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SHELLEY'S POETRY AND PROSE



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thought to be. It is sufficiently irregular to help evoke the 'untameable wildness' Shelley spoke of, some of the most interesting rhymes in the poem are so distant and so muted by distended syntax that the reader may find them as 'remote' and 'inaccessible' as Mont Blanc itself. With the three unrhymed lines Shelley's rhyme remains open, partly unresolved. Yet rhyme is there as one of the resources with which the poet verbally counters as well as encounters an experience of threatening power and sublimity. A glance at Shelley's final question, together with the sentence that precedes it, may help to confirm our sense of why he did not ask about Mont Blanc in blank verse:

The secret strength of things
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind's imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

(139-44)

At the beginning of the poem, 'things' (1) became Shelley's first rhyme-word by finding its phonetic complement in 'secret springs' (4), a phrase which appears prominently and characteristically in the opening section of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as a metaphor for the unknowable first principle 'by which the human mind is actuated in its operations'.⁷ Here at the end of *Mont Blanc*, 'things' finds a rhyme with a different, apparently less skeptical resonance in 'imaginings', although the difference diminishes when one takes in the immediate context of those words: the 'secret strength of things' in line 139; the if-clause and interrogative syntax surrounding 'the human mind's imaginings'. 'Thee' in line 140 forms a couplet with 'sea' and thus supports the initial 'And' through which the final question is joined logically to what precedes it. And does 'vacancy' belong in this rhyming sequence with 'thee' and 'sea'? It both does and does not: the '-cy' suffix rhymes with 'thee' and 'sea', but imperfectly, because it is rhythmically unstressed and because it is attached to the root *vacan(s)*. Shelley simultaneously draws that critical last word into and separates it from the central rhyme of the entire passage—'vacancy' seems both to yield to and to resist the rhyming power of the compositional will—and in the process he makes us conscious of the ambiguous categorizations on which rhyme depends in the first place.

The rhymes of *Mont Blanc* are part of Shelley's response to a landscape and to a philosophical tradition—to the Arve's commotion, / A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame' (31-2), and to Hume's

7. Ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, 14. See also 30, 33, 42, 66. 'Secret springs' receives additional emphasis by forming the poem's first couplet with 'brings' in line 5. If this phrase is a Humean allusion, it developed late in Shelley's revisions; he wrote 'secret caves' both in the Bodleian draft and in the recently discovered fair copy. See Cherniak, *The Lyrics of Shelley*, 288, and Judith Cherniak and Timothy Burnett, 'The Byron and Shelley notebooks in the Scrope Davies find', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 29, 1978, 45-49.

argument that the 'ultimate springs and principles' of phenomenal reality 'are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry', that the mind's attempts to make sense of them as necessity are nothing more than arbitrary impositions:

every effect is a distinct event from its cause. It could not, therefore, be discovered in the cause, and the first invention or conception of it, *a priori*, must be entirely arbitrary. And even after it is suggested, the conjunction of it with the cause must appear equally arbitrary.⁸

(*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.1)

Shelley's irregular rhymes do not tame the wildness of a 'sound no other sound can tame', nor can they break the inaccessible silence at the summit of Mont Blanc. But they impose on his and our experience of both an order of language that accepts the arbitrary and submits it to the deliberations of art. They are part of the evidence the poem offers that the arbitrary connections of thought and language need not leave the 'human mind's imaginings' in vacancy.

KELVIN EVEREST

Shelley's Doubles: An Approach to *Julian and Maddalo*[†]

My purpose is to offer some thoughts on two problems often encountered in reading and teaching Shelley's poetry. These problems share enough features to suggest some significant relation between them, and it is the possibility of such a relationship, and its implications, that I wish to explore.

One problem arises out of a simple and striking paradox of Shelley's poetry that is easy for the 'specialist' reader to gloss over. How do we reconcile the very sophisticated, and often very difficult manner of Shelley's most characteristic visionary poetry with the essentially radical character of the ideas—their 'levelling' cast, in the contemporary idiom—that inform all the major poems? Is there not the persistent and sometimes worrying impression that the social reference of Shelley's poetic style, in its use of conventions and traditions (with their concomitant assumptions about the kind of audience in mind), is curiously at odds with the social analyses and aspirations—unmistakably revolutionary, in a direct way—that are articulated? This paradox is scarcely a *weakness* in the poetry, for it is precisely in their transformation of received conventions that the great poems generate their distinctive strength. Shelley's handling of traditional forms, the Greek

8. Ed. Selby-Bigge, 30.

[†] From *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp. 63-64, 79-88. Reprinted by permission.

mythic drama, the persona of the poet, the pastoral elegy, exerts a pressure which can shift the base of assumptions that had seemed to support such forms. Shelley's literary idiom is fundamentally subversive in this sense, and this is a quality in his poetry with which the reader must come to terms. But a properly positive alertness to the subversive function of Shelley's rhetoric need not blind us to that persistent paradoxical ambivalence to which I have drawn attention. Shelley's poetry appears to operate from within a literary culture that is the possession and medium of the ruling class that his revolutionary critique is directed towards, and while this is not a damaging criticism of the poetry, I think that it produces a considerable part of its difficulty.

That difficulty bears an immediately recognizable affinity to the other Shelleyan problem that I have in mind, and again it is a problem simple in outline, and involving a paradox. Shelley's passionate and thoroughgoing radicalism was yet the conviction of a temperament in some ways decidedly aristocratic. It was the natural product of a family background, upbringing, and education that placed Shelley, in accomplishments and social manner, as a member of the dominant class into which he was born. I do not mean to imply anything specious in Shelley's radicalism (although I will suggest that some of his contemporaries may have seen it that way); but there is evidence that points to his consciousness of this paradox, and which does imply that he felt his own class position to be a problem that he resolved in his poetry, but which remained rather more discomfiting in the actual experience of his life in English society, and as an exile in Italy. An informed and highly intelligent subversion of received literary modes is shadowed in the life by a nagging contradiction between manner and commitment, at least in the view of contemporaries who we might have expected to be sympathetic. And this misunderstanding has been reproduced by readers of the poetry who, taking their cue from various associations of the literary manner, continue to minimize the political and social orientation of the poetry in favour particularly of what is seen as a significantly determining 'Platonic' cast of thought.

The following discussion explores various related aspects of the two problems proposed, and suggests one way in which our awareness of these paradoxical elements may help us to read the major poetry, by a detailed examination of *Julian and Maddalo*.

* * *

Shelley explained to Hunt how he had attempted, in *Julian and Maddalo*, to imitate the manner of conversation between people whom 'education and a certain refinement of sentiment have placed above the use of vulgar idioms'. Shelley's 'sermo pedestris' style, as he himself called it, was a manner adapted to the familiar idiom of the poetic audience, and as such it was preferred and encouraged by Mary Shelley. In *Julian and Maddalo*, and in *The Cenci*, it is a style appropriate to a specific poetic intention; to present 'sad reality', as opposed to 'visions which impersonate apprehensions of the beautiful and just',

'dreams of what ought to be, or may be'.¹ The style is interestingly problematic for a radical poet, for it involves the danger of acceding to the ideological implications of that familiar idiom. And there is a strong possibility that Shelley was fully alert to this problem in *Julian and Maddalo*, where the single most striking rhetorical effect of the poem is the violently contrasting idiom of the maniac's soliloquy, which is set against the gentlemanly discourse of Maddalo and Julian.

There is a passage in Donald Davie's discussion of Shelley, in his *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, that points up the problem:

The conversation that we have attended to in the poem is just as civilized as the intercourse of Maddalo and Julian here described. It is in keeping that Julian should know little of Maddalo and not approve of all that he knows, but should be prepared to take him, with personal reservations, on his own terms. It is the habit of gentlemen; and the poet inculcates it in the reader, simply by taking it for granted in his manner of address. The poem civilizes the reader; that is its virtue and its value.²

This does indeed catch a certain quality of tone in the poem; but Professor Davie's own tone here is more arresting, not simply in its oblivion to Shelley's whole manner of proceeding in the poem, where we are constantly offered qualifying and contrasting contexts for each passage, but in its bewildering identification of civilizing virtues and values with 'the habit of gentlemen'. It may be suggested that this identification is something that the whole movement of *Julian and Maddalo* is directed against, in its presentation of Julian's creative, 'poetic' potential as frozen within his quiescent commitment to the manner of a repressive and repressed dominant social group. The figure of the maniac may then emerge in the poem as the externalized representation of this buried poetic potential in Julian, a potential tragically unmediated for any audience and thus possessing the aspect of a tragic incoherence.

Julian and Maddalo opens in a tone of cultivated and relatively cool self-possession, which introduces into the voice of Julian, who speaks the poem, a note of wry self-distance, worldly, and not in fact very far from Maddalo's frank disillusionment. This tone is picked up from the preface, which we assume to be in some other voice, but a voice close in its estimate of Julian to Julian's own self-awareness. The preface tells us of Julian's 'passionate attachment' to certain 'philosophical notions', of how he is 'for ever speculating' how good may be made superior to evil. This is all good-humoured, of course, well-mannered; more *amusedly* tolerant than the sympathetic tolerance extended in the preface to Maddalo's lofty gloom, but still quite definitely not disaffected. The tone is echoed at various points by Julian's own perspective on his radical views:

1. Preface to *The Cenci*, *Works*, 274-75. Shelley's own position here is probably influenced by Hunt's views on poetic diction in his Preface to *The Story of Rimini* (1816), xv-xix (this important document has never been reprinted).
2. D. Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952), 144.

I love all waste
 And solitary places; where we taste
 The pleasure of believing what we see
 Is boundless, as we wish ourselves to be. (ll. 14–17)

The phrasing and diction here—'taste . . . pleasure . . . believing'—suggest something agreeably luxurious in the indulgence of such a whim. And again, in

as we rode, we talked; and the swift thought,
 Winging itself with laughter, lingered not,
 But flew from brain to brain,—such glee was ours,
 Charged with light memories of remembered hours,
 None slow enough for sadness: till we came
 Homeward, which always makes the spirit tame. (ll. 28–33)

Talk is fine, but the possibilities it seems to open out must always be chastened as we recall the familiar substance of our actual lives. The tone of the poem's opening section is really the best medium for Maddalo, who, convinced in spite of his powers of the nothingness of human life, supports social life, as the preface tells us, by being in his manners surpassingly 'gentle, patient, and unassuming'. For all the balanced objectivity of Shelley's presentation of the argument between the two men, that argument is conducted in a manner in which Maddalo's position is more at home than Julian's. It is no more than we would expect from a style adapted to 'sad realities', rather than 'dreams of what ought to be, or may be'. Julian's radicalism is bound to appear diminished in strength, to have too much the aspect of a theory, 'refutation-tight/As far as words go', when the words are organized on Maddalo's gentlemanly terms. And it does seem that this effect in the poem is intended by Shelley; for in the context of the whole poem, the argument between Maddalo and Julian will itself be diminished in strength, because we are exposed, in the maniac's soliloquy, to just precisely what it lacks. What unsettles us in Julian's manner is the absence of any critically disruptive emotional engagement with the conflict between social aspiration and social reality. His cultivated composure is tantamount to consent; so that the potential for change embodied in his ideas—a poetic potential, in Shelley's large sense of the 'poet'—is rendered inoperable. The maniac combines a passionate restatement of Julian's radical creed, with a grim enactment of its fate in the response of a society—an audience—that does not understand the language of that radicalism. This is in the order of a poetic failure, a failure of communication; Julian's ideals are not mediated for his society, and this consigns those ideals to an inarticulate limbo, like the madhouse.

Julian and Maddalo has grown steadily in critical esteem over the last 15 years, and recent studies have rated it very highly indeed.³ It

3. See for example Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), ch. 2, and G. M. Matthews, "Julian and Maddalo: The Draft and the Meaning," *Studia Neophilologica*, xxxv (1963), 57–84.

is now assumed that the poem is a coherent whole, an executed design, and not the hotch-potch of autobiographical and other fragments that it once seemed. The difficulty of the poem's structure has always lain in what we are to make of the maniac, but it is now generally agreed that whatever his function in the poem he clearly provides us with a further perspective on the contrasting views of Julian and Maddalo. Julian believes, we can agree, that man has the capacity to imagine and create for himself a better world; Maddalo thinks that experience proves life to be unconquerably inimical to human aspirations and desires. The maniac, it is argued, shows us that the questions involved are too large for resolution, and that his presence in the poem throws the debate open for the reader's participation, to be decided in his own response to the maniac. As the preface says, 'the unconnected exclamations of his agony will perhaps be found a sufficient comment for the text of every heart'.

The progress of this argument is underpinned by the changing implications of the natural setting; however; and this makes a difference. The poem opens on:

a bare strand
 Of hillocks, heaped from ever-shifting sand,
 Matted with thistles and amphibious weeds,
 Such as from earth's embrace the salt ooze breeds . . . (ll. 3–6)

An ambiguously neutral territory, potentially fertile but barren in the immediate prospect, like the opposed grounds of the argument. Julian's optimism is confirmed in the beautiful Italian light, and in the lingering sunset over the distant mountains, and over Venice: 'in evening's gleam/Its temples and its palaces did seem/Like fabrics of enchantment piled to Heaven'. But Maddalo manoeuvres Julian into what he calls 'a better station', from which the madhouse is seen outlined against the fading sunset, the emblem of mortality in Maddalo's view. As the discussion takes its sombre turn, nature assumes an increasing hostility: 'The following morn was rainy, cold and dim', and, as they approach the madhouse on their visit, they sail 'Through the fast-falling rain and high-wrought sea'. This development implies the poem's tacit assent to Maddalo's pessimism, and for the maniac himself, at the nadir of hope, nature takes on an almost Hardy-esque malicious indifference; human achievement perishes in its imperious and irrelevant necessities. Through the bars of the madhouse Julian sees 'like weeds on a wrecked palace growing/Long tangled locks flung wildly forth'. The maniac himself is discovered 'sitting mournfully/Near a piano, his pale fingers twined/One with the other, and the ooze and wind/Rushed through an open casement, and did sway/His hair, and starred it with the brackish spray'. This specification of the natural context appears to imply man's subjection to the natural forces that govern him, independently and oblivious of the uniquely human consciousness that is the only part of nature not made immortal in its cycles. It is a position that Shelley arrives at, and transcends, in the first, darker half of *Adonais*. The ooze and brackish spray are tugging

at the maniac's independent consciousness, threatening to resolve it back into meaningless elemental constituents; and this contrasts with Julian's earlier cheerful contemplation of the embrace of earth with the salt ooze, and his exultation at the way that 'the winds drove/The living spray along the sunny air/Into our faces'. The negative implication of nature in the poem, up to the maniac's soliloquy, is countered to a certain extent by the more hopeful implication of the stress on perspective in the early part of the poem. From where Julian stands, and in his concentration on the sunset, nature can be made a beautiful and sympathetic setting for mind. Maddalo's differently chosen perspectives and emphases can confirm his different views; so that the status of nature is a matter determined by consciousness, which fits with Julian's argument. But this possibility is very definitely subdued in the first section of the poem, and the maniac's soliloquy opens to the accompaniment of a hostile natural world:

all the while the loud and gusty storm
Hisssed through the window, and we stood behind
Stealing his accents from the envious wind
Unseen. (ll. 295-8)

The maniac's soliloquy begins at a point in the poem where Maddalo's perspective has as it were infected the rhetorical strategies of the poem.

The figure of the maniac is apparently based on parts of the real experience of Shelley and Byron, as of course are the figures of Julian and Maddalo, and this in itself suggests Shelley's concern to explore a disjunction of social and poetic identity that has some context in his own life. The maniac incorporates too details derived from Shelley's contemporary interest in Torquato Tasso, a striking example of the poet isolated and driven to madness, or the appearance of madness in the eyes of his audience, and thus frustrated by his social context. But we do not need to know these things to think of the maniac as a poet frustrated by the failure to achieve an audience. He is 'as a nerve o'er which do creep/The else unfelt oppressions of this earth'; he strikes Julian as 'one who wrought from his own fervid heart/The eloquence of passion', and he speaks 'as one who wrote, and thought/His words might move some heart that heeded not,/If sent to distant lands'. He speaks of his 'sad writing', and says at one point

How vain
Are words! I thought never to speak again,
Not even in secret,—not to my own heart—
But from my lips the unwilling accents start,
And from my pen the words flow as I write,
Dazzling my eyes with scalding tears . . . my sight
Is dim to see that character'd in vain
On this unfeeling leaf which burns the brain
And eats into it . . . (ll. 472-80)

The maniac has two audiences in the poem: the absent ex-lover that his speech is addressed to, and the unseen Julian and Maddalo who overhear him, and whose urbane discussion pales into a passionless inadequacy in comparison with his words: 'our argument was quite forgot'. It is understandable that the maniac's suffering is the result of a broken love affair; the poet's need for an audience merges, in Shelley's thought, into his need for love (as in the lyric 'An Exhortation', published in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume), and the withholding of love by his audience, the failure of sympathetic and responsive consciousness, makes the poet seem inarticulate because he will not be understood. The maniac's state of mind is comparable with that expressed by the sixth Spirit in act I of *Prometheus Unbound*, in the lines beginning 'Ah, sister, Desolation is a delicate thing'. The passage seems to have developed out of Shelley's recent work on a translation of Plato's *Symposium*, at Bagni di Lucca; he had been particularly impressed by the broad terms of Diotima's discussion of love, which expand the reference of the word to embrace the spirit of all creative human endeavour, in whatever sphere. The sixth Spirit's speech, closely following a passage in Diotima's discussion, articulates the especially devastating emotional effects of disappointment in our highest ideals; those who are most sensitive, and most delicately responsive to the human condition, are most severely vulnerable to its buffetings. But it is interesting to note that in the maniac's case, his desperate inarticulacy is itself partly the product of a hostility in the audience whose loss his manner of speech confirms.

This reading of the maniac's soliloquy, as a dramatization of the poet's position in a society whose attitudes severely hamper his creative potential, has been suggested by Donald Davie, although in a curiously inverted form:

It is in [his dealings with the abstractions of moral philosophy] that Shelley's diction is woefully impure. He expressed, in *The Defence of Poetry*, his concern for these large abstractions, and his Platonic intention to make them apprehensible and 'living' in themselves. In *The Witch of Atlas* he came near to effecting this; but more often, this programme only means that an abstraction such as Reason, or Justice must always be tugged about in figurative language. The moment they appear in Shelley's verse (and they always come in droves) the tone becomes hectic, the syntax and punctuation disintegrate. In *Julian and Maddalo*, by inventing the figure and the predicament of the maniac, Shelley excuses this incoherency and presents it (plausibly enough) as a verbatim report of the lunatic's ravings.⁴

Even given the extreme and grossly misrepresenting hostility of this passage, Professor Davie has settled on a telling quality in Shelley's creation of the maniac; introduced into the discourse of Julian and

4. Davie, *op. cit.*, 143.

Maddalo, the maniac's speech has an effect that reproduces the effect of Shelley's poetry on its contemporary audience (and indeed the effect that it frequently still has on readers unsympathetic or new to Shelley). It is worth emphasizing once more that the single most dramatic effect of reading the poem is its violent contrast of styles, between the urbane and wholly familiar manner of the two gentlemen, and the uncomprehended and thus despairingly isolated words of the maniac. His inarticulacy is simply the reflex, in Julian and Maddalo and in the ex-lover, of a consciousness that will not change until it can understand, and cannot understand except by being changed. The dramatic situation of the poem here externalizes a conflict that is implicit in the contradiction of Julian's radical creed and his passive acquiescence in the manners of a gentleman. Maddalo's attitude to the maniac is that he can but treat him with the decency owing to any man, 'evidently a very cultivated and amiable person when in his right senses', who has been defeated by life into a touching but wholly inarticulate intensity of despair. Maddalo attempts to alleviate the maniac's suffering by creating the illusion of a gentlemanly normality like the personal style with which Maddalo in fact supports his own sense of 'the nothingness of human life':

I fitted up for him
 Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim,
 And sent him busts and books and urns for flowers,
 Which had adorned his life in happier hours,
 And instruments of music—you may guess
 A stranger could do little more or less
 For one so gentle and unfortunate (ll. 252–8)

Julian's response similarly reveals an inadequacy that is the measure of the limitations imposed by his social identity. He rightly detects something retrievable in the maniac's raving—it is very difficult for the reader too to decide whether the maniac is in fact mad, or really inarticulate—but his intention to work at the task of healing the maniac, of making him articulate again, is smothered by the commitment to a social existence that has no room for the maniac's experience. It is a perfectly appropriate irony that we can recognize in the maniac the outlines of Julian's own radicalism, and that this intellectual commitment is no less potently realized in the maniac's speech than in Julian's. The maniac is 'ever still the same/In creed as in resolve', and, like Julian, he is especially sensitive to 'the else unfelt oppressions of the earth'. The maniac is recognizably Shelleyan too in his rejection of revenge, his sense of the fruitlessness of the desire to reciprocate wrongs. Shelley's ironic juxtapositioning of Julian and the maniac seems most overt in his representation of Julian's awareness of the poetic potential of the maniac, a potential that Maddalo is the more alert to:

The colours of his mind seemed yet unworn;
 For the wild language of his grief was high,

Such as in measure were called poetry;
 And I remember one remark which then
 Maddalo made. He said: 'Most wretched men
 Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
 They learn in suffering what they teach in song.' (ll. 540–6)

The maniac's 'high' language is 'in measure'; his speech is controlled and heightened by the same metrical convention that animates the speech of Maddalo and Julian. Here Shelley quite manifestly stands beyond his gentlemanly creations, and places them for us within the limitations that prevent them from recognizing themselves in the maniac.

The poem ends with Julian's failure or refusal to explain to 'the cold world' the story of the maniac, given to him by Maddalo's daughter. The daughter is a positive and hopeful but silent figure in the poem; she appears for the reader only through the idealizing medium of Julian's somewhat watery perception of her. We receive the impression, perhaps, from Julian's account of her—'a wonder of this earth,/Where there is little of transcendent worth,—/Like one of Shakespeare's women'—that he is not prepared in practice to countenance the existence in his real world of simple human goodness, without the distancing perspective that experiences a realized ideal as somehow transcendent and remote in character. This note sounds more strongly in the passage towards the end of the poem in which Julian rationalizes his failure to attempt the rehabilitation of the maniac (ll. 547–83). We witness here the process by which Julian accommodates his ideas to a social life which consigns them, inevitably, to the realm of the unrealizably ideal. He leaves the maniac, and Venice—the 'bright Venice' of his optimistic perception—and returns to the familiar tenor of his accustomed existence. Julian chooses not to articulate the maniac in himself, and aspires rather, appropriately, more to the life of Maddalo than of the maniac. It is Maddalo, and not the maniac, in whom Julian seeks to know himself.

Julian and Maddalo dramatizes the dangers that operate to nullify the creative radical potential of a man whose way of life identifies him with the class against which his radical critique is directed. These dangers were real enough, certainly in the view of contemporaries, in Shelley's own life, and they beset him still in the different form of the misleading expectations that his sophisticated literary medium produces in his readers. *Julian and Maddalo* overcomes the problem by building its rhetorical strategies upon it; so that the damaging limitations of Julian's situation emerge as the condition of his failure, in forming the materials of Shelley's poetic success.