32
George Santayana, Winds of Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 171.
- 33
William J. McTaggart, "The Design and Unity of Shelley's Alastor Volume," Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin, 23 (1972), 13.
- 34
See the conclusion of Kubla Khan.
- 35
Ford, p. 179.
- 36
See Hoffman (pp. 69-74) for an informative discussion of the boat imagery.
- 37
Cf. Hoffman pp. 70-76.

38

In addition to Hoffman's very comprehensive list of sources and influences, I suggest this poem by Catullus:

Phasellus ille quem videtis, hospites,
ait fuisse navium celerimus,
neque ullius natantis impetum trabis
nequisse prater ire...
et hoc negat minacus Hadriatici
negare litus insulas Cyclades
Rhodumque nobilem horridamque Thraciam
Propontida, trucemue Ponticum Sinum,
ubi iste post phasellus antea fuit
comata silva: nam Cytorie in iuge
locuente saepe sibilum edidit coma
Amastri Pontica et Cytore buxifer
tibi haec fuisse et esse cognitissima
ait phasellus.

This passage recalls lines 340-341 and 359-360 and looks forward to the scene where the heights of the waves appear to equal the mountains' (ll. 389-394).

39

Cf. The Sensitive Plant, Part First, ll. 18-20.
William Keach, whose article I read after this was written,
notes this same passage in his "Reflective Imagery in Shelley,"
Keats-Shelley Journal, 24 (1975), 52.

40

Cf. Queen Mab, VIII. ll. 31-40.

41

Metamorphoses, III. l. 420.

42

Clark, "On Love," p. 170.

43

Benjamin P. Kurtz, The Pursuit of Death (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 280.

44

John C. Bean, "The Poet Borne Darkly: The Dream-Voyage
Allegory in Shelley's Alastor," Keats-Shelley Journal, 23
(1974), 70.

45

Jones, p. 111.

46

Clark, "On Love," p. 170.

47

Clark, "On a Future State," p. 177.

48 Hoffman (p. 124) stresses the Gothic influence on Shelley and observes that this phrase first appeared in Mrs. Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho.

49 Hough's phrase.

50 Edmund Blunden, Shelley (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 134.

51 Consult Dobell's Alastor or the Spirit of Solitude and Other Poems, The Shelley Society Publications, 2nd Ser. #3, London: Reeves & Turner, 1887. See also Woodberry's comments and list on pp. 616-617.

52 Hoffman, p. 54.

53 A. M. Hughes, "Alastor or the Spirit of Solitude," Modern Language Review, 43, no. 4 (1948), 470.

54 Six years later, Shelley, having refined this concept, spoke of the young Keats in Adonais: "He is a portion of the loveliness/which once he made more lovely" (XLIII. ll. 1-2)

55 Hoffman, p. 56.

56 Metamorphoses, III. ll. 477-478, 502-503.

57 Shelley, The Banquet of Plato in The Complete Works, VII, 183-184.

58 Clark, "On a Future State," p. 177.

59 Bean, p. 74.

60 Clark, "On a Future State," p. 177.

61 Ibid., p. 176.

62

Death releases both the poet and Jude from their torments. Neither really belonged to the world in which he found himself. But those who remained after them, the speaker and Sue, were not released from their agony but condemned to live.

63

Metamorphoses, VII. 11. 282-285.

64

The poem explores what appears to be and what actually is and thus recalls lines 213-219.

65

The City of Dreadful Night. XXI. 1. 84.

66

See King Lear, V,iii. 11. 305-311.

67

As in Lycidas, 11. 165-166, Adonais, XLI. 11. 1-2, and In Memoriam, XCV. 11. 33-36.

68

Theocritus, The Idylls of Theocritus with the Fragments, Bion and Moschus. Trans. J. M. Hallard, 4th ed., (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1924), p. 197.

69

Norman Thurston, "Author, Narrator, and Hero in Shelley's Alastor," Studies in Romanticism, 14, no. 2 (Spring, 1975), 128.

70

Ibid.

71

Romeo and Juliet, V.iii. 1. 295.

72

Albert Gerard, "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solipsism," Philological Quarterly, 33, no. 1 (April, 1954), 176.

Chapter III. Prince Athanase: The Transition

O prodigio! Il mio 'cor s'affida, si
 consola;
 Il souvenir del dolor s'invola,
 Il ciel pieta sentí di tanto duol.

Shelley's Prince Athanase has not generally received much critical attention. Most critics seem content to note that it contains certain themes that Shelley developed more fully in his greater works. For example, Carlos Baker cites Prince Athanase in his chapter on Epipsychidion only to observe that "the conception of the three parts of the soul or three aspects of love, which in Epipsychidion are imaged forth as the Comet, the Moon, and the Sun, was not any greater novelty in Shelley's poetry than ...the intrusion of the false lady (Prince Athanase)."¹ Practicing a silence characteristic among earlier commentators about Shelley, Harold Hoffman neglects to mention this work either in relation to Alastor in general or to "Shelley's fresh recollection of the Alps" described in History of a Six Weeks' Tour. That his An Odyssey of the Soul contains no reference to this poem does seem surprising because "the idea that Shelley had formed of Prince Athanase was a good deal modelled on Alastor."² Still, Hoffman's attitude is typical of Shelley criticism.

Part of this neglect undoubtedly occurs because Prince Athanase³ is only a fragment,⁴ and what we do have cannot be called representative of Shelley's finest or most beautiful composition. A flatness of description pervades the work as a whole, especially Part 1. With the introduction of Zonoras

in Part II, the quality of the piece definitely improves, but the poem certainly cannot be called great. That is not to say, however, that this poem is not important. It certainly is, particularly if we wish to obtain a clearer understanding of the quest poems. Most significantly, Prince Athanase can clarify the relationship between Love and Death that is so ambiguous in Alastor. In this work Shelley attempts to unite his hero with the Ideal woman within a more social framework. Also, despite the merest of descriptions of the maiden, Shelley obviously conceived her as a physical counterpart to the noble Athanase, thus expanding upon an idea first expressed in Alastor. That he failed to complete Prince Athanase might suggest Shelley's continued ambivalence about the relationship of Love and Death. At the same time, his failure prepares us for the radical turn that Epipsychidion takes regarding those two forces in the poet's life.

Perhaps the most instructive way to read this perplexing fragment is to heed Mary Shelley's comparison of it to the 1815 Alastor and to interpret it as if it were an alternate ending to the earlier poem. The two works do have numerous points in common, and the unfinished poem might be read as one more experience of the hero in Alastor.

As we begin Prince Athanase, a number of similarities are immediately apparent. First, we have an unnamed narrator who relates the tale of an unhappy hero who has died young. Like the figure in Alastor, he seems to have been singled out

to experience a multitude of lives within a brief time. Typical of Shelley (and Byron) is the idea of a unique individual literally becoming old before his time. One recalls the not yet thirty year old Byron's only semi-comic declaration to a hotel owner in Switzerland that he was actually one hundred years of age. Likewise, in the character of the prince, we have one who "as with toil and travel/Had grown quite weak and gray before his time." He reminds us of the youth in Alastor whose "hair grows thin and white" and of Shelley's own comment on himself and his premature aging: "what if my leaves are falling like your own." But Shelley has also advanced beyond Alastor in one respect: he is much more straight-forward in his treatment of the hero and his plight. The poem flows in a way that Alastor did not because of its excessive description. Within two terza rima stanzas, we know that Athanase has been plagued by furies, "restless griefs" that drive him "from land to land" and quite literally wear him out. Thus, the destructive restlessness that tormented the hero of Alastor is at work within the good prince. Unlike Shelley's treatment of the 1815 poem, he does not reveal to us early what causes the youth's suffering. But he does provide certain clues to allow us to penetrate into his character's mind. That he endures "restless griefs" immediately returns us to a similar situation in Alastor (ll. 224-227). In Prince Athanase Shelley qualifies this situation somewhat: "nor could any the restless griefs unravel."⁵ By implication, then, Shelley's hero dwells within a different type of solitude.

Evidently, people have sought to aid the youth, who is not without friends and companions:

Liberal he was of soul, and frank of heart,
 And to his many friends--all loved him
 well--
 Whate'er he knew or felt he would impart
 If words he found those inmost thoughts to
 tell.

(11. 46-49)

Therefore, a more frightening and hopeless "fate" dominates the hero. In the earlier Alastor, one could argue that because of the youth's inexperience, his only latent realization of the need for love, and his singular devotion to the vision that he unconsciously separated himself from humanity. Here, however, the hero lives in society, but he may as well exist in the wilderness. For Shelley clearly suggests that so powerful is this unnamed force or desire in the poet, that it consequently isolates him from friends. Human intercourse--friendship and companionship--evidently cannot compensate for the absence of an Ideal love embodied in one woman. Both heroes literally have their life's flame extinguished. Those "restless griefs" burning inside Athanase have their destructive antecedents in "the brooding care that ever fed on its decaying flame" in the poet of Alastor. The fiends that operate within and the failure of any to "unravel the restless griefs that burned within him" were to be more movingly and fully explored a year later:

Ye few by whom my nature has been
 weighed
 In friendship, let me not that name de-
 grade
 By placing on your hearts the secret load
 Which crushes mine to dust....
 And we agreed his was some dreadful ill
 Wrought on him boldly, yet unspeakable,
 By a dear friend; some deadly change in
 love
 Of one vowed deeply. ⁶
 (ll. 344-347, 525-528)

In the passage quoted from Julian and Maddalo, there is a madness associated with the individual's obsession with love, a love that alienates and destroys when not attained. In addition, Earl Wasserman believes that "in wishing it printed with Prince Athanase, he [Shelley] intimated its thematic relation to the somewhat Byronic hero of that fragment: a noble, Manfred-like figure inspired by all virtuous principles but goaded by the maddening fiends of an inward discontent."⁷ But Shelley is not operating with an unqualifiedly Byronic conception of the hero. In Athanase we do not have one who suffers because of unspeakable deeds, of "the load of any secret crime"

There is a power upon me which withholds,
 And makes it my fatality to live;
 If it be life to wear within myself
 This barrenness of spirit, and to be
 My soul's own sepulchre, for I have ceased
 To justify my deeds unto myself--
 The last infirmity of evil.

(Manfred, I. ll. 284-290)

We are to interpret "not his the load of any secret crime, for nought of ill his heart could understand" and "nor evil joys, which fire the vulgar breast and quench in speedy smoke

its feeble flame" as an answer to and partial rejection of Byron's Manfred and of his personal life. Instead, Athanase bears a different affliction and curse. He is isolated by a poetic sensitivity that distinguishes and separates him from humanity:

For none than he a purer heart could have,
 Or that loved good more for itself alone;
 Of nought in heaven or earth was he the slave....
 His soul had wedded wisdom, and her
 dower
 Is love and justice, clothed in which he sat
 Apart from men, as in a lonely tower.
(ll. 16-18, 41-43)

Now these concerns make him a very fine student of Plato and might derive their origins from The Banquet of Plato:

But love which incites to the acquirement of its objects according to virtue and wisdom, possesses the most exclusive dominion, and prepares for his worshippers the highest happiness through the mutual intercourse of social kindness which it promotes among them....9

But if he is a slave "of nought in heaven or earth," he has certainly been enslaved by the power of love. Again, what we have is a schism between the immediate world and Ideal world: he is in limbo. Shelley's simile "as in a lonely tower" is interesting because it re-inforces this idea of suspension between the world of imagination and society. For the tower has its foundations in earth at the same time that it is somewhat removed from it. Thus, Athanase is a part of society because of his humanity and apart from it because of his imagination. Like the figure in Alastor, he needs to be reconciled with himself and his world. Unlike that unfortunate

youth, he has reciprocated what mankind has given to him. In this sense, he is like, but really superior to, the narrator of the Invocation. The speaker of Alastor has "still loved and cherished these my kindred--the bright bird, insect, or gentle beast." But the prince's charity and generosity extend beyond the creatures in Nature's schema, and, although the poem is not religious in an orthodox sense, he acts in a spirit of true Christianity:

And such a glorious consolation find
 In others' joy, when all their own is dead.
 He loved, and labored for his kind of grief.

(ll. 24-26)

His selfless actions also recall one of the definitions of love in Blake's "The Clod and the Pebble":

Love seeketh not itself to please,
 Nor for itself hath any care,
 But for another gives its ease.

Having become a "hopeless wanderer through mankind," he seeks to serve others even though this dedication does not assuage his own suffering:

And yet, unlike all others, it is said,
 That from such toil he never found relief.
 (ll. 27-28)

What he needs of course is to be loved, to have someone respond to his goodness. Thus, his situation, while in many ways analogous to that of the poet in Alastor, is also the reverse of it here. Actually, he seems closer in concept to "the Arab

lies
 Such power, for I grow weary to behold
 The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
 Without reproach or check.

(Canto I.iii. ll. 6-9
 IV. ll. 4-8)

This occurrence in the young Shelley's life has been cited because it enables us to appreciate the problem confronting the hero in the poem. Obviously, despite his unceasing benevolence, he has not been accepted totally by his society. When one of so sensitive a nature as the Shelleyan prince realizes that he is cast off or rejected by a portion of his brethren, he would naturally seek sympathy to assuage his sorrow. Since Shelley has made it clear in Alastor that Nature alone cannot compensate for the separation from mankind, the hero must seek solace elsewhere:

I know not the internal constitution of other men, nor even thine, whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when, misled by that appearance, I have sought to appeal to something in common, and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land.¹⁶

Understood by neither friends nor enemies, the youth in Prince Athanase actually seeks "an understanding capable of clearly estimating [his] own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret."¹⁷ Although Shelley portrays the hero as less remote than the youth of Alastor, their fates are curiously intertwined. One existed in Nature and ignored humanity, while the other lived in society

and gradually removed himself from humanity--both were finally alienated from their worlds:

And through his sleep, and o'er each wak-
 ing hour,
 Thoughts after thoughts, unresting multi-
 tudes,
 Were driven within him by some secret
 power.

(ll. 65-67)

Although he does not spurn his friends, neither does he admit them into his world. The "adamantine veil between his heart and mind," symbolic of the failure to reconcile love and the imagination's image of love, also symbolizes the barrier that must separate him from others until he is loved wholly. That his friends cannot offer him that unique love is apparent from the fact that they lack the intellectual sympathy or "understanding" so necessary for him:

What was this grief, which ne'er in other
 minds
 A mirror found, he knew not--none could
 know.

(ll. 75-76)

Shelley of course demands more of any one person than most of us could give to another. Yet, he cannot demand less. This idea of totality in love becomes an all-consuming one for him and for his poetic creations, assuming considerable importance in his prose also. For instance, in "On the Manners of the Ancient Greeks," he attempts to expand upon his concept of love in language that recalls "On Love" and the quest poems:

Let it not be imagined that because the Greeks were deprived of its legitimate object, they were incapable of sentimental love; and that this passion is the mere child of chivalry and the literature of modern times. This object of its archetype for ever exists in the mind, which selects among those who resemble that which most resembles it.¹⁸

But the youth's friends cannot respond totally to his desires and imaginings. For Shelley suggests that even when he tries to communicate some explanation of the origins of his sufferings, others do not comprehend. He "...spoke words from which none ever learned the cause of his disquietude." He has failed to find the one individual who is "not only the portrait of his external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which his nature is composed."¹⁹ He has not yet discovered a sympathetic and corresponding intellect, and thus "the grief within still burned."

Athanase's friends realize that he suffers and try to discover the cause. As they speculate, the poem makes certain allusions to its generic twin of 1815. This seems to be a technique used by Shelley in both Prince Athanase and in Epipsychidion. His works are commentaries not only on the individual hero's experiences, but they also serve as commentaries on the quest poems that preceded them. In Prince Athanase this method was still experimental. When Shelley composed Epipsychidion, however, he devoted nearly a third of that poem to re-examining the quest in Alastor.

As Part I nears its conclusion, Shelley uses a sort of dramatic irony here. That is, the friends' speculations do

answer in part the questions about the cause of his grief and sorrow. Of course, they never learn the reason, nor does the prince. But the audience of Alastor, to whom "the picture was not barren of instruction," would gradually know more than the hero and his friends. For each of the reasons corresponds in some way to the experiences of the poet in Alastor. That the obsession with Love is a kind of madness (I. 1. 90) could be read as a gloss on all of Alastor itself. We have only to remember the description of the youth as one roused by "the fierce fiend of a distempered dream," or later "as one roused by some joyous madness" to have a realization of the forces at work within both of the doomed, driven heroes. More specific is the suggestion "that memories of an antenatal life made this, where he now dwelt, a penal hell." For that describes very closely the gulf between an infancy "by solemn vision and bright silver dream nurtured" and an existence in which the torturers Hope and Despair slept only when death ended the hero's earthly hell. As each of the four possible explanations is offered, each becomes more fully developed, and the poet's dilemma more comprehensible.

Without this implicit interpretation, Prince Athanase may seem so remote and obscure as to preclude the reader's sympathy and interest. With the third suggestion, we have our clearest reference to the situation in Alastor:

And others said that such mysterious grief
 From God's displeasure, like a darkness,
 fell
 On souls like his which owned no higher law
 Than love; love calm, steadfast, invincible
 By mortal fear or supernatural awe.

(11. 93-97)

We are once more directed to the Preface of Alastor: "the Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." This is not to suggest that the pursuit of the vision is a punitive fate. Although the phrase "God's displeasure" could support that reading, a more useful approach would be to refer to these lines from Alastor:

The spirit of sweet human love has sent
 A vision to the sleep of him who spurned
 Her choicest gifts.

(11. 203-205)

In Shelley's quest poems, love serves a double role as ²⁰ daimon. If the poet can love an Ideal woman, their love can bridge the gulf between poet and Ideal Love. But that love can also bridge another gulf that has resulted because of the hero's relentless search for the maiden. One of the more intriguing characteristics about both heroes is that neither seeks her within his own society. In a sense, both spurn "the choicest gifts" of love when they reject the companionship and generosity of others. Although the prince does have friends, his unfulfilled yearning for an idealized woman isolates and destroys him. Were he to unite with her, love would then become his means of re-entry into society, of bridg-

ing the gulf between man and society. It is not so much that Athanase rejects society, but that his quest forces him to foresake mankind until its completion, for love is sought to complement and complete the poet's self. Once he has united with his feminine alter-ego, he can then re-unite with mankind.

Finally, the last suggestion recalls the youth's rather heedless, frenzied voyage in the shallop when he sought to unite himself with Death and Love:

'Tis the shadow of a
dream
Which veiled eye of memory never saw,
But through the soul's abyss, like some
dark stream
Through shattered mines and caverns
underground,
Rolls, shaking its foundations. (ll. 98-102)

Here the last surmise not only reads as the last phase of the poet's attempt in Alastor to meet the veiled maiden, but it also functions as our introduction to Athanase and his dilemma. Although Shelley never described the quest in this poem, he does suggest that he was pursuing a fuller exploration of Love and Death:

and no
beam
Of joy may rise but it is quenched and
drowned
In the dim whirlpools of this dream ob-
scure. (ll. 102-104)

In Prince Athanase, Shelley evidently believed that the hero would suffer the same fate as the youth of Alastor if he sought his Idealized Love in the physical world. Words like "beams,"

"quenched," and "drowned" echo those used in key lines from
Alastor:

...--a

dream
 Of youth, which night and time have
 quenched forever--
 Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered
 now.

(ll. 669-671)

Also, the lines "soon its exhausted waters will have found/A
 lair of rest beneath thy spirit pure,/O Athanase!" are to be
 read ironically. His friends, of course, believe that gradu-
 ally the torments of Athanase--his furies--will subside and
 sleep. But if we read this poem as an extension of the
Alastorian motif, we would interpret those lines as meaning
 that the "lair of rest beneath thy spirit pure" symbolizes the
 mutual extinction of vision and visionary. The exhausted waters
 find rest when Athanase finds rest in death, when his eyes
 "image sleep in death." Again, the speaker possesses greater
 knowledge than his creations, and he comments upon that dis-
 tinction:

So spake they--idly of another's state
 Babbling vain words and fond philosophy.
 (ll. 109-110)

Furthermore, Shelley seems to introduce one more example of
 irony, this time at his own expense:

nor did he,
 Like one who labors with a human woe,
 Decline this talk; as if its theme might be
 Another, not himself.

(ll. 112-115)

He seems to be commenting on both the youth in Alastor and Prince Athanase as extensions of his own mind and of his own attempts to distance himself from them--"as if its theme might be another, not himself."

Whatever the actual relationship of Shelley to his poetic creation, there can be little doubt about the relationship of Prince Athanase to Alastor. The conclusion of Part I of Prince Athanase certainly makes this clear:

For like an eyeless nightmare grief did sit
 Upon his being; a snake which fold by fold
 Pressed out the life of life, a clinging fiend
 Which clenched him if he stirred with
 Deadlier hold.

(ll. 120-123)

We are reminded of the scene in Alastor in which the hero has been roused from his dream of the dream-maiden. Like Athanase, he too was beset by a "fierce fiend" that relentlessly vitiated his strength. In addition, the snake's "deadlier hold" reminds one of Shelley's comparison of the youth in Alastor to an "eagle grasped in folds of the green serpent" (ll. 227-228) that constricted his hopes of achieving the quest. By recognizing the relationship between the poems, we gain an understanding and appreciation of the quest theme that extend beyond the tantalizing, but fragmentary Prince Athanase.

The opening of Part II parallels the commencement of the poet's history in Alastor--with a number of significant differences. Both poems depict heroes isolated in the world.

In Alastor few references to the youth's parents or family are made, while in Prince Athanase only the briefest allusion to parents occurs:

And as the lady looked with faithful grief
 From her high lattice o'er the rugged path,...
 And Athanase, her child, who must have
 been
 Then three years old, sate opposite and
 gazed
 In patient silence (at Zonoras).

(ll. 25-26, 37-39)

The orphan in Alastor receives nurturing from Nature and instruction from ancient civilizations; Prince Athanase, having lost his father--the honored chief who fell in "Byzant"--receives instruction from Zonoras. What Shelley attempts in Part II is a portrait of a more humanized, less remote hero. Although Part I stresses that the prince did have many friends, the rather extensive description of Zonoras would suggest that he alone constitutes Athanase's society. Once more we have an individual whose intellectual excellence and curiosity isolate and distinguish him from mankind.

The Athanase-Zonoras episode represents the first profound interaction between individuals in the quest poems. Shelley does not imply that Zonoras could equal the importance of Love in the hero's life. Love is all-sufficing to the poet, and when he partakes of it, then he can love "the deep heart of man." Instead, the function of their relationship is really one of student and teacher. But even here Shelley alters that somewhat. That Zonoras is a beneficent, educational influence upon the impressionable youth is indisputable:

Thus through his age, dark, cold, and tem-
 pest-tossed;
 Shone truth upon Zonoras; and he filled
 From fountains pure, nigh overgrown and
 lost,
 The spirit of Prince Athanase.

(ll. 43-46)

The child receives impulses from his "one beloved friend"; the knowledge of the old man is impressed upon him. Although Athanase does have a living biological mother, Zonoras seems to be something of a dual guardian for the youth. He functions as Nature did in Alastor in the sense that he nurtures intellectual curiosity and questioning:

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.

(ll. 71-75)

But he also tutors the prince, and here his purpose reminds one of the way in which the ancient civilizations had done so in Alastor. In the later quest poem, Shelley has humanized the hero's instructor. By these devices Shelley gives the fragment a focus that contrasts rather markedly with the more episodic, impressionistic Alastor. The character of Zonoras looks both forward and backward. Not only does he bear some similarity in function to the Nature of the 1815 poem, but he is another example of Shelley's immortalizing those individuals whom he had loved in his youth. As the youth in Alastor was (most probably) a minor tribute to his first friend at Sion House Academy, so too is Zonoras a tribute to the old friend, savior, and solace of his youth, Doctor Lind.²¹

And thus Zonoras, by forever seeing
 Their bright creations, grew like wisest
 men.

(ll. 12-17)

A number of ideas warrant some discussion. That Shelley should describe him as a "lonely being" suggests that he, too, has been alienated or at least separated from society. Thus we have another wanderer in the quest poems: "many weary years he wandered." Zonoras' fate is an alternative one to that which befalls the heroes in Alastor and Prince Athanase. Beholding him is like peering into a mirror which reflects not the present but the future. When Athanase sits opposite his teacher, he sees an aspect of himself--the arrowy light being a mutual reflection. This idea of mutuality is important because it represents a continuation of and an advance on the idea of reciprocity introduced in the earlier quest poem. For while Zonoras teaches the young prince, he also learns from him:

The youth, as shadows on a grassy hill
 Outrun the winds that chase them, soon
 outran
 His teacher, and did teach with native
 skill
 Strange truths and new to that experienced
 man.²³

(ll. 52-55)

In Alastor, the poet "left his cold fireside and alienated home/To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands." Shelley altered the learning process somewhat in Prince Athanase by developing the relationship between the youthful student and elder teacher. Athanase reciprocates the kindness and love

of his tutor, just as the speaker in Alastor tried to reciprocate Nature's love, by allowing Zonoras to partake of a unique knowledge. Both are "the fountains of divine philosophy," partaking of and replenishing their source.

Their mutual learning and knowledge have profound implications for man as a whole--if he would only use them. As Zonoras and Athanase speculate and debate far into the night, their lamp shines forth from "Laiian's turret." The fishermen at sea use that beacon to find their way home as they are "hanging upon the peaked waves afar." But the lamp assumes additional importance in the poem. Shelley also wants this lamp or beacon to symbolize the truth, beauty, and light that flash across and pierce the darkness of human ignorance and corruption. The beacon could save the "unforeseeing multitudes" from themselves, but the turret can also symbolize the poet-philosopher's division from mankind. The poet is simultaneously the source of others' salvation and of his own isolation. The situation reminds one of a scene described--in different imagery--by Shelley in A Defence of Poetry, when he compares the poet to a nightingale whose "auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why." Interestingly, as Athanase muses gloomily on his fate, he thinks of a comparable situation:

How many a
 Of fevered brains, oppressed with grief
 and madness,
 Were lulled by thee, delightful nightin-
 gale!

(11. 78-80)

But "no human ear heard his lament," which underscores the sense of total isolation that engulfs the prince. Although Zonoras obviously sympathizes with the unfortunate youth, all he can offer is reminiscences of their long talks together. That, of course, is insufficient for Athanase, and emphasizes the limitations of Zonoras just as Alastor stressed the inadequacy of Nature in the poet's life.

What Zonoras refers to in the talks is Plato's Banquet, especially a key episode that was to have been the source of a similar idea in Shelley's poem. One of the concepts that he intended to explore was the two natures of love that Plato discusses:

...but since there are two Venuses, of necessity also must there be two Loves. For assuredly are there two Venuses; one, the eldest, the daughter of Uranus, born without a mother, whom we call the Uranian; the younger, the daughter of Jupiter and Dione, whom we call the Pandemian.²⁵

Although the prince's disillusionment with Pandemos and his subsequent deathbed meeting with Urania were never depicted in this poem, the description of the youth's hand as a "cold, lean" one recalls the "listless hand [that] hung like dead bone within its withered skin" of the poet in Alastor. In short, Athanase needs love, and his desire is destroying him. In a section not included in the text by Mary Shelley, Zonoras apprehends the source of his young student's anguish:

'My friend, one grief alone can wean
A gentle mind from all that once delighted:--
Thou lovest, and thy secret heart is laden
With feelings which should not be unrequited.'
And Athanase...then smiled....²⁶

Shelley may have been influenced somewhat by a similar passage in his friend's poem Rhododaphne:

Many, lone amidst mankind,
Claim from Love's unplying power
The kindred heart they ne'er shall find.²⁷

Just as Thomas Love Peacock played a role in Alastor by suggesting the title of the poem, here his poem, which Shelley had read during the period in which Prince Athanase was composed, seems a possible source of language, if not ideas.

Returning to Shelley's work, we note that the hero must remain content with love's shade, its image within, until he arranges to find and to unite with the object of his quest. What is disturbing, however, is the phrase "though none be near to love," because it suggests the immense difficulty of reconciling the mind's imaginings and a female counterpart in this world. Quite simply, none may be near to love because no mortal could embody the intellectual, physical, and moral perfection that the poet envisions. No human is perfect, but the poet can be satisfied with no one less. The idea derives somewhat from the scene in The Banquet in which Diotima and Socrates ponder the nature of Love:

It is asserted by some, that they love, who are seeking the lost half of their divided being. But I assert, that Love is neither of the half nor of the whole, unless, my friend, it meets with that which is good.²⁸

But as Shelley discussed earlier in "On Love," his concept of love must necessarily be associated with good, beauty, and

excellence. Indeed, in a later passage of The Banquet, Diotima describes how the mind creates, in a manner that could serve as a gloss on the first two quest poems:

Think you not that to him alone is accorded the prerogative of bringing forth, not images and shadows of virtue, for he is in contact not with a shadow but with reality.²⁹

Although Prince Athanase never actually undergoes an experience similar to the youth's in Alastor, the notes by Shelley and his wife and the slight physical description of the woman in the poem would strongly indicate that these concepts and speculations would not have been alien to Shelley's intentions--had he completed the poem. As Zonoras continues his remembrances, he comments on those who dwell in the world of the imagination. Certainly, the following lines are applicable to the situation of Athanase, as well as of the youths in Alastor and Epipsychidion:

How many a spirit then puts on the pin-
ions
Of fancy, and outstrips the lagging blast,
Sweeps in his dream-drawn chariot, far
and fast.

(ll. 121-122, 124)

Zonoras chooses to deal with the universe on its own terms, but the more impassioned, inexperienced Athanase wishes to transcend it in his "dream-drawn chariot" and seek solace in the imagination. In this process, "the wide world sinks below," and thus it seems that Athanase seeks a world of solipsism--something which Shelley had warned against in his Preface to

Alastor.

Having made this decision, the unfortunate youth isolates himself somewhat from the companionship and guidance of Zonoras. Because Zonoras cannot enter totally into Athanase's world,-- (that "divine old man/Beheld his mystic friend's whole being/Shake"), but the poet revealed nothing about the cause of his unhappiness--the isolation of Athanase is complete. It is in this mood that the prince undertakes a journey, not in the season of hope and generation but in the winter that mirrors his own state of being. Everything is in stasis now, "the white Alps," "shrouds of snow," and "mines of sunless crystal." Only Athanase himself moves amidst the natural landscape. But whereas the coming movement in Nature--the spring thawing of winter's grip--heralds renewed life, Athanase's movement can mean only a quickening destruction and vitiating restlessness.

Evidently Shelley intended to describe the journey as a quest similar to that undertaken by the wanderer in Alastor. It is interesting that having left Zonoras, the source of his intellectual and emotional nurturing, he should have beheld a world of ancient civilizations. For it suggests that Shelley was attempting to resolve some of the difficulties encountered in his 1815 treatment of the quest theme. Thus, we can assume that "many a town circled with antique towers and walls" would be scenes of great introspective contemplation by the prince, as they had been by the figures in Alastor and in The Ruins. Also, Shelley's use of "image reflected" in the lucid streams below" might have been useful in exploring the hero's

psychological states and the stream-of-life motif.

Because of the poem's fragmentary nature, we can only surmise what Prince Athanase would have meant had Shelley been able to complete it. What may have been one reading of the poem would have involved a definition of love somewhat like that still to be developed in Epipsychidion and A Defence of Poetry. For example, although the speaker's paean to Love does begin rather abruptly, there are several implicit themes that warrant at least passing consideration:

Thou art the wine whose drunkenness is all
 We can desire, O Love! and happy souls,
 Ere from thy vine the leaves of autumn fall,
 Catch thee, and feed from their o'erflowing bowls
 Thousands who thirst for thine ambrosial dew.
 (ll. 136-140)

Love is here equated with the highest level of knowledge. The "o'erflowing bowls" are, in actuality, a variant of the fountain imagery described earlier in Alastor and this work. Love itself is infinite in supply, but man must will himself to partake of it. The more individuals drink from those "o'erflowing bowls," the more they can nourish others. Shelley presents to his readers his re-working of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Man cannot exhaust love, but paradoxically he seems to increase it by using it. To an extent, Shelley says here about love what he was to repeat, in a different form, about high poetry in A Defence of Poetry:

All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn,
 which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil
 may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning
 never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever over-
 flowing with the waters of wisdom and delight.30

because without love he is entombed in "shrouds of snow." He can arise only when love resurrects him. Unloved, he must die.

The concluding lines also look back to Alastor. Although the extent of the relationship between its Invocation and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" is highly debatable, here Shelley seems to conceive love as an aspect of the force of "Intellectual Beauty." The shadow of thy moving wings" and "thou floatest among men" read like drafts from the 1816 "Hymn."

Shelley also refers again to the discord that he perceives in a world seemingly bereft of love--a world eventually little changed from that described in the Preface to Alastor:

the weak
Alone kneel to thee, offering up the
 hearts
The strong have broken.
(ll. 152-153)

Shelley's association of love with the "soft air of spring" as an animating force might have been expanded and diversified in the deathbed scene that was to have concluded the poem. In this work, Shelley clearly conceived of the poet's beloved as a mortal figure and therein lay the problem. When he described the woman who would have appeared to Athanase, he went beyond the suggestion of a physical being envisioned in a dream. As I noticed earlier, Prince Athanase was meant to be a more intimate, more personal rendering of the themes pursued in Alastor. In describing the woman, Shelley once more

Notes

- 1
Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 236.
- 2
Harold Hoffman, An Odyssey of the Soul: Shelley's Alastor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), p. 112.
- 3
See Neville Rogers's edition of Shelley's poetry for an interesting discussion of the source of the poems' and the hero's name (p. 400).
- 4
To make the most sense of this perplexing poem, use Woodberry's version of the text (approved by Mrs. Shelley) in conjunction with Rogers's edition, which incorporates some cancelled lines.
- 5
What Shelley seems to stress here is the inadequacy of the ordinary man's response to the hero's dilemma. Even if Athanase wanted to remain a part of his society, this gulf in understanding would preclude it. Not until he unites with his beloved, a being capable of understanding and responding to his unique nature, is any sort of "living intercourse" possible.
- 6
Shelley suffered a similar dilemma. Only through his poetry and the masking of his own nature through madmen, poets, and lovers could he reveal the intensity of his own agony and frustration with an imperfect universe and personal life.
- 7
Earl R. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 58.
- 8
Cf. Julian and Maddalo, ll. 482-484.
- 9
Shelley, The Banquet of Plato in The Complete Works, VII, 182.
- 10
"I did not yet love, and I loved to love; I sought that love, loving to love."

11
 Eilo Fialo, The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism (New York: Humanities Press, 1964), p. 276.

12
 Cf. ll. 290-301.

13
 The original title was Laon and Cythna but, according to Rogers, "the second title (The Revolt of Islam) has become more generally familiar" (p. 360).

14
 In that poem, Shelley introduces the character of the King (III) whose lamentations (ll. 64ff.) anticipate Jupiter's in Prometheus Unbound (III.ii. ll. 63-70).

15
 Newman I. White, John A. Symonds, Walter Peck, and other biographers note these episodes and their almost maddening effects upon the isolated, fragile Shelley.

16
 Clark, "On Love," p. 169.

17
 Ibid., p. 170.

18
 Clark, "On the Manners of the Ancient Greeks," p. 220.

19
 Clark, "On Love," p. 170.

20
 In The Banquet, which he had translated, Shelley says, "every thing daemonical holds an intermediate place between what is divine and what is mortal," p. 197. I would also recommend James Allsup's discussion about daimons in his The Magic Circle: A Study of Shelley's Concept of Love (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1976), pp. 49, 59, and 82.

21
 Doctor Lind had convinced Shelley's father that the boy was not insane and should not be confined in an asylum.

22
 Clark, "On the Manners of the Ancient Greeks," p. 219.

23
 The situation is somewhat analogous to the young Christ astonishing his teachers.

- 24 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 282.
- 25 Shelley, The Banquet of Plato in The Complete Works, VII, 174.
- 26 Neville Rogers combines the parts of Prince Athanase in his edition. Following this system, the quotation is from lines 232-236.
- 27 The Halliford edition of Thomas Love Peacock's Works, edited by H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C.E. Jones, contains no line references. The lines cited are from Canto I, p. 16.
- 28 Shelley, The Banquet of Plato in The Complete Works, VII, 200.
- 29 Ibid., p. 207.
- 30 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 291.
- 31 Ibid., p. 282.

Chapter IV. Epipsychidion: The Triumph

E tutto assorto
 In quel leggiadro aspetto, un altro cielo
 Mirar credetti, un altro cielo in lei

Epipsychidion, the last of the three quest poems, invites more autobiographical reading than any other of Shelley's works. That he calls his beloved "Emily" undoubtedly encourages this approach. Among many critics, Kenneth Cameron and Newman White¹ have been major forces stressing the close relationship between Shelley's personal life and his work. While this approach does clarify some of the difficulties of Epipsychidion, it should not be considered the only valid method. Rather, one would do well to remember that "Emilia Viviani was only the occasion and not the cause"² of the composition. We must not forget that this poem is Shelley's most profound and mature treatment of a theme that had obsessed him during his life. In other words, even without Emilia Viviani and her influence, Shelley might also have composed an Epipsychidion of some sort. The fact that a full third of the poem comments on his previous exploration of the quest theme should be helpful in establishing a relationship among Alastor, Prince Athanase and Epipsychidion. In addition, the same triad of poet, Love, and Death exists, a triad which Shelley explores more definitively than he had in the earlier poems. The focus of this section of the study, therefore, will be to show how Shelley finally resolved for himself the roles of Love and Death in the poet's life.

Before considering the text itself, it is necessary to

note a few characteristics of Shelley's Advertisement to his poem. For example, we are introduced to the poem by a speaker who informs us of the death of the hero. Thus, Epipsyichidion, like its predecessors, begins with the death of a poet. In describing the poet's life, the speaker refers to some of the youth's attributes, which are similar to those of the youth in Alastor and the good prince. We know that he was unique among mankind and that "his life was singular."³ But the hero, like the previous heroes, remained apart from this world:

it was his hope to have realized a scheme of life,
suited perhaps to that happier and better world of
which he is now an inhabitant, but hardly practicable
in this.⁴

If we did not know the source of this quotation, we might speculate that it referred to the "child of genius" or Athanase-- with one significant qualification. The speaker himself refers to "that happier and better world of which he is now an inhabitant." Thus, he begins to dispel the ambiguity about an after life that had made interpreting the earlier quest poems so difficult. Also, the speaker's belief that death was a benevolent force in the hero's life would suggest that the poet had lived as a solitary among men. Once again, the themes of isolation and separation emerge as dominant concerns of Shelley. As we have noted previously in both Alastor and Prince Athanase, the speaker also comments on other poets and their works. Here, the Advertisement specifically refers to Dante's Il Convivo,⁵ but the poem also recalls other works by Dante and some by

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 Petrarca. In addition, Shelley's separation of himself from the poet figure parallels a similar technique used in the Preface and opening of Alastor. His appeal for "a smile not of contempt, but pity: for this "unfortunate friend" reminds us of the speaker's lamentations for the hero of the 1815 poem.

Like Alastor, Epipsychidion begins with an invocation. But it is the differences between the two openings that should especially interest us. One essential difference is that the poet, although dead, speaks directly to us at the outset. Shelley has dispensed with the convention of the speaker in Alastor appealing for inspiration and then narrating the tale of the youth. Instead, we are much more involved with the poet's tale in Epipsychidion because he personally narrates it. Second, the poet, by directly addressing his Ideal, places the entire situation in a more social context: speaker, beloved, and audience. The remoteness from humanity that characterized the situations of the other heroes seems less prevalent here. The key to this last distinction would seem to be the overall tone of Epipsychidion. No longer do we have the autumnal somberness of Alastor; in Epipsychidion we have a poem of warmth, growth, fruition, and fullness. For Epipsychidion's unique quality is its triumphal ascent beyond mutability and Death.

One way that Shelley's triumphant spirit manifests itself is through his extensive use of exclamations. This is evident in the opening direct address:

Sweet Spirit! sister of that orphan one,
Whose empire is the name thou weepest
on,

In my heart's temple I suspend to thee
These votive wreaths of withered memory.

(ll. 1-4)

A number of interesting possibilities emerge from these lines. That Shelley addresses her as a "Sweet Spirit" ⁸ suggests the influence of the Italian Renaissance poets whom Shelley had read, assimilated, and on occasion translated. In particular, Petrarca's "Gentil mia Donna, i'veggio" (72) seems a likely source for Shelley:

Ky noble Lady, I see in the moving of your eyes
a sweet light that shows me the way that leads to
Heaven; and through long habit, there within where
with Love I sit, almost visibly your heart shines
through.⁹

(ll. 1-6)

What is essential to a correct reading of Epipsychidion is the realization that the "Sweet Spirit" should not be equated solely with Emilia Viviani. Shelley's "Emily" is not exclusively a human counterpart like Dante's Beatrice or Petrarca's Laura. The first twelve lines can clarify this. After hailing his "Sweet Spirit," the poet calls her "sister of that orphan one." Now, it would be natural to assume that Shelley refers to Mary Godwin. One can argue that Shelley was proposing the same type of domestic arrangement--Mary (sister)-Shelley-Emilia(lover) that he had unsuccessfully suggested to the young Harriet Westbrook before he deserted her for Mary. But something more subtle occurs in these lines.

The "orphan one" is actually Shelley speaking of himself in the third person:

The orphan one is not Mary, but Shelley himself, or better, the spirit of Shelley, who, by the way, was as much an orphan as Mary and was called Emilia's brother as Mary was called Emilia's sister.¹¹

This is crucial in understanding the relationship of Epipsychidion to the other quest poems. For Shelley conceives of his beloved as a twin force and part of himself. Once again, he explores the possibility of uniting with a force that he imagines. Unlike Alastor in which the poet then sought a human counterpart of the dream maiden, Epipsychidion does not really deal with any new quest here. Those lines describing the hero's search in this world comment on that theme as Shelley developed it in the earlier works. Thus, although Epipsychidion is certainly autobiographical, it is primarily his spiritual or imaginative history. The following lines are useful in this respect:

Poor captive bird! who from thy narrow
cage
Pourest such music that it might assuage
The rugged hearts of those who prisoned
thee,
Were they not deaf to all sweet melody.
This song shall be thy rose; its petals pale
Are dead, indeed, my adored nightingale!
(11. 5-10)

Of course one can argue that Shelley refers to Emilia secluded in her convent school. But another, more helpful interpretation can be advanced. If we recall a passage from A Defence of Poetry already cited in the discussion of Prince Athanase,

Shelley's part, but to indicate how intimate a part of himself--because his concept of Love was begotten of himself--this feminine complement actually was. Shelley recognized the difficulties in deciding whether that complement was both Ideal and human when he commented that:

I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.¹⁴

Epipsychidion is Shelley's rectification of that error in the quest poems.

Returning to the opening lines, we need to expand upon several ideas. While the passage from A Defence of Poetry proves helpful for comparative purposes, a crucial distinction between the concept of the poet in the poem and the essay must be stressed. In the essay, Shelley states that the poet's "auditors are as men entranced." Thus the poet's song produces positive effects upon the world despite the singer's own basic solitude. The situation in Epipsychidion is different: those who have isolated or rejected the poet remain "deaf to all sweet melody" (l. 8). But why do the situations of the two poets differ so greatly? When Shelley wrote the essay, he was defining his general concept of what he hoped it meant to be a poet. When he composed Epipsychidion, however, he was narrating his actual experiences of what it meant to be a poet.¹⁵ His own experiences could not allow him to delude himself into believing that "his auditors were as men entranced."

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Rather, he felt too acutely the hostility or bewilderment with which others reacted to him.¹⁶ Hence, a growing sense of remoteness and separation from man led him to think of himself as "that orphan one." All of his heroes in the quest poems--the youth in Alastor, Athanase "of an ancestral name the orphan chief" and the hero in Epipsychidion--were also alone in their worlds.

In the opening lines Shelley also concerns himself with images of decay and deterioration. For instance, he speaks of "these votive wreaths of withered memory," "petals pale," and a "faded blossom." Woodberry suggests that "the idea of the captive bird leads at once to Shelley's imaging his relation as that of the rose to the nightingale, but a rose without mortal life or passion, a dead and thornless rose; and, directly, in lines 13-18, the image of the bird and the cage loses touch with Emilia and becomes the metaphor for the spirit in the body."¹⁷ That is, Emilia has been displaced as a central image in the poem--at least temporarily. Were Emilia to be identified solely with La Viviani, this certainly would seem to be so. But Woodberry could have extended the imagery to include the "Sweet Spirit." Read in this way, the opening lines maintain a unity that critics are sometimes reluctant to concede to the poem. What Shelley achieves here is a tribute to his own poetic nature in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the speaker's tribute to the poet in Alastor. Within his tribute is a lament for a part of his nature already dead. He conveys this sense of personal loss through

the imagery of decay:

This song shall be thy rose; its petals pale
 Are dead, indeed, my adored nightingale!
 But soft and fragrant is the faded blossom,
 And it has no thorn left to wound thy
 bosom.

(ll. 9-12)

The poem itself will remain a lasting tribute to his idealistic hopes and aspirations, even if his actual experiences preclude their fulfillment here. For instance, when he promises to the "Sweet Spirit" that his song shall be thy rose" he offers his poem as a chivalric tribute to his lady. Though the physical characteristics of the poet in the quest are subject to alteration--"its petals pale/Are dead, indeed, my adored nightingale!"--his essence remains. That the faded blossoms remain "soft and fragrant" suggests that something of the poet remains (i.e., his work) in a world of mutability. In Epipsychidion the poet's belief in and devotion to his vision, even when he cannot attain it here, gives this poem its impetus. The poet cannot prove the existence of an idealized Love, but his belief in its existence remains firm. Since he has not yet succeeded in uniting with the woman who embodies this love, the poet shifts the locus of that union: he desires to transcend the world.¹⁹ It is this undercurrent of transcendence, which finally becomes the *raison d'être* of this composition, that finally distinguishes Epipsychidion from its predecessors.

Shelley's tenacious adherence to a belief in the possibility of discovering an Ideal Love receives comment through-

out the poem:

High, spirit-winged Heart! who dost
 forever
 Beat thine unfeeling bars with vain en-
 deavor
 Till those bright plumes of thought, in
 which arrayed
 It over-spared this low and worldly shade.
 (ll. 13-16)

These lines honor both the poet and his beloved, for ideally they should remain one and inseparable. Here, Shelley bears eloquent and moving testimony to his own sense of failure. Like a poetic Icarus, he has soared too high to attain a vision which the physical world cannot contain: "those bright plumes of thought, in which arrayed/It over-soared this low and worldly shade,/Lie shattered."

Shelley achieves a fascinating comparison of opposites. In thought he has been able to soar beyond the confines of the world, but that does not compensate for isolation from humanity. Neither, however, does life in the world which is experienced as "this low and worldly shade." By imprisoning the poet and frustrating his efforts, he becomes totally alone--being an inhabitant of neither this nor the Ideal world. Yet, Epipsychidion is not pessimistic. True, it concerns itself with the failure of poetic aspirations, but in charting that failure Shelley does achieve a resolution of conflicts. This accounts for the adavance of his assertion that the "High, spirit-winged Heart forever beats thine unfeeling bars with vain endeavor."

Within his adamance is Shelley's sense of inevitable triumph. "Thine unfeeling bars" (like the "narrow cage") should be interpreted as the physical limitations which the world attempts to impose upon poetic natures. According to the poem, this cannot happen.

We realize this when we are introduced to an astonishing list of metaphors:

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be
 human,
 Veiling beneath that radiant form of Wo-
 man
 All that is insupportable in thee
 Of light, and love, and immortality!
 (ll. 21-24)

When reading this opening hymn, it is best not to identify Shelley's "Seraph" with any particular person. Instead, we should identify the "Seraph" with the Idea of Woman,²⁰ an idealized concept that embodies all intellectual, imaginative, emotional, and physical capacities. Emily, though, remains relatively abstract. A helpful analogy would be to compare Emily to the Blessed Virgin whom many Catholics revere more as a symbol of purity, love, and kindness than as an actual personage. Petrarca's "Vergine Bella" seems helpful in expanding upon this concept:

Beautiful Virgin who, clothed with the sun and
 crowned with stars, so pleased the highest Sun that
 in you He hid His light: love drives me to speak
 words of you.²¹

Not only is the description reminiscent of that of Shelley's Emily, but it enables us to perceive how the poetic/religious

intellect can transform a mortal entity into a divine one. A particular woman becomes the symbol of Woman. In this way, Shelley began to resolve one of the major dilemmas in Alastor and Prince Athanase: the desire of "meeting an understanding capable of clearly estimating [the poet's] own."²² Shelley realized that his concept of love could not be incarnate. Instead, he conceived love in the vision which his Imagination recreated, but he no longer sought in this world a human counterpart to himself and to his vision. As Shelley continues to praise Emily, his poetry utilizes extensive astronomical imagery. That he had to use this type of description indicates that the "Seraph" really cannot be adequately described even in poetry. For, at best, it can only suggest rather than define the nature of Shelley's inspiration:

Veiled glory of this lampless Universe!
 Thou Moon beyond the clouds! thou living
 Form
 Among the Dead! thou Star above the
 Storm!

(ll. 26-28)

He views her through a scrim, suggestive of her spiritual, other worldly nature: she is veiled, beyond the clouds, and above the storm. Thus, we have another poem dealing with Intellectual Beauty.²³ Is not Shelley extending his ideas in the 1816 "Hymn" in a more elaborate form? For example, her veiled nature recalls the description of Intellectual Beauty as "the awful shadow of some unseen Power/Floats though unseen among us/...Like clouds in starlight widely spread." When

Shelley refers to the "veiled glory of this lampless Universe," he echoes Stanza IV of the "Hymn":

Thou, that to human thought art nourish-
 ment,
 Like darkness to a dying flame,
 Depart not as thy shadow came!
 (IV. 11. 8-10)

But man does not have to be abandoned to "a dark reality"
 --as the following lines in *Epipsychidion* make explicit:

Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou
 Terror.
 Thou Harmony of Nature's art. Thou Mir-
 ror
 In whom, as in the splendor of the Sun,
 All shapes look glorious which thou gazest
 on.
 (11. 29-32)

Shelley stresses his conception of the "Seraph of Heaven" as a moral, animating force. The significance of these lines is at least threefold. First, in looking upon the poetic presence, the spectator glimpses what he himself might be under the perpetual influence of poetry. As Shelley declared in A Defence of Poetry, "Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted."²⁴ By peering into the pool of "a soul within our soul," the poet beholds himself reflected in his purest, brightest light, in "a mirror whose surface re-
 flects only the forms of purity and brightness."²⁵

A second way of understanding these lines is to say that this Force could restore us to an Edenic state of innocence. Before any restoration is possible, however, a serious problem

must be confronted: we must await the moment when the "Seraph" chooses to visit us. Part of the difficulty occurs because our linguistic faculties, as Shelley suggests, are limited in their range. Poetic language can only approximate the extent of the "Seraph's" glory. By extension, the other faculties are likewise limited, and thus the poet depends upon the radiance of Emily to effect his transformation. The situation is analogous to one's looking at the sun in its fullest intensity. Eventually, the individual can no longer stand its brilliance, but its warmth continues to penetrate him. Likewise, the poet cannot completely pierce the veil between this world and the Ideal one which obscures his animating force, but when Emily's shining gaze does at times pierce the veil, then his vision is strengthened.

Last, the entire situation and process are somewhat Dantean in concept, and Joseph Mazzeo's commentary on Beatrice in Il Convivio seems especially helpful. He observes that "her beauty has not only a revealing power but a saving power²⁶ in that it can make a new nature in those who gaze upon it":

thou Mirror
 In whom, as in the splendor of the Sun,
 All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on.
 (ll. 30-32)

Continuing the discussion of Dante and his work, we ought also to consider Shelley's association of his "Seraph" with light imagery: she is radiant, a light, a Star, a Mirror. She radiates amidst a universe cast into gloom, doubt, and despair

("veiled glory of the lampless Universe"), and here her purpose has a definite affinity with the Beatrice of Il Convivio who "gives light to those who are in darkness and in gloom."²⁷

Although Dante certainly influenced Shelley, we must not equate Emilia Viviani with Beatrice. For Dante, Beatrice remained an inspiration both as the actual woman whom he loved and as la divina creature whom he imaged. But in Shelley's case, it would be erroneous to think that Emilia exerted, or could ever have exerted, a similar power over the poet. Whereas Dante devoted his entire being and genius to Beatrice,²⁸ Shelley proved himself incapable of a similar devotion to a single woman. Instead, he ultimately conceived a feminine Ideal who symbolized all qualities of the various women whom he had loved.

As the poet concludes the first of many hymns to Emily, she has gazed on him and inspired him: "ay, even the dim words which obscure thee now/Flash lightning-like with unaccustomed glow." The poetic imagination has begun to create.

To relate this unique experience, the speaker uses religious imagery. Again, his language can only suggest the experience, for language is, after all, limited in its power. But the importance of the moment cannot be denied:

I pray thee that thou blot from this sad
 song
 All of its much mortality and wrong,
 With those clear drops, which start like
 sacred dew
 From the twin lights thy sweet soul dark-
 ens through.

(ll. 35-38)

By creating poetry, the poet immortalizes Emily and himself:
 "Then smile on it, so that it might not die."²⁹

What is most fascinating about this section is Shelley's interesting variation on his use of "twin" imagery. First, he rather conventionally refers to Emily's eyes "twin lights," but he brilliantly expands his conception in a crucial line: "I thought before my death to see/Youth's vision thus never made perfect." (ll. 41-42) Shelley seems to mean vision in two ways. First, he has imaged the woman of the Ideal Woman. Thus, the powers of his poetic intellect have allowed him to glimpse a vision in this world. But Emily is not merely poetic inspiration. More importantly, she is equated with Love. Nowhere in the previous quest poems has a speaker been emboldened to declare his love: "Emily, I love thee." The love that he declares is one that Shelley had elaborated upon in A Defence of Poetry. For him, poetry is always a moral force which can guide man to achieve his divine potentiality. What Shelley means by love in his declaration to Emily could certainly include the sexual element, but he also sees love as a force emanating from poetry which can redeem the fallen world: "The great secret of morals is love! or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, person, not our own.... The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause."³⁰ To understand this more fully, we must read ahead to the concluding lines of this section: "I am not thine--I am part of

thee."³¹ This desire for absorption into another (and for Shelley higher) entity had also appeared in Alastor: "With frantic gesture and short breathless cry/Folded his frame in her dissolving arms." In Epipsychidion, this fusion is a spiritual experience: the force of Emily has descended upon the speaker and he is transformed into a poet. Through that "great instrument of moral good," he has gone out of his own nature and identified his being with Emily. When we understand how Emily complements his being, we understand the need of Shelley to use "twin" imagery. He still yearns for an "incestuous" union with one who co-responds fully to his own nature: "Would we two had been twins of the same mother!" But Shelley's line is both conditional and plaintive because such has not been his experience. Realizing this, he suggests another relationship: "Or that the name my heart lent to another/Could be a sister's bond for her and thee."³²

What he hoped was that both women--Emilia Viviani and Mary Shelley--might inspire him by "blending two beams of one eternity." They would then by supplementary forces of each other and symbolize his complete feminine (poetic) nature. That Shelley conceived of two women embodying that portion of his being of course underscores his doubts that this Love could ever be embodied in a single person. Certainly the fact that he suggests the "sister's bond" as an alternative to one antitype seems to be an admission that the expectations of realizing his quest had modified even if his aspirations had not. Shelley admits as much:

These names, though' dear, could paint not,
 as is due,
 How beyond refuge I am thine. Ah me!
 I am not thine--I am a part of thee.
 (ll. 50-52)

The speaker's exclamation "I am part of thee" transports him beyond earthly attachments, and he now cherishes Emily for what she symbolizes poetically. If she has transformed him into a poet, he has certainly transformed her into a divinity in the poem. The process is a reciprocal one. By peering into her "twin lights," he begins to see imaginatively about and beyond him. Thus, we now have the second reading of "I never thought before my death to see/Youth's vision thus made perfect."

During the composition of his tale, the speaker constantly reminds his audience of the burden that he feels as a poet. Throughout Epipsychidion this recognition of the difficulty of creating poetry becomes one of its signatures:

I measure
 The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
 And find--alas! mine own infirmity.
 (ll. 69-71)

Later, he becomes almost desperate about the poetic task that he has delegated to himself and agonizes "Ah! woe is me!/What have I dared? where am I lifted?" His admission of vulnerability creates a greater sympathy for him from his audience and, consequently, a greater intimacy between them. The poet is more recognizably human and frail. His use of the first person also makes Epipsychidion the most personal of the three

quest poems.

This personal element is especially evident when the poet narrates his tale. His audience is more closely engaged in his history because he directly relates his experiences to his readers. As his audience, we realize through the experience of reading the poem that Epipsychidion at its conclusion celebrates the union of Love and Death. The opening of the tale begins the poem's movement toward ultimate affirmation amidst doubt, and permanence despite mutability:

She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,
And lured me towards sweet Death; as Night by Day,
Winter by Spring, or Sorrow by swift Hope,
Led into light, life, peace.

(ll. 72-75)

The tone here is one of acceptance and joy. To understand this, we should focus upon "sweet death."³³ Death is not "sweet" because it is the final escape from this world--the total extinction of being. Instead, Death is, for the speaker, his means of attaining Life, of escape to the world of Love.

This gradual shift in the speaker's relationship to Death becomes a very positive relationship. The "Sorrow" that the heroes of Alastor and Prince Athanase bore until death now yields to the "swift Hope" of attaining Love through Emily. Under her guidance and inspiration, the poet composes another hymn of praise to her:

the brightness
Of her divinest presence trembles through
Her limbs...
And from her lips, as from a hyacinth full
Of honey-dew, a liquid murmur drops,
Killing the sense with passion.

(ll. 77-79, 83-85)

representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted cord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past."³⁴ Both Emily and poetry can be placed in a clearer context by recalling the discussion of love in The Banquet. Shelley's identification in Epipsychidion of love with re-animation and vitality derives to some extent from a discussion between Diotima and Socrates:

Love, then, O Socrates, is not as you imagine the love of the beautiful. '...What then?'--'Of generation and production in the beautiful.'--'Why then of generation?'--'Generation is something eternal and immortal in mortality.'³⁵

What Emily becomes for Shelley is a union of love and poetry. Her generative and regenerative powers--the "fiery dews that melt into the bosom of a frozen bud"--kindle Shelley's imaginative processes and by implication man's. Just as spring convinces man that death is not a permanent force in the natural world, but a temporary one, so too does the composition of poetry allow him to be reborn spiritually and imaginatively. Death thus becomes a necessary experience through which one can be regenerated eternally.

By appreciating Shelley's conception of Emily, we can better comprehend what Shelley thought that man might become. She is a mirror image of his potential divinity. Looking into the pool of Narcissus, man is enamoured not of what he is but of what he might become:

a mortal shape in-
 dued
 With love and life and light and deity,
 And motion which may change but cannot die;36
 An image of some bright Eternity;
 A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour
 Leaving the third sphere pilotless;37 a tender
 Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love
 ...A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning.

(ll. 112-118,
120)

In this section Shelley expands upon his concept of the dream-
 maiden and assigns her an importance that far exceeds any
 suggested in the earlier quest poems. He conceives her as
 a spiritual deity whose love can re-animate the world. Like
 a somewhat Christlike figure, Emily--so Shelley hoped--could
 redeem the world "from its visitations of decay"³⁸ through the
 penetrating force of her love. He also had hoped that Emily,
 like Christ, would appear as the Incarnation of Love:

a mortal shape in-
 dued
 With love and life and light and deity,
 ...A vision like incarnate April, warning,
 With smiles and tears, Frost the Anatomy
 Into his summer grave.

(ll. 112-113, 121-123)

To some extent, Shelley reworks the Christian myth of resur-
 rection here. Just as the souls of the dead are believed to
 arise at the time of death and again at the time of the Last
 Judgment, a similar event is suggested here. According to
 these lines, much of the world's good impulse has died, or at
 least lies dormant (to use a secular comparison). Yet under
 the radiating influence of Emily, that good, and indeed the
 universe as a whole, can be regenerated. This is why Shelley

has expanded the sphere of Emily's force from "fiery dews that melt/Into the bosom of a frozen bud" to a salutation of her as a more extended "Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning."

The presence of Emily can nurture the world as Nature nurtured the youth in Alastor. To convey this idea, Shelley relies very much upon a description of her in terms of Spring imagery. He has departed from the more limited conception of Emily as any particular woman. As Alastor and Prince Atharase had indicated to him, such a concept was too unsatisfactory. But by ascribing to Emily the powers of April which warn "Frost the Anatomy/Into his summer grave," Shelley is finally assigning an identity to this "Sweet Spirit" that transcends the limitations of mutability. Also, he uses the interaction of this Spring deity and Frost to prepare us for his own salvation and resurrection by the powers of his Vision (ll. 300-344). Here, Frost descends into its grave, but it is a "summer grave." Thus, there is the promise of renewed life and fruition. Likewise, the poet constantly fears his destruction (of his imaginative powers),

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

(ll. 123-125)

but hopes that the force of Love will renew him and inspire his efforts:

Lady mine,
 Scorn not these flowers of thought, the
 fading birth,
 Which from its heart of hearts that plant
 puts forth,
 Whose fruit, made perfect by thy sunny
 eyes,
 Will be as the trees of Paradise.

(ll. 383-387)

"Ah! woe is me!/What have I dared? where am I lifted?/how/
 Shall I descend and perish not?" indicates Shelley's continuing awareness of the chasm between an Ideal Love and his realization of It here." How shall I descend and perish not?" goes to the very center of the quest poems. How, indeed, can Shelley reconcile his imaginative aspirations of and yearning for this Love with the frailties that he perceives throughout mankind? Alastor and Prince Athanase both suggest a negative response.

The speaker's vulnerability and doubts continue into the next section:

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the
 Fate
 Whose course has been so starless!
 (ll. 130-131)

His addressing Emily as "Spouse!" "Sister!" and "Angel!" reveals the extent of his own dependence upon her and of her importance in his life. Obviously, few, if any, women would have been able to fulfill Shelley's expectations. While he does call Emily "Spouse," we must not forget that she is also his "Sister" and "Angel." Remembering her various roles allows a proper perspective on the section dealing with the poet's definition of "True Love." Although one can assume that Shelley's union

here with the embodiment of the vision would have been of a sexual nature, it would be wrong to define that union solely in terms of sexuality. As this study has shown, Shelley gradually realized the futility of seeking his feminine counterpart here, and the element of sexual love does not receive the attention in this work that Shelley had accorded it in the poet's dream in Alastor.³⁹ Instead, we should focus more on the spiritual element in Epipsychidion.⁴⁰ For example, although Shelley identifies Emily with his sister, he is not proposing an incestuous physical relationship. On the contrary, it is evidence of how deeply he longed for a woman who was a poetic twin, who was his feminine self. The term "Sister" recalls his earlier ardency when he exclaimed, "Would we two had been twins of the same mother!" To refer to Alastor, we might suggest that he still yearns for a woman, "herself a poet," who complements and comprehends his aspirations and imaginings. That he yearned for such a woman does not mean that Shelley still believed that he would find her. Although Epipsychidion considers Emily's influence upon the world in general, the poem really remains very much a private statement. The work does not expand to a celebration of the new world that poetry can effect. Epipsychidion lacks the Act IV of Prometheus Unbound in which "poetry creates anew the universe" for mankind. Instead, Shelley is more interested in setting forth his personal intellectual history and its relationship with Emily. In that sense, Epipsychidion's hero is closer to the solipsistic youth of Alastor than to the social poet of Prince

Athanase. Despite his stated passion for reforming the world, a more urgent desire for experiencing Love dominates Epipsychidion.

Shelley's realization that he was not destined to succeed in finding a co-respondent woman could have led to a paralyzing despair similar to that of the youth in Alastor. But Epipsychidion is a poem of hope, and Shelley can hope because he found consolation in the conception of Emily as the power of Love, his "virtus unitiva." More than "Spouse" or "Sister," Emily is Shelley's, and the world's, "Angel" who will guide him to Eternal Love.

To stress his conception of Emily as his "Guardian Angel," Shelley resorts to religious language in this address to her:

Oh, too soon adored by me!
 For in the fields of immortality
 My spirit should at first have worshipped
 thine
 A divine presence in a place divine.
(ll. 132-135)

Shelley worships at the altar of his beloved goddess:

I love thee; yes I feel
 That on the fountain of my heart a seal
 Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright
 For thee.
(ll. 138-141)

It is useful to equate Emily with a basically divine force in order to prepare for the direction that the remainder of the poem takes. Stated briefly, its concerns become increasingly less mundane and more other worldly. There is an earth to

"heaven" movement that contrasts markedly with the decidedly physical locus of Alastor.⁴¹

Shelley makes this distinction in this portion of Epipsychidion. As an alternative to adoring Emily "in the fields of immortality," Shelley states that he "should have moved beside it (her spirit) on this earth, / A shadow of its substance from its birth." But he has done neither and remains dissatisfied with his present state: "But not as now." Thus, he seeks some way of uniting with the eternal world of Love, and he looks to his "Pilot of the Fate / Whose course has been so starless" to lead him. The role that she will assume is that of a mediator between mortal and the Divine ("some bright Eternity"), a mediator "between what is divine and what is mortal."⁴²

In this section, an increasing sense of intimacy between speaker and Emily emerges. This intimacy is conveyed simply and aptly by the use of the personal "we" and in connection with a musical analogy. The "we" has the effect of uniting them in spirit, if not in body, and Shelley uses the concept of combining notes of music to produce harmony to establish his feeling of oneness with Emily. "It is not melody alone but harmony"⁴³ that has been created here:

We--are we not formed, as notes of music
 are,
 For one another, though dissimilar;
 Such difference without discord as can
 make
 Those sweetest sounds...?
 (ll. 142-145)

The speaker becomes the instrument of poetic inspiration through whom Emily speaks. This episode is another variation on the Pentecostal theme that we observed in the Invocation of Alastor: "I wait thy breath, Great Parent":

Thy wisdom speaks in me, and bids me
dare
Beacon the rocks on which high hearts are
wrecked.

(ll. 146-147)

Shelley's description of himself as a beacon helps us to understand better his role as a vessel of Poetry. He hopes that the Splendor of Emily will guide others and that her Splendor will be diffused through his poetry. In a way, he takes up the concerns that he explored in the Preface to Alastor. The "high hearts" whom he now wishes to instruct would correspond to the "luminaries of the world" whom he mentioned in the Preface. This image of the poet as a beacon of truth ("thy wisdom speaks in me") in a world of ignorance also recalls the lines in Prince Athanase in which Laian's turret lighted the way of the fishermen to safety.

In addition, the poet is a beacon to himself. His composition will assuage the feelings of disillusionment and futility which have beset him during the course of his quest. The speaker in Epipsychidion is the only one of the three heroes who actually composes poetry, and that process affords him a certain consolation. It accounts for the tonal difference that distinguishes Epipsychidion from the earlier quest poems, because through the writing of his poetry the

speaker believed that he was also achieving a permanent union with Eternal Love. The dissatisfaction expressed as "But not as now" will gradually yield to a serenity and acceptance that are the direct consequence of the salutary powers of poetry:

What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship--what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave-- and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar?⁴⁴

The speaker communicates these powers of poetry directly when he discourses on the nature of Love to mankind. In the opening lines of this revelation, he takes care to separate himself from general mankind which he believes to be in error about Love:

I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each should
 select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise,
 commend
To cold oblivion....

(ll. 149-153)

He assumes the role of teacher and sage here. The speaker is like Zonoras when he tries to impart some of his knowledge to man. In this situation, the poet functions almost like a religious leader who wishes to convert/through Love/ others to his beliefs, thus allowing them to be redeemed. It is necessary to place this entire section in a religious context because Shelley's famous pronouncements on Love have

often been misinterpreted and misunderstood. The standard reading by some critics is that Shelley is advocating Free Love.⁴⁵ That is true, but it is how they define Free Love that distorts its meaning in Epipsychidion.

Shelley's concept of Free Love should not be associated with promiscuity and licentiousness. This is a common tendency of those who read too much autobiography into this poem. Certainly Shelley was attracted to and attractive to a number of women during his lifetime. Whether or not these mutual attractions developed into sexual relationships should not really be a key consideration for a proper understanding of these lines. Instead, we are better critics of Shelley if we grasp that his concept of Free Love is one associated with generosity and selflessness, one associated with *caritas*. For example, when Shelley argues against selecting "out of the crowd a mistress or a friend," he is consciously rejecting the exclusively egocentric concerns that characterized the youth in Alastor. In Epipsychidion the speaker is very careful to inform us that the rest are "fair and wise." In other words, they too should be cherished. When an individual fails to extend his love to others, he dooms them, and by implication himself, to "cold oblivion.":

...and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary foot-
steps tread
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world.

(ll. 154-157)

"The broad highway of the world" indicates how pervasive this self-inflicted bondage has become in the universe. This is the real message of Shelley's doctrine of Free Love: Love can become the liberating force through which "those poor slaves" are freed from isolation and ignorance. To place this doctrine in even sharper focus, we should recall these lines from Alastor:

If no bird, insect, or gentle beast
I consciously have injured, but still loved
And cherished these my kindred.
(ll. 13-15)

That is Shelley's primary concern, that we learn to cherish and love our "fair and wise" brethren. In Alastor, Shelley restricted this interaction to the youth and Nature; in Epipsychidion, he hopes to extend that interaction first to poet and society and then ultimately to each person and his society. Unless he heeds this message, man will continue on the treadmill of enslavement in marriage and other relationships:

and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous
foe,⁴⁶
The dreariest and longest journey go.
(ll. 157-159)

This consideration of Free Love versus bondage is something that Shelley takes up in A Defence of Poetry, too:

The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.⁴⁷

"A going out of our own nature" is precisely what the heroes of Alastor and Prince Athanese failed to do. As a result, they died in despair. Indeed, in Epipsychidion Shelley comments upon the futility of anyone attempting to realize their limited concept of love:

Narrow
The heart that loves, the brain that con-
templates,
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds
thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

(ll. 169-173)

In the process of composition, he also reveals the extent to which he has learned from his past history. Hence, Epipsychidion may be interpreted in part as Shelley's own admission and recognition of his own error and as his expression of a hope that his experiences--which have taught him--will not be "barren of instruction to other men." One could not find a better commentary upon and summation of the youth's dilemma and tragedy in Alastor than the lines quoted above. In them Shelley has recognized the noble aspirations and inevitable failure of anyone "that creates/One object, and one form, and builds/Thereby/A sepulchre for its eternity."

Shelley's commentary on True Love is also related to a crucial observation about the quest for Love that he had made in the Preface to Epipsychidion:

I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.⁴⁸

Interpreted in this context, the following lines reveal the magnitude of Love's function (through Emily's power) in the poem:

True Love in this differs from gold and
 clay,
 That to divide is not to take away.
 Love is like understanding that grows
 bright
 Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
 Imagination....

(ll. 160-164)

To identify Love's mediator with Emilia Viviani would have been another instance of a Shelleyan spirit building "A sepulchre for its eternity." Rather, the comparison of True Love to the Imagination seems helpful in further identifying Emily as a spiritual vessel of all that is fair and wise and beautiful in the world. For Love, like the Imagination,

 from earth and sky,
 And from the depths of human fantasy,
 As from a thousand prisms and mirrors,
 fills
 The Universe with glorious beams, and
 kills
 Error, the worm, with many a sun-like
 arrow
 Of its reverberated lightning.

(ll. 164-169)

This is similar to the process by which Poetry acts upon the Imagination (as the cause of moral good):

Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts....Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.⁴⁹

The spheres of Love and the Imagination are enlarged by their absorbing moral good from the universe and reflecting back upon the world even more Good. The Imagination, the instrument of Love, constantly radiates that Good through the efficacy of Poetry. Thus, the Imagination remains a constant central force of moral good at the same time that it expands the boundaries of its effluence. It is not unlike the sun whose rays extend their warmth further over the earth as the sun ascends higher in the sky:

It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; It is at the same time the root and bloom of all other systems of thought....It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things.⁵⁰

The diffusion and the radiance that emanate from the Imagination correspond to an extension of an earlier description of Emily whose Beauty "penetrates and clasps and fills the world." Emily, the animating force of the poet, inspires the poet who first receives the effluences of her rays and then composes. He is the vessel through which she speaks, just as the Imagination is the instrument of her love, which spans the chasm between mortal and Divine:

And if she finds one worthy to behold her,
 that man will feel her power for salvation
 when she accords to him her salutation,
 which humbles him till he forgets all wrongs.
 God has graced her with an even greater gift:
 whoever speaks with her shall speak with Him.⁵¹

After attempting to define the nature of True Love, the speaker begins the major portion of his quest history. This section of Epipsychidion reads like an elaboration of the experiences already described in the two other quest poems, especially Alastor. For instance, when he mentions "a Being" whom he had sought earlier in his life, the narrator makes it clear that he first "imaged to himself" the vision and then sought a feminine embodiment of it. In this he differs from Dante and Petrarca who each loved a woman whom he elevated to a position of reverence. Shelley has reversed the process, and this may very well account for the apparent aimlessness of his search, first in Alastor, then in Prince Athanase, and finally his recollection of it in Epipsychidion and later his subsequent collapse:

There was a Being whom my spirit oft 52
 Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,
 In the clear golden prime of my youth's
 dawn,
 Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
 Amid the enchanted mountains, and the
 caves
 Of divine sleep, and on air-like waves
 Of wonder-level dream.

(ll. 190-196)

Shelley's use of fantastical description serves for more than decoration. In his poetry, he tries to convey the vision of "this Elysian earth" which he one day hoped to effect

through his works. He dedicated himself to "create anew the universe," a commitment which he mentions in his discussion of the nature and power of Love:

the eternal law
By which those live, to whom this world of
 life
Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
Tells for the promise of a later birth
The wilderness of this Elysian earth. (ll. 185-189)

Although the poet is conscious of his potential role as a reformer of mankind, he really focuses his energies on the more individualized aspect of his history. That is, Epipsychidion becomes increasingly more personalized, almost solipsistic, until the poet's sole concern is his imagined flight with Emily away from this world.

We glimpse something of the narrator's exceedingly private nature in the following lines:

She met me, robed in such exceeding glory
That I beheld her not. In solitudes
Her voice came to me through the whis-
 pering woods,
And from the fountains of the odors deep
Of flowers, which, like lips murmuring in
 their sleep
Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them
 there,
Breathed but of her to the enamoured air. (ll. 199-205)

From the moment that the narrator beheld his beloved, Love became his Fate. Love's force compelled him to undertake a lifelong pursuit of the feminine Ideal that he celebrated in high verse. Shelley's inability to look directly upon his

vision ("She met me, robed in such exceeding glory that I beheld her not/") may have been influenced by a similar event in Dante's *Paradiso*:

ma quella folgro nel mio sguardo
 si che da prima il viso non sofferse.

(III. ll.
 128-129)

But on mine eyes her light at first so blazed,
 They could not bear the beauty and the burning. 53
 (III. ll. 128-129)

The important distinction that must be made is that Dante celebrated an actual person while Shelley beheld his "Being on an imagined shore."

From Alastor to Epipsychidion, the spiritual nature of this "Being" has been acknowledged, but only in the last of the poems does Shelley admit the futility of ever finding its mortal counterpart. Instead, Shelley transfigures his conception of the "Being" ("such exceeding glory") and also depicts its omnipresence in Nature: "In solitudes/Her voice came to me through the whispering woods,/And from the fountains and odors deep/Of flowers." We are once more in a world resembling the youth's in Alastor and recalling the situation in On Love:

Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, and the waters, and the sky. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul, awakens the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic excess, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone.⁵⁴

In the essay, the experience seems to be an antidote to the speaker's feelings of isolation and loneliness, but in Epipsyichidion the episode moves the hero to seek the Incarnation of the "Being" whom he loves:

Then from the caverns of my dreamy
 youth
 I sprang as one sandalled with plumes of
 fire,
 And towards the lodestar of my one desire
 I flitted, like a dizzy moth,⁵⁵ whose flight
 Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet flight.
 (ll. 217-221)

The speaker's comparison of himself to "a dizzy moth" is one that places this entire episode in a clearer perspective. Shelley realizes that any attempt to pursue his vision in this world must ultimately fail. But he also suggests how inextricable from his own destiny is the pursuit of that "Being." For once he has imagined her, he must seek her. Because, according to Shelley, "a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth," what the poet sees in his vision must be true. That is, it must exist. The entire thrust of these lines and the next one hundred indicates Shelley's recognition that while he still believes in the reality of the Being, his belief that she was embodied in one woman was erroneous. We might expect the speaker to become despondent about the futility of his past quests. Instead, his Epipsyichidion is ultimately a poem about triumph over mortality and its limitations. All the images of conflagration--"plumes of fire," "radiant death," and "fiery sepulchre"--will recur in the conclusion when Shelley redefines the role of Death and its relationship to Love and himself.

As he relates his past quests, however, it is clear that he still had not--at that time in his life--resolved this dilemma of where he could unite with the vision. He tells us that like a "dizzy moth" he sought his dream-maiden everywhere. In this portion of the composition, he describes her as being "like a god throned on a winged planet/Whose burning plumes to tenfold swiftness fan it." But he continues to think of her in terms of a mortal being. Rather than being identified with any particular woman, "her burning plumes" should be associated with the poet "sandalled with plumes of fire." That her plumes fan the "winged planet to tenfold swiftness" suggests the visitation of Intellectual Beauty into this "vale of tears," the "dreary cone of our life's shade." Under her presence and influence, the poet springs into intellectual activity: Her fire has kindled his. The "Being's association with Poetry and with the inspiration of its composition has already been suggested earlier when the narrator defines "Her spirit" as "the harmony of truth."

In the
words
Of antique verse and high romance, in
form
Sound, color, in whatever checks that Storm
Which with the shattered present chokes
the past,
And in that best philosophy, whose taste
Makes this cold common hell, our life, a
doom
As glorious as a fiery martyrdom.

(11. 209-215)

Having undertaken this quest, the poet speaks of his obsession in a highly revealing line: "I would have followed, though the grave between/Yawned like a gulf whose spectres

are unseen." At the time that Alastor was composed, Shelley's own ambiguity about Death left its role in the quest unclear. As my discussion of that poem showed, he certainly equivocated about Death and feared that it might indeed be the gulf--the force of extinction--that would permanently separate him from the object of his relentless searching.

The irony is that Shelley gradually realized that Death might be his only means of attaining a permanent union with Eternal Love. Until then, he had to content himself with the inconstant visitation of his "Being." That may be the significance of the voice who tells the poet "O thou of hearts/ the weakest,/The phantom is beside thee whom thou seekest." The force exists about the poet--at least on occasion--but he misinterprets that presence to be a physical one:

Then I--'Where?'--the world's echo answered my 'where?'
 And in that silence, and in my despair,
 I questioned every tongueless wind that flew
 Over my tower of mourning, if it knew
 Whither 'twas fled, this soul out of my soul;
 (ll. 234-238)

The passage reveals the fatalistic control that the vision assumes over the poet's life. Having envisioned "the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man," the poet cannot cease in his pursuit of the vision. This is despite his recognition that this pursuit "is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends." This is crucial because if the poet cannot discover the antitype of his vision⁵⁶ but also cannot bear to be separated at any time from the vision, then obviously he must evolve an alternative means

of attaining his union. He alludes to his situation in the following lines:

But neither prayers nor verse could dissipate
 The night which closed on her; nor uncreate
 That world within this Chaos, mine and
 me,
 Of which she was the veiled Divinity. (ll. 241-244)

The poet's imagination is powerless to prevent the occasional departure from this world of the dream-maiden. At the same time, so strong are those powers that the vision within the poet cannot be entirely extinguished. Without her imminence, though, the Imagination does wane and she appears as a "veiled Divinity" (as opposed to one "robed in exceeding glory"). But the poet still perceives her in his mind, however dimly.

The poet confronts the same type of situation that the youth of Alastor encountered:

And therefore I went forth, with hope and
 fear
 And every gentle passion sick to death,
 Feeding my course with expectation's
 breath,
 Into the wintry forest of our life;
 ...
 Seeking among those untaught foresters
 If I could find one form resembling hers,
 In which she might have masked herself
 from me. (ll. 246-249, 253-255)

These lines recapitulate that part of the hero's search for the veiled maid in Alastor when he was beset by the twin furies of hope and fear and later when he forsook "the cottagers, the mountaineer, and the youthful maiden" who tried to nourish and

befriend him. As he struggles through life, the poet likewise comprehends his own errors. In that sense he is still untaught. Only when he passes through a state in which he "was not alive nor dead" does he begin to dispel his ignorance and to perceive the vision correctly--youth's vision is thus made perfect.

Before he can do that, however, he plunges even more deeply into an experiential world. One of his experiences is an encounter with a force that envelops the poet with her pestilence and nearly destroys him:

There,--One whose voice was venomed
 melody
 Sate by a well, under blue night-shade
 bowers;
 The breath of her false mough was like
 faint flowers;
 Her touch was an electric poison,--flame
 Out of her locks into my vitals came,
 and from her living cheeks and bosom flew
 A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
 Into the core of my green heart, and lay
 Upon its leaves; until, as hair grown gray
 O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown
 prime
 With ruins of unseasonable time.

(ll. 256-266)

Attempting to identify this "One" proves to be very difficult. Critics have suggested interpretations that range from Shelley's having contracted venereal disease at Oxford to a particular woman in his life.⁵⁷ Another possible interpretation of this perplexing event in the speaker's life is that the "One" represents the delusory nature of life in this world. Specifically, Shelley may suggest that during his youth, Life seemed to promise him the fulfillment of his quest. This situation recalls the experience of Prince Athanase when he

"meets in the ship, in which he is embarked, a lady who appears to him to embody his ideal of love and beauty." In Epipsychidion, the "One whose voice was venomed melody" can be compared to a Siren who is beautiful, but who actually beckons the naive youth to his destruction. After all, the speaker does tell us that she sings to him ("venomed melody") and lures him with sweetness ("faint flowers and honey-dew"). He is, of course, speaking in retrospect and thus can realize how poisonous her presence really was, but in his youth such knowledge was wanting. Also, a similar incident in Una Favola, composed at the time of Epipsychidion, may be helpful for us to use in our interpretation of the "venomed melody":

...Life...had the fame of a potent enchantress. She was tall of person and beautiful, cheerful and easy in her manners, and richly adorned, and, as it seemed from her ready unveiling of herself, she wished well to this youth. But he soon perceived that she was more false than any Siren....58

Life to both youths seemed to promise attainment of union with the Ideal ("e siccome dal suo svelarsi voleva bene a questo giovane"), but for each it would eventually offer only despair and disillusionment in their quests. Shelley comments on the false expectations of his youth:

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought.
(ll. 267-268)

Life had led him to believe that he could discover the one who embodied the feminine nature of the poet's idealized self. Instead, his actual experiences would suggest that life betrayed

shape," his deliverance does not kindle his poetic imagination: it is not a source of inspiration for the poet. Instead, the speaker tells us that

...I was laid asleep, spirit and limb,
 And all my being became bright or dim
 As the Moon's image in a summer sea,
 According as she smiled or frowned on me;
 And there I lay, within a chaste cold bed
 Alas, I then was nor alive nor dead.

(ll. 295-300)

This state partially restores the weakened poet and allows him a temporary respite from the fervid intensity of his own creative powers. It also allows him an equally necessary relief from the pursuit of those powers' creation in this world--a pursuit that destroyed the poets in the earlier quest poems. His deliverance functions somewhat like the faculty of Reason. Its illuminating powers⁶¹ allow him to analyze the poet's role in creating the Ideal form and then objectify-
 ing it. During the course of his imaginative convalescence under the guidance of this force, the poet undergoes two crucial experiences. First, order is restored to his being and the division between his imaginative and physical selves ceases:

She hid me, as the Moon may hide the
 night
 From its own darkness, until all was bright
 Between the Heaven and Earth of my
 calm mind.

(ll. 287-289)

When the Vision does finally arrive in the poet's life ("at length into the obscure forest came/The Vision I had sought through grief and shame"), both his imaginative and physical natures become complementary forces united in the ultimate quest of Eternal Love. No longer will the human nature of the poet ("Earth") seek a physical embodiment of the mind's creation ("Heaven"). But Reason's powers are not limitless. Thus, although the hero realizes that he cannot succeed in his earthly quest, he cannot yet redirect the nature of that quest. Consequently, the Imagination ceases to recreate for the poet his vision:

What storms then shock the ocean of my
 sleep,
 Blotting that Moon, whose pale and waning
 lips
 Then shrank as the sickness of eclipse;
 And how my soul was as a lampless sea.⁶²
 (11. 308-311)

Having realized the futility of pursuing his vision here, the hero is now afflicted by another illness. His Reason has shown him why he has failed in the quest so far, but it seems powerless ("that Moon whose pale and waning lips") to guide him further. He is in danger of despairing once more because he cannot see rightly: "And how my soul was as a lampless sea." He too may be imprisoned on "the rocks on which high hearts are wrecked":

till from coast to
 coast
 The moving billows of my being fell
 Into a death of ice, immovable.
 (11. 314-316)

The poet suffers in this Dantean hell because at the moment he cannot conceive of an alternate means of discovering Love:

Alas, I then was nor alive nor dead;
 For at her silver voice came Death and
 Life,
 Unmindful of their accustomed strife,
 ...
 And through the cavern without wings they
 flew,
 And cried, 'Away! he is not of our crew.'
 I wept, and though it be a dream, I weep.
(ll. 300-302
 306-308)

This ambiguous relationship with Life and Death is also explored in Una Favola. In that work, the youth has made the mistake of rejecting Life and loving Death solely for its own sake:

...and passion so overcame him, that upon his knees he prayed Death to love him as he loved her, and consent to do his pleasure. But Death said, "Audacious that thou art, with whose desire has Death ever complied? If thou lovest me not, perchance I might love thee-- beloved by thee, I hate thee and I fly thee." Thus saying, she went forth from the cavern, and her dusky and ethereal form was soon lost amid the interwoven boughs of the forest....He cast himself upon the grass and wept for many hours....63

The hero has lost sight of his original objective: he has, instead, relegated Love to a position secondary to Life and Death. "At bay with his thoughts" in Epipsychidion and too enamored of Death (as a force of extinction) in Una Favola, he is once more alone and isolated.

Having mistakenly assumed that Life and Death are contrary forces, the speaker in Epipsychidion resides in limbo: "Alas, I was nor alive nor dead." Although his Reason has shown him

the errors in his conception of Love,

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought,

the Imagination through the power of love will relume the path of his journey to it, which is at present only a journey in la selva oscura.

In contrast to others who exist in limbo, however, the poet's Beatific Vision is restored to him:

At length, into the obscure forest came
The Vision I had sought through grief and
shame.

...
And from her presence life was radiated
Through the gray earth and branches bare
and dead;

....

this glorious

One

Floated into the cavern where I lay,
And called my Spirit.⁶⁴

(ll. 321-322, 325-326, 336-338)

This restoration assumes great importance in the poem for a number of reasons. First, the work itself achieves a fine circular motion because the radiating presence of the Vision is yet another elaboration upon the Emily described earlier as "a Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning." In this context, the speaker's portrayal of himself in the following lines suggests that the poet is now a metaphor of life also:

and the dreaming

clay
Was lifted by the thing that dreamed be-
low
As smoke by fire.

(ll. 338-340)

He is like a winged seed, "like a corpse within its grave,"

that bursts with life: "I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night/Was penetrating me with living light."

The effects of this restoration are felt throughout the earth and within the poet. At first, the Vision--like "a Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning"--renews life in a wintry, barren world:

And from her presence life was radiated
Through the gray earth and branches bare
and dead;
So that her way was paved and roofed
above
With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding
love.

(ll. 325-328)

What is especially striking about these lines is that "her way was paved and roofed above/With flowers." For Shelley demonstrates the pervasiveness of Emily's effluence "One intense diffusion, One serene Omnipresence,"--that penetrates beneath the surface, too. In addition, the flowers that Shelley speaks of may be interpreted in two ways. First, as the "Metaphor of Spring," Emily--through the poet's composition --does re-animate the dormant earth. But we must not overlook the comparison of these flowers to "thoughts of budding love." Here, the narrator alludes to the re-animation of his own poetical powers through the inspiration of Emily--"these flowers of thought" as he called them later. Like "a winged seed," the poet rises from his "chaste cold bed." Once he has been restored, he begins again the process of composition. Thus it is particularly appropriate that Emily's path should be "roofed above with flowers" because it suggests her fusion with both the earth and the poet below. She assumes a salu-

tary function here. In the presence of her radiance, the speaker's death-like state yields to Life. When Emily penetrates his being and revives him, he pulsates with renewed life: "the dawn of my long night/Was penetrating me with living light." Emily's way is thus doubly paved. In one sense, the world is covered with a profusion of blossoms and buds. But more important, the poet sends forth his own "flowers of thought." The poetic imagination has been rekindled, his love for Emily regenerated, and his quest for her resumed:

I knew it was the Vision veiled from me
So many years--that it was Emily.
(ll. 343-344)

When Emily enters into the poet's psyche ("the cavern where I lay"), he immediately recognizes her. He has begun to perceive his relationship with the Vision correctly. That is the significance of "I knew it was the Vision veiled from me/So many years." Shelley is not saying only that as a mortal he has been separated from his Love. More significantly, he also comments on what he has learned from the quests of his own life and in his poetry. Specifically, the Vision has been veiled in the sense that the means of uniting with it formerly seemed obscured or hidden. Now, however, Emily has returned to him, and his completion of Epipsychidion will reveal the ultimate direction of his quest and its completion. With the return of Emily the poet's vision has been restored. He begins to see imaginatively again through "Twin spheres of

light."⁶⁶ This concept bears some relationship to Shelley's comparing himself to a beacon through which Emily's wisdom speaks. Here, the poet's mind will illumine the world through Emily's light. Under her influence, Shelley's poetry will enlighten the world and create within it a universe of love. Some of that good has already occurred because Shelley identifies himself with Earth. For the first time in the quest poems, a hero is united with rather than alienated from the physical world: "This passive Earth,/This world of love, this me." The speaker also identifies himself with both of his mental faculties: Imagination and Reason. He does this because he can now perceive the relative importance of each to his quest:

So ye, bright regents, with alternate sway
Govern my sphere of being, night and day!
(11. 360-361)

Of course he needs the Imagination to inspire the composition of poetry and the recreation of his vision. But without Reason he might have continued to err in his conception of Love--an error that would have frustrated his composition and further veiled the Vision from him. Reason illumines the poet's relationship with his Imaginative creation. Shelley seems to assume that this sway of Imagination and Reason functions as a natural law, in much the same way that the Sun and Moon control the elements in the universe:

By everlasting laws, each wind and tide
To its fit cloud, and its appointed cave.
and guide
(11. 349-351)

Shelley's concept of the mutual attraction of elements in Nature complements somewhat his belief in the poet's "soul-mate" as his other half. To some extent, he saw in Nature a mirror of the relationship between the lover and his beloved, "this soul out of my soul."⁶⁷ Hence, his use of double imagery--"Twin Spheres"--fuses very effectively the two forces of Imagination and Reason whose powers are actually complementary rather than contrary. It anticipates Shelley's final decision on the proper relationship between Life and Death--two forces that at first may appear to be antithetical. Shelley indicates something of this change in attitude when he discusses the effects of the twin spheres upon the seasons:

And, through the shadows of the seasons three,
From Spring to Autumn's sere maturity,
Light it into the Winter of the tomb,
Where it may ripen to a brighter bloom.

(ll. 364-367)

His "brighter bloom" may refer to his belief that his poetry will be greater under the continued influence of Emily. But "bloom" also seems to be analogous to his comparison of "flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love." The cessation of his physical being may really be the prelude to union with Eternal Love. His use of "ripen" suggests an organic process in which death becomes his source of Life Eternal.

The serene, confident, loving mood of the speaker after the reappearance of Emily is sustained through the remainder of Epipsychidion. In this mood, he continues the process of healing the self-division that once threatened the fulfillment

of his quest. Now that he has understood the importance of both Imagination and Reason, he appeals to another poetic faculty to enter this aura of calm unity:

68

Thou too, O Comet beautiful and fierce,
 Who drew the heart of this frail Universe
 Towards thine own; till, wrecked in that convulsion,
 Alternating attraction and repulsion,
 Thine went astray and that was rent in twain;
 Oh, float into our azure heaven again.

(ll. 368-373)

These lines are difficult to interpret. Shelley may be commenting on the despair and destruction that overtook the heroes of Alastor and Prince Athanase. Because of their youthful inexperience, they believed that the embodiment of the Vision could be found in this world. What the poet created in his mind he sought here: "Who drew the heart of this frail Universe /Towards thine own." Instead of consummating his quest, he became the haunted wanderer of Alastor who never returned to the happy world of his childhood and never entered the world of his vision: "Thine went astray, and that was rent in twain." The Comet, then, is to be associated with the Imagination, but its potentially destructive nature. In his innocence the poet misjudged his relationship with the vision and this world. He erred because the Imagination isolated him through the intensity of its powers. But the intensity isolated him from his mankind and absorbed him into the "self-centered seclusion" of the Imagination. When this occurred and he failed to find the object of his quest, his life went out of control, "rent in twain" between the world of Ideal Love and this.

Because the Imagination could so dazzle the poet and

blind his perception of what he created, Reason must return and restore, at least partially, the poet's vision. Once the vision has been fully restored--under the influence of Emily--the poet can recognize and thus control the more solipsistic tendencies of his creative nature: "Oh, float into our azure heaven again."

With the balance among his faculties restored, the poet resumes the task of being a poet:

Lady mine,
Scorn not these flowers of thought, the
...fading birth
Whose fruit, made perfect by thy sunny
eyes,
Will be as the trees of Paradise.

(ll. 383-384
386-387)

Besides their echoes of Il Paradiso and his own Prometheus Unbound in particular, these lines find a complement in A Defence of Poetry. "The fading birth" is the poet's realization that the resumption of composition simultaneously hastens its end: "for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness." ⁷⁰ Shelley's reference to "transitory brightness" seems especially applicable to the situation in Epipsychidion. Inspired once more by Emily, the poet reflects her "exceeding glory" onto an imaginative universe. In the process of creating perfect poetry,--"whose fruit made perfect by thy sunny eyes/Will be as the trees of Paradise"--the poet himself attains a state of perfection, if only temporarily:

...but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.⁷¹

But Shelley demands more from the experience and can no longer be content with having his mind awakened "to transitory brightness." Instead, he desires to unite with Love permanently. The last section of Epipsychidion charts the poet's ultimate resolution of his quest for Eternal Love:

The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me.
 To whatsoe'er of dull mortality
 Is mine, remain a vestal sister still;
 To the intense, the deep the imperishable,
 Not mine but me, henceforth be thou united.
 (ll. 388-392)

It is essential that we understand completely the shift that occurs in this last section of the poem. Not until the concluding thirteen lines does Shelley concern himself again with the immediate world. And when he does, it is to serve as a contrast between his present state and the poet's in Epipsychidion. Here, however, it seems clear that the type of union that the poet seeks cannot be a physical one. He no longer seeks a human counterpart to the dream-maiden. For the poet because he learned that he must find her elsewhere:

To whatsoe'er of dull mortality
 Is mine remain a vestal sister still.

Unlike the heroes in the earlier quest poems, the speaker perceives an alternative to his death. That Emily will "remain a vestal sister still" reveals just how radically

Epipsychidion departs from its predecessors in its treatment of the search for Love. For in this poem the speaker perceives a means of uniting with his vision, a means that utilizes the force of death that seemed so much a nemesis earlier. What he proposes to Emily is a spiritual fusion of the poet and Love, a resurrection of his spirit to his life-source:

To the intense, the deep, the imperishable
 Not mine but me, henceforth be thou
 united.

Death for the poet ceases to be a negating force, and Shelley's previous ambivalence about its role in the quest is completely absent here. Indeed, Death in Epipsychidion can be a force of absolute liberation from "dull mortality" to Eternity. Shelley makes this very clear when he compares true love--another liberating force--to Death:

but true Love never yet
 Was thus constrained: it overleaps all fence:
 Like lightning, with invisible violence
 Piercing its continents; like Heaven's free breath,
 Which he who grasps can hold not; like Death
 Who rides upon a thought, and makes his way
 Through temple, tower, and palace, and the array
 Of arms.

(ll. 397-404)

Once more, Shelley elaborates upon his doctrine of "True Love." What he stresses is the contrast between those chained in this world "who travel to their homes among the dead" and himself who loves Love. Those others are confined to the "vacant prison" of Earth and are truly dead:

We decay
 like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
 Convulse us and consume us day by day,
 And cold hopes swarm like worms within our
 living clay.

(Adonais, XXXIX, 348-351)

But for the poet the "painted veil" is about to be torn
 asunder ⁷². He realizes that the power of Love transcends
 time and mutability, and it is through Love that he can pass
 beyond Death to Eternal Life:

more strength has Love than he or they;
 For it can burst his charnel, and make free
 The limbs in chains, the heart in agony,
 The soul in dust and chaos.⁷³

(ll. 404-407)

Thus a dual liberation is at work within the poem's narration
 of the hero's history. First, Death--like Love--releases
 man from earthly bondage. But Shelley does not perceive
 the role of Death merely as a means of escape from this
 world. Second, and more important then, Death releases the
 poet to a realm of Eternal Love. The poet will die, Death
 will die, and he will be reborn in Eternity:

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
 ...
 He lives, he wakes--'tis Death is dead, not he.

(Adonais. XL. 352,
 XLI. 361)

Once the poet has united with Emily (by dying), he will stand
 among the Elect and dwell in Eternal Love.

With Love as his guide, the poet prepares for his imag-
 inary embarkation from earth. His moment of liberation nears,
 and all in Nature harmoniously propels him on his journey.

In marked contrast to the wild voyage described in Alastor, the scene here is best described as one of tranquility and serenity:

Emily,
 A ship is floating in the harbour now,
 A wind is hovering o'er the mountain's brow;
 There is a path on the sea's azure floor,
 No keel has ever ploughed that path before.
 (ll. 407-410)

It is fitting that Shelley should echo Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner about the uniqueness of his voyage: "no keel has ever ploughed that path before."⁷⁴ Both poems are works about the liberating powers of the Imagination and its ability to transport certain individuals to worlds experienced by very few. Here, Shelley's hero anticipates in narrating his imminent death and his "journey through the unapparent."⁷⁵ During this section of the composition, the poet seems more like an energy diffused throughout the universe than as a mortal on a journey. His seeing a "path on the sea's azure floor" reminds us of the omnipresence of Emily whose "way was paved and roofed above/With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love." The poet also seems to be everywhere and enlists a number of opposing elements in Nature to unite to accelerate his voyage:

And we between her wings will sit, while Night,
 And Day, and Storm, and Calm, pursue their flight,
 Our ministers, along the boundless Sea,
 Treading each other's heels unheededly.
 (ll. 418-421)

Whereas the poets in Alastor and Prince Athanase were weakened and finally destroyed by contrary elements within their natures, here the poet seems to have succeeded in harnessing and fusing all potential energies (within and without) for his union with the Eternal. Having united his Imagination and Reason to consummate his quest, he now imaginatively commands Nature's forces to help him to complete that quest.

The fulfillment of that aspiration would evidently be achieved by re-experiencing in Eternity some type of Eden and the Golden Age of Greece together. Thus, the best of Nature and of Civilization is joined and enjoyed by the poet:

This land would have remained a solitude
 But for some pastoral people native there,
 Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air
 Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
 Simple and spirited; innocent and bold.

...

There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
 And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
 As clear as elemental diamond,
 Or serene morning iar; and far beyond,
 The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer
 Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year.

(ll. 425-429, 435-440)

Amidst all this pastoral splendor which the poet now imagines, music is heard. Youth's vision has now been made perfect, and his union with all in Nature produces a universal harmony that exists everywhere in his visionary Eden: "And all the place is peopled with sweet airs." But it is music, though existing everywhere, that few hear. Shelley is very careful to stress the solitary aspects of this realm and, most important, of his experience with Emily in this newly created Paradise:

This land would have remained a solitude
But for some pastoral people native there.

In this, Epipsychidion differs considerably from Prometheus Unbound with its apocalyptic ending and rebirth of the universe for all mankind:

This is the day, which down the void abyss
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism,
and Conquest is dragged captive through the deep:
Love...

And folds over the world its healing wings
...springs

...

This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

(IV. 554-556, 557,
560-561, 576-578)

By the time that he composed Epipsychidion, Shelley's poetic Apocalypse had become very much a private experience.

During this experience, the poet's imaginative scope is considerably enlarged and clarified. For example, in the act of composing he begins to pierce the veil that separates him from his vision:

The light clear element which the isle
wears
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen
showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep;
...
And every motion, odor, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison.

(ll. 446-449;
453-454)

Again, what Shelley emphasizes is the impending final union of the poet with his beloved. Every element in Nature--

described by the senses of touch, smell, sight, and sound-- becomes a portion of the "deep music" that is Emily (Poetry and Love). At the same time, the poet is also a part of Emily. She is the music and he the instrument, the lyre,⁷⁷ upon which the beautiful music is played. In one sense, this idea is a variation upon the concept of poet as beacon--the instrument through which Poetry speaks: "thy wisdom speaks in me." But this idea also has its source in A Defence of Poetry, particularly the early discussion of poetry and poet:

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which act otherwise than the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony ("in unison")..... Every man in the infancy of art observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which the highest delight results: but the diversity is not sufficiently marked, as that its gradations should be sensible, except in those instances where the predominance of this faculty of approximation to the beautiful... is very great. Those in whom it exists in excess are poets....78

The distinction between the essay and the poem that must be made once more is that Epipsychidion is primarily concerned with the successful attainment of the poet's quest for love and not the consequences of that union upon this world:

It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and
Sea,
Cradled and hung in clear tranquillity;
Bright as that wandering Eden, Lucifer,
Washed by the soft blue Oceans of young
air.
It is a favored place.

(ll. 457-461)

"Dans les oeuvres plus purement idealistes, dont Epipsychidion est le meilleur exemple, ce n'est plus dans la sein de la Terre qu'il imaginera le bonheur, mais dans la transcendance de ses regions inferieures." ⁷⁹ The phrase "ce n'est plus" is important to a correct understanding of Epipsychidion and the ways that it differs from Alastor and Prince Athanase. No longer does the poet seek an actual woman as his poetic alter-ego and no longer does he pursue his quest in the physical world. Both the object and the world of his quest are now decidedly non-physical--a concept totally unlike that of the earlier works. Indeed, Shelley seems to assert that nothing harmful can any longer threaten the poet's realm or his serene anticipation of success in his quest:

Famine or Blight,
Pestilence, War, and Earthquake, never
light
Upon its mountain-peaks; blind vultures
they
Sail onward far upon their fatal way;
The winged storms, chanting their thunder-
psalm
To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm
Over this isle.

(ll. 461-467)

In absolute contrast to the "blind vultures, / who sail far upon their fatal way," the poet experiences moments of remarkably intense vision. Unlike the heroes in Alastor and Prince Athanase who seemed always to be groping in search of their beloved, the youth in Epipsychidion has his passageway to the Eternal revealed. At the same time, under the influence of Emily, he is the beacon of that light. For it is his Poetry

that "strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms."⁸⁰

81

Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,
Which Sun or Moon or zephyr draw aside,
Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride
Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
Blushes and trembles at its own excess.⁸²

Through the fusion of all of his imaginative faculties, here classified under images of "Sun or Moon or zephyr," the poet pierces the veil of mystery about the Eternal and imparts his knowledge to his fellow man. As their beacon of "Knowledge and truth and virtue" (Alastor 1.158), he can guide "all else, selfish, blind, and torpid...those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world."⁸³ That is, even though the poet himself and his poem focus primarily on the union of lover and Emily in an imaginative realm, the mere existence of Epipsychidion could conceivably raise man to a greater appreciation of and understanding of both himself and this world:

Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man. Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed.⁸⁴

Nowhere in the earlier quest poems does so much poetic activity occur, and certainly it is only in Epipsychidion that this activity "creates anew the universe." If the poet is the beacon for mankind who "strips away the veil of familiarity

from the world," Emily most assuredly is the poet's. For she leads him (lures him) away from his world to one that promises him Eternal Love. His imaginative vision allows him alone to see Emily clearly as she lights his path to Eternity:

Yet, like a buried lamp, a Soul no less
Burns in the heart of this delicious isle,
An atom of the Eternal, whose own smile ⁸⁵
Unfolds itself, and may be felt, not seen,
O'er the gray rocks, blue waves, and forests
green.

(ll. 477-481)

This earth to sky movement is one of the poem's unique characteristics and clearly differentiates the entire concept of the fulfilled quest from the quest-motif that Shelley explored in Alastor and Prince Athanase. Not all critics, though, choose to read Epipsychidion this way. For instance, D. J. Hughes argues that the poet's creation of the enchanted isle "is to be identified as an earthly, not a heavenly, ⁸⁶paradise...."

But Shelley's very important identification of this Soul of Beauty as "a buried lamp" and as "An atom of the Eternal" would certainly seem to suggest that Emily should be equated with Poetry and Love as a means of attaining Eternity rather than with the elusive maiden of the earlier quest poems. The entire idea of Emily as a Beacon of Eternity so clearly anticipates Shelley's portrait of Keats as the symbol of Poet (rather than as an actual man) at the conclusion of Adonais, that it is very difficult to accept the argument that in Epipsychidion Shelley was describing a proposed physical union with Emilia Viviani in an "earthly paradise":

contrasted with the poet's failure to experience any type of relationship with the dream maiden. Here, in Epipsychidion, the description of the intricate, complex unity in Nature mirrors the poet's own anticipated bliss and intimacy with Emily:

87

The ivy and the wild vine interknit
 The volumes of their many-twining stems;
 Parasite flowers illumine with dewy gems
 The lampless halls, and, when they fade,
 the sky
 keeps through their winter-woof of tracery
 With moonlight patches, or star-atoms keen,
 Or fragments of the day's intense serene,
 Working mosaic on the Parian floors.

(ll. 500-507)

In contrast to the somber, darkened wilderness world of Alastor, the abode of the poet and his lady is one of perpetual illumination. Although the halls are lampless, the dwelling is not plunged into darkness. Instead, in lines of exquisite delicacy, Shelley tells how "Parasite flowers illumine with dewy gems/The lampless halls," and later in the day how "Moonlight patches" or "star-atoms keen" disperse the darkness. The poet of Epipsychidion will dwell forever (so Shelley hopes) in a world of radiance. The experiences of this poet are quite unlike those of the youth in Alastor whose "fierce fiend of a distempered/Dream...led him forth/Into the darkness" and whose "dream/Of youth...night and time have/Quenched forever--/Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered/now."

Shelley begins the final movement of Epipsychidion with a scene of domestic tranquility. Despite the poet's concerns with proper furnishings, books, and music, he is not describing a "bower of bliss" in this world. He uses concrete language,

just as he will use erotic language later, to allow his audience to comprehend--at least partially--something of the joyous existence that the speaker envisions and anticipates. But "the Ionian isle and all else are meant to be impalpable, images of an immaterial world." ⁸⁸ More important is this section's exploration of Poetry and its powers:

I have sent books and music there, and all
 Those instruments with which high spirits
 call
 The future from its cradle, and the past
 Out of its grave, and make the present last
 In thoughts and joys which sleep, but can-
 not die,
 Folded within their own eternity.

(ll. 519-524)

The speaker claims for the poet some of those powers that justify his being called poet. That is, the poet is both rooted in time (he is mortal) and exists beyond time--looking back to the past and ahead to the future. Perhaps Shelley conceived of the poet as a daimon, an intermediary between Time and Eternity:

For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flowers and the fruit of latest time.... A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one...89

Shelley believed that man did not understand that the banality and hollowness of this existence--which most call life--is actually a sentence of death. It is the poet, participating as he does "in the eternal, the infinite, and the one," who instructs man on how to rectify his error:

Death is the veil, which those who live call
 life;
 They sleep, and it is lifted.

(Prometheus Unbound,
 III.iii. 1.113)

Through the efficacy of his poetry, the poet allows man a glimpse of Life, of an Eternal Love, Beauty, and Goodness: "Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted."⁹⁰

Something of Life can be glimpsed in the Edenic setting that the poet creates. Except for himself and Emily, no other person shares their joy. Instead, their companions will be Nature's creatures:

The ring-dove, in the embowering ivy, yet
 Keeps up her love-lament, and the owls flit
 Round the evening tower, and the young
 stars glance
 Between the quick bats in their twilight
 dance;
 The spotted deer bask in the fresh moon-
 light
 Before our gate, and the slow silent night
 Is measured by the pants of their calm
 sleep.

(ll. 529-535)

Shelley's Eden is a very exclusive one, and Epipsyichidion no longer concerns itself directly with the relationship of poet and society. What the poet imagines is a life in which he would remain under the inspiration of Emily and continue to create poetry--as he does now. But the theme of discovering Love in a world other than this--which critics like Shealy and Lemaitre have noted--dominates this poem and distinguishes it from both Alastor and Prince Athanase. Whereas neither of the earlier works ever successfully resolved

the question of Death's function in the quest or its relationship to Love, Epipsyehidion makes it quite clear that the poet's union with Emily will not be transitory. It will not be governed by laws of mutability in which Death will separate poet and Love:

Be this our home in life, and when years
 Their ^{heap} withered hours, like leaves, ⁹¹ on our
 decay,
 Let us become the overhanging day,
 The living soul of this Elysian isle,
 Conscious, inseparable, one.
 (ll. 536-540)

In a sense, the union of poet and Emily in this world is only a prelude to their permanent union beyond the grave. Though the body may decay, the essence of the poet cannot be destroyed. In losing his physical entity, he becomes a portion of the Eternal: "the living soul of this Elysian isle/Conscious, inseparable one." Shelley's insistence upon a conscious existence after death is a clear departure from his ambiguous treatment of Death in the earlier quest poems. However much he had wanted to hope that the youth of Alastor or the poet in Prince Athanase would discover his vision after Death, his own skepticism about an afterlife precluded such an unequivocal assertion in his poetry. But in Epipsyehidion such skepticism no longer prevailed, and his belief in the conscious survival of the poet after death makes the poem the only celebratory work among the three. We need only refer to "On a Future State," one of the prose companion pieces to Alastor, to appreciate how radically Epipsyehidion differs in its treatment of Death.

In contrast to his poet who triumphantly exhorts Emily to become with him "the living soul of this Elysian isle,/ Conscious, inseparable, one," Shelley had solemnly intoned in 1815 a different attitude about an afterlife:

Life and thought differ indeed from everything else.
But that it survives that period /of death/ beyond which
we have no experience of its existence, such distinction
and dissimilarity affords no shadow of proof, and nothing
but our own desires could have led us to conjecture or
imagine.⁹²

Of course, Shelley could offer no actual proof in 1821, but he certainly believed that "Life and thought [it] survives that period," and that belief makes Epipsychidion his definitive treatment of the quest theme.

This belief that the poet may be permanently united with Emily creates the almost unbearable tension and intensity of his concluding lines. Part of that tension arises from the poet's mortality. Initially, he perceives time as a potential ally because its passing, and hence the passing of his own earthly life, brings him that much closer to death and Eternity: "We bear Time to his tomb in Eternity."⁹³ Because he does evaluate time, at first, in this way, his tone remains one of tranquil expectation and contemplation:

Meanwhile
We two will rise, and sit, and walk together
Under the roof of blue Ionian weather,
And wander in the meadows....

(ll. 540-544)

But in surveying his visionary Eden, the poet also beholds the intimacy that exists amongst the elements in Nature:

...the blue heavens bend
 With lightest winds, to touch their paramour;
 Or linger, where the pebble-paven shore,
 Under the quick faint kisses of the sea
 Trembles and sparkles as with ecstasy,--
 Possessing and possessed by all that is
 Within that calm circumference of bliss,
 And by each other, till to love and live
 Be one.

(ll. 545-552)

What he perceives in this Eden re-awakens and excites his own yearnings for Emily. Until now, the poet has only been preparing his abode for Emily. Now he desires to consummate his relationship with an Ideal Love, to become one with and inseparable from his "soul within the soul." To convey this ardor, he proposes an intensely erotic experience to Emily. But that experience is not sexual since Emily is not physical. ⁹⁴ Shelley must rely upon such strong eroticism, however, because the sexual experience--the most mysterious, profound, and intense human experience--is the only one that could even begin to approximate the type of union that the poet desires with Emily.

The final movement of Epipsychidion now begins. It is a movement which begins quietly, almost sotto voce, and which gradually builds into a climactic intensity that is both the culmination and destruction of the poet's quest in this world. In the first section of this movement, the means of communication between poet and Emily becomes increasingly more difficult to describe linguistically. Indeed, they co-respond profoundly through a silence that underscores the limitations of poetic language:

And we will talk, until thought's melody
 Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
 In words, to live again in looks, which dart
 With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
 Harmonizing silence without a sound.

(ll. 560-564)

Gradually, language ceases between them; instead they share an experience much like the moment of silence in Tristan und Isolde when the two lovers behold one another and realize their mutual destinies.

The analogy to Tristan und Isolde seems extremely helpful for an understanding of the direction that Epipsychidion takes in its concluding lines. Like the final music of that great work, a poetic Liebestod concludes Epipsychidion.⁹⁵

With its ever mounting eroticism and passion, the last scene of the poem is like the consummation of the poet's dram in Alastor.⁹⁶ That is, the union which he sought physically in the earlier poem is achieved imaginatively and spiritually in Epipsychidion--despite the obviously sexual imagery of the scene. Instead, the movement is one of a river (the poet) surging into Ocean (Emily in Eternity), in which it is no longer possible to separate the poet's essence from his Ideal Love. Such a negation of self is necessary for him to become a portion of the "white radiance of Eternity"⁹⁷ through Emily. More important, what we must also recognize is that, unlike the meeting of two bodies of water, the movement within Epipsychidion is ultimately from the physical realm to the final transcendence of all mutability.

At the outset of the poet's final earthly experience, we have a scene of undeniable sexuality:

Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms
 bound,
 And our veins beat together; and our lips,
 With other eloquence than words, eclipse
 The soul that burns between them.
 (ll. 565-568)

But the poet's quest is no longer for a mortal dream maiden and what is "vital to the present discussion is the lifelong pursuit of an ideal which expressed itself in terms of interpenetration, mutual absorption, and assimilation." ⁹⁸ Shelley's usage of words like "intermix," "bound," "eclipse," and, finally, "confused" is suggestive of both the poet's "yearning for what lies beyond embodied forms" ⁹⁹ and the satisfaction of that yearning through the dissolution of his own physical being into Eternity:

and the
 wells
 Which boil under our being's inmost calls,
 The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
 Confused in passion's golden purity,
 As mountain-springs under the morning
 Sun.
 (ll. 568-572)

Although the consummation of the poet's quest is still to occur, he remains unwavering in his confident anticipation of that experience. First of all, unlike the other heroes, he stresses his identification with, not his separation from, his Love:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames.
 (ll. 573-574)

In these lines, he asserts the indissolubility of his bond with Emily. But they are not yet one, for the speaker

sees their "Spirit" existing, "within two frames." ¹⁰⁰ What still separates them, then, is the poet's own mortality. Consequently, the poet aspires to and strives for the release of his soul from his physical nature. At this moment, he must not experience less if he is to succeed in his quest:

oh! wherefore
two?
One passion in twin-hearts, which grows
and grew,
Till like meteors of expanding flame
Those spheres instinct with it become the
same,
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
Burning, yet ever unconsumable.¹⁰¹
(ll. 574-579)

It is a distinct characteristic of Epipsychidion that so much of the action of its final scene looks forward. The poet's experience is a timeless one, as if by the "one passion in twin-hearts" the poet and Emily become the heartbeats of an Eternal present.

Shelley's use of conflagration seems especially appropriate for his poetic purposes here. The poet's mortal nature is like a contaminant that must be purified so that his spirituality may shine forth. That is, his mortal self is like an impurity that obscures his brightness and "stains the white radiance of Eternity."

In addition, Shelley's use of conflagration is a useful simile for the imaginative activity that now occurs in the poem. Beholding Emily, the poet's imagination is inspired to its most intense moment of composition. Emily's presence kindles his creativity and, under the influence of her presence, he

begins to expand the boundaries of poetic vision. The "expanding flame" burns away the veil that dims his image of the Eternal and creates within the speaker a heightened yearning for it. Even though Shelley's usage of flame imagery is dazzling, he gives very little specific description of what the poet now sees. This vagueness is intentional. Despite the poet's straining to re-create his vision of Eternity, his poetry must ultimately fail because "the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of ¹⁰² [his] original conception."

But the poet's passion for Emily (and thus for Eternity) can no longer be quelled nor can the act of consummating that passion be reversed:

yet ever inconsumable;

...
Like flames too pure and light and unim-
bued

...
Which point to Heaven and cannot pass
away.¹⁰³

(ll. 579, 581, 583)

"Love, therefore,...is the infinite yearning of the soul for its antitype, a yearning that cannot be fulfilled in the relationship between man and woman, and must, as a result, find its visionary fulfillment in the ideal world of poetry."¹⁰⁴ Emily's radiance lights the poet's way to Ideal Love and guides him to Eternity. It is now that the poet's lifelong pursuit of Love will be triumphant. The experience of Emily's presence arouses within the poet such unbearable, irresistible longing for her, that he struggles against the bonds of his own mortality to unite with her. In struggling to pierce the veil

between Time and Eternity, he also strains against his own physical nature that chains him to the world of mutability. There begins, here, a tremendous swelling of desire, energy, and will to liberate him from his own physicality:

One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one
death,
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation.

(ll. 584-587)

He nears the climax of his own poetic and personal Liebestod in which Time and Eternity, body and spirit will finally become one and inseparable: "One Heaven, one Hell, one Immortality /And one annihilation."

But what the poet envisions at this moment cannot be described poetically, and the very failure of his linguistic abilities assures his triumph in the quest. For he passes beyond a world of limitations to one of Beauty, Truth, and Love, the glory of which the human mind has only the faintest concept:

Woe is me!
The winged words on which my soul would
pierce
Into the height of love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.

(ll. 587-590)

Though the poet's "winged words" are insufficient to create anew "love's rare Universe" he himself is transfigured. Through his self-willed destruction, "I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire,"--the recording of his own physical death--the poet has surged forth on an effulgence of light to that realm of

Timeless Love where mortality is unknown:

nel fulgor d'una luce immortal
 attratta...rapita
 me smarrita!
 Sonno ben. 105

After the drama of the preceding lines, Shelley quietly concludes Epipsychidion by re-introducing the speaker of the Advertisement to comment upon the poet's history. If we have learned something from it, so too has the speaker. He alone among the three speakers of the quest poems, as distinguished from the three dead poets, no longer mourns the poet's destiny. Instead, he envies that fate and awaits a similar one for himself. The mood is one of serene acceptance and anticipation:

Weak Verses, go, kneel at your Sovereign's feet, 108
 And say:--'We are the masters of thy
 slave;
 What wouldst thou with us and ours and
 thine?'

(ll. 592-594)

All of the lines in the conclusion contrast the poet's situation with the speaker's. To understand this, we must focus on the central question of the entire quest theme: "What wouldst thou with us and ours and/thine?" Quite simply, having attained his quest, does the poet have any more association with this world? Certainly, as the speaker's words make clear, we are not to lament the poet's passing beyond this universe. In that sense, we (like the speaker) would not want him to have remained a portion of this mortal world because he now dwells

in Eternity. But that does not mean that the poet must remain forever separate from us. For, if we choose to learn from his experience, we too shall dwell with the poet and Emily and the Eternal. The speaker certainly understands this because his tribute to the poet's death is a celebration rather than a dirge--unlike the speaker's reaction to the youth's death in either Alastor or Prince Athanase. No, in the poet's death the speaker foresees his own. That is, despite the inherent limitations of poetic language, of these "Weak Verses," poetry still allows us a glimpse of what the poet envisions. Thus, its effect upon us, like Emily's upon the poet, is salutary. It is our beacon to the Eternal.

Understood in this context, we can comprehend better the other sense of the speaker's question "What wouldst thou with us and ours and/thine?" Even though he can nevermore return physically to this earth, the poet can still guide us to become a portion of the One with him. Physically he no longer exists, but his presence and influence are immutable. For through the efficacy of his poetry, the dead poet here participates "in the infinite, the eternal, and the one":

'Love's very pain is
sweet,
But its reward is in the world divine,
Which, if not here, it builds beyond the
grave.

(ll. 596-598)

Nowhere in the other quest poems does Shelley state so unequivocally that we will not experience and Ideal Love in this realm. His phrase "Love's very pain is sweet" suggests the martyr's

ecstasy in no longer fearing suffering, anguish, and death because he believes that through them he shall attain Eternal happiness. Additionally, "if not here" has a dual meaning. First, if the poet does not discover Ideal Love in this world, he will experience it in an afterlife.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Epipsychidion has evolved considerably from the very ambiguous, tentative treatment in Alastor and Prince Athanase of both the poet's death and the implications of that death in the quest motif. For Shelley, death must be the passageway to Eternity, and that necessity involves the second reading of "if not here, it builds beyond the/grave." Shelley also meant that because (if) Love cannot be discovered here, it must be found after death. Without this belief in an afterlife, the speaker would have concluded Epipsychidion in despondency. Instead, he asserts his faith in the existence of an Ideal Love that is Eternal: "So shall ye live when I am there."¹⁰⁸ At this point, he clearly believes, or must believe (since he cannot prove it), that he too will attain Eternity.

Also, Shelley achieves a very fine thematic continuity in these final lines. When the speaker invites poetry to "meet Marina, Vanna, Primus, and the rest," he has become a beacon of truth to his friends, just as Emily and the poet are beacons. This entire movement suggests a procession of Olympiads, each of whom bears the torch of "Knowledge and truth and virtue" (Alastor, l. 158) to receptive hearts. In bidding "Marina, Vanna, Primus, and the rest"¹⁰⁹ to depart from "the troop which errs," the speaker returns us to the concerns of poetry as ex-

pressed in the Preface to Alastor in which Shelley distinguished between the "luminaries of the world" who receive the Power's grace and "those unforeseeing multitudes" who reject salvation.

In its peaceful, confident conclusion, Epipsychidion leaves us with the portrait of a speaker, himself a poet, who has been receptive to Poetry and to Love ("for I am Love's") and who would shortly beacon "from the abode where the Eternal/ are."

Notes

- 1 See Newman. I. White, Portrait of Shelley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), pp. 387-398, Kenneth N. Cameron, "The Planet-Tempest Passage in Epipsychidion," PMLA, 63, no. 3 (Sept., 1948), 950-972, and Richard Holmes, Shelley: The Pursuit (New York: E. F. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 632ff.
- 2 Ellsworth Barnard, Shelley's Religion (Minneapolis: The University of Minneapolis Press, 1937), p. 80.
- 3 Shelley, The Poems, p. 298. Consult Shelley's description of the youth in Alastor (Preface) and ll. 67-75 for a similar conception of the hero.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Shelley had done his own translation and cites Dante's poem in the Advertisement to Epipsychidion.
- 6 Dante's La Divina Commedia, especially Paradiso, would be an obvious influence. But La Vita Nuova, the Sonnet "To Guido Cavalcanti," and Ballata 9 are also likely influences. Among Petrarca's works, I would cite Poems 19, 48, 55, 72, 122, 141, 359, and 366. Guido Cavalcanti's Ballata 5 is also a likely influence.
- 7 See Adolfo de Bosis, "On the first two lines of Epipsychidion," Bulletin and Review of the Keats-Shelley Memorial, 1-2, no. 2 (1913), 14-19.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 16-18.
- 9 See Poem 53.
- 10 See Morris Bishop, Petrarch and His World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 62-70, on the identity of Laura.

11 Adolfo de Bosis, p. 15.

12 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p.282.

13 Clark, "On Love," p. 170.

14 Shelley, The Poems, p. 298.

15 Compare Shelley's sense of isolation to these lines in "On Love: "With a spirit ill fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have everywhere sought sympathy and found only repulse and disappointment." (p. 170).

16 Cf. Adonais XXXI. 11. 1-4, XXXII. 11. 1-2, XXXIII. 11. 8-9.

17 Shelley, The Poems, p. 632.

18 Shelley suggests something similar in The Sensitive Plant:

That garden sweet, that lady air,
And all sweet shapes and odors there,
In truth have never passed away;
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
There is no death nor change: their might
exceeds our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure.
(Conclusion, 11. 130-138)

19 Ann Shealy expresses a similar idea when she states that "In Prince Athanase and Epipsychidion his desire to reform the world is always crossed by a desire to transcend it." The quotation occurs in Journey through the Unapparent (Hicksville: Exposition Press, 1974), p. 47.

20 Cf. Paradiso, XVIII. 11 8-21., XXXI. 11. 79-93.

- 21 Petrarch, Madrigals and Odes from Petrarch Trans. Helen Lee Peabody (New York: Lcker Raley, 1940), p. 76.
- 22 Clark, "On Love," p. 170.
- 23 Of all the quest poems, Epipsychidion is perhaps the closest thematically to the "Hymn" because it alone equates Ideal Love with a spiritual rather than human force.
- 24 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 281. Cf. La Vita Nuova, XIX, ll. 19-22.
- 25 Clark, "On Love," p. 170.
- 26 Joseph Mazzeo, Structure and Thought in the Paradiso, (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), p. 116. The reader should also compare The Second Treatise of Il Convivio to lines 30-32 of Epipsychidion.
- 27 Dante Alighieri, The Banquet of Dante Alighieri, Trans. Elizabeth Price Sayer (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1887) p. 45.
- 28 Despite several sonnets addressed to "the lady in the window" in La Vita Nuova, Dante "repented" of his heart's letting itself be possessed for some time, contrary to the constancy of reason." The following lines also reveal his determination to think solely of Beatrice:
- Alas! By the full force of countless sighs
born of the thoughts that overflow my heart,
the eyes are vanquished, and they do not date
to return the glance of anyone who sees them.
(LXXIX. 11. 1-4)
- The text used is Mark Musa, Dante's Vita Nuova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 81.
- 29 Cf. Shakespeare's Sonnets 15, 18, 19, 38 and 54.
- 30 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, pp. 282-283.

31 Cf. "Nelly, I am Heathcliff!"

32 Read autobiographically, the line suggests a triad of Shelley, Emily and Mary.

33 Cf. Una Favola: "and he besought her to tell him her own /name/, and she said, with a faint but sweet voice, 'Death' (Garnett translation).

34 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 294.

35 Shelley, The Banquet of Plato in the Complete Works, VII, 206.

36 Cf. "The Cloud," l. 76 and Death's farewell speech to the youth in Una Favola beginning "You suspect me, but I forgive you...they love eternally." See Benjamin Kurtz's The Pursuit of Death (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), pp. 252-253.

37 Shelley, The Poems, p. 633. Also, the quotation cited from Una Favola (footnote #36) seems helpful here because of the union of love and eternity that both works suggest.

38 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 295. The full quotation reads, "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man."

39 Cf. Alastor, ll. 176-185:

40 For an entirely different emphasis than mine, the reader is directed to Neman I. White and Kenneth N. Cameron who are foremost in interpreting Epipsychidion very autobiographically.

41 Shelley's own personal disillusionment with La Viviani-- after numerous disappointments with Harriet Grove, Elizabeth Hitchener, and Mary Shelley--could hardly have encouraged his belief that any woman could be the embodiment of an Ideal Love. Shelley's basically optimistic nature remained fairly positive about the world in general (see Acts III and IV of Prometheus Unbound), but he found little to sustain his own personal hopes.

- 42 Shelley, The Banquet of Plato, in The Complete Works, VII, 197.
- 43 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 277.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 293-294.
- 45 Ellsworth Barnard's Shelley's Religion (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1937) contains a fine chapter on the nature of Shelleyan love. One of Barnard's emphases is that his analysis is offered to counterbalance those critics who maintain that by "True Love" Shelley meant "free love in the vulgar sense." (p. 282) He also rightly stresses how little Shelley dealt with the sexual aspects of love. Certainly, "On Love" defines a spiritual, non-physical concept of love, a concept that we ought to associate with Shelley's treatment of love in Epipsychidion.
- 46 Cf. Blake's "Poison Tree."
- 47 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, pp. 282-283.
- 48 Shelley, The Poems, p. 298.
- 49 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 283; the last sentence appears on p. 281.
- 50 Ibid., p. 293.
- 51 La Vita Nuova, XIX. ll. 37-42.
- 52 The opening of La Vita Nuova seems to have been an influence upon this portion of the poem: "Nine times already since my birth the heaven of light had circled back to almost the same point, when there appeared before my eyes the glorious lady of my mind.... Let me say that, from that time on, Love governed my soul," pp. 3 & 4 of the Musa translation.
- 53 Dante, The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Cantico III Trans. Dorothy Sayers (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1962), p. 76.

- 54
Clark, "On Love," pp. 170-171.
- 55
Cf. Petrarca's Poems 19 "Son animali al mondo," ll. 12-14 and 141 "Come talora al caldo tempo sole."
- 56
Cf. Alastor, ll. 224-227.
- 57
Consult Edmund Blunden's Shelley and Keats: As they struck their contemporaries, (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1925), pp. 30-31, 44, Kenneth N. Cameron's Shelley: The Golden Years, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 280, and Richard Holmes' Shelley: The Pursuit, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 637-638.
- 58
Clark, Una Favola, p. 298.
- 59
Ibid.
- 60
For a likely influence on the poet's delirium in Epipsychidion, see La Vita Nuova, XXIII. Shelley's source of deliverance allows him to see more correctly, more imaginatively, and this passage may be indebted to Paradiso, XXVI. ll. 76-81.
- 61
See Shelley's discussion on Reason and Imagination in A Defence of Poetry, pp. 276-277.
- 62
Compare with the plight of the "The Balearic fisher" in Prince Athanase, Part II, ll. 63-67.
- 63
Clark, Una Favola, p. 299.
- 64
See Dante's dream in La Vita Nuova, XXIII and the appearance of "il scave mio fido conforto" in Petrarca's Canzone 359.
- 65
"Ode to the West Wind," l. 8.
- 66
See Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry, pp. 235-236.
- 67
Cf. Petrarca's Poem 48:

Also, a portion of Una Favola, not translated by Garnett, has a similar theme: "And there are some that say the souls of all pairs were marked, before being born in the world, so that each may be happy with the other." (Notebooks, III. 167-168). The translation is mine.

68

See Cameron, "The Planet-Tempest Passage in Epipsychidion," pp. 950-972, and Holmes, Shelley: The Pursuit, p. 630.

69

Cf. Prometheus Unbound, IV. ll. 126-128 and Paradiso, XVIII, ll. 13-21.

70

Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 294.

71

Ibid.

72

See Prometheus Unbound, IV. ll. 190-204 and "Lift not the painted veil." The latter reads like a capsule history of the quest poems.

73

Perhaps Shelley varied the Fury motif in Alastor. His reference to the "limbs in chains" and the "soul in chaos" without the power of Love might represent man's physical and psychological enslavement--the result of his separation from Love.

74

Cf. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: "We were the first that ever burst/into that silent sea," ll. 105-106.

75

Ann Shealy's term.

76

Epipsychidion returns us to the worlds of the youth in Alastor, but the poet dwells in both harmoniously.

77

Cf. Alastor, ll. 165-168.

78

Clark, A Defence of Poetry, pp. 277-278.

79

Helene Lemaitre, Shelley: Poete des Elements (Paris: Didier, 1962), p. 56.

- 80 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 295.
- 81 See Prometheus Unbound, III. iii. ll. 54-62.
- 82 Cf. A Defence of Poetry: "Veil after veil may be undrawn and the inmost beauty of the meaning never exposed." (p. 291)
- 83 Shelley, The Poems, p. 33.
- 84 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 295.
- 85 Cf. Epipsychidion, ll. 325-328.
- 86 D. J. Hughes, "Coherence and Collapse in Shelley, with particular reference to Epipsychidion," English Literary History, 28 (1961), 276.
- 87 Cf. The Sensitive Plant, Part First, ll. 66-69.
- 88 Stopford A. Brooke, Studies in Poetry (London: Duckworth & Co., 1907; rpt. 1910), p. 186.
- 89 Clark, A Defence of Poetry, p. 279.
- 90 Ibid., p. 281.
- 91 Cf. Alastor, ll. 50-54.
- 92 Clark, "On a Future State," p. 177.
- 93 Prometheus Unbound, IV. 1. 14.
- 94 In Shelley: The Golden Years, Kenneth N. Cameron argues for a completely different interpretation: "It almost passes comprehension that some commentators have considered this passage as purely spiritual, for the sexual imagery is obvious and intentional," p. 288.

105

See The Third Treatise of Il Convito:

If my Song fail, blame wit and words, whose force
Fails to tell all I hear in Love's discourse,

(11. 11-12)

106

Emilia Viviani's words, which are quoted in the beginning of the poem, sum up the central theme of Epipsychidion: "L'anima amante si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea nell'infinito un mondo tutto per essa, diverso assai da questo oscuro e pauroso baratro." In imagining the union between Emily and himself, the poet "creates in the infinite a world completely his own."

107

Cf. Hellas, ll. 795-797.

108

Dante's Sonnet to Guido Cavalcanti "Guido, Vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io" is the accepted source of these final lines. A passage from La Vita Nuova seems an even likelier source:

and saw there Lady Joan and Lady Bice
coming toward the place where I was standing:
a miracle that led a miracle,
and as my memory recalls the scene,
Love said to me, "The first to come is Spring;
the one who is my image is called Love."

(XXIV. ll. 9-14)

The translation is Mark Musa's, p. 53.

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